

Preface

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How long are you willing to search for real meaning in your life? What are you ready to face in order to get to the center of Truth that reveals what you have longed for?

It is obvious that not everyone follows the same path in order to come to the truth. Some arrive rather directly; others follow paths with many deviations and hidden perils. Some come by means which are absolutely inconceivable to many of us.

We shouldn't be surprised: God has at His disposal innumerable means for making Himself and His Word known to individuals. His Word is able to reach anywhere in the world and touch the heart of someone who never even imagined to call himself a child of God.

There are individuals like Annamaria and Cristiana who have believed in God from the time they were small children. Their desire as young women was to serve God and man by helping the poor. They dedicated over fifty years of their lives serving in an environment devoted to the work of God only to discover that they really didn't know Him personally and knew nothing about His Word.

How can you lead someone else to know God through His Word if you haven't had that personal experience yourself and know where to guide someone else? That heart-wrenching perplexity took Annamaria and Cristiana on a long journey full of detours and perils in search of the Truth.

If you
ABIDE
IN MY WORD,
you are
TRULY
MY DISCIPLES
& you will
KNOW
THE TRUTH,
&
THE TRUTH
will set you
FREE.

—JOHN 8:31-32



Dear Lord, please give my mamma twelve children so we will be blessed!

... prayed little seven-year-old Annamaria Mazzari. Every Sunday afternoon she went with other children to hear a nun tell her stories from the Old Testament. She was struck by the story of Jacob and his twelve children who were a great blessing from God to his home.

The Bible stories, recounted on hot summer afternoons, were the only encounters that Annamaria had with the Word of God and they left a great impression on her. She listened with fixed attention because she didn't want to miss a word; she was fascinated by these stories

and they took deep root in her heart.

"After that," recounts Annamaria, "for many years I did not have any other occasion to hear Bible stories nor even to read the Bible; in my house I never saw a Bible nor was one ever found in the religious institute that later became my home. With the passage of time, deep inside of me there began to grow a deep desire to know the Word of God."

A Sense of Calling to Serve the Poor

Annamaria had been attracted to all that was religious from the time she was small; she loved to go to church and participate in the functions and sacred rites. She had always felt called to help poor people and those in difficulty. At the age of 22, she decided to realize what had been a dream for her from the time she was fourteen or fifteen by joining a Catholic order that served the poor. She became Sister Elisabetta.

Deep Dissatisfaction and Increasing Unrest

In spite of her sense of avocation towards the poor, the Order gave her the job of teaching children, which she did for twenty-five years in the Florence area.

"This assignment caused me a great deal of dissatisfaction," she says. "Not because I didn't like children, but because I had felt a strong sense of calling towards serving the poor. Therefore I attempted, in my free time, and with the permission of the Mother Superior, to visit the needy and dedicate myself to other charity activities."

In the meantime, she had an ever-increasing desire to know the Word, as well as a rising sense of dissatisfaction for how she was living. Certain rules, practices and religious rites seemed sterile to her and didn't help her in her spiritual walk. She began to criticize certain aspects of the Church of which she was a part.

"For example," she says, "the vast riches of the Vatican bothered me and I told myself that if Jesus were in this world today

(I knew nothing about His second coming at that time), He certainly would not go stay in the Vatican but would go to the edge of some big city (or to the center of that city) where the poor lived.”

“I couldn’t understand why priests, who were messengers of the Gospel, were prohibited to marry; and I didn’t understand why babies were baptized because it seemed to me that this step should be a conscious choice made by adults. I never thought to check these things out with the Word of God because I didn’t know it, but I knew that something was not right.”

Further Disappointment

Finally the opportunity came for Sister Elisabetta to serve in a parish as a catechist and to visit families in that same parish who had difficulties. She was excited about that because she believed the moment had finally come for her to fulfill her desires. She became quickly disappointed as she realized that in spite of all her efforts, teaching the catechism

did not bring children to know Jesus Christ because it was based on the Catholic Church sacraments, precepts and dogmas. The Bible was not a part of the teaching program. “How could I help them to know Him if I didn’t even know Him myself?” was her perplexing question.

“Only later, when I came to know the Lord as my Saviour, did I realize why I had felt so uncomfortable in teaching catechism and in seeking to prepare parents for their infant’s baptism and children for their first communion. This sense of lack was caused by the fact that I was not born again. I lacked a personal relationship with the Lord and certainly did not know His Word.”

A new movement was forming in the parish that encouraged Bible study. She thought that becoming a part of this group would enable her to deepen her knowledge of the Bible, so she asked permission from her superiors, who, rather unwillingly, allowed her to participate. The studies were not as deep as she would have liked, but it was important



to her that at least she, for the first time, could read the Bible and discuss the various books with others.

False Accusations

She dedicated herself to creating space and activities in the parish that would keep the children off the streets because, she says, “otherwise the streets would become their teacher.”

“In the midst of this involvement”, she recounts sadly, “someone burned the ground around me... I understood that it was time to leave the field of action... With a heavy heart I left the parish. To help alleviate the deep pain I was feeling, I looked for something that would occupy my time and especially my mind and heart, to keep me from dwelling on the incomprehension and the false accusations that had deeply hurt me.”

The false accusations made against her were believed by her superiors in the religious Order she was a part of, and they made a drastic decision regarding her without asking her for any explanations: she was suspended from her vows and forbidden to attend the Bible study group.

Controversial Doors Open

It happened one day that she encountered a priest from the study group who wanted to know what had happened to her. She told him her story and he suggested that she attend a “revivalist” movement within the Catholic Church. A little skeptical, she accepted the invitation to attend. She was struck by their way of praying, by the joy that they expressed when they sang songs of praise, and by their testimonies. The hours that she spent in prayer and praise to the Lord filled her with serenity. Often American pastors were invited to these meetings where they taught the Word of God with such persuasion that she was in ecstasy. At the end of the meet-

ings they displayed evangelical books, and she bought numbers of them to devour one after the other. She was hungry for the Word.

“I wanted to become one of them,” she said wistfully. “But how did I do that?” In one of the books she read, she found a citation for another book and wanted to read it. But she was ashamed to enter the evangelical bookstore dressed as a nun. She felt that she would cause a scandal and she felt guilty. But finally one day, she swallowed her fear and entered the bookstore. “It was the first in a long series of books which I devoured evening after evening...,” she says with a smile.

Sister Elisabetta had to do something to keep herself occupied during the period of time in which she was suspended from her ministry in the parish. So she returned to her painting, something she had started when she was younger. “But my thoughts continued to run to what had happened to me and I continued to suffer. I was devastated,” she admits.

What could she do? She bought a small radio and searched various stations for something pleasant to listen to while she painted. She wanted something that would occupy her mind and distract her from sad and resentful thinking. One day she happened to hear someone talk about the Gospel. She listened and was attracted by what she heard. At the end of the program, she heard the announcer say that it was Radio Evangelica Firenze, and from that day on "it became my radio station," she says. "Listening to that station brought me much consolation and I finally felt that my need to know the Word of God more deeply was being met."

Opportunity Knocks Behind Bars

Meantime, something different began to happen in her life. A young man from the parish, one of her former catechism students, ended up in prison and sent for her to come and see him. She obtained permission to go and see him. When she went back the second time, he

asked her if she would be willing to meet with some other prisoners as well. She agreed and soon decided to get permission to be a volunteer visitor for the prison. "Meeting with the prisoners regularly," she explains, "caused to grow within me a sense of the deep need to do something for those who could not take advantage of benefits conceded to them by law because they had no place to live outside the prison during their prison leaves."

She talked to the prison chaplain and in a few months a receiving house (type of halfway house) was prepared for these men. But now Sister Elisabetta had another problem. Who would help her in this work? She could not do it alone.

Finding A Fellow Traveler

"I thought of Sister Cristiana, another nun who had listened and sympathized with me when I was passing that dark period in my life that I mentioned before, when I had felt ostracized by my superiors in the order. She was just finishing up an assignment



as Mother Superior in one of the institutes, so I asked her if she were available to join me in the service of receiving prisoners in the halfway house. She agreed to my request and we began this new ministry, as well as a new walk of faith. How true the words of Psalm 23:4:

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff,
they comfort me (or give me assurance).*

“Sister Cristiana had been in the Order for many years and enjoyed the esteem of her superiors. Now we could organize our prayer life as we wished, sing beautiful praises to the Lord learned from the revival movement and dedicate ourselves to the study of the Word of God. Now we were alone, without the vigilance of a superior. God guides us . . . prepares our table . . . and accompanies us with His mercy and truth all the days (that remain) of our lives and we can live in the house of the Lord forever.”

Sister Elisabetta talked to Sister Cristiana about the books she was reading and the new things she was discovering from those books; Sister Cristiana listened with great interest. As they studied the Bible, many questions arose, but who could give them some kind

of explanation? Sister Elisabetta thought about the evangelical pastor who talked on the radio and spoke to Sister Cristiana about it. Certainly, it would be wonderful to be able to meet and talk with him, but how could they do that? Catholic nuns had no contact with protestant ministers.

The house where they were serving was not theirs, but belonged to the charity arm of the Catholic Church. "Sister Cristiana was more courageous than I," admits Sister Elisabetta.

"Why don't we invite the pastor to come here to the house when it is closed to the prisoners, (during the mornings when the prisoners were out working)," suggested Sister Cristiana. So that is what they did.

Courageous Step Toward Truth

For about ten years, the evangelical pastor-missionary, Richard Paul, came punctually every week to speak about the Lord. With great tact he began to lead them to the path of liberty

from beliefs that were not in line with the Word of God and to clarify for them the "whys" that for years had tormented them because they had no answer.

"Deepening our understanding of the Scriptural doctrines put us in direct conflict with those of the Catholic Church," the ex-nuns say. "We understood that the cult of Mary, the Madonna, had no Biblical base, just as the dogmas attributed to her had no base Biblically. We discovered that those and other dogmas were invented by men, without any Biblical foundation, like, for example, the dogma of purgatory. We felt disappointed and deceived by all that we had believed in good faith."

They continue: "The patience and discretion that the pastor showed us slowly brought us to understand where the Truth really was and where true salvation lay; not in good works but through faith in Jesus, the only one that can save."

Being in the halfway house without supervision, these two nuns could commit... omissions

of rites without coming under sanction. Elisabetta admits, “I stopped saying the rosary. I was very devoted to Mary, but had come to realize that the Mary who was venerated by the Catholic rites was not the Biblical Mary, a simple woman rich in faith; then I stopped going to confession and participating in holidays devoted to Our Lady Mary, and finally quit attending Sunday mass. Little by little Cristiana made the same choices and it became impossible to continue in this condition. We needed to make a choice!”

A Tormented Choice

By now Sister Elisabetta was ready to make the “big jump” because she could no longer live in compromise. But Sister Cristiana, while realizing where the Truth really was, could not bring herself to leave the Order where she had enjoyed much esteem; to her it seemed a betrayal. She was sure that she could remain in the Order and avoid observance of those rites and those beliefs that had nothing to do with the Word of God. “You decide for

yourself,” she told Sister Elisabetta, “but you’ll see that I will be able to avoid all that does not conform to the Word of God.”

In the halfway house they had a lot of freedom, so Sister Elisabetta wanted to be patient. But they didn’t go to mass anymore and that would certainly be noticed. On the other hand, they didn’t feel that they could attend an evangelical service wearing their habits that identified them as nuns without first having made an open declaration of their choice. It was clear, at least to Sister Elisabetta, that they couldn’t wait much longer.

Sister Cristiana’s choice became very heavy for her; making a decision was increasingly more difficult to the point that she fell into depression. This state of things created an ulcer that took her to the brink of death. In fact, when she was hospitalized she had lost so much blood that if she had waited another hour without help she would have died. After her hospital emergency stay was over, she was sent to a rehabilitation clinic

run by her same Order, and she was cared for by the nuns for six months. With such excellent care, she recuperated well. Sister Elisabetta thought that perhaps Sister Cristiana would want to stay there with the nuns the rest of her life.

However while Sister Cristiana was recuperating, she became very aware that she was unable to absent herself from certain practices. When the priest came for confession, she, as a nun, was expected to confess; every day she was expected to recite the rosary with the other nuns as well as the act of consecration to Mary. Every day she had to participate at mass, honor and sing praises to Mary, etc. She began to realize how difficult it was to profess one faith and live another one.

Placing Trust In God

At this point, a decision had to be made. Sister Elisabetta recalls, “I told Sister Cristiana I had already decided that when March came, the month in which



our Order renewed their vows, I would confirm my request to be exonerated from the vows and that I would talk to the provincial directress at the headquarters for the Order. And that is what I did.”

The provincial directress suggested that she ask for six months of suspension (something possible in their Order) and then after that ask for dismissal from the Order. She wrote a letter requesting abstention from the vows, but before she sent it she took it to the clinic for Sister Cristiana to read.

“What shock and surprise,” Sister Elisabetta says, “when Sister Cristiana told me, ‘Write one for me as well’, because it was impossible at that point for her to write it with her own hand. They submitted their letters asking for



a suspension of their vows in March of 2004 and in September they presented their final letters of resignation from the Order.

"I cannot express what joy I felt in that moment!" declares Elisabetta. "The Lord had worked in a marvelous way and that risky health problem was necessary for Cristiana to understand that her place was no longer among the nuns (whom she so loved) nor in the Catholic Church. Hallelujah! Certainly, Lord, You restore our souls and lead us in paths of righteousness for your name's sake."

Old Habits Die

Cristiana shares her joy. They declare together, "Finally our

choice for Christ was realized! Now, even if we are old, we are young in spirit, and we can serve the Lord with full liberty because we have known the Truth. We are happy, we don't have human security (financial or material), but we have one assurance, the true one, Jesus Christ!"

Sisters Elisabetta and Cristiana, ages 70 and 84, were baptized in the Bible Christian Church of Florence by Dick Paul and Sam Wegner (missionaries with Biblical Ministries Worldwide) on September 25, 2005. Elisabetta asked that her name revert to her given one—Annamaria—because Elisabetta was the name given to her when she entered the Order as a nun. Cristiana, on the other hand, whose given name is Maria, asked to continue with the name Cristiana (Christian) because, she said, "it represents better who I really am." They have put off their "old habits" for nuns, and wear "believer" clothing like other believers.

New Life Begins

These servants of the Lord have bought a small, one-room apartment where they live as of January of 2006. They are trusting the Lord completely to meet all their living expenses from then on, knowing that He can multiply the small loaves and fishes that they have (about \$500 each per month pension) to more than satisfy their needs. Annamaria uses her art talents to augment their income a little by painting beautiful Tuscan scenes and flowery decorations on porcelain vases, cups and saucers, and plates. She also creates Florentine designs on paper; etches famous paintings on gold leaf, and designs unusual greeting cards.

After listening to an Italian couple who minister to the local Romanian gypsy camp in Florence (the people are called ROM), Annamaria declared, "If I can serve the Lord among these people then my art will take a secondary place." Her heart is still to serve the Lord first through serving the poor. She, along with others in her local church, bring some of the ROM children in two or three days a week to teach them various artistic crafts to encourage them to work to earn money. She teaches them songs and encourages them in their lives. The Lord is allowing her to use her art and serve the poor for His glory. Cristiana serves them as a "Marta", preparing meals, and aiding Annamaria where needed. They both are very faithful to and active in the local church.

The Lord has also opened doors for Cristiana and Annamaria to give their testimonies in a number of evangelical churches in Italy. It is with great enthusiasm that they share with churches concerning their journey to freedom in Christ, which took almost 20 years, and they challenge and encourage believers to be faithful in witnessing to their Catholic friends and relatives.

As Annamaria has often said, **Hallelujah!**

For the
WORD of GOD
is LIVING
& ACTIVE,
SHARPER
than any
TWO-EDGED
SWORD,
PIERCING
*to the***DIVISION**
of SOUL
and of SPIRIT,
of JOINTS
and of MARROW,
DISCERNING
*the***THOUGHTS**
&
INTENTIONS
of the
HEART.

—HEBREWS 4:12

Appendix



After having read & studied the Scriptures, certain verses were important in convincing us to leave the Catholic Church.

We would like to share them with you.

We were impressed by I Corinthians 4:6: "...not to go beyond what is written.", which in the Italian Bible reads "that you might learn from us not to practice more than that which is written"; words that disturbed us very much. In studying the Word of God and reading the history of the Church, we had come to understand that various doctrines, dogmas, rites, and patrimony of the Catholic Church, had no Biblical foundation and were the inventions of man. We studied

the Bible and confronted it with our Catholic beliefs.

In a notebook I (Annamaria) wrote the Bible verses that confirmed that which was contrary to the Catholic doctrine and its dogmas. "Add or take away" and "Do not go beyond what is written" were two affirmations constantly present with me.

Statues & sacred images

We found in Exodus 20:4-5 the commandment that prohibited the making of statues or paintings to adore them.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. . . Exodus 20:4-5a

I asked myself why this commandment was not present in the Catholic Ten Commandments. I compared this to Deuteronomy 4:7-10 which was the same commandment as in Exodus.

Why did the Catholic Church omit the second commandment?

In our Bible studies, when we had doubts or questions, God, in one way or another gave us the answer through a book, a person who had studied, or the radio. This was the explanation we found concerning the second commandment: the grand theologian Augustine of Hippo took out the second commandment and divided the tenth commandment in two parts. Now we understood why there were many statues, sacred paintings, candles, etc, in the church and in Catholic homes.

It was in Deuteronomy 4:2 that we found written for the first time, *You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.*

The risk of adding or taking away from Scripture

We eliminated all sacred images from our worship. We freed ourselves from all worship that

was not directed to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We wanted to understand more the instruction of God which said : *Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it* (Deuteronomy 12:32). In order to confirm the goodness of the Law of the Lord, Moses said to his people,

See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them Deut. 4:5

We found many verses in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament in which God gave the order to neither “take away or add to.”

Psalms 19 and 119 speak about the perfection of the law of the Lord.

Proverbs 30:5-6

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

I perceived that whatever God

does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.

Matthew 15:1-19

In these verses Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their attachment to their traditions; among other things He says,

So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. v. 6b

I Corinthians 15:1-2

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

Galatians 1:8-9

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say it again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

II John 9-11

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Revelation 22:18-19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The question of authority

When one studies Catholic doctrine, one needs to confront that doctrine with Biblical doctrine.

For us, the Bible became the authority that we must obey because it was the “Word of God”.

Jesus himself said that He came to fulfill all the law (**The Word of God**) and that “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18), because it was the absolute authority above every other law or human tradition.

We compared the Catholic tradition with the Bible and discovered that Jesus did not want tradition. In Mark 7:9 Jesus said, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!” Jesus continued to speak giving them examples of what they were doing.

Many times we had heard the reading of this passage in the Catholic settings but its content passed over our heads. We thought that Jesus was referring to the Pharisees; we thought that they were words only for the Hebrews and not for today. We did not think about the fact that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) and therefore His Word is valid in every age. We did not find a single Bible pas-

sage that spoke in favor of tradition. Instead we found:

Matthew 15:3

He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Mark 7:7-8, 13

“In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

. . . thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Paul, who before his conversion was zealous in following the tradition of his fathers, said:

Galatians 1:14

And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

After his conversion he exhorted believers:

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty

deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Purgatory and the worship of the dead

With all this evidence against tradition, we asked why the Catholic authorities placed the tradition of the fathers of the Church on the same level with the Bible. How could they allow certain traditions to become dogmas of faith? For example, we did not find purgatory in a single Biblical passage where it spoke of this intermediate state between hell and heaven.

Why did the Catholic Church continue to sustain this tradition? Is not this deceitful for the Catholic believers that continually have masses celebrated for their dead? It is true that a reference to purgatory is found in the book of the Maccabees (II Maccabees 12:41, 45) but we know that this book is not contained in the canon of the books of the Old Testament accepted by the Hebrew people as inspired by God.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

II John 9

Jesus said,

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

The sacrifice of Christ

In studying the letter to the Hebrews, we became aware that the sacrifice of Christ was made “once for all”. (Hebrews 9:12) Why therefore does the Catholic doctrine teach that the mass is the repeated sacrifice of Christ? The letter to the Hebrews says,

[Christ] has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.
Hebrews 7:27

Unlike the other high priests, he

does not need to offer sacrifices day after day. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. In Hebrews the phrase, “he has appeared once for all . . . by the sacrifice of himself” is repeated different times. (Heb. 9:26, 28; 10:10, 18)

The priesthood of Christ

We asked, “What purpose is the mass if it does not need to be repeated? As for the priests, why do we need them if there is no sacrifice?” We found the answer in Hebrews 7:24-25,

But he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

The priesthood of Christ is not transmitted to another (not even that of the Old Testament which finished with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem) because Christ made only one sacrifice and has no need of either priests or a repeated sacrifice. This is confirmed in the let-

ter to the Ephesians (4:11) where we find a list of things God has given for the maturation of the church, but there is no priest in the list. The sacrifice of Christ was made once for all; there is no need for the priests.

Do not practice other than what is written!

The priesthood of the believer

The most stupendous thing that we discovered is found in I Peter 2:9 which states,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When did we become a royal priesthood? At the death of Jesus when the veil of the temple was rent in two. From that moment, the Holy of Holies was no longer reserved just for the High Priest, but was made accessible to all those who have accepted Christ as personal Saviour, making it possible for each one to

enter into the presence of God as priests offering the sacrifice that Christ made for us.

Hallelujah!

The Eucharist

The Eucharist was a doubt that occupied the mind of Cristiana for a long time. She could not believe that transubstantiation (the teaching that the Eucharist becomes the actual body and the wine the actual blood of Christ) was only a doctrine which came from the theology of men. It was a term that originated with Thomas Aquinas and was without Biblical foundation. She often reflected on this subject and asked herself questions about what Jesus said, "This is my body . . ." and "This is my blood . . ." (Matthew 26:26-28). Because of these words, she often had doubts and was continuously looking for a convincing explanation. Finally someone reminded her as to how Jesus had clarified the concept very well, responding to the Jews who were scandalized by thinking they needed to eat His blood:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. John 6:51

A little further on He explains,

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. John 6:63

If the body of Christ is not an earthly body, how can we nourish ourselves with his earthly resurrected body?

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second

man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I Corinthians 15:42-49

In reading and understanding this Cristiana was convinced that the Catholic teaching was not true.

Do not practice other than what is written!

Confession

What shall we say about confessing one's sins to a priest?

Had not Jesus first told Peter "whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19) and then to the disciples, in Matthew 18:18, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"?

To us it seemed normal to confess our guilt to the priest in order to obtain absolution from our sins. Besides, didn't that priest

have to confess his own sins to another priest?

And yet, what did those words from the Gospel of Matthew mean? We discovered that it meant that when a believer evangelizes someone and this person believes, accepts the Gospel, recognizing that Christ bore his sins on the cross and washed him with His own blood, his sins are loosed, that is, pardoned, because the Gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

Well, then, to whom should one confess his sins? S. Clemente Romano, a believer in the first century of Christianity, in his epistle wrote: "The Lord doesn't ask anything from man except a confession made to Him." Besides, only God can forgive our sins.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I John 1:9

Mary, Mother of God

Another doctrine very dear to Catholic authority, and certainly very dear to the Catholic people, is related to Mary, the Madonna. For both Cristiana and me it was a subject of study and research because we both were very devoted to Mary. For us it seemed impossible not to turn to her, to pray to her, to ask for her protection. She was the mother of Jesus! We began our research with Jesus on the cross as he entrusted his mother to John. We sought in his writings things he said about Mary, but found no reference to the mother of Jesus that would justify such popular devotion to Mary.

In the Bible we did not find a single passage favoring the worship of Mary, but we became aware that she also died as any other human. First Corinthians 15:20-23 speaks of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of those who have died in Christ who will rise from the dead at his coming:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of

those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Here it speaks exclusively of the resurrection of Christ and of the future resurrection of those who are dead in Christ, who will, however, be resurrected at His coming. If Mary would have been assumed into heaven, it would have been written that she was the only exception.

In the Catholic Church, one prays to Mary as the “co-redeemer,” but in Acts 4:12, this affirmation is denied. There it is written:

And there is a salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Those who pray to Mary invoke her as “mediator,” but in the Bible we read:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God

and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all I Timothy 2:5-6

No one comes to the Father except through me (Jesus).
John 14:6

Who is it that intercedes for us?

Hebrews 7:25 says,

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Another of our doubts about Mary's immaculate conception came as a result of reading Revelation. If Mary would have been truly conceived without sin, should it not have been she who could open the book of the seven seals in Revelation 5:2-4? Instead we read:

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

Only Jesus, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (vs. 5) was able to open it.

In the Catholic prayer, Hail Queen Mary, she is invoked as "advocate (lawyer) of sinners", but in I John 2:1 it is written that,

We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus himself said to Satan in Matthew 4:10,

You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

Do not practice other than what is written!

Why is it that the Catholic authorities have not obeyed God and have gone beyond that which is written in establishing the doctrine of Mary? What is it based on? After looking through many books, we discovered that these doctrines are based on traditions and popular devotion. For Cristiana and me this was a great delusion. We felt deceived by our Church that we had loved so sincerely!

The papacy

We were certain that the Catholic Church was right concerning the Biblical affirmation of Matthew 16:18-19:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Even though we did not approve of the Vatican's pomp, its theatrics, its riches and although we did not find it right that the Vicar of Christ should be the head of State (Christ did not have a place to lay his head, which indicates that the Vatican is not the heir of Christ), these words spoken to Peter we believed to be continued in the Pope. From the phrase, “on this rock I will build my church”, we came to understand that the Rock was Christ, because the words said by Peter, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16) was the affirmation that Christ was the “Rock” on which the

church would be built. In Ephesians 2:20-21 we have the confirmation because it is written,

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Other verses confirm this: Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; I Peter 2:7; Psalms 118:22. There is no mention of Peter being the “rock”.

As far as the “binding and loosing” is concerned, remember that Peter and the apostles were sent to the Gentiles, and whoever accepted the Gospel, that is, salvation in Christ, were loosed from their sins, but whoever did not accept Christ remained bound in their sin.

Acts 10:43

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 26:18

To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan

to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

We asked ourselves why the Pope is the “vicar” of Christ. Jesus himself said He would be with us until the end of time (Matthew 28:20), and He also promised to send the “Comforter” who would clarify and cause to remember that which Jesus taught when he was on earth (John 14:16-26; 15:26; 16:7). It is the Holy Spirit Who is the vicar of Christ!

The infallibility of the Pope we never understood not even when we were fervent Catholics (for more than 50 years of religious life). Studying the Bible, it became evident that only God is infallible—ineffability is part of God’s character while we mortals are sinners and therefore fallible. Even Peter who was one of the “elders” was wrong in his behavior and was rebuked by Paul before the entire community:

But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I (Paul) opposed him to his face, because he stood

condemned. Galatians 2:11

We have never found any Bible passage which confirmed the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope. If the Holy Spirit is always with the believer (words of Jesus), is there any need for a second infallible person?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

... that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. 1 Corinthians 4:6

Conclusion

In the letter to the Galatians (1:8) it is written:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Cristiana and I have decided, with His help, to persevere in His Word. Jesus has given us a great certainty, the certainty that we are saved eternally, justified!

In his letter to the Romans (8:1), Paul wrote:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is condemnation for those who do not believe in Christ as Saviour, but not for those who have accepted Him as personal Saviour and are in Christ. The apostle John repeated many times in his writings that “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”

Therefore, it is not by works that one is saved, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

As religious figures, nuns, we were heard to repeat many times to people, “You will certainly go to Paradise because of all the good works that you do!” Instead, the Lord tells us that it is not our works that save us.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

To have the certainty of our salvation, to know that our sins will not send us to Hell, but that they

are pardoned and we are freed because we have believed in Jesus and want to live according to His teachings, these are the things that fill our hearts with joy, a great inner peace, because we know that we are his daughters and that we will live eternally with Him!

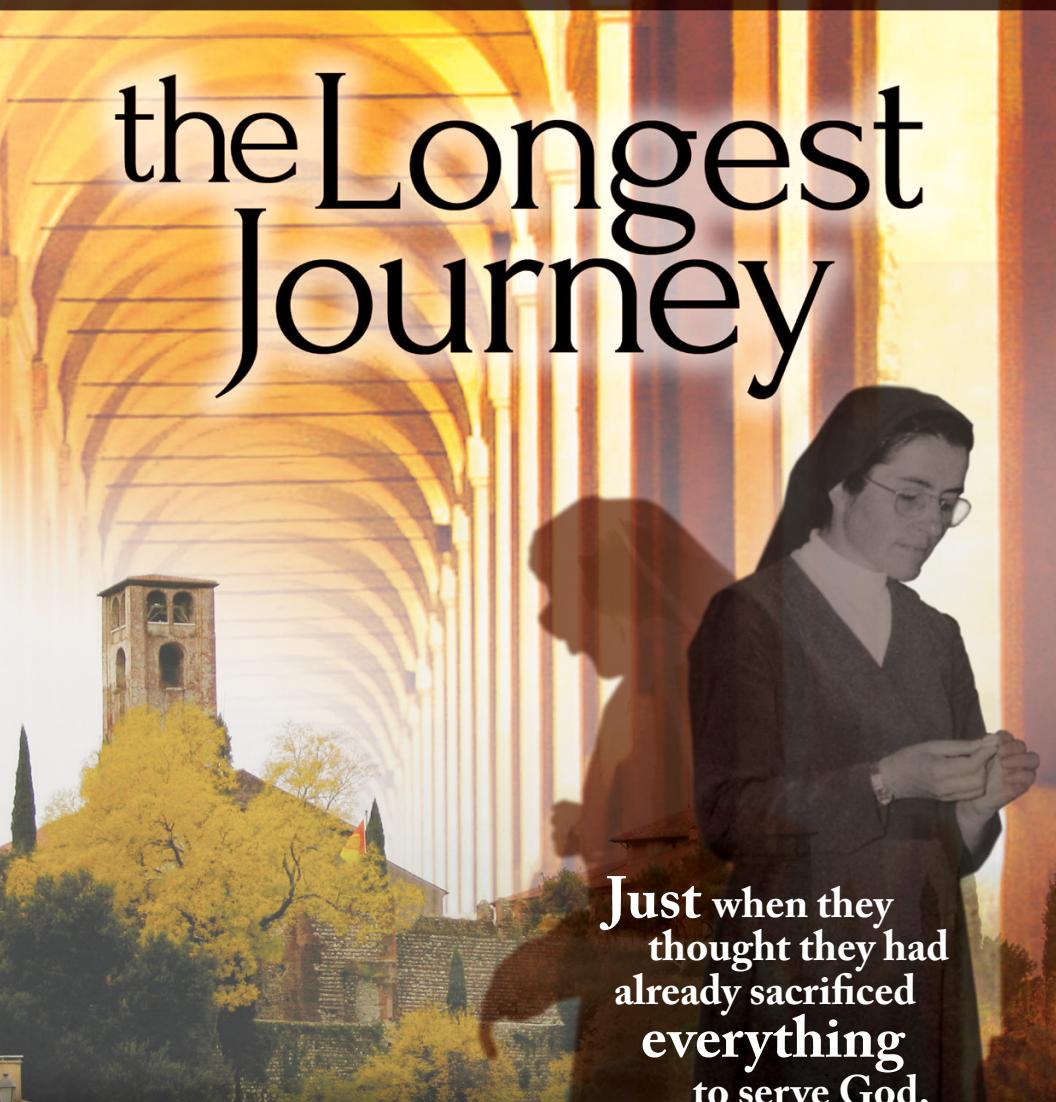
These are the reasons we have chosen Christ and Him alone!

Annamaria Mazzari & Cristiana Gavagni are active members of Chiesa Cristiana Biblica of Florence, Italy, founded by veteran BMW missionaries

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We Chose Christ and Him Alone!

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