

# Irish Presbyterianism: 'Then and Now'

After my beloved father died and went to be with the Lord in 1995 I was sorting through some small booklets in his desk and one in particular caught my eye. On the front of it was a map of Ireland with a large red cross superimposed upon it. Beside the cross was this scripture quotation "**The truth shall make you free**" [John 8:32]. At the bottom of the front cover are these words – '**Published by the Youth Committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**'. Nowhere in the little booklet is a publication date given but again on the front cover the price is stated – '**PRICE THREEPENCE**' – and this of course would be in pre-decimal currency. My guess is that this booklet may have been issued in the 1940's or even earlier. The title of the booklet is as follows –

## **HANDBOOK on ROMANISM and EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY**

In the preface to the booklet we read the following –

***'Several years ago a number of Presbyteries expressed the opinion that one of the urgent needs of our Church was a Catechism dealing with Romanism and Evangelical Christianity. In answer to that request the Youth Committee of the General Assembly issues the present Handbook***'.

The Preface goes on to state that most answers contain quotations from official Roman Catholic sources and references for each quotation are listed near the back of the booklet. A bibliography listing other sources is also given and the Preface ends with this statement –

***'It is the hope and prayer of the Youth Committee that this handbook will supply, through the blessing of God, the need of our Church: and they issue it, believing in the declaration of Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church "The Truth shall make you free" (St John viii, 32)***'.

I want now just to quote a few examples of the questions and answers contained in this little booklet.

### **Question 4: What is the Church?**

***The Church is the company of those who believe in God, in Christ as Lord and Saviour, and, living and working together in His Spirit, seek to win the world for Him. This is the true Catholic, or Universal Church.***

### **Question 5: What is the Presbyterian Church?**

**The Presbyterian Church is that branch of the Catholic Church which bases her form of government upon that of the New Testament Church.**

**Question 10: Does the Church of Rome give the Bible to all her members to read?**

**No: the Church of Rome has placed the Bible on the Index of Prohibited Books. [Ref: Index de Lib. Prohib: reg 4; Catholic Doctrine on Use of Bible (Wiseman)]**

**Question 11: What does the Roman Index of Prohibited Books say concerning the reading of the Bible?**

**The Roman Index says "It is manifest from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it". However written permission may be given by a bishop to certain individuals. [Ref: Index de Lib. Prohib: reg 4]**

**Question 12: If a member of the Church of Rome possesses a copy of the Bible without such written permission, what is the penalty?**

**"If any shall have the presumption to read or possess it without any such written permission, he shall not receive absolution until he have first delivered up such Bible to the Ordinary [usually the local Bishop]" that is, his soul is damned. [Ref: Index de Lib. Prohib: reg 4]**

**COMMENT** Whilst nowadays Roman Catholics are allowed to possess and read a copy of the Bible they are not allowed to privately interpret the meaning of what they read. The 1994 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' states in paragraph 100 'The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him'. In the 1960's the Roman Catholic Vatican 2 Council reconfirmed the teachings of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Catholic Council of Trent, which declared 'No one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held or holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teachings of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published'.

**Question 19: Did Jesus Christ appoint an earthly head to His Church?**

**The only King and Head of the Church is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.**

**Question 20: What does the Church of Rome claim with regard to the Headship of the Church on earth?**

**The Church of Rome claims that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ on earth, and therefore, the supreme head and infallible teacher of the Church and that to believe this is necessary for salvation. [Ref: De Synod (Benedict XIV lib ii. Creed of Pius IV art. X: The Catholic Faith (Pius X) pp21-24: Douay Catechism p20: Maynooth Catechism p21].**

**Question 34: How did the Popes in the Middle Ages attempt to establish their claims?**

**The Popes in the Middle Ages frequently attempted to establish their claims by the use of certain Decretals [A Decretal is a letter of the Pope determining**

some point or question in ecclesiastical law] which have since been proved to be forgeries. [Ref: *The Church and the Papacy* (Jalland); *The Evolution of Latin Christianity* (Heron) pp125-180; *Romanism and Evangelical Christianity* (Paul) pp358-369; *The Infallibility of the Church* (Salmon) pp447-454; *The Latin Church in the Middle Ages* (Lagarde)].

**Question 45: What does the Church of Rome teach concerning Baptism?**

**The Church of Rome teaches that Baptism regenerates, inasmuch as it “confers the first sanctifying grace by which original sin is cancelled and actual sin also, if there is any”. [Ref: Council of Trent sess. v; Can 5; Catechism (Cafferata) p107; *The Catholic Faith* (Pius X) p68; *Maynooth Catechism* pp47-48]**

**Question 50: What is Confirmation according to the Church of Rome?**

**Confirmation according to the Church of Rome is “a sacrament instituted by our Lord by which the faithful, who have already been made children of God by baptism, receive the Holy Ghost by prayer, unction or anointing with oil, and the laying on of hands of a bishop”. [Ref: Council of Trent sess. vii; *Tridentine Catechism* II iii; *Maynooth Catechism* pp48-49; *The Sacrament of Confirmation* (Kreuser)]**

**Question 51: Why do we reject Confirmation as practised by the Church of Rome?**

**We reject Confirmation, as practised by the Church of Rome, as a sacrament, because no such rite was instituted by Jesus.**

**Question 53: What is the doctrine of the Church of Rome with regard to the visible signs of bread and wine?**

**The doctrine of the Church of Rome is that the bread and wine are changed “truly, really and substantially into the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, and the bones and sinews of Christ”. This is the doctrine of Transubstantiation. [Ref: Council of Trent sess.xiii, xxii; *Tridentine Catechism* II iv; *Convert’s Catechism* pp49-50; *Protestant Catechism* (McDonald) p57].**

**Question 87: What are the ends for which Mass is said according to the Church of Rome?**

**“The sacrifice of the Mass” according to the Church of Rome “is offered to God...to appease Him “to give God honour and glory, to thank Him for His benefits, to obtain pardon for our sins, and all other graces and blessings through Jesus Christ” and “to continue and represent the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross” [Ref: *The Catholic Faith* (Pius X) p81; Council of Trent sess. xxii; *Convert’s Catechism* 279; *Maynooth Catechism* p51]**

**Question 89: In what way does the Church of Rome contradict the teaching of the New Testament concerning the priesthood of Jesus?**

**The Church of Rome contradicts the teaching of the New Testament by asserting that Jesus Christ has appointed on earth a special order of men to succeed His priesthood in the work of offering sacrifice for sin; and by asserting that the Mass is a repetition of the sacrifice of the Cross through the miracle of Transubstantiation. [Ref: Council of Trent sess. xiv. Can 9; Catechism (Cafferata) p138; *The Catholic Faith* (Pius X) p81; *Maynooth Catechism* p51]**

**Question 93: Name the superstitions and abuses which have arisen out of the doctrine of Transubstantiation**

**Some superstitions and abuses, which have arisen out of the doctrine of Transubstantiation are – (a) The worship of the consecrated bread or host, which gave rise to the feast of Corpus Christi [Body of Christ] (b) Revolting ideas concerning correct procedure should a fly or spider fall into the consecrated wine or a mouse nibble the consecrated bread. [Ref: Romanism and Evangelical Christianity (Paul) p149; Has Rome Changed (Bain) pp21-28]**

**Question 99: What is an Indulgence according to the Church of Rome?**

**By an Indulgence the Church of Rome means “the remission, through the power of the Church, of the temporal punishment due to sin which sometimes remains after the sin itself is forgiven”. [Ref: Council of Trent sess. xxv; Maynooth Catechism p56]**

**Question 104: Does the Church of Rome issue Indulgences for the dead?**

**Yes: the Church of Rome issues Indulgences for the dead for the relief of their sufferings in an alleged Purgatory. [Ref: Creed of Pius iv, art. 6; Romanism and Evangelical Christianity (Paul) pp241, 246].**

**Question 105: What is Purgatory according to the Church of Rome?**

**Purgatory according to the Church of Rome “is a place where souls suffer for a time after death on account of their sins” and “those souls go to Purgatory that depart this life in venial sin; or that have not fully paid the debt of their temporal punishment due to those sins of which the guilt has been forgiven”. [Ref: Creed of Pius iv, art. 6; Convert’s Catechism 106-107; Maynooth Catechism pp25-26].**

**Question 108: What does the Church of Rome teach concerning the assistance which may be given to souls in Purgatory?**

**According to the Church of Rome “the souls therein detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful” which means they are helped by “the sacrifices of masses, prayers, almsgivings and other works of piety performed” on their behalf. [Ref: Council of Trent sess. xxv; Creed of Pius iv, art.6]**

**Question 109: To what serious sin and superstition do the Roman doctrines of Indulgences and Masses for the dead lead?**

**These Roman doctrines lead to the belief that a wicked man can, by money paid by himself, or by others on his behalf, obtain release from punishment for sin. [Ref: Romanism and Evangelical Christianity (Paul) p261]**

**COMMENT The words of Psalm 49:6-7 seem most appropriate in this context “They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him”**

**Question 116: Why did the worship of Mary and of the Saints arise?**

**One of the main reasons why the worship of Mary and of the saints arose was because the all-sufficiency and approachableness of our Lord and Saviour were not taught. [Ref: The Evolution of Latin Christianity (Heron) pp280-301]**

**Question 120: Why is it wrong to worship Mary and the saints?**

**It is wrong to worship Mary and the saints because the New Testament teaches that worship is to be given to God alone and that the ONLY**

**MEDIATOR between God and man is the Lord Jesus Christ.** [Ref: St Matt iv:10; 1 Tim. ii:5; Heb. vii:25; 1Jn. ii:1-2; Rev. xxii:8-9]

**Question 121: What does the Church of Rome teach concerning images?**

**The Church of Rome teaches that “Images are representations of Christ, of His Blessed Mother, or of the saints” and members of the Church of Rome are encouraged to pay them homage and give them votive offerings [a votive offering is given as the consequence of a vow] In practice this leads to the worship of Images, that is, idolatry, which is forbidden in the second commandment. [Ref: The Catholic Faith (Pius X); Creed of Pius iv, art. 8; Catechism (Cafferata) p84; Maynooth Catechism pp31-32; Good Friday Service of Adoration of the Cross in the Roman Missal]**

**Question 123: What does the Church of Rome mean by relics?**

**Relics, according to the Church of Rome, are the dead bodies, or bones, of the saints, or many other things which belonged to them in this life.** [Ref: Council of Trent sess. xxv; Creed of Pius iv, art. 7]

**Question 124: Name some relics which are displayed and honoured by the Church of Rome**

**The Church of Rome displays and honours among a great many other things the following alleged relics – “the hair of St Mary Magdalene, stones thrown at St Stephen, hay from the manger in Bethlehem, the tail of Balaam’s ass, a tooth of St Paul, parings of St Edmund’s toes” and it is said “that there are more heads of St Peter than one or two”. [Ref: Is Roman Catholicism of God? (Pollock) p40; Romanism and the Gospel (Scott) pp153-155]**

**Question 125: What is the Rosary?**

**The Rosary consists of a string of beads, and is a Roman mechanical device for saying certain prayers, which must be regularly repeated.** [Ref: Is Roman Catholicism of God? (Pollock) p40]

**Question 126: Is the use of the Rosary liable to abuse?**

**The use of the Rosary for the saying of prayers tends to become a “vain repetition” such as was condemned by Christ.** [Ref: St Matt. vi:7]

**Question 128: What was the reason for the Reformation?**

**The reason for the Reformation was that the Church, dominated as she was by Rome, had become corrupt, with the result that those who loved God and His Church sought to restore her to her true purity and holiness.** [Ref: Institutes (Calvin); Tracts (Calvin); History of the Reformation (Lindsay); Age of the Reformation (Smith); Documents of the Continental Reformation (edit. Kidd)]

**Question 131: What is a “Protestant”?**

**The term “Protestant” has a negative and a positive aspect, because it involves not only protesting against error, but the asserting of truth. A Protestant, therefore, is one who not only protests against the errors and abuses of Romanism, but also bears witness to the fundamental principles of the Gospel.** [Ref: Institutes (Calvin); Confession of Faith; Shorter Catechism; The Scots Confession; Any Statement of Reformed Doctrine is a proof of this]

In these extracts from this little Catechism, the unnamed editor rightly identified the following errors and abuses contained in Roman Catholicism:-

- (a) The false Papal claim for the Pope to be the Church's 'earthly head'**
- (b) The exposure of Papal power based upon forged documents**
- (c) The heresy of 'Baptismal Regeneration'**
- (d) The heresy of Roman 'Confirmation'**
- (e) The heresy of 'Transubstantiation'**
- (f) The heretical claims made for The Mass**
- (g) The scripture-contradicting Roman 'Priesthood'**
- (h) The heresy of 'Rome's restrictions on Biblical interpretation**
- (i) The heresy of 'Indulgences'**
- (j) The heresy of obtaining forgiveness for those who have died**
- (k) The heresy of 'Purgatory**
- (l) The heresy of worshipping 'Mary and the Saints'**
- (m) The idolatry of 'image' worship**
- (n) The deceit of 'relic' worship**

## **THIS WAS IRISH PRESBYTERIANISM "THEN"**

## **WHAT ABOUT IRISH PRESBYTERIANISM 'NOW'?**

I think the sad decline of Irish Presbyterianism from its stated position in the little Catechism about what constitutes a "Protestant" namely – *'A Protestant, therefore, is one who not only protests against the errors and abuses of Romanism, but also bears witness to the fundamental principles of the Gospel'* is best illustrated by the stated intention of the Irish Presbyterian Moderator for 2004-2005, Ken Newell, to invite the Roman Catholic Primate of Ireland, Archbishop Sean Brady, to be one of his 'personal guests' at the opening night of the General Assembly on 7 June 2004.

Alf McCreary, the Religious Affairs correspondent of the Belfast Telegraph and an elder of the Irish Presbyterian Church, who very publicly abused his journalistic position to conduct a personal campaign to influence the election of Ken Newell to the post of Moderator, wrote in *'Perspectives'* [Belfast Telegraph 22 May 2004] –

*'It is blindingly obvious to anyone with even an ounce of ecclesiastical and political wit that it makes sense to invite the other Church leaders to the Assembly. To do so is to underline their joint mission and to symbolise the work being carried on by their respective flocks, often in the face of difficulties...Whether the anti-ecumenists like it or not, the main Churches are going to continue working together and to show that Christians can inspire and challenge our increasingly secular world...The Presbyterian Church, in practice, is much more tolerant and broad-based than some of its conservative backwoodsmen would suggest...Ken Newell has shown leadership in sending out the personal invitations and he should be respected and supported for doing so'.*

Ken Newell and his 'spin-doctor', Alf McCreary, represent all that has gone wrong within Irish Presbyterianism, for they perceive that there is a

**'joint mission' to be pursued in co-operation with a Church that still unashamedly and doggedly holds to –**

- (a) The false Papal claim for the Pope to be the Church's 'earthly head'**
- (b) Papal power based upon forged documents**
- (c) The heresy of 'Baptismal Regeneration'**
- (d) The heresy of Roman 'Confirmation'**
- (e) The heresy of 'Transubstantiation'**
- (f) The heretical claims made for The Mass**
- (g) The scripture-contradicting Roman 'Priesthood'**
- (h) The heresy of 'Rome's restrictions on Biblical interpretation**
- (i) The heresy of 'Indulgences'**
- (j) The heresy of obtaining forgiveness for those who have died**
- (k) The heresy of 'Purgatory**
- (l) The heresy of worshipping 'Mary and the Saints'**
- (m) The idolatry of 'image' worship**
- (n) The deceit of 'relic' worship**

and the perception is that those, who like those who drew up the little HANDBOOK on ROMANISM and EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, are to viewed as merely '*conservative backwoodsmen*'.

This is a time for God's people to pray very much that God will give wisdom and direction to His people within Irish Presbyterianism as they face a year that will no doubt stretch their Biblical convictions almost to breaking point.

In closing, I think I can do no better than quote in full C H Spurgeon's 'Evening Meditation' for this very date – 29 May – with this thought that "he being dead yet speaketh" [Hebrews 11:4]

**This evening's verse:**

**"Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho." Joshua 6:26**

Since he was cursed who rebuilt Jericho, much more the man who labours to restore Popery among us. In our fathers' days the gigantic walls of Popery fell by the power of their faith, the perseverance of their efforts, and the blast of their gospel trumpets; and now there are some who would rebuild that accursed system upon its old foundation. O Lord, be pleased to thwart their unrighteous endeavours, and pull down every stone which they build. It should be a serious business with us to be thoroughly purged of every error which may have a tendency to foster the spirit of Popery, and when we have made a clean sweep at home we should seek in every way to oppose its all too rapid spread abroad in the church and in the world. This last can be done in secret by fervent prayer, and in public by decided testimony. We must warn with judicious boldness those who are inclined towards the errors of Rome; **we must instruct the young in gospel truth, and tell them of the black doings of Popery in the olden times.** We must aid in spreading the light more thoroughly through the land, for priests, like owls, hate daylight. Are we doing all we can for Jesus and the gospel? If not, our negligence

**plays into the hands of the priest-craft. What are we doing to spread the Bible, which is the Pope's bane and poison? Are we casting abroad good, sound gospel writings? Luther once said, "The devil hates goose quills" and, doubtless, he has good reason, for ready writers, by the Holy Spirit's blessing, have done his kingdom much damage. If the thousands who will read this short word this night will do all they can to hinder the rebuilding of this accursed Jericho, the Lord's glory shall speed among the sons of men. Reader, what can you do? What will you do?**

<b>Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 29 May 2004</b>
---