

Why Did Fifty Catholic Priests Leave the Priesthood and Papal Rome?

By Richard Bennett

People ask me why did fifty former Catholic priests leave the priesthood, and indeed the Roman Catholic Church. The book I have published, called *Far from Rome Near to God: the Testimonies of Fifty Former Catholic Priests*, answers this question. In that book, each of the 50 former priests gives his distinctive account of his coming to salvation in Jesus Christ the Lord by faith alone. However, there is a common account that runs throughout the experiences of these converted priests and myself. Each of us had a great yearning to be different from those around us. We wanted to be more pure, nearer to God. Thus, we sought the priesthood in which we thought we could administer salvation to our fellow man stage by stage through the sacraments. Hearing confessions, forgiving sins, bringing Christ down upon the altar, the wonder of being like unto Christ in power and authority, all of these attracted us.

The Office of the Priesthood

However, quite a few of us in the early 1970s, who gloried in being priests, were shocked by words of one of our best Roman Catholic Scripture scholars, Raymond E. Brown. In his book, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, he wrote the following,

When we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, it is striking that while there are pagan priests and Jewish priests on the scene, no individual Christian is ever specifically identified as a priest.

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the high priesthood of Jesus by comparing his death and entry into heaven with the actions of the Jewish high priest who went into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle once a year with a blood offering for himself and for the sins of his people.¹

But it is noteworthy that the author of Hebrews does not associate the priesthood of Jesus with the Eucharist or the Last Supper; ...In fact, the once-for-all atmosphere that surrounds the priesthood of Jesus in Hebrews 10:12-14, has been offered as an explanation of why there are no Christian priests in the New Testament period.

Later, in the same chapter, Brown argues for priesthood in Christian ministry from Tradition. Even those of us who knew very little of the Bible knew that the Pharisees counted tradition superior to the clear Word of God. Raymond Brown made us doubt that we were indeed priests. Indeed, his book troubled our minds!

Besides the royal priesthood, which applies to all true believers in Christ, there is no office of priesthood in the New Testament. Rather, as the Book of Hebrews states so clearly of the Old Testament priests, “*And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, [Jesus Christ] because he continues ever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make*

¹ Hebrews 9:6-7

*intercession for them.*² “Unchangeable priesthood” means just that in the Greek: *aparabatos* means “untransferable.” The reason it cannot be transferred to men is that its essence belongs to Christ alone. Christ alone as Priest “*is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*”³

We 50 Priests believed that Catholic sacraments were necessary for salvation and the means of grace. Thus, the Church of Rome officially teaches,

The [Roman Catholic] Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation.*⁴

The sacraments were of major importance to us fifty priests. Every day began with Mass. Our doubts regarding the physical sacraments as central to our life with God began from experience. Serving as priests for years, many of us had baptized countless infants, and had said the words, “I absolve you,” over countless heads. We had anointed many aged, sick, and accident victims with the words, “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” Year after year, we saw the children we had baptized as infants grow up living as wickedly as other children who did not claim to be Christian.

Because of what we were seeing with the failure of infant baptism, many of us then dared to check the Bible. Here we discovered,

*“It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”*⁵ *“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*⁶

The verses in Ephesians shocked us most of all. Our standard definitions of sacraments defined them as “works,” as in the famous Canon 8 of the Council of Trent:

“If anyone says that by the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* [from the work worked], but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let him be anathema.”

It was difficult even to begin to doubt the sacraments. These and other physical signs absorbed much of our time. How could any of us dare to hear the Lord's principle stated so clearly: *“It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing.”*⁷ But hear the words we did, as our fifty testimonies bear witness.

The Father drew us, showing us our own worthlessness of Tradition and the sufficiency and truth of His Word in the Bible, as Jesus said to the Father, *“Thy word is truth”*⁸

I wish to illustrate the biblical truth that by the Lord's intervention, He moved some of the priests to leave the priesthood.

² Hebrews 7:23-25

³ Hebrews 7:26

⁴ CCC Para 1129

⁵ John 6: 63

⁶ Ephesians 2:8, 9

⁷ John 6:63

⁸ John 17:17



Bob Bush when he was a Jesuit Catholic Priest

The first testimony here is actually the first testimony in the book, that of Bob Bush. What Bob Bush wrote regarding the difference between biblical faith and Romanism was short and clear. He wrote,

The Catholic Church says that in order to be saved you must keep its laws, rules, and regulations. And if these laws are violated (for example, attendance at Mass every Sunday), then you have committed a sin. The

Catholic Church says in canon law of the present day that if you commit a serious sin, that sin must be forgiven by confessing that sin to a priest; “Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary way by which the faithful person who is aware of serious sin can be reconciled with God, and with the Church...”⁹ The Catholic Church says that this is the way sins are forgiven, the ordinary way that sins are forgiven.

The Bible says that if we repent in our heart and believe on His finished sacrifice that we are saved. We are saved by grace, not by our works. The Catholic Church adds works, in that you have to do these specific things in order to be saved, whereas the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9 that it is by grace that we are saved, not by works. The Bible makes it very clear that we are saved by grace. It is a free gift given by God, not because of any works we do. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”*¹⁰ *“And if by grace then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.”*¹¹

That power packed comments of Bob Bush are a fitting declaration that bears witness to the Gospel.

⁹ Canon 9609

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:8-9

¹¹ Romans 11:6



Cuthbert DZingirai - former Catholic priest in Zimbabwe

We now come to Cuthbert Dzingirai, the 3rd testimony in the book. Cuthbert states,

My family was not Catholic when I was born in late 1965, and we moved to a home on a farm around Gokomere Mission in Zimbabwe. I am the fourth in a family of four boys and two girls. As soon as we moved to the farm, I was baptized Cuthbert and my family became Catholics. This was a requirement to settle at the mission and be employed by the church. As I got older, I wanted to become a priest. I ended up joining a religious congregation to be a regular clergy.

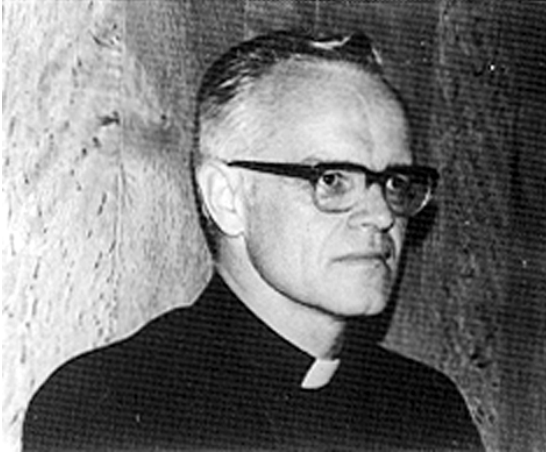
Not long after my final profession, I began to see some of the ugly realities of the Church and myself. Little by little, I discovered how difficult it was to keep the evangelical counsels, especially chastity. I learned that some of my seniors bought houses in the names of their relatives, some even in the names of their children. Was this possible—avowed “celibates” with children?

I decided to seek advice outside the Catholic Church. I found an article that “exposed the falsehoods of Catholic teachings. Finally I understood that Jesus Christ completely fulfilled the law; He fully paid my sin debt. I was not credited with this payment for my sin until I had faith in Christ alone and in His all-sufficient death on the cross, burial, and resurrection for my salvation. This is also true for every genuine believer because the righteousness of God is imputed to everyone who believes in the perfect work of His Son on the cross.¹² “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*”¹³

Thus, we have a most interesting conversion from Zimbabwe. Cuthbert, with whom I have contact by email, continues to evangelize across the nation of Zimbabwe.

¹² Romans 3:22

¹³ Romans 10:4



Sandy Carson when he was a Catholic Priest in 1972

Sandy Carson, whom I know well, is testimony number 8 in the book. He writes,

From childhood to age forty-four, seventeen years as a Roman priest (1955-1972), the Roman Catholic Church had been the pillar of truth to me, and my infallible guide to God. This “pillar of truth,” the Roman Church, was not

constructed solely of the infallible Scriptures, but also constructed of man’s “traditions” apart from Scripture, which were held to be revelations from God, but which in fact contradicted, and were in opposition to the plain teachings of Scripture.

One night I knelt in a confessional booth and confessed every sin of my life that I could bring to mind. At confession I always confessed my sins to God first, though it was in the presence of the priest who would give “absolution.” *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...”*¹⁴ After I expressed my repentance, and while the priest was giving the ritual “absolution,” I cried out to God with my heart, saying, “God, if you will forgive all my sins, I take you as Lord of my heart and I will serve you the rest of my life!” *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*¹⁵

Leaving that confessional box and walking across the transept of the church, I felt a great peace and “Abba, Father!” rang in my heart. I knew that I had a relationship with God!

This did not happen because of the presence of a priest and liturgical absolution. It happened because of the presence of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest Who made intercession for me and Who made me the object of His grace, mercy, and compassion. *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*¹⁶

There you have it, statements that cannot be refuted. In Christ Jesus alone you behold the wisdom, goodness, grace, mercy, and most of all, the love of our Abba Father!

¹⁴ 1 John 1:9

¹⁵ Romans 10:13

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-9



Catholic Priest Cipriano Valdes Jaimes

From Michoacan, Mexico we have testimony number 12 from Cipriano Valdes Jaimes. Cipriano states, You and I have no doubt seen at one time or another a man dressed as a Priest walking along with a serene expression on his face. Our first thought may have been that we were looking at a “god, dressed like a man.” Actually, it was a Roman Catholic priest, a figure shrouded in mystery.

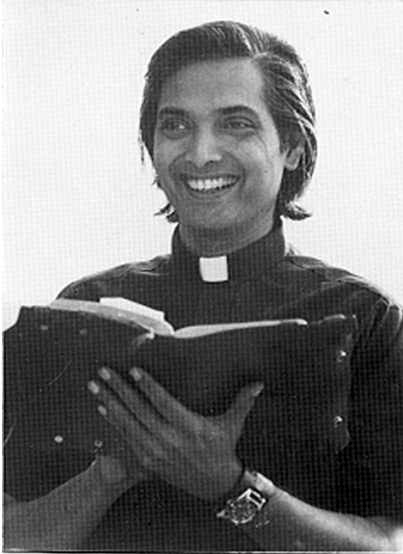
I, Cipriano Valdes Jaimes, was one of these priests. Born in Michoacan, Mexico, to a devout Catholic family, I received my primary education under the watchful eye

of those who taught me to observe frequent confession and daily communion. When I reached the age of twelve I requested the office of the Priesthood. For three years, my mind was filled with the philosophy of the Greek writers. With great care, I was given four years of theology where I learned all the dogmas of Romanism. Finally I was ordained a priest. So, when I was told that I had power to forgive the sins of my fellow men, I accepted the fact with all my heart. What I did not realize was that the forgiving of sins is a divine attribute. It cannot be delegated to a man. The Scripture says, “*I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*”¹⁷ For twenty years in the Roman Catholic priesthood, I performed this ridiculous, shameful, anti-Scriptural practice of daily listening to the sins of society, including military men, professionals, and politicians.

In spite of this, God’s voice interrupted me! God’s irresistible voice would not leave me alone! I don’t know what I’ll do, or where I’ll go. All I know is that I have to leave the Roman priesthood. I was not expelled from the priesthood in the Roman Church; I left because THE LORD CALLED ME.

The message of Cipriano Valdes Jaimes is crystal clear. Is the Lord also calling you? The light and liberty of the Gospel is transforming. You must not rest content until you have a personal knowledge of the transforming power of the Gospel.

¹⁷ Isaiah 43:25



Indian Catholic Priest Victor Affonso

All the way from India, we have Victor Affonso's testimony, number 14. He gives his account in these words,

At age of twenty-three I joined the Society of Jesus, a missionary order with "Spiritual Exercises." I desired to serve Jesus at any cost and lead all men to know Him, His peace, and His justice.

In the early sixties and seventies, when studying abroad, I lived in the Philippines and in many countries of Europe, and later in the U.S.A. I witnessed the emptying out of Roman Catholic churches in Europe. For example in Spain only six percent attended Sunday Mass! Later, in Los Angeles, USA, I saw the double-standard lives of the "Sunday Catholics," including myself and the other priests and nuns. I questioned my Christianity and wondered if Jesus Christ and the Bible were not mere fables for which I was giving up my life in vain.

My vision, when I joined, was to know Jesus intimately and I wanted to bring India to Christ. I was already seventeen years a Jesuit in my late thirties, equipped with several university degrees.

I considered leaving the powerless and unexciting priesthood. Unknown to me, some Christians were praying for me to be delivered from my deception. They prayed and I received the grace to come to a point of confusion and desperation regarding my faith and vocation and to cry out to the Lord, "O God, show me if You are true, if Jesus is Your Son, and if the Bible is Your true Word."

In 1972, precisely on Pentecost Sunday, the Lord dramatically saved me. I now knew the big difference between experiencing Jesus as my personal Savior after being "born-again" and knowing Him as a Roman Catholic. Words cannot describe this wonderful experience of having Jesus as my Savior.

Likewise, by the Lord's grace you also can have an amazing experience of having Jesus as your Savior.



Robert Champagne as Catholic Priest

Robert Champagne's testimony number 26 starts at any early age. He says,

At the age of five, I dreamed of becoming a Roman Catholic priest. Also at age five, the Roman Catholic Church had taught that my original sin had been washed away by the sacrament of water baptism, which I was told had made me a child of God and incorporated *me* into the Roman Catholic Church. I was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest for the diocese of Manchester on May 17, 1969. After being ordained, I celebrated my first Mass as "another Christ", and hundreds more during the few years that followed. I was ignorant of the fact that the Mass was such an offense to the Lord.

The Bible clearly states that salvation was Christ's work and his alone: "*When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*"¹⁸

In retrospect, I realize that it would have been utterly impossible for me to come to Christ by my own strength, which did not exist, or my own will, because of sin in Adam my heart was an enemy of God. I was desperately lost and alienated from God until the Good Shepherd found me and pulled me out of the pit of my sin, by causing me to repent and believe in Him.

Dear Friend, I would like to assure you that it is not my desire to put down anyone who is involved in Roman Catholicism. I have no resentment in my heart toward them. How could I, when the Lord Jesus Christ has been so merciful toward a sinner like me? I am giving my testimony with the earnest hope that many may come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and "*the power of his resurrection.*" As the Apostle Paul expressed it, that, "*I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*"¹⁹ Call upon Him now; trust Him. He died as a ransom, a substitute, for the ungodly.

Robert Champagne says it all! Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what Robert says is true! Then by grace you can turn Christ Jesus in faith alone for the salvation that He alone gives, truly we praise the Lord!

¹⁸ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁹ Philippians 3:10

What are we to learn from these Testimonies?

Salvation is the Lord God's majestic, finished work. Woven throughout these testimonies that I have given as illustrations, and indeed all fifty testimonies, is the same scarlet thread of God's sovereign grace. Before Him, each person is dead in sin. By grace, one is saved through faith. What the Bible has to say about priesthood becomes crystal clear in these personal testimonies, men who experienced the false priesthood of the Church of Rome.

The best summary of what happened to us in the Roman Catholic priesthood is found in the words of Paul, *"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*²⁰

The Priesthood of Christ is glorious, like Himself. It is the Priesthood in which He has offered to the Father all that He is. It is His final finished work in which the glory of His Person will shine forever. As Priest, He has done all that was necessary to put away the sins of His people. He has provided for them both the forgiveness for their sins and His own perfect standing before God. *"It is finished,"*²¹ He declared. What was finished was the believer's slavery to sin and the true moral guilt that attends his sin! Paid was the price of the believer's redemption. Performed were all the requirements of God's law. In a word, complete satisfaction has been made to God for the believer by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In contrast to the glorious priesthood of Christ, the Catholic priesthood is smoke and mirrors. Like the well-known allegory of the king's new suit, it simply does not exist!

Believe on the Eternal Lord and know the alone, true Priest that gives life now, and forever! *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God."*²² This is the living way, the only way to eternal life. It is death to attempt to come to God through earthly sacrificial priests who have no place in this New Testament era. The way to the Eternal Father is through the Eternal Priest alone; Jesus' death is for us the way to true, eternal life. To those who believe this, He is precious beyond all understanding.

Concerning the Holy Spirit the Lord promised that, *"when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."*²³ The Holy Spirit convicts of sin as He makes the sinner realize his lost condition and brings him to sense his need of Christ's righteousness. The Holy Spirit only can impart spiritual life to the soul and supernatural light to the mind. Therefore the Lord Himself proclaimed, *"verily, verily, I say unto thee except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Verily, verily is an expression used by Lord to draw attention to the crucial importance of what

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:1-2

²¹ John 19:30

²² Hebrews 10:19-21

²³ John 16:8

He said. What He calls being “born again,” He also establishes as a principle of life, *“that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*²⁴ The Holy Spirit is the sole and only efficient cause of being “born again.” The same principle of life is later repeated by the Lord, *“it is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing...”*²⁵

Our greatest problem as human beings is that we have offended the Lord God, the all Holy One. His holiness is the distinguishing factor in all His essential characteristics. This is the reason why we need to be in right standing before the one and only All-Holy God on the terms He prescribes. Our evil thoughts, deeds, and character have made us enemies of Him. We have a spiritual debt of infinite proportions that we are unable to repay. Even our good deeds are as filthy rags before the holy God due to our innate rebellion toward Him. The good news however is that by His grace we can turn to Him in faith alone for the salvation that He alone gives, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, based on Christ’s death and resurrection for His own, and believe on Him alone. The Lord’s solemn promise harmonizes entirely with this, *“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?”*²⁶ *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”*²⁷ This gives us assurance that we can expect the Holy Spirit’s assistance, in conviction and finally in being born again.

Trusting in the promise of our heavenly Father,
Richard Bennett

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²⁴ John 3:6

²⁵ John 6:63

²⁶ Luke 11:11

²⁷ Matthew 7:11