

Some questions to ask yourself before you vote in November:

- Which political party is really the party of “life”?
  - For all of their promises, what impact have consecutive Republican administrations had on the number of abortions performed in the United States? (See article, “Abortion: Rhetoric or Results,” below.)
  - Will Republicans support mothers’ efforts to carry their children to term by promising to help them provide for their children after they are born – with healthcare, education assistance, day care, nutrition, etc.?
  - Will Republicans promise to stop lying to get us into conflicts where “our” children have to kill “their” children?
  - Do you believe that some lives (those in the womb) are more valuable than other lives (those of death row inmates or enemy combatants)? Jesus didn’t. And he doesn’t want us to either. (Mt. 5: 43-48) Every human life (innocent and “guilty”) is equally precious to God, whose perfection we are told to emulate.
  - Archbishop Burke, should politicians who support unjust wars and the death penalty also be deprived of Communion?
  - Do we really want to return to the days of illegal, back-room abortions?
  - Will Republicans make just about any promise in October to convince naïve Catholic voters that they are really the party of life, and then revert to being the party of Corporate America in January?
  
- Republicans came into office with the pledge of smaller government.
  - President G. W. Bush returned government (our) money to his wealthy friends to ensure that no resources would be available to fund the social safety net. Now he wants to bail out Wall Street, which exploited those who were guilty of believing in the American dream of home ownership.
  - Who should pay for the bailout?
  - Who will profit from it?
  - Why don’t we offer direct economic assistance to the families who are losing (or have lost) their homes instead?
  
- If Republicans further deplete government resources (with wars of aggression and Wall Street buyouts), will they ultimately ensure their legacy by bequeathing us a “smaller government” which will be incapable of accomplishing anything for lack of funds?
  
- Granted that the economy confronted an unimaginable challenge with the events of 9/11, is that the entire explanation for the deficit we face today? Who benefited? Follow the money.
  - If we are going to socialize the debts of Wall Street, why can’t we socialize its profits by raising taxes on those making \$1 million or more a year?
  - It was the Republican effort to deregulate banks and investment firms that got us into this situation. Do we want John McCain (and his economic advisor, Senator Phil Gramm, the mastermind of deregulation) to make economic decisions for us during the next 4 years?
  - Do Republicans still want Americans to invest their social security funds in the stock market?

- Which is worse: *tax* and *spend*? ... or *borrow* from future generations and foreign countries and *spend*?
- Why is corporate welfare good and personal welfare bad?
  - Have government hand-outs to corporations made us totally incapable of caring for the poor and the vulnerable in our midst?
  - Isn't Catholic social teaching still predicated on a "preferential option for the poor"?
  - Which candidate will provide the greatest assistance to families with children?
- Aren't undocumented aliens children of God and, therefore, worthy of respect?
- Which party will provide appropriate care for our veterans?
- Which party will move us closer to developing renewable sources of energy?
- Which party is more likely to restrict ownership of handguns in our metropolitan areas?
- Governor Palin
  - Should she stay in Alaska so she can keep an eye on Russia?
  - Should she stay in Alaska so she can keep an eye on her children?
  - Disregard the first question.

Clearly, these questions don't even begin to touch issues like our corporate weapons industry, corporate control of the sources of information, etc. Please feel free to suggest additions to this list. I will expand it as we get closer to November 4<sup>th</sup>.

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Posted on October 1, 2008. Time sensitive!

***A Message from Center of Concern President, Jim Hug, S.J.***

The rejection of the Financial Bailout package (HR3997) by the House of Representatives has sent stock markets into a state of chaos. After regaining more than half of Monday's historic loss on Tuesday, the Dow is down over 200 points at mid-morning Wednesday. The tweaked bailout package is scheduled for votes later today. Main Street is starting to feel the credit crunch. How did this crisis get so bad and what will it mean for ordinary people in the near future? The Center of Concern's **Education for Justice** project is preparing a special resource analyzing the causes and the shape of the crisis.

Bookmark [www.coc.org](http://www.coc.org) and check back here later today or tomorrow for the very informative resource.

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What follows is an excerpt from a letter addressed to Sal Umana and those on his mailing list from Bob Willis:

“Christianity is a mythological system. Yet it's our myth. A myth is a history of symbols, a skein of stories, and a fabric of rituals around which a people organize its life and meaning. Its truth is rhetorical, not actual. Its images excite the emotions and increase a sense of unity. As a Christian, my days thrive in the liveliness of the Christian myth.

“Like all mythological systems, Christianity has its version of the creation of the world and an explanation of life as it is subsequently experienced. Thus we have the pictures of, and stories about, God molding something out of nothing, creating all things including humans, and setting them in a lovely garden. But then those humans rebelled and we end up with the human mess that requires a new divine intervention. That saving action takes place when a virgin unites with the Divine Spirit to bring forth a God/Man who saves all those who believe in him. From this flows the community of those people who find lives made coherent by, and energized in, this myth.

“The mistake comes when people begin to proclaim the rhetorical as actual. At that moment orthodoxy is born. That orthodoxy creates authorities that will protect it from heretics. Those authorities do so through indoctrination, threats, and the presumption that following the myth is to believe their interpretation of it as if it is actually true, in all its parts. Moreover, one shall personally realize the purpose of the myth through living out their version of it. In this wise, the ecclesiastical authorities become god, an idol, and following them means being one with a pseudo-god. Sadly, with this comes the vanishing of the true God and the lifelong attempt to find oneself in God.

“The Catholic church is a mess, not just because of pedophilia, not just because of its obtuseness about the human condition; it is mostly in a mess because it thinks that its job is to protect orthodoxy rather than to help its members find God. A Church that does not lead to God is not a church; it should fold up its rulebooks and fork up its flabby religious credentials.

“Through a lifetime of thought and prayer, I have come to recognize the actual fact of Jesus. This is the man revealed in the myth; it is also the man whose life shapes the person I want to be. I know in my life and person that living as Jesus lived is very good for me. This Jesus knew in his very bones that we humans are more than we seem. For no reasons of our own, we participate in a Life that is overwhelming in its vitality and energy, its love and hope. His task, and mine, and ours, is none other than to get out of the way and to let that Life live us. This Jesus does not lead me through the mythology about him; he accompanies me into the Life we both are called to fulfill.

“Sal, you are right: I love Jesus with all my being. However, the Jesus I love is not the fabrication of the myth, nor the definitions of the theologians and priests; the Jesus I love infuses my life with Life: he is the one in "whom I live, and love, and have my being." In loving my life I love Jesus.

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*From A Call for a New Reformation by Retired Anglican Bishop John S. Spong*

“My sense is that history has come to a point where only one thing will save this venerable faith tradition at this critical time in Christian history, and that is a new Reformation far more radical than Christianity has ever before known and that this Reformation must deal with the very substance of that faith. This Reformation will recognize that the pre-modern concepts in which Christianity has traditionally been carried will never again speak to the post-modern world we now inhabit. This Reformation will be about the very life and death of Christianity. Because it goes to the heart of how Christianity is to be understood, it will dwarf in intensity the Reformation of the 16th century. It will not be concerned about authority, ecclesiastical polity, valid ordinations and valid sacraments. It will be rather a Reformation that will examine the very nature of the Christian faith itself. It will ask whether or not this ancient religious system can be refocused and re-articulated so as to continue living in this increasingly non-religious world.

Martin Luther ignited the Reformation of the 16th century by nailing to the door of the church in Wittenberg in 1517 the 95 Theses that he wished to debate. ... I will post my theses on the Internet and send copies with invitations to debate them to the recognized Christian leaders of the world. My theses are far smaller in number than were those of Martin Luther, but they are far more threatening theologically. The issues to which I now call the Christians of the world to debate are these:

1. Theism, as a way of defining God, is dead. So most theological God-talk is today meaningless. A new way to speak of God must be found.
2. Since God can no longer be conceived in theistic terms, it becomes nonsensical to seek to understand Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity. So the Christology of the ages is bankrupt.

3. The biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which human beings fell into sin is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense.

4. The virgin birth, understood as literal biology, makes Christ's divinity, as traditionally understood, impossible.

5. The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events performed by an incarnate deity.

6. The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.

7. Resurrection is an action of God. Jesus was raised into the meaning of God. It therefore cannot be a physical resuscitation occurring inside human history.

8. The story of the Ascension assumed a three-tiered universe and is therefore not capable of being translated into the concepts of a post-Copernican space age.

9. There is no external, objective, revealed standard writ in scripture or on tablets of stone that will govern our ethical behavior for all time.

10. Prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way.

11. The hope for life after death must be separated forever from the behavior control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behavior.

12. All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination.

So I set these theses today before the Christian world and I stand ready to debate each of them as we prepare to enter the third millennium.

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An excerpt from an article by Tom Reese S.J., courtesy of the *Washington Post* by way of Ed Reynolds. Father Reese is a Senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center. While editor of the Catholic weekly magazine '*America*', Father Reese encouraged open discussion on current issues facing the Catholic Church and the world. He is the author of *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*. This is an absolute "must read."

## **Abortion: Rhetoric or Results**

Abortion has been one of the most divisive and polarizing issues in American politics for the past 35 years. Despite the extensive public debate, people's views are not changing. Opinions on abortion have remained relatively stable since 1995 according to [a recent report from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life](#).

Support for keeping abortion legal in all or most cases has fluctuated between 49% and 61% while support for making abortion illegal in all or most cases has fluctuated between 36% and 48%. Currently the numbers are 54% for keeping it legal; 41% for making it illegal. Neither side is convincing the other.

Opponents of abortion argue that morality is not based on public opinion. That is true; but law is often based on public opinion. Certainly laws cannot be enforced without the support of public opinion. The inability of the United States successfully to enforce laws against illegal immigration, drugs, prostitution and gambling shows how difficult it is to enforce laws that significant numbers of citizens, even a significant minority, do not support.

In many countries where abortion is illegal, the laws are simply ignored. For example, in Argentina abortion is against the law but state hospitals perform abortions and the state pays for them. They have a much more flexible attitude toward law than Americans do. We believe laws should be enforced.

For years, Republicans have been courting the pro-life public by arguing that the Supreme Court is only one vote away from overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Vote for a Republican president, they say, and he will appoint pro-life justices. In fact, Republican presidents have appointed a majority of the justices since 1973 and the decision is still in place. The reluctance of justices to reverse earlier decisions (*stare decisis*) makes the hurdle very high even for a conservative justice.

Let me be clear. I think *Roe v. Wade* was a bad decision. It was bad law. It was a classic case of judicial activism. At the same time, to think that reversing *Roe v. Wade* will solve the abortion problem is naive. It will simply return the issue to the states and most states will keep abortion legal. And in states where abortion is made illegal, those seeking abortions will simply drive to another state.

A [recent study by Catholics United](#) found that in only 16 states does over 45% of the population self-identify as pro-life. A total ban on abortions in all 16 states would only affect 10% of the abortions in the country. This number does not take into consideration

the women who will go to other states for their abortions.

Nor does a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion have a chance of passing Congress let alone getting approved by the states. Any activity that is engaged in by over 1 million people a year is not going to be outlawed, especially if 54% of the country does not think it should be outlawed.

Those wanting to do something about abortion must face the political reality that abortion is not going to be made illegal in the United States. Granted that fact, then the political question has to change from 'Who will make abortion illegal?' to 'Who will enact programs that will reduce the number of abortions?'

Democrats can argue that their programs will in fact reduce the number of abortions. This year, for the first time, Democrats placed in their party platform language calling for programs that will reduce the number of abortions.

Congressional Democrats have supported the Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act (HR 1074, known as the DeLauro-Ryan bill) and the Prevention First Act bill (HR 819).

Congressional Democrats have also worked on making other alternatives more attractive with the Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 (Public Law No: 108-145), which was championed by Senator Hillary Clinton.

[Democrats for Life](#) have made an important contribution with their Pregnant Women Support Act that aims to reduce the abortion rate in America by 95 percent in 10 years by enacting the social and economic supports that actually do something to help women avoid going through this ordeal. The U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference supports this bill.

Do these programs actually help reduce the number of abortions?

During the Reagan Administration, the number of abortions rose significantly and peaked during the George H. W. Bush Administration. In contrast, during the Clinton Administration, the number of abortions fell significantly (to 1.3 million a year from 1.6 million a year during the Bush administration), and were performed at a significantly earlier stage in pregnancy. During the current Bush Administration, these declines have slowed almost to a standstill. In fact, rates of abortions among teenagers and poor people appear to have increased. [For abortion statistics click here.](#)

A landmark [2007 study by Catholics United](#) shows that lower unemployment, higher rates of health insurance coverage, and greater availability of Head Start centers are more effective at lowering abortion rates than lower availability of abortion providers.

The study, which looks at county-level data in Kansas from 2000 to 2004, suggests that abortion reduction is best achieved by addressing the root causes of abortion than restricting access to abortion services. Access the [full report](#) here.

In another [study released in August 2008, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good](#) examined the long- and short-term effects of public policy on the abortion rate over a twenty-year period. The findings reveal that social and economic supports for women and families dramatically reduce the number of abortions. The study of all U.S. states from 1982-2000 finds that benefits for pregnant women and mothers, employment, economic assistance to low-income families, quality child care for working mothers and removal of state caps on the number of children eligible for economic assistance in low-income families have reduced abortions. Access the [full report](#) here.

Another study by Rutgers University found that the number of abortions among New Jersey women on welfare went up when the Republican State Legislature told mothers on welfare that they would not get additional funds if they had another child. See James Kelly, 'Sociology and Public Theology: A Case Study of Pro-Choice/ Prolife Common Ground,' *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 99-124

[About three-quarters of women](#) having abortions say that they cannot afford to have a child. If 'It's the economy stupid,' then any pro-life strategy that is worth is salt must be willing to spend money to help women choose life. A Catholic Democrat like Joseph Biden can say that he will do everything possible to reduce the number of abortions short of putting women and doctors in jail. Republicans can only say that they will do anything possible to reduce the number of abortions short of voting for programs that cost money. The U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference is one of the few groups that are willing to say it wants the government to do both.

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While walking down the street one day a US senator is tragically hit by a truck and dies. His soul arrives in heaven and is met by St. Peter at the entrance.

'Welcome to heaven,' says St. Peter. 'Before you settle in, it seems there is a problem. We seldom see a high official around these parts, you see, so we're not sure what to do with you.'

'No problem, just let me in,' says the man.

'Well, I'd like to, but I do have orders from higher up. What we'll do is have you spend one day in hell and one in heaven. Then you can choose where to spend eternity.'

'Really, I've made up my mind. I want to be in heaven,' says the senator.

'I'm sorry, but we have our rules.'

And with that, St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down, down, down to hell. The doors open and he finds himself in the middle of a green golf course. In the distance is a clubhouse and standing in front of it are all his friends and other politicians who had worked with him. Everyone is very happy and in evening dress. They run to greet him, shake his hand, and reminisce about the good times they had while getting rich at the expense of the people.

They play a friendly game of golf and then dine on lobster, caviar and champagne.

Also present is the devil, who really is a very friendly guy who has a good time dancing and telling jokes. They are having such a good time that before he realizes it, it is time to go.

Everyone gives him a hearty farewell and waves while the elevator rises...

The elevator goes up, up, up and the door reopens on heaven where St. Peter is waiting for him.

'Now it's time to visit heaven.'

So, 24 hours pass with the senator joining a group of contented souls moving from cloud to cloud, playing the harp and singing. They have a good time and, before he realizes it, the 24 hours have gone by and St. Peter returns.

'Well, then, you've spent a day in hell and another in heaven. Now choose your eternity.'

The senator reflects for a minute, then he answers: 'Well, I would never have said it before, I mean heaven has been delightful, but I think I would be better off in hell.'

So St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down, down, down to hell.

Now the doors of the elevator open and he's in the middle of a barren land covered with waste and garbage. He sees all his friends, dressed in rags, picking up the trash and putting it in black bags as more trash falls from above.

The devil comes over to him and puts his arm around his shoulder.

'I don't understand,' stammers the senator. 'Yesterday I was here and there was a golf course and clubhouse, and we ate lobster and caviar, drank champagne, and danced and had a great time. Now there's just a wasteland full of garbage and my friends look miserable.'

What happened?'

The devil looks at him, smiles and says, 'Yesterday we were campaigning...

Today you voted!!!'

Barb, thanks for sharing this.

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## WHY THIS PRIEST VOTES FOR OBAMA

Posted by Raymond A. Schroth at:

[http://blog.nj.com/njv\\_ray\\_schroth/2008/09/why\\_this\\_priest\\_votes\\_for\\_obam.html](http://blog.nj.com/njv_ray_schroth/2008/09/why_this_priest_votes_for_obam.html). Here you will also find a significant number of responses to his posting.

One school of thought says that because of the separation of church and state and because the priest has a religious role requiring him to rise above politics, he should not run for office or identify himself with any candidate or party. Some add that if a priest takes a political stand he alienates those who disagree with him.

On the other hand, Jesus and his followers often alienated the political and religious establishments of their day. And in Europe there's a history of popes and bishops calling on Catholics to vote against communists and those who contradict church teaching on abortion, marriage and other issues.

Here a handful of bishops declare that candidates who don't agree that abortion must be outlawed are thus in mortal sin, destined for hell, and must be denied the eucharist.

Meanwhile mid-20th century movements like the worker priests and labor priests, and, later, liberation theology have helped priests and religious orders like mine to understand the degree to which both the prophets and the gospels demand that Christians identify with the poor. As a result, more than ever, to be a Catholic today requires not just opposition to abortion, but an end to the death penalty, commitment to economic fairness, and adherence to the conditions for a just war -- conditions violated by our invasion of Iraq.

There is no way I can separate my political, literary, or social judgments from my priesthood. The values that made me become a priest permeate everything I do. Those principles are that our love for one another must reach beyond the boundaries of family, nation, or creed and that national policy should above all protect the weak. For me this includes laws that would lessen the number of abortions, mostly through social and economic reform rather than by sending women who have aborted to jail.

Therefore I will vote for Barack Obama for president and encourage anyone who reads this to do the same and to pass the word. I was born when Franklin D. Roosevelt came

into office and gave us hope to overcome fear. A Hudson River aristocrat paralyzed from the waist down, he identified with the helpless. He used his God-given gifts of voice, eloquence, and character to inspire a nation through the depression and World War II. Obama has the basic FDR ideals and political skills, the ability to bring people together and lift them up with his words. Editor of the Harvard Law Review, Obama passed up big law firms to organize Chicago's neighborhood poor and teach Constitutional Law before entering politics.

He is a genuinely religious man whose social policies, more than his opponent's resemble Catholic social teaching. Above all, he opposed the Iraq war. Had his views prevailed, 4000 Americans and hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis would still be alive.

Finally, under his steady leadership, America has a chance to confront its racial problems, including the black family breakdown and the plight of young black males who lack both education and hope. No other candidate has even mentioned this problem. I do not say this from a pulpit. I imply no moral obligation that you accept my ideas. I simply argue that Obama, more than his opponent, represents a chance for justice and peace.

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[This letter, by Tony Equale, also appeared on Sal Umana's mailing list.](#)

The Roman Catholic authorities think that their Church is divine ... not merely in the sense that it is loved by God, or forgiven by God, or encouraged by God to live in joy and peace ... no the Roman Church believes that, together with God Himself, it is the unique instrument of the salvation of the entire world, dispensing "grace" through sacramental rituals that work unfailingly, even in the absence of the proper disposition of the celebrant, but also through its utterances which are divinely guaranteed to be infallible, inerrant, absolutely true and to be believed without question by the whole world, not matter how self-serving or dubious they appear.

The Church thinks it is "God." [and] we're so used to it, that we hardly take notice.

Have you? ... What are the fruits of this "doctrine" of the Church's divinity?

-That no other religion has the right to exist. If it exists, it is only by the tolerance (or the powerlessness) of the Roman Catholic Church.

-Gnostic christians as old as the Church itself (like the Cathari, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century) were physically exterminated in a "crusade" organized and launched by the Pope himself.

-Muslims were targeted for extinction in multi-century crusades. The fact that they survived had to do with their ability to defend themselves, ... militarily ... against papally supported, convinced "christians."

-Jews were subjected to genocidal pogroms and holocausts throughout Christian European history. There has always been a serious intention in the West to exterminate them. Hitler was only a hi-tech recap.

-Stone Age peoples in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Africa and the Americas were enslaved wholesale and had their religions, cultures, languages and way of life taken from them in order to make them "christian." This cultural genocide and mass enslavement was defended and even praised by JP II in Santo Domingo in 1992.

-Christian Individuals who dissented from the orthodox Catholic expressions of faith were dubbed heretics and summarily executed, their properties impounded and their families consigned to penury ... by Inquisitors who were Dominicans and Franciscans ... orders whose very *raison d'être* was the extirpation of "heresy."

"By their fruits," Jesus said, "you will know them."

... Read *Dominus Jesus* of Sept 2000, written by the very man that now warms the seat of "Peter." If you read carefully you will see that Dr. Ratzinger said, unambiguously, that the only one with the right to interpret the Jewish Scriptures is not the Jewish People, it's the Roman Catholic Church ... the only one with the right to determine what truth may reside in the Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, or Confucian "holy books" is the Roman Catholic Church. This mentality cannot be ignored ... It has huge ramifications.

I suggest that until the "Catholic" Church drops its imperial sobriquet "Catholic" and becomes, as it began, a simple christian community, we will have not only these historically verified travesties, but future atrocities of unthinkable proportions that will rival anything the Roman Catholic Church has done to people through the millennia. The pedophile revelations are a case in point. They derive directly from the Church's arrogant self-definition which gives rise to, among many other things:

- ... an anachronistic insistence on mandatory celibacy for priests despite its obvious dysfunctionality.
- ... the altogether magical (and substantialist) conception of priestly orders & sacramental effect and efficacy,
- ... and the right of the bishop to absolute autocratic rule without accountability to the people.

These are all manifestations of the same pathology — self-divinization.

You cannot believe you are "God" without perpetrating crimes of idolatrous proportions. The Catholic Church thinks it is "God."

... frankly, under the circumstances, I believe reform is impossible. You cannot reform an institution that claims its authority structure, its rituals, its teachings and its spiritual practices come directly from "God." The only change that will actually change things is the one that challenges the dogmatic supports for an arrogant and eternally self-justifying authority, ritual, teaching and practice.

... The Church claims it was established by Jesus, ("God" himself) as recorded in the gospels. I contend that is a myth. I will offer, in opposition to that claim, that the RC Church derived its sense of self-divinity from the Roman Empire.

The community of Jesus' followers called themselves "christians" UNTIL Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, declared that the christian religion was to be the official religion of the Empire. That is when it became "Catholic." The word "catholic" does not refer, as we were taught, to some universal human appeal or mandate from "God." It refers rather to the laws of the Roman Empire, which decreed that this religion had to be followed and obeyed by the whole empire - *kat'holos* - under pain of punishment, possibly death. The Romans were no liberals. There was no "freedom of religion." Rome was an unmitigated theocracy. Religion was integral to the functioning of the empire — an essential factor in the establishment of social order. The job of the official religion was to homogenize the moral and social conscience of the subjects in order to provide an obedient stability at home and an unquestioning enthusiasm for its adventures abroad.

We must understand. Rome was believed "divine" long before the christian ascendancy. In fact, the most incontrovertible divine presence in the Roman World was Rome itself, the city of destiny, chosen by "the gods" to rule the world. What greater sign of divine favor could there be? And the emperor was considered divine in the wake of it. In the very next generation after Constantine, Augustine found it convenient to concur with the general belief, and even while criticizing Rome's bloody and brutal rise to power, declared that it was all predestined, the will of God, designed to spread the "faith" throughout the world. The symbiosis was complete. The nuptials insured that Rome and the Church would make mutual use of each other for their respective purposes that would shortly become indistinguishable. As in all marriages, the two became one flesh. Twelve years after the emperor had chosen Christianity as his state religion, he (yes, he) called a "council" ... the first ecumenical council ... to be held at his own private villa at

Nicaea, to "assist" the bishops to resolve their controversies over the "divinity of Jesus." Even though the majority of the fathers were not happy with the term "homoousios" ("consubstantial") because it was not scriptural, it was the term that the Emperor preferred and so it was accepted by the bishops, entered history, and became immutable, infallible dogma ... so overwhelmed were the bishops that the divine emperor himself would sit and deliberate christian doctrine with them.

Ask yourself why the Roman Emperor would do such a thing? Obviously this religion meant a great deal to him, but not for personal reasons for he was never baptized, but as emperor of Rome. It was the instrument of his power, a major factor in his control over the minds and hearts of his subjects. He needed a religious tool that suited his purposes and supported his goals ... that justified conquest and universal rule ... that generated the awe and respect for Roman power ... that confirmed and deepened the people's identification of Roman control with God's will. This religion had to be what Rome wanted it to be. It was a tool that had to work -- first time, every time. This was, after all, the Roman Empire, not some two-bit Mediterranean polis. Its religion could not be second rate, and its "god" had to be of the highest rank. Christianity was his baby. Constantine produced and micro-managed Nicaea to insure his goals.

And those "christian fathers" were all too happy to oblige him... Basking in the warmth and light of Rome's unquestioned divinity — indisputably confirmed by astronomical wealth and uncontested power — the Church itself became increasingly "divine" (... and wealthy ... and powerful).

"Catholic" pronouncements became "infallible," Catholic sacraments started to work *ex opere operato*, automatically, just like magic. Catholic authority became justified as "apostolic," and, wow, what a surprise ... suddenly "outside the church there was no salvation."

Had the church accepted the example and definition of "divine authority and power" offered by the one it claims is its "divine" founder, it would

- ... wash the feet of the people it serves, for real ... like for a living ... like a minimum-wage nursing-home aide. Not only as a liturgical symbol.
- ... be as a little child -- not vying for power -- in the midst of its people and the world,
- ... run from the crowds that wanted to make it "king"
- ... like a good shepherd, give its life (or prestige, or reputation, or career) to save its people from "the wolf" of oppression, and predatory abuse.
- ... not consider being equal to God something to cling to, insist on, proclaim to the

world urbi et orbi... but empty itself, taking the form of a minimum-wage servant and die doing what's right, even if it means being treated like a total pariah ... a reject ... a worthless, powerless, impotent bum, executed like a common criminal. Sound familiar? Hey, these are not my "ideas," man, it's the way Jesus played it ... or haven't we noticed? ... and the way Paul wrote it up. Are we listening or what? Or is it all just rhetoric?

The Church, however, betrayed its teacher, the worker-rabbi executed by Rome. It refused the path Jesus laid out so very, very, very clearly. It preferred to take its example and definitions of "divinity" and power from its new "master," "diva Roma," Divine Rome ... Is this the "Church" you expect to respect others ... to learn from others ... adjust to their ways ... adopt their customs ... wash their feet? Forget about it, man, forget about it. You're whistling Dixie ... deluding yourself ... and postponing what really has to be done. ...