IT HAPPENED THIS WAY
The True Story

What's the truth? What's the real story? How did it come about? How did it begin? What happened next? And what followed?

These are legitimate questions to ask about any matter of public interest. And they are certainly legitimate questions to ask about the Church. Is the Roman Catholic Church the Church that Jesus Christ established?

Let's look at the facts of the record. Whether you are for or against the Roman Catholic Church you should want to know what the true story is. It's an interesting story. We will find out what Jesus said about His Church, and what actually happened as the apostles carried out His instructions.

Shortly after the year 2000 B.C. God directed a man by the name of Abraham to go to the country which is now Palestine. God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation of him there. The nation of Israel was the result.

It was through the nation Israel that God purposed to bless the nations of the world. He promised Israel a Savior. This promised Savior was born in Bethlehem. He was Jesus the Christ--the Son of God.

Christ died as God's sin offering for the sins of the world, on the hill of Calvary. You can read the full story in the New Testament part of the Bible.

After the death of Christ His followers preached the simple message that there was salvation and everlasting life to those who repented of their sins and believed in Jesus Christ as the one who died as God's sacrifice for their sins. The meeting places of the Christians were the homes of the believers. Every Christian became a missionary, especially at the time when persecution arose and they were scattered everywhere.

The Churches of that day, meeting in the homes, were local autonomous bodies, each Church completely independent. Each Church had two officers and two ordinances. The two officers were pastor (sometimes called bishop, presbyter, elder, minister, or shepherd) and deacon. There was usually one pastor in each Church, although some Churches had several, and several deacons. These pastors and deacons usually worked during the week for their material needs. There was no distinction between clergy and laity. The pastor had no more authority in offering salvation through Christ than any other member.

The two ordinances were baptism and the Lord's supper. These were considered simply symbolical memorials. It was not taught that salvation or spiritual gifts came through either of these ordinances.

The worship services were simple, consisting of the singing of hymns, praying, reading the scriptures, and exhortations. If a member of the congregation had something to say or a question to ask, he was allowed to speak up.
The Church expanded in a great way during the first three centuries, in spite of great persecution. There were Churches throughout northern Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and throughout the west into Italy, Spain and other countries.

Evidence shows that at the close of the first century the Christian movement was pure in doctrine and growing in numbers. It is true that there were efforts on every hand to dilute the nature of Christianity, but apostolic leadership helped to maintain a strong internal unity. The Church at that time showed no signs of developing into an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

During the second century there was a gradual infiltration of error, which can be detected in the writings of this era. There was no violent change, but the Christian vocabulary began to take on new meanings.

The writers of the New Testament taught that salvation came through simple faith in Jesus Christ. They taught that saving faith is an immediate experience with Christ, and that all men are capable of coming directly to Christ. There was no external institution necessary, no human priest or religious rite was required to qualify a man for coming to Christ and receiving forgiveness and eternal life. New Testament Christianity also taught that a New Testament Church was a body of persons who had been born again (read John chapter 3), had been baptized, and possessed the Spirit of Christ. All Churches were on the same level, and each possessed authority to govern its own affairs without outside interference.

But during the second and third centuries this began to be changed. Water baptism began to be considered as having some saving power. Justin Martyr, about the year 165, wrote that baptism completes salvation. Irenacus, writing about 185, boldly declared that baptism is the new birth and brings regeneration.

Irenacus' writings gave the first hint that perhaps infants were at that time subjects of baptism, which would be the natural thing to follow if water baptism brings salvation.

Ignatius wrote, about 115, that the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper were the "medicine of immortality." perhaps speaking in symbolical language. However, by the time of Irenacus, in the last part of the century, the teaching was flatly being made that after the bread had been consecrated it was no longer common bread. They began to believe that in some way the consecrated bread was now able to convey spiritual grace to men. This had never been taught by the apostles of Christ, not by Christ Himself.

There is no indication whatever in the writings of the first century that the Church at that time considered baptism or the Lord's supper to be anything other than symbolical memorials. They were simply pictures of spiritual truths. However, when it came to be believed that baptism and the Lord's supper were the means of imparting salvation and spiritual blessing, then the pastor, or the priest, as he then came to be called, had a power over the people which he had not previously had.
The Jewish system and also the ancient pagan cults required priests and ritual as a part of their religious worship. The introduction of the need for magical words to be said over bread and wine, etc., brought the necessity to secure men as priests for the Churches who were trained and qualified to administer these "sacraments," as they were now called. It came to be believed that only the bishop, or the priests who had been trained and authorized by him, could effectively administer baptism and perform the "magic" of changing the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. This of course gave a new power to the bishops and the priests over the people.

This new conception of baptism and of the Lord's supper made a great difference in the conception of what the Church was. In the New Testament, the Church consisted of the people in a local body. The leaders were on the same level with the people, but served because they were given special gifts by the Holy Spirit. The ordinances were not magical but symbolical. This conception had now entirely changed. Also, the original equality among the various pastors, bishops, or presbyters serving in the church began to disappear.

In the New Testament Church there was no difference in office between a bishop and a presbyter, these two names describing the same office. But quite early in the second century it became common for one of the ministers to assume leadership. This was sometimes because of extra ability, strong personality, or maturity. Also, no doubt the natural impulse to advance one's self had a great part in this taking place.

As early as the year 150 one of the writers speaks of a president of the ministers in a single Church. There were good reasons why this would happen, because in the early Church the pastors engaged in secular work to earn their own living and performed the duties of their office in the Church when they were not at work. As Christians increased, they asked one man, the best qualified, to resign his secular work and devote full time to the ministry.

It became his business to "oversee" the work of the Christian community. (The word bishop means "oversee." ) He then received the title of bishop in a special sense. The other ministers were now called "presbyters." By the end of the second century the office of bishop had become a third Church office. This meant that in each local Church, or diocese, there were three grades of ministers. There was one bishop to oversee all and to exercise total authority, many presbyters and many deacons.

Soon the office of bishop extended beyond the confines of a single congregation. In the beginning one Church served an entire city, but as Christians multiplied there were new Churches formed. Soon the office of bishop was the office of the one who was the overseer over all the congregations of a city. The pastors in these Churches were still called presbyters, but later on they were called priests. Then later developments were that the bishops in the larger cities would extend their influence over the smaller cities and towns and oversee the congregations in these areas as well.
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These stronger bishops began to assume additional titles such as archbishop--ruling bishop, patriarch, ruling father, or pope (meaning papa--father). These stronger bishops presided at large councils attended by the regular bishops and priests from adjacent territories. Then they began looking toward extending their jurisdiction even farther.

By the time of the first universal council at Nicea in 325 there were three of these major bishops seeking to extend their influence. These were the ruling bishops at Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch.

By this time, the year 325, it would have been difficult to look at the general state of Christianity and recognize it as the Church which Christ founded. The "people" were no longer considered to be the Church. Now the bishops and the priests were viewed as constituting the Church. The Church was no longer considered to be the local body or local institution, but it was the totality of bishops and priests. Salvation was now viewed as coming through the bishop or priest as the custodians of the saving sacraments of the Church. They alone were qualified, it was believed, to administer or authorize saving baptism and to serve the "medicine of immortality," the Lord's supper.

No longer were all Churches and pastors equal under God and before men. Men in the Church in the offices of bishop and priest were vying with one another for authority and power.

By 325 "faith" was no longer considered as being the dependence of a person entirely upon the person and work of Christ. Rather, Christ was just a part of the system. Faith was to be directed toward the institution called the Church. And salvation did not result from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit but was now considered to be mediated by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. And since the sacraments were under the control of the Church, and since salvation was now considered to come through them only, it followed that a person must join the Church in order to be saved.

If it is the Church that saves through baptism then individual faith and a newborn regenerate experience become unnecessary. This opened the door for great masses of unregenerate pagans to be brought into the Churches. And with these pagans came heathen practices and ideas. In the Roman pagan religion great stress was laid upon "pronouncing the ritual exactly" as a means of making the service effective. If a word was mispronounced or omitted, the magical nature of the religious service could not be appropriated. This spirit also began to prevail in Roman Christianity; they came to believe that the ritual must be repeated exactly according to formula in order to be efficacious.

So, you can see that by this time the purely spiritual nature of Christian religious services had changed. The service now became, for all practical purposes, a magical performance.
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Magnificent processions and external splendor, after the manner of pagan parades, also became popular. Thus, by the year 323, when the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity, the Church had already begun to decay.

It is hard to believe that Constantine was truly converted in heart to Christianity. The Romans practiced religion mainly for political purposes. The religious department was one of the branches of the government. The Roman Empire was fast declining, and the Christian movement was vigorous and promised the means by which Constantine could keep his empire together.

He was taught by the bishops of the Christian Church of his day that baptism washed away sins, and he delayed receiving this rite until he was at the point of death. Also, he did not divorce himself from his religious support of the pagan gods; he retained the title of chief priest of their system even after he professed faith in Christ.

He showered favors upon Christianity. Persecutions of the Christians ceased. In 325 he issued a command to his subjects to become Christians. This of course opened the doors to the Church for everyone. Baptism being the means of joining the Church, and salvation promised thereby, the floodgates were open for untold numbers of unregenerate pagans to enter its folds.

Emperor Constantine found various factions warring against each other in the Church and he called the first universal council. This council convened in Nicea, in northwest Asia Minor, in 325. This Ecumenical Council was attended by some 300 bishops. They came from as far west as Spain, and as far east as Persia.

Constantine decided what the council should decide, and yet the decrees of the council were to be recognized as authoritative Christian pronouncements. In real fact the Roman Emperor Constantine had become the chief bishop of the Church. This was the beginning of the takeover by the Church at Rome.

The leading bishops of that day were the bishops at Alexandria, Rome and Antioch. However, the bishop in the Capital City of Rome naturally had the inside track. Ancient Rome was the Capital of the world, and this gave natural prestige and power to the bishop there.

The sixth canon (or, decision) of the council of Nicea (325) recognized the bishops of Alexandria, Rome and Antioch to be on a par. However, when the next council convened, which was the council of Constantinople, in 381, the bishop of Rome claimed that the council of Nicea had recognized the bishop of Rome as supreme. It was later discovered a forgery had been inserted into the copy of this canon in the possession of the Roman bishop, which alleged that Rome had always held primacy. This forgery was discovered when it was compared with other copies of the Nicean records. This is not the only forgery of which the Roman Church has been guilty, with discovery and disclosure being made. It is no wonder that many scholars today doubt the texts of some of the older writings which have been preserved by Rome.
From this point on the bishops of Rome claimed the top spot.

In the year 330 Emperor Constantine moved the Capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople. This greatly strengthened the Roman bishop. As long as the Emperor lived in Rome, the bishop must take second place. As "bishop of bishops" the Emperor could overshadow and dominate the bishop. But when the Emperor left Rome the Roman bishop began to dominate in both the secular affairs of the city as well as the affairs of the Church.

Rome had been the center of the political world for several centuries at this time, and this of course gave great prestige to the bishop at Rome--thus he was continually able to press his claims for the supreme position.

It was Innocent I, who was bishop of Rome from 402 until 417, who first claimed that the apostle Peter had been the first bishop of Rome, and that this was sufficient cause for the Roman bishop to be considered the supreme bishop. It was Leo I, the bishop of Rome from 440 to 461, who interpreted three scriptures to prove his contention that Peter was given the authority to rule over all Christendom.

The first scripture he used is found in Matthew 16:18-19. This speaks of the rock upon which Christ would build His Church. Bishop Leo interpreted this to mean that Christ would build His Church upon Peter personally, and that Peter was given the authority to bind and loose souls in a spiritual monarchy. But if you will notice in John 20:22 and 23, the Lord says these very same words to all the apostles.

There is no indication whatsoever in early Christian literature that Peter was either pastor or bishop at Rome, or that he was given any exalted position among the apostles. In fact, at the first real council of the Church, which was held in Jerusalem, James presided, not Peter. (Acts, chapter 15). At this council, Peter gave a very labored explanation concerning his reason for baptizing Cornelius. If he had been supreme there would have been no need for him to make such appeal and explanation to the other apostles.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans (about the year 58) makes no mention of Peter. But the Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter was bishop at Rome for 25 years until the year 64 or 67. He should have been bishop there when Paul wrote to the Roman Church if this were true. In the 16th chapter of this letter Paul greets and mentions 26 persons in the Church at Rome. But he sends no greeting to Peter. This would be a terrible breach of ethics if Peter was there and was the bishop. Paul was not the kind of person to act so disgracefully. The simple answer is that Peter was not there.

None of the early writers, either in the New Testament or later, considered that Christ spoke of Peter as the rock on which He would build His Church. And Chrysostom, who lived as late as from 345 to 407, said that the rock was the faith of the confession; Ambrose (337-397) said that the rock was a confession of the universal faith;
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Jerome (340-420) and Augustine (354-430) interpreted the rock as Christ. And if one desires to be literal in the interpretation of this scripture, he should continue his literal view to verse 23 in this 16th chapter of Matthew, where Jesus names Peter as Satan. Certainly any right thinking person can see that these teachings are simply spiritual illustrations.

Leo I also set forth the claim that Peter had been designated by Christ as the chief shepherd of the Church, and he used John 21:15-17 and Luke 22:31-32 as his basis for this. One needs to do some fancy twisting of truth in order to prove from these scriptures that Peter was to be the supreme shepherd. Peter had backslidden. He had denied Christ. And the account in John 21:15-17 tells of Christ seeking to get him restored in faith and service. The account in Luke simply foretells this backsliding, with instructions to Peter to help establish others in the faith when he himself gets firmly established. Christ wants us all to do the same.

However, it has been upon these scriptures that the Catholic Church has laid claim to the privilege of coming forth with new teachings which are absolutely contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. They claim that the Roman Catholic Church is supreme, instead of the Word of God, as recorded in the Bible.

The New Testament portion of our Bible was assembled from the writings of the apostles and those who knew our Lord. The Roman Catholic Church claims that the Bible is their book. However, the Church at Rome had no greater part in preserving the ancient manuscripts and in bringing them together as our Bible than the other Churches. By the time of the so-called first universal council of the Church at Nicea in 325 the Bible was already in its present form.

The New Testament in the form and in the order which we have it now was ratified by the councils held at Carthage, in 397 and 41, under the influence of Augustine. However, it had been generally accepted throughout Christendom for over a hundred years before the year 419, when it was formally ratified.

Although the bishop at Rome continued to be considered by the other bishops as of no greater consequence than themselves he continued to make his claims of supremacy. If antiquity and tradition possess any authority, the principle of equality of all bishops should claim a primary place. This was a very ancient and universal belief. The New Testament shows that even the apostles themselves respected the decisions of the Churches which they had established. According to the book of Acts in the New Testament. Antioch did not ask Jerusalem for permission to begin the first missionary movement, and Paul did not first consult Peter before preaching salvation to the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire.

In the second century the same principle was followed, and also in the third.

Nevertheless, as time passed, the Roman Church gained more and more power. There finally came a separation of the eastern Churches from Rome. These Churches
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came to be known as the Greek Catholic Church. Or sometimes called the Greek Orthodox Church. The Churches from Greece eastward, and northward including all of Russia, comprised the Greek Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that at one time the entire Church was Roman Catholic. This is not true. At no time did the Church as a whole bow to the bishop at Rome. And even in the west where the Roman Church finally gained power these were small groups of people in many places through the centuries who were worshipping God after the dictates of their own heart and conscience in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament, instead of the teachings of the Church of Rome.

Rome claims to be the only Christian Church that has existed for over 500 years. She cannot say this concerning the Greek Catholic Church. And after overpowering and subjecting all the other early Churches to her will, she has sought through the centuries to crush every attempt of those who would return to the faith of our fathers--as set forth in the New Testament and in the New Testament alone.

As the Church at Rome gained power and influence she became more intolerant. Anyone, who did not bow to her wishes was considered a heretic. And tens of thousands of persons were burned or slain at the command of the Roman pope. We will not go into any of these details here, but you can read the full history of the Church by obtaining a Church history in any good Bible store. Another book to read on this part of the Church history is "Fox's Book of Martyrs." A study of this subject in the encyclopedias will also be enlightening.

The Roman Catholic Church finally dominated western Europe. Things became so corrupt that brave men such as John Huss in Bohemia, Jacques Lefevre Etaples of France, John Wycliffe of England, Savonarola in Italy, and many others, rose up in protest and preached the true gospel of Christ. These men preceded Martin Luther by as much as one hundred fifty years. All during this time and up to the time of Luther there were brave men who began to stand up for the truth as recorded in God's Word and to take their stand against the corrupt Roman Catholic Church. Many of these were martyred by the Church of Rome.

In the year 1517 a monk named Martin Luther, took his stand against the corrupt practices of his Church, and under his leadership the great Protestant movement gained momentum.

These men were not seeking to teach new doctrines or start a new religion. They were seeking to get their Church, the Roman Catholic Church, back to the teachings of the New Testament. When the Roman Church violently refused to return to the truth and refused to reform--the natural outcome was for these sincere men to preach the true message to all who would listen.

Great numbers followed these reformers, including many of the nobility. This caused great wars throughout Europe during the sixteenth century, as the Church of

(Written and compiled by Ray W. Johnson)
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Rome sought to quench the Reformation and as those who were discovering the truth of
the Bible sought to free themselves from Rome.

If a political party in power begins to make laws contrary to the constitution, is it
not right for the people of that nation to rise up and put that party out of power and
restore the laws that conform with the constitution? The constitution Jesus Christ gave us
is the New Testament.

The early Church Fathers of the first three centuries gave witness after witness to
the supremacy and finality of the Word of God. Even as late as at the council of
Chalcedon in 451 the Gospels were placed in the center, as the final court of appeal. The
Roman Church's claim that the traditions of the Church have equal authority with the
New Testament is a later claim. Church tradition tends to deteriorate and change in the
course of time. It never abides fixed. The Bible is our only final authority!

Even Christ struck a blow at tradition in the Jewish teachings of His day. He said
to them, "You make void the commandment of God by your tradition, which you have
handed down" (Mark 7:13). They were teaching their traditions as gospel truth, just as
the Roman Church has done through the last centuries and continues to do.

Wherever tradition has no scriptural foundation it must be discarded as
misleading and erroneous teaching, no matter what the antiquity of the teaching may be.
For the final end of error is death. All that the Protestant Reformers asked, and still ask
of everyone, is that the New Testament be carefully studied and faithfully followed.

A lady recently wrote us, "I was a Catholic for 28 of my 29 years, then I bought a
Bible and just read and read until God showed me the way of real truth and light. I have
found what I've been looking for--real Christians to worship with and everything that
goes with it, such as good Bible inspired sermons."

A similar testimony could be given by multitudes who have done likewise. When
any person, whether Catholic or not, reads the New Testament searchingly, honestly,
fervently and prayerfully he will find the true message which Christ gave to His Church.
And those who by faith accept the message for their own heart and life will find God's
forgiveness and the assurance of life everlasting--plus other experiences and blessing for
this present life, too numerous to mention here.

The New Testament should first be read in its virgin form, without reading any
notes or comments on it by other writers. Give the Spirit of God a chance to teach you
without being influenced in any way by mortal man. You can later read the comments of
others. You will later benefit by the comments of others, and you will also know then
which comments of men to accept and which to reject as you consider them in the light of
God's Truth.

The Roman Catholic Church is the same today wherever she has full power. You
need look only as far as the countries of Spain, Colombia and elsewhere to see how the
Roman Church dominates the lives of all wherever she can, contending that she is right in doing so because she alone has the real truth.

There is still need for Christians today to be strong and to stand up for that which is right, and to protest against that which is wrong and which is not in accordance with the true teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is not wrong to protest against evil and falsehoods. It is rather wrong to keep silence. Most of the letters of the apostle Paul in the New Testament were written in protest against error and to bring correction.

Let us therefore in this day contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, and seek diligently ourselves to know the truth and to bring it to all peoples everywhere. Our Lord has a life for you to live and a work for YOU to do in His service. Multitudes are bound in superstition and error. Only the light of God's unadulterated Truth will bring deliverance, peace, joy and Life Everlasting.