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Why I Left the Roman Catholic Church

By Aniceto Mario Sparagna

During the several meetings I have had with the brethren of the church of Christ, for whom I have spoken here and there about the reasons why I left the Roman Catholic Church, many people asked to have a copy of my speech. Till now I have been unwilling to present them such a work because of the motto: "*Verba volant, sed scripta manent*" which means "The words vanish while the writings remain forever." And this, not because I was afraid to substantiate my assertions, which are absolutely true, with a complete documentation of the facts; but because of my poor knowledge of the purity and propriety of the English language. However, confident and trustful of the comprehension of those who will read this speech, I have typed it almost literally with the hope to prepare a better and more detailed monograph in the near future, God willing.



ANICETO SPARAGNA

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

It is with the greatest pleasure that I have the present opportunity to speak to you, and certainly I appreciate very much your kind invitation. I am very sorry not to be able to explain my ideas as clearly as I would, because I cannot speak English very well; and therefore, I ask your comprehension and forgiveness. However, I shall try to show to you, as clearly as possible, the reasons why I left the Roman Catholic Church and have accepted the principles of the Christian faith whose light still recalls many people who love truth and freedom.

I see the New Testament as a sublime rock, whereon are crushed the stormy waves of falsehood and servitude. For centuries the Christian people were held under the obscurantism and hypocrisy of a usurping power, but with the arrival of the Restoration of the New Testament church in the world a new light shone on the earth: the light of the real faith in Christ, the splendor of His eternal love upon humanity. Then we reconquered the truth and liberty; for Jesus said: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Then we understood that the best and the most acceptable religion is a humble spirit, a loving heart, a clean life. Then we were called to learn the way of life not from the traditions and inventions of men, but from the very words of God who speaks to us in the immortal pages of the Bible.

This is the religious spirit of the great revolution brought down by the Restoration in the world. This spirit wonderfully continues even at the present time and attracts, as a loadstone, so many people aspiring to the truth and freedom. So, I also, have pledged allegiance to Christ as my personal Savior, my Friend, my Master, and to His church, after having repudiated all of the errors of my past life: moral, doctrinal, and also of practice. And now, I am very happy to follow Jesus and to obey His commandments in the great family of the church of Christ. This church realizes, in the most perfect manner, the famous middle way in which only we may find the truth. Because it avoids

the two most dangerous extremes, and that is Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, whereof one claims more tradition than Bible, and the other almost destroys the foundation of the Christian faith. This is why I believe, with deep conviction, that the church of Christ is the only true church which realizes better the teaching of the New Testament, and therefore it is the only church through which we may achieve, with more security, the final salvation.

But I have almost forgotten to speak to you on the main subject of my speech, namely: Why I left the Roman Catholic Church.

It is natural that whosoever forsakes any doctrinal group, accepting another one, must give the reasons for his change. So, I think that you, too, anxiously expect to hear from my mouth how I have found the truth. It would be nearly impossible for me to analyze every particular problem concerning this matter; therefore I should like to tie up together in just one proposition all my experiences which I have met in my struggles and give to you a satisfactory answer to this question, and that is: I left the Roman Catholic Church because of my love for freedom and truth.

FREEDOM

And firstly, I love freedom. Liberty is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to all humanity. Each person receives by nature the right to be free. The dignity of man comports with the freedom of man. In serfdom there is no dignity. But man is God's immortal child and was made a little lower than the angels.

King David expressed it in this manner: "O Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth . . . When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but a little lower than the angels and crownest him with glory and honor" (Psalms 8:1ff).

Be it remembered that man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The human creature, by virtue of his dignified station, has every right to be free and independent. It is an inalienable and God-given right. Now, the Roman Catholic Church, while theoretically affirming this principle, practically denies it. In fact, the monarchical structure of this church claims authority over all the peoples and governments of the world, pretending that everybody must be subject to its dictatorial laws, if they desire to achieve the eternal life. This is why I believe that the Roman Church is not the true church of Christ, but is rather a political association whose aim is the domination of the world through the monopoly of men's consciences, of the schools, and of the laws by the exclusive and selfish interpretation of the holy scriptures.

This is the first reason why I left the Roman Catholic Church and became a free son of God. According to the teaching of Christ we are taught to worship God in spirit and in truth in the freedom of the sons of the Lord. On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church is really a tyrannical and an oppressive church, persecuting and condemning all those men of genius, who fought totalitarianism in every form, especially in the field of religion. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church seems more like fascism, nazism and communism than like a church. The Pope and Stalin are alike in their determination to achieve, in different ways, the domination of the people of the world.

I can analyze the main similarities between the power-structure of the Holy See and the power-structure of the Kremlin, calling them "two forms of foreign imperialism that are both animated by their own type of self-interest." There are ". . . six deadly parallels" between the two aggressively expanding systems that I should like to present to your attention.

1. Both are undemocratic in structure.
2. Both oppose genuine separation of church and state.
3. Both deify their leaders.
4. Both oppose a free public school system.
5. Both suppress freedom of thought.
6. Both use violence for the achievement of their goals.

This is why the Pope persecutes, in the most extreme manner, all the priests who leave the Roman Catholic Church. This is why, also, I am persecuted by this Church: Because

I have chosen the blessed freedom of the American people, because I have refused all the errors which are contained in the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. But I thank God, who has been helping me to reach the right way which is the way of truth and salvation.

Everybody knows that Romanism is strongly traditional and conservative, and in consequence it is fighting against renovation in any form. One time, when the Pope was even king, he stifled with bloody persecutions every attempt to restore religious and political freedom. You know of the so-called Holy Inquisition and of all the blood that was poured out in the slaughter of so many good and great men, beginning from Arnold of Brescia, Huss, Savonarola, Jordan Bruno and so forth and so on, whose unique fault was their determination to break the absolutism of the Roman Church. Romanism is really an apostasy from Christ, a true profanation of His commandments, a miserable usurpation of the rights of the universal church of Christ.

Dante, the best Italian poet and one of the greatest towering minds of all humanity, reprimands with bitter words the fraud and simony of the Roman hierarchy, and reproaches the emperor Constantine for his so-called donation made to the Pope Silvester in these splendid verses:

"Ah, Constantine! of how much ill was mother,
Not thy conversion, but that marriage dower
Which the first wealthy Father took from thee!

With reason, therefore, somebody called Rome the center of the living Babylon and the papacy the throne of the antichrist. Indeed, we may find a great resemblance between the Roman Catholic Church and the whore of Revelation, upon whose head was a name written: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." And this is true, because even at the present time Romanism attacks with its absolutism and its corruptions millions and millions of persons. Also you and all Protestant people have been excommunicated until now by that church, whose leaders believe that out of it there cannot be truth, life and salvation.

I do not understand why the free people of the world and particularly all the Protestant denominations are indifferent to this strong persecution and continue to consider the Roman Catholic Church as a friend and a good church. I think that you do not realize the danger of this church and thus you have no concern about it. But so you make a big mistake, because it is needful at all costs to fight against that church with the same aggressive spirit wherewith Romanism is fighting against you. Remember that your civil and religious liberties were secured by blood and toil, and sweat and tears. A great many of your forefathers made the supreme sacrifice of their lives in order that others might be free. In 1776, the great-grandchildren of the early settlers created, signed, and sealed, and poured out their blood in order to make good the Declaration of Independence. "Give me liberty or give me death" will continue to ring in the chambers of American history until times knell is sounded.

Then came the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Then came the immortal words of the great Emancipator: "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot retain it." And elsewhere: "This nation cannot survive half free and half slave." Then more than one hundred priceless documents were displayed, and this most valuable cargo is the epitome of the yearnings and aspirations of men and women of all ages.

And now, you, who today enjoy the benefits and privileges of freedom, have failed to recognize that it was purchased at a frightful cost. You do not possess that appreciation which you should have. You have been lulled into a state of apathy, taking your freedom for granted. Too few are aware of the great threats which rob you completely and reduce your people to serfdom and shame. Not only are your civil rights and religious liberties threatened by police-states in the political world, but there is likewise a very real and a very serious threat to freedom in the religious world.

There are powerful religious forces and religious combines that would destroy the freedom of religion this day if only they possessed sufficient power. There are sinister forces now working in the field of religion that would destroy the first amendment of the Bill of Rights prohibiting the congress to make a law respecting an establishment of religion. Not only are we plagued by the subversive overtures of Fascism and Com-

munist and various forms of state socialism, but within the realm of religion itself is a monster bent on mischief. He would rob you and me of all civil rights and forever close the door to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Totalitarianism in religion is just as heinous as totalitarianism in politics.

When any pressure group, political, religious or otherwise, attempts to violate the constitution of this great government and rob us of our cherished liberties, we should rise as men and oppose with all of our energies this treasonable and infamous practice. Why fight for religious liberty and then not use it? Therefore, we must move, my dear friends, and combat strongly and bitterly against all the enemies of Christ and freedom, holding high the banner of the Christian faith for the glory of God, for the expansion of His kingdom on earth, and finally for the salvation of all humanity. And I pray that God may help us in this wonderful Christian work!

TRUTH

The second reason why I left the Roman Catholic Church is the eager love for the truth. I love the truth and I have always fought against every kind of enemy in order to reach this great thing which consists in the spiritual happiness and tranquility of mind. I could not stay any longer in a church which has so many errors in its doctrine and what we may consider as really an apostasy from Christ. In fact, the Roman Church denies the direct authority of the Word of God and claims to be the only authority on the Bible, condemning any other interpretation. On the contrary, Jesus said: "He that rejects me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Therefore we have just one authority, namely the Word of the Lord.

Remember that He said, too, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Moreover, Jesus said of those whose religion is based on the tradition of men, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8-9). Now, it is quite clear that the source of our faith is not the authority of the church nor the tradition of men, but the Word of the Lord, and therefore falls down all the great superstructure of the monarchical constitution of the Roman Papacy.

Another false point taught by the Catholic Church is the doctrine about baptism. We have no one example in the Bible to administrate baptism to infants, because they are innocent according to the words of Christ who said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for such is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). Besides we know that for a valid baptism according to the Bible one needs to understand and believe in Christ as the first step, and afterward be baptized, because Jesus said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Can a baby qualify? Now we can readily understand the verse of Acts 2:41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized."

Again, there is another important problem in the Roman Catholic Church which is very false and contradictory, namely matrimony. The Roman Church claims that only the marriage contracted and administered under its jurisdiction is good and valid, denying to other churches and governments of the world the authority to perform and assist any marriage contract. So that, whosoever marries out of this church is considered to be in a state of continual concubinage and to live like animals. This is why the Roman priests, while they do not recognize divorce, bless the wedding of all people already married elsewhere. And they plead their false doctrine with the passage of the apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, in which he speaks about the liberty of unbelieving husband and wife to remarry in case of their religious dissention. But here the apostle permits this privilege only between pagan and Christian, and not between Christian and Christian, as the Roman Church usually does, which recognizes the baptism of other churches while refusing to recognize their matrimony. You know that this is really a monstrosity and therefore we reject this doctrine as an unreasonable and paradoxical misconception of all human and divine right.

And now, what may I say to you on the Roman doctrines about Auricular Confession, Purgatory, Indulgences, Mass, Infallibility of the Pope, Ecclesiastical Celibacy, Venera

tion of the Images, Worship of the Virgin Mary and so forth? You know that all these doctrines taught by the Roman Catholic Church are very false and unscriptural, and, therefore, I am sure that you will excuse me if I cannot analyze singly each problem as I would do. I should like rather to show you my great happiness to have had the possibility to abandon a church so full of errors and iniquities. I enjoy together with you to have found the truth after so many struggles and experiences, and now I feel very, very glad to belong to the Church of Christ, which I believe is the only reasonable and true church that Jesus has founded upon His rock. In fact, this church avoids all the errors of the denominations, whether Catholic or Protestant, refusing every human creed and only accepting the Word of God as the unique and infallible source of our faith. The Church of Christ appears to me like a shining light in the world, recalling all humanity to the truth of the Gospel, and I am sure that through this church we may achieve, in the most safe way, the eternal life in the everlasting Kingdom of our heavenly Father.

MY RELIGIOUS WORK

And now, let me show you the whole project of my religious work, which I believe is the same that God requires by me. I have planned to announce the teaching of the New Testament among the Italian people, who have been for too long a time under the servility and slavery of the Roman Catholic Church. This people, now, are tired of the unbearable domination of the Pope who uses his old privileges against the poor workmen aspiring to reach a better standard of life. The Italian people are ripe to receive the preaching of the pure and holy gospel; they are ready to hear the new Christian life and to follow the commandments of Christ, because they believe in Him and desire to forsake forever the Pope and his tyrannical and false church.

For this work I may find as evangelists, after a quick reorientation in some place that I wish and hope to build up soon, many Italian ex-priests, whose lives constitute really a big drama, the worst tragedy in the world. Nobody knows the miserable conditions of this class of persons, compelled to stay into a church which is the negation of freedom and truth. I am sure that not less than seventy-five per cent of the Roman priests would leave their dire church if they had the material possibility to live economically independent outside of the Catholic Church. They know the truth and would like to follow it, but because of the tyrannical constitution of Romanism, which would consider them as criminal if they left the church, forbidding everybody under bond of conscience to give them any job, they cannot do anything for reaching their own liberty, and therefore are forced to remain, willy-nilly, behind the iron-curtain of Romanism. However, in spite of this horrible persecution there are at least a thousand of priests who each year in Italy forsake the Roman Catholic Church, wishing rather to die than continue to live under an impossible religious compromise, which destroys the purity of thought and the morality of conscience. And there are many others who, yet remaining bound within the Roman Church for necessity of life, spiritually they have lost the faith in the Catholic doctrines and try to do everything possible for their own liberation. On February 1946, for instance, when I still was a priest in good standing, I joined myself with an International Association of ex-priests, which is in Florence, Italy, under the supervision of Prof. Tartaglia (an ex-Jesuit), and I found there the signatures of more than 15,000 priests, who, like me, were seeking help for freedom and truth. Even in this country and throughout the Catholic world there are very many so-called apostasies among the Roman priests, and I know that only in the Franciscan Province of New York, thirty-seven priests left the Church in one year. If we could give these depressed and unhappy men the assurance of the bare necessities of life, I believe that in a few years we could change the face of Catholicism in the world. Many priests receive four and five hundred dollars a month in active duty but they are willing to make a big sacrifice for the sake of the truth.

Besides, the Roman hierarchy claims that the priests were called freely to the priesthood; but this is an infamous falsehood, because from the earliest age the boys are enclosed in the seminaries and ceaselessly bound under the heavy chains of slavery. For ten years I was not allowed to see the face of my mother; and when, after my ordination at twenty-three years of age, I went to my home I did not recognize her. I know so many

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priests, good friends of mine, who cry and scream night and day, not being able to break the chains of servitude.

This is the main reason for the spiritual unsatisfaction of the priests, who, being trained from babies in the career of priesthood, they understand later to have been beguiled by the superiors who taught them a conception of life completely different from the reality. And when they, having become adults and priests, realize the falsity of the learned doctrines it is too late for them to change.

The last day before my leaving from the monastery in seeking liberty and truth, a very old monk, who knew secretly my flight plan, approached me and said: “My dear friend, my unhappy life is near to the end; I have poured out from my eyes rivers of tears, I am really desperate and, as I have lost my body in this Church of iniquities, which I never had the possibility to leave, so I am sure to lose even my soul in the eternal life. Wherefore, you go away freely and gladly and I pray that God may give to you that peace, joy, and happiness which I could not have on this earth.”

I tell you the truth, my dear Brethren, that it is almost impossible for all the priests, restless and breathless for freedom, to leave the Roman Catholic Church without our material and spiritual assistance. Therefore, we must assist and help those people, my good friends, if we love them like we love ourselves. Now, you have in me and Brother Graham the opportunity to use us for this wonderful work, which is according to the purpose of Christ. Under the oversight of the elders of the Flushing Church of Christ Bro. Graham and I have prepared together a useful plan for the assistance of those ex-priests who would like to accept New Testament Christianity. After a brief re-orientation in New York, now considered the heart of the world, we can spread these new evangelists all over the country. But for the realization of this plan we have need of your support both economically and spiritually. I am trustful and hopeful that you, too, will have part in this work and co-operate with us for the best solution of this great Christian problem, and whatever aid you will grant for this aim the everlasting love of our divine Father will reward you more and more with His peaceful, immense and joyful blessings.

BROTHER ANICETO MARIO SPARAGNA
42-08 Murray Street
Flushing, New York

A note from the Flushing Elders:

Dear brethren, contributions to the Graham-Sparagna fund may be sent to the elders of the Flushing Church of Christ, 42-08 Murray Street, Flushing, N.Y. You may be able to send no more than a Christian colored servant girl in Tennessee or perhaps you will desire to send a regular monthly contribution as do some others. Your contribution may be sent through the elders of the congregation where you worship or if you so desire it may be sent directly to the Flushing elders designated for the Graham-Sparagna fund. A congregation may desire to send a special contribution or commit itself for a definite sum monthly. Brethren, we believe that you can see the implications of this opportunity. Will you not open up your hearts and make a special effort to support this work? It is worthy, scriptural, and opportune beyond the power to imagine. We believe that you will. May God help you to do this.

THE ELDERS OF THE FLUSHING CHURCH OF CHRIST
42-08 Murray Street
Flushing, New York.