

THE SCAPULAR

by

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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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When Jesus after His resurrection sent His friends and disciples to spread the good news about Himself, He told them that the centre of their message was to be about the forgiveness of sins. The Christian gospel, or good news, is that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. If we confess our sins, God forgives us our sins and restores us to fellowship with Himself. And this is thro' Jesus, and Jesus alone. As Peter preached in Jerusalem, there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved, except the name of Jesus.

The Reformers followed the Bible in teaching that all our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake. He became man, lived perfectly and died on the cross for us. He bore our curse and penalty. The curse that we had deserved because we had broken God's law, Christ underwent on our behalf. He united Himself with us, He took our nature, became man, took our sin upon Himself, He bore our sins in His own body on the cross so that we might be forgiven. God promises forgiveness to all those who come to Him in Christ. As St John says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins", and "the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin". Sin is the great barrier to fellowship and it is God's purpose in His love to draw us back into fellowship with Himself by Himself providing the way of forgiveness, so that when

our sins are forgiven and our hearts are changed we may become His sons, living in fellowship with Him, enjoying His presence and His Spirit, not only now but throughout eternity. For it is sin, not death, which separates. God has created us for fellowship with Himself - and though we have sinned against Him we may be restored to that fellowship through full and free forgiveness in Christ. Free forgiveness through Christ and Christ alone, is the Christian gospel. This gospel was the crux of the Reformation.

You will remember that the Reformation started by Luther nailing up on the Castle Church of Wittenburg, where he was Professor of Theology, ninety five theses which dealt with the subject of the forgiveness of sins, and he invited people to discuss the various points that he had mentioned in these ninety five short statements. The Pope of those days was selling an indulgence to pay for the building of St Peter's Cathedral at Rome, and his agent, named Tetzel, had come into Germany, preaching up these indulgences and selling them to those who would come and pay the money for them. Now an indulgence is said to forgive the penalty of sin, and Luther was much disturbed by the fact that members of his congregation were buying these indulgences as a simple way of getting to heaven. You may have thought that in 1969 this doctrine of having your sins forgiven through an indulgence would have been left behind in the

Roman Catholic church, especially now after the Second Vatican Council, but I am afraid it is not so. The doctrine of indulgences is still being taught; people are still being urged to put their faith for eternal salvation in these indulgences and so diverted from Jesus Christ the only Saviour.

One of the most famous of these indulgences is the scapular. Roman Catholics teach that if you wear the scapular all your life and you die wearing it you will escape Hell, and also your time in Purgatory will be greatly shortened, in fact, you won't have to stay in Purgatory beyond the Saturday that follows your death. I quote from "Moral and Pastoral Theology" by H. Davis, published in 1938, Vol.III page 426: "The scapular of our Lady of Carmel carries many great indulgences. It is piously believed that this scapular will save from Hell those who wear it till death, and deliver them from Purgatory at least on the Saturday after death." The reason Saturday is mentioned is because the Virgin Mary is thought to visit Purgatory every Saturday for the purpose of taking out of Purgatory any of her devotees who may have died during the week. The Feast of the Scapular takes place on Wednesday next July 16 and in connection with this, in the last week's issue of "The Catholic Weekly" there was a display advertisement entitled "The Scapular" with a quotation underneath it: "Whoever dies clothed in this scap-

ular shall not suffer eternal fire". Mary's promise to St Simon Stock, 16 July 1251." The advertisement goes on to say that the present pope, Pope Paul VI, has stated, "The scapular is a practice of piety which by its very simplicity is suited to everyone and has spread widely among the faithful to their spiritual profit". Thus you see it is here stated explicitly with the encouragement of the present Pope that the wearing of the scapular medal saves a person from Hell. The Bible is quite clear that only faith in Christ, accepting Him as Lord, saves us from the judgment of our sins and eternal damnation. As John 3:36 puts it: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on Him. Yet this advertisement and Roman Catholic text books are still asserting that the wearing of the scapular preserves from Hell.

Let me explain what a scapular is. The scapular is part of the clothing worn by a monk. It was an outer garment put over his habit; and the monks used to give this article of clothing to their supporters to wear. It became after a while just simply small pieces of cloth worn over the back and the chest, connected over the shoulders by string; and since 1910 the scapular may simply be a medal worn round the neck, so long as it has a picture of our Lord showing His heart on the one side and a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the other. The

wearing of this scapular medal is so potent that, according to the Roman Catholic teaching, it preserves a person from Hell.

This claim is based on a vision that St Simon Stock is supposed to have had in the thirteenth century at Cambridge in England. The Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to him and to have promised that anyone who dies wearing the scapular will not be eternally lost. This is stated by the Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol.13, p.800. On p.511 of the same volume it is stated, "Whoever therefore, even though he be now a sinner, wears the badge of the Mother of God through life as her faithful servant, not presumptuously relying on the scapular, as on a miraculous amulet, but trustfully confiding in the power and goodness of Mary, may securely hope that Mary will through her powerful and motherly intercession procure for him all the necessary graces for true conversion and for perseverance in good. Such is the meaning and importance of the first privilege of the Carmelite scapular which is wont to be expressed in the words, "Whoever wears the scapular until death shall be preserved from hell".

There are here two very grave errors. First of all the relying for salvation on some action of our own, in this case, the relying on the wearing of some particularly blessed object as though that can bring about

the forgiveness of our sins and restore us to fellowship with God, and secondly, since the scapular is worn in honour of Mary the sinner's hope is placed in Mary as the means of his salvation. The facts are, of course, quite otherwise. Our only hope of salvation is in Jesus Christ: we are saved as we put our faith and reliance in Him. He is Son of God who for our sins became man and died for us on the cross. As we look to Him for salvation we are restored to fellowship with God. How vain it is to trust in the wearing of a medal or even to trust in Mary, for there is not a single word in Scripture to suggest that we should put our hope in her.

You will see then from what the "Catholic Weekly" is advertising, and from what Pope Paul VI is supporting, that the struggle of the Reformers to re-establish the truth of the Gospel is by no means out of date. Exactly the same errors are being taught and exactly the same superstitions are still being trusted in as Luther had to contend with at the beginning of the Reformation. Exactly the same obscuring of God's goodness to forgive is still being perpetuated.

This is the principal reason why we are opposed to State Aid to Church schools. Roman Catholic schools are founded to propagate the Roman Catholic teaching, and we must say explicitly that this is superstitious teaching, and is the exact contradiction of the

Christian gospel with regard to the most important of all topics - forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God - and we ought not to be asked to support from the taxes to which we contribute schools which aim to propagate such superstitious aberrations from the Christian faith as this doctrine about the scapular, which is still being advertised in the Roman Catholic press, still being taught in Roman Catholic text books, and still being supported by the present Pope.

The truth is so different to this trying to obtain forgiveness by scapulars, indulgences, merits, good works, sacraments and so on. 'Come to me', said Jesus, 'I will give you rest'. As we think about others, have we ourselves come to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

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