

What Is Our Source of Authority?

Mary Ann Collins
(A Former Catholic Nun)

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since Martin Luther's cry of "sola scriptura" (Scripture alone is our authoritative source of truth), there has been an on-going debate between Catholics and Protestants as to whether the truth is to be found in the Bible alone, or in the Bible plus "Tradition". I will discuss tradition and the doctrine of infallibility later in this paper.

If Christianity really works, then it has to work under all circumstances. That includes working for new converts who are isolated in prisons and have no Bible and no fellow Christians to help them. That kind of thing is happening today in some Muslim nations. You can get information about this from a ministry called Open Doors. (See the Endnotes.) [Note 1]

God has provided for such situations by giving us the Holy Spirit, who helps us remember things (especially Scripture) and enables us to understand the things of God. (See John 14:26 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.) It is through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we are able to understand Scripture.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13; see John 16:7-15). Jesus said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26) (Scripture quotations are in the King James Version.)

The Apostle John said, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1 John 2:27) I don't really understand what "the anointing" means, but this Scripture clearly shows that in some way God has enabled us to learn what we need to know directly from Him.

2 Peter 1:3 says: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue". In other words, God has already provided us with what we need for life and godliness. It is valuable to have Bibles and pastors and teachers. If they are available, then we should benefit from them as much as possible. But if

those things are not available, then God is powerful enough to enable us to live godly lives without them. Jude 1:24 says that God is able to keep us from falling.

TRADITION

The Catholic Church officially states that Catholic tradition is equal in authority to the Bible. [Note 2] The problem is that Catholic tradition consists of various expressions of worship and belief of the Catholic people. [Note 3] It is nebulous. It keeps changing. You cannot find it written in one place. You can't really put your hands on exactly what it is.

Additional information about tradition and the doctrine of infallibility is given in the Appendix. For a real understanding of the subject I strongly recommend that you read pages 229 to 309 of the book "The Gospel According to Rome" by James McCarthy. Anybody who is serious about understanding the fundamental issues of Catholicism should read this book. You can go on-line and use a search engine to check his references to the "Catechism of the Catholic Church". (See Note 2) If you want a more thorough understanding of the historical aspect of tradition and infallibility, then read pages 22 to 71 of "The Church of Rome at the Bar of History" by William Webster.

For Jesus' evaluation of the religious traditions of his time, read Mark 7:1-13 and Matthew 15:1-9. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees because their traditions nullified the Word of God. He used Scripture to measure the validity of their religious traditions. He was distressed because the religious leaders of his time considered their traditions to be equal in authority to Scripture. He rebuked them saying, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and 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." (Matthew 15:8-9) In Mark 7:8, Jesus says, "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the traditions of men". (See Mark 7:6-8.)

The Bible clearly tells us that we are not to add to Scripture or take away from it. We need to stay with what has been written.

Deuteronomy 4:2 says, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." In other words, adding to Scripture results in disobeying God. If we say that Tradition is equal in authority to Scripture, then we can no longer use Scripture to test Tradition, like Jesus did. Instead, we are allowing Tradition to determine how we interpret Scripture. Either this is "adding to Scripture" or else it is perilously close to it.

Deuteronomy 12:32 says, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Revelation 22:18-19 warns that adding to God's words can cause a person to have their name be removed from the "book of life".

INFALLIBILITY

The doctrine of papal infallibility is based upon Matthew 16:18 in which Jesus tells Peter, “And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” A huge doctrine with immense historical consequences has been built upon one short verse. The question is, does the rock on which the church is built represent Peter or does it represent Jesus?

Peter himself answers this question when he says that Jesus is a living stone (1 Peter 2:4). (This is a Messianic prophecy which Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16.) The Apostle Paul says that Jesus Christ is our spiritual Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). In Romans 9:31-33, Paul says that Jesus was a rock of offense for the Israelites who were trying to be saved by works of the law instead of by faith.

In the New Testament there are three words for “stone”. “Lithos” means a stone like a mill stone or a stumbling stone. The other two words are “petra” and “petros”. “Vine’s Expository Dictionary” says, “‘Petra’ [Strong’s number 4073] denotes ‘a mass of rock,’ as distinct from ‘petros,’ [Strong’s number 4074], ‘a detached stone or boulder,’ or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved.”

In Matthew 16:18, the word for Peter is “petros,” a detached stone that can easily be moved. The word for the rock on which the church is built is “petra,” a mass of rock. Other examples of the use of “petra” show what a huge mass of rock is meant by the word. They include the man who built his house on rock, as opposed to sand (Matthew 7:24-27) and the tomb where Jesus’ body was put, which was carved out of a rock (Matthew 27:60).

Debating the fine points of a language that most of us don’t understand (Greek) is not the only way to approach this problem.

The Bible commends the people of Berea because they “searched the Scriptures daily” in order to “see whether these things were so”. (Acts 17:10-11) God wants His people to check everything against Scripture.

In the days of the Apostle Paul, the Scriptures consisted of the Old Testament. The New Testament was in the process of being written (Paul and other apostles were writing letters and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were writing the Gospels). Paul’s epistles constitute about one-fourth of the New Testament. These are Scriptures that we study, and that theologians analyze. Paul was one of the leading theologians of his time. In addition, he had been to the Third Heaven where he had seen mysteries that he was not allowed to tell us about. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) But the Bible does not criticize the Bereans for questioning what the Apostle Paul taught them. Rather, it commends them for checking it out for themselves by comparing his teaching with Scripture.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (According to “Strong’s Concordance,” the word “prove” means “to test”.) God requires that every man and woman test all things for themselves.

However, the Catholic Church teaches that only the Magisterium of the Church (the Pope and the bishops in communion with him) has the right to interpret Scripture. People like you and I (and the Bereans) are not allowed to interpret Scripture for themselves. [Note 4]

Where does the Catholic approach leave Christian prisoners in countries where there is persecution? All they have to go on is prayer and their memory of Scripture. They can't read a Bible. They can't consult with a priest or bishop. They are often doing well if they get to see any Christians at all. Would God set up a system that doesn't take care of His most faithful followers, those who are willing to pay the highest price for serving Him?

Catholicism teaches that Christians are supposed to "receive with docility" any directives given to them by Church authorities. [Note 5] According to "Webster's Dictionary," "docile" means "disposed to be taught; tractable; as, a docile child". The word "tractable" means "capable of being easily led, taught, or controlled; docile."

That doesn't sound like Berean men who are studying the Scriptures to see whether or not what the Apostle Paul taught them is Biblical. Rather, it sounds like a young child who accepts without question whatever his parents tell him. In fact, I believe that is precisely what Jesus warned us against when He told us to "Call no man father". (Matthew 23:9)

Following is the ending of the bull "Ineffabilis Deus" in which Pope Pius IX declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854. The phrase "subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law" is significant because less than 30 years earlier, a man in Spain was executed for heresy. [Note 6]

"Therefore, if some should presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, have made shipwreck concerning the faith, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law, if, by word or writing, or any other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their hearts." [Note 7]

Did Jesus treat people like this for disagreeing in their hearts with something which He or the Apostles told them? With amazing patience He kept on teaching the crowds of people, healing the sick and demonstrating the love and the power of God. When His disciples didn't understand His teachings, He explained them. (Luke 8:5-15) When the rich young man turned away from Jesus, He didn't rebuke him or threaten him. He let him go. (Matthew 19:16-22) In John 6:48-68, Jesus gave a teaching that was difficult for people. Many of His disciples left him and no longer followed Him. He asked the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (Verse 67) He didn't threaten them or rebuke them. He didn't try to force them to believe what He taught them. He left them free to believe or not believe, to stay or to leave.

Now if Jesus didn't demand that people believe His teachings about morals and doctrine, then how can anybody else validly do it? Nobody else has the purity of doctrine, or the purity of heart, that Jesus did.

There was one occasion when James and John wanted to call down fire on some Samaritans who wouldn't listen to them. Jesus rebuked them saying, "You know not what manner of spirit ye are of." (Luke 9:55-56; see Luke 9:51-56.)

Look at how Jesus responded to "doubting Thomas". All of the Apostles except Thomas had seen Jesus after the Resurrection. Jesus had repeatedly told his Disciples that He would be crucified and then resurrected on the third day. In spite of all that, Thomas said that he wouldn't believe unless he put his finger into the holes from the nails, and put his hand into the wound in Jesus' side. When Jesus appeared again, did He rebuke Thomas? No. Did Jesus call down curses and anathemas on Thomas for not believing what the Apostles had said? No. He invited Thomas to put his finger into the nail holes and to put his hand into the wound in Jesus' side. In other words, he invited Thomas to check it out for himself. (See John 20:24-29)

Look at a theological confrontation that occurs in Galatians 2:11-16. Peter made a decision that was theologically incorrect. Paul publicly scolded Peter "to his face" for it, and then he wrote to the Galatian church about it. We have no record that Paul was rebuked for this. He certainly wasn't embarrassed by it because he used the incident as a teaching illustration in his Epistle to the Galatians.

According to the Catholic Church, Peter was the first pope. How does Peter address people? Does he demand that they believe what he says? Read the two epistles of Peter. (They are short.) In 1 Peter, he identifies himself as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1). In 2 Peter, he identifies himself as "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). He does not set himself apart as being in a higher position of authority than the other apostles.

It is Peter who tells us that all Christians are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people". (1 Peter 2:9) He tells us, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5) Peter (supposedly the first pope) says that every Christian man and woman is a priest, and that our spiritual sacrifices can be acceptable to God.

DANGERS OF INFALLIBILITY

DECEPTION

When the Disciples asked Jesus what the signs of the End Times would be, the first thing that He said was, "Take heed that no man deceive you." (Matthew 24:4) The main sign of the End Times is deception.

If every Christian reads the Bible and checks things out against Scripture (like the Bereans did), then the devil and his demon cohorts will have a tough job deceiving each of the Christians individually.

However, if Christians are required to accept whatever the Pope says “with docility” (like a trusting, unquestioning child), then the devil’s job is much easier. If he can just deceive the Pope to the point where he declares an error to be doctrine, then the devil has successfully deceived everybody who is under the Pope’s authority.

I wrote this paper because I’m afraid that this is precisely what is going to happen. There is something supernatural which has been appearing as “Mary”. She is trying to get the Pope to proclaim that Mary is Co-Redemptrix (she and Jesus together redeemed us from sin). [Note 8] She says that she will put her “sign” on the foreheads of her followers during the End Times. According to “Webster’s Dictionary,” one of the definitions of the word “sign” is “mark”. So “Mary” wants to put her mark on people’s foreheads. [Note 9]

The Bible says that Satan can appear looking like an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) I am afraid that this false “Mary” will lead the Catholic Church into deception. If she can deceive the Pope into declaring false doctrines, then the entire Catholic Church will be required to believe them.

She will be difficult to resist. She is beautiful and persuasive. An encounter with something supernatural like this can be overwhelming. It is difficult to keep a clear mind and “try [test] the spirits whether they are of God”. (1 John 4:1)

The Apostle Peter was so deceived by the devil that Jesus rebuked him saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matthew 16:23, Mark 8:33, Luke 4:8) The devil successfully deceived Peter concerning an important matter of faith (the death and resurrection of Jesus, as prophesied by Jesus Himself). So how can the popes (who claim to be the successors of Peter) say that the devil is incapable of deceiving them?

CORRUPTION

It has been said that “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” [Note 10] When you give any one man (the Pope) or group of men (the Magisterium) the power to define what people are required to believe in order to be able to go to Heaven, then you invite abuses of power.

History is full of examples of this abuse of power. Paul Johnson is a devout Catholic and a prominent historian. His book “A History of Christianity” shows many examples of abuses of power in the chapter entitled “From Martyrs to Inquisitors” (pages 67 to 124) and elsewhere.

Malachi Martin was a Catholic priest, a Vatican insider, and the personal confessor of Pope John XXIII. He considered himself to be a “Pope’s man”. He wrote a book entitled “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church.” [Note 11] This Catholic book about the history of the papacy shows great immorality, cruelty, and abuses of power.

Fr. Martin tells of popes who came to power by murder, by armed conquest, and by buying the papacy. Many popes openly fornicated with women and with boys. Some popes were incredibly cruel. For example, Pope Stephen IV condemned a man to be killed by having little pieces of his body cut off of him every day until he died. (pages 85-89) Pope Benedict IX was bisexual, he had sex with animals, and he gave orders for people to be murdered. He also practiced witchcraft and Satanism. (Page 132) (Please forgive the gory details, but I can't make my point without mentioning them. I've tried to keep it to a minimum.)

Obviously, not all popes are like that. But some were. There is no guarantee that it won't happen again.

Fr. Martin has other books which show what goes on behind the scenes at the Vatican. "The Jesuits" and "The Keys of This Blood" are quite recent and are easy to obtain. However, the most comprehensive historical picture is given in "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church". (It is out of print but Note 11 tells you how to get it.)

David Yallop wrote the book, "In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I." Vatican insiders asked Yallop to investigate the death of John Paul I because they suspected that he was murdered. Yallop did his homework. His information comes from interviews with Vatican insiders and Mafia gangsters. He gives a revealing and disturbing picture of life in the Vatican, including a quotation of Pope John Paul I to a visiting relative. The Pope said, "There are two things that are hard to find in the Vatican: the truth and a good cup of coffee."

I realize that there have been scandals in many Christian denominations throughout Church history. Jesus warned us about wolves in sheep's clothing. (Matthew 7:15) Therefore, we should not be shocked when we discover some of them.

In Matthew 7:15, Jesus is talking about false prophets. Prophets are people who claim to speak for God. That is precisely what the Pope does. He claims to be the vicar (representative) of Christ. The Magisterium also claims to speak for Christ. The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" says that whoever listens to the Pope and the bishops (the Magisterium) is actually listening to Christ. [Note 12]

There have been tares among the wheat, and wolves among the sheep, throughout Church history. No denomination has been perfect. However, only the Catholic Church claims to be infallible. That claim makes wolves in sheep's clothing far more dangerous because of the power that it gives them over the minds (and therefore the lives) of other people.

CONCLUSION

Jesus promised us that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. That requires the supernatural intervention of God. According to the Bible, God has done this by sending us the Holy Spirit to teach us and to guide us. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that Scripture is the key to sound doctrine and instruction in righteousness.

According to the Catholic Church, God has miraculously protected the popes from making errors when they make pronouncements about faith or morals. This idea has a natural appeal. We would all like to have magical protection from error. Also, it is nice to be able to be passive spectators, receiving “with docility” whatever our superiors give us, without having to face the responsibility of checking it out for ourselves. But attractive or not, this idea is not supported by Scripture or by Church history. (See the Appendix.)

What is our source of authority? God. He reveals Himself and His ways in the Bible, which He has given us for instruction in doctrine and in how to live a Godly life. (2 Timothy 3:16) And He has sent the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand Scripture, and to “guide us into all truth.” (John 16:13)

APPENDIX

Following is some additional information which shows that the doctrine of papal infallibility is contrary to both Scripture and Church history.

The Early Fathers used Scripture as the standard against which they tested Church tradition. The modern Catholic doctrine that Church tradition is equal in authority with the Bible is contrary to the writings of the Early Fathers. [Note 13]

According to the official teaching of the Catholic Church, Catholic men and women are not allowed to believe what they read in the Bible without first checking it out with the Catholic Church. They are required to find out how the bishops of the Church interpret a passage and they are to accept what the bishops teach “with docility” as if it came from Jesus Christ Himself. They are not allowed to use their own judgment or follow their own conscience. They are required to believe whatever the bishops teach without questioning it. [Note 14]

The Catholic Church teaches that when the bishops officially teach doctrine relating to faith and morals, then God supernaturally prevents them from making any errors. This is called “infallibility”. It applies to official councils, such as the Second Vatican Council. It also applies to other teachings, as long as the bishops and the Pope are in agreement about them. [Note 15]

The Pope is said to be infallible whenever he makes an official decree on matters of faith and morals. According to Catholic doctrine, it is impossible for the Pope to teach false doctrine. Catholics are expected to obey the Pope without question even when he is not making an “infallible” statement about doctrine. They are expected to submit their wills and minds to the Pope without question. [Note 16]

The Early Fathers, and the theologians and canon lawyers of the Middle Ages, never taught that the bishops or the Pope were infallible. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 680 A.D. the Sixth Ecumenical Council condemned a pope as a heretic. It was not until the fourteenth century that the theory of infallibility began to emerge. With the development of this theory came a change in the interpretation of some biblical passages. [Note 17]

The history of the early Church shows that the Bishop of Rome was considered to be just another bishop. For example, Pope Gregory (590-604 A.D.) explicitly stated that all of the bishops were equal. He specifically repudiated the idea that any one bishop could be the supreme ruler of the Church. [Note 18]

The claim for papal infallibility does not stand up to the test of history. For example, Pope Zosimus (417-418 A.D.) reversed the pronouncement of a previous pope. He also retracted a doctrinal pronouncement that he himself had previously made. Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681 A.D.). He was also condemned as a heretic by Pope Leo II, as well as by every other pope until the eleventh century. So here we have “infallible” popes condemning another “infallible” pope as a heretic. In 1870, the First Vatican Council abolished “infallible” papal decrees and the decrees of two “infallible” councils. [Note 19]

In the seventeenth century, the Catholic church officially condemned Galileo as a heretic because he taught that the earth revolves around the sun. This did not conflict with the Bible or with the teachings of the Early Fathers. However, it was contrary to seventeenth century Catholic theology. The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that the sun revolves around the earth. Aristotle influenced Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century theologian and “doctor of the Church” whose theology had a major impact on the Catholic Church. Some modern astronomers believe that Galileo was right. Others believe that Einstein's theory of relativity makes the question irrelevant. [Note 20] Either way, Galileo was not a heretic for disagreeing with Aristotle. The “infallible” pronouncement of the Catholic Church regarding Galileo's teaching was wrong.

The doctrine of Assumption of Mary was officially declared to be a dogma of the Roman Catholic faith in 1950. This means that every Roman Catholic is required to believe this doctrine without questioning it. However, as we will see, the teaching of the Assumption originated with heretical writings which were officially condemned by the early Church.

In 495 A.D., Pope Gelasius issued a decree which rejected this teaching as heresy and its proponents as heretics. In the sixth century, Pope Hormisdas also condemned as heretics those authors who taught the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. The early Church clearly considered the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary to be a heresy worthy of condemnation. Here we have “infallible” popes declaring something to be a heresy. Then in 1950, Pope Pius XII, another “infallible” pope, declared it to be official Roman Catholic doctrine. [Note 21]

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The information in this article is the result of many years of personal struggle and search for truth. I want to make it as easy as possible for people to get this information and to pass it on to anyone who might be helped by it.

May the Lord bless you, guide you, and reveal Himself to you.

Mary Ann Collins
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NOTES

1. Open Doors has been smuggling Bibles and other Christian materials into Communist and Muslim nations for over forty years. They have a free newsletter which tells what our persecuted brothers and sisters are enduring around the world. Their web site address is <http://www.opendoorsusa.org>
2. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 80, 84, 86, and 97. The “Catechism” is available in many languages and many editions. It has numbered paragraphs so you can locate things precisely, no matter what language it is in or what edition you are using. It is available on-line. It does searches by topic or by paragraph number. Two addresses are <http://www.christusrex.org/www2/kerygma/ccc/searchcat.html> and <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm> (If these addresses don’t work for you, then you can do an Internet search for “catechism + Catholic”.)
3. “Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs numbered 78, 98, 113, 2650, and 2661.
4. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 85, 100, 891, and 2051.
5. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 87, 1310, and 2037.
6. Paul Johnson, “A History of Christianity,” page 308.
7. Philip Schaff, “The Decree of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception,” in “The Creeds of Christendom,” vol. II (New York: Harper, 1877), pages 211-212. Quoted in William Webster, “The Church of Rome at the Bar of History,” pages 187-188.
8. Peter Heintz, “A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary,” pages 100-114.
9. Peter Heintz, pages 125-129.
10. I believe that this quotation comes from Lord Acton, but I’m not sure. Whatever the source, the quotation is widely known.
11. Malachi Martin, “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church”. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons). This book is out of print but you can get it through <http://www.bookfinders.org>. If you fill out their form, they will send you e-mail messages about used copies that are available. (Be sure to go to [bookfinders.ORG](http://www.bookfinders.ORG). The address “bookfinders.COM leads” to a pornography site that traps you; you have to turn your computer off in order to get out of there.)
12. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 87, 862, 891, and 2051.
13. William Webster, “The Church of Rome at the Bar of History,” pages 22-33. For a description of how pious practices can become official Catholic doctrine, and how this conflicts with both Scripture

and the writings of the Early Fathers, see James G. McCarthy, “The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God,” pages 281-309.

14. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 85, 87, 100, 862, 891, 939, 2034, 2037, 2041, and 2050.

15. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” paragraphs numbered 890, 891, 939, 2033, 2034, and 2049.

16. “Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs numbered 892, 2037, and 2050.

17. William Webster, pages 34-55.

18. William Webster, pages 56-63.

19. William Webster, pages 63-71.

20. Gerald E. Aardsma, “Geocentricity and Creation,” in “Vital Articles on Science/Creation,” July 1994. Information about Aristotle's influence on Thomas Aquinas comes from a class on Metaphysics which I took at Catholic University.

21. William Webster, “The Church of Rome at the Bar of History,” pages 81-85.

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www.MaryWorship.com

E-MAIL: MaryAnnCollins@juno.com