

~ The Vicar of Christ? ~

As the news media provides coverage of the Pope, one major issue recurs – the moral dilemma. What about the gay community? What about abortion for Catholics? What about promiscuous behavior of many Catholics? The credibility gap between the Pope's teachings and the lifestyle of many American Catholics widens.

We do not need the media or the Pope to clarify the morals taught in the Bible. What the media does not address is whether the Pope is indeed the vicegerent of Christ on earth. No eyebrow is raised on this weightier matter. Protestants do not protest the Pope's claims to be the vicar of Christ. The Pope, a nice kindly man speaking good and noble sentiments seems to be all that matters. Is this Pope, and the countless ones before him, really successors of the Apostle Peter? This question is far more weighty.

What about the history of the Catholic Church? No one wishes to dwell on the fact that

it is cruel and ruthless – filled with the horrors of the “Holy Inquisition” and “holy wars” and “holy crusades”. In celebrating the birth of our Constitution, we never hear mentioned that this country was founded largely out of a desire to escape religious persecution of Europe. It was so vivid in the minds of the writers of the Constitution. They desired to create a new government with human rights, where religious bodies could not kill and persecute those who shared a different faith. The separation of church and state required by our Constitution clearly was a strong protest to the world of that time against the marriage of church and state everywhere rampant in Europe, and against the suppression of the rights and liberty of humankind in the name of Christ. Nor is it mentioned that World War II, which witnessed the death of some 50,000,000 people was precipitated by Germany, which had signed a Concordat with the Vatican in 1933. Would the vicar of Christ have entered into such a Concordat? Did not Jesus teach that he had come

to “save men’s lives and not to destroy them”? (Luke 9: 55)

A simple test, one that requires no profound theology, is the test of love. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 35) Applying this simple test to the history of the Papal reign would leave one questioning whose disciples they were.

Some may think it unfair to bring up the past. And it would be if the purpose were simply to find fault with another religion other than our own. But the question must be raised in the context of this question – “Is the Pope the vicar of Christ?” If he is the vicar of Christ, then there must be the historic evidence of purity, love, and holiness that a true representative of Christ would have as his credentials. It would be easy to understand if history showed an occasional slip from Christian practice. We could, with charity, say this was the occasional fall of an otherwise saintly performance. But when history shows cruel and dark oppression as the rule rather than the exception, then there is reason to suspect the claim that the Pope is the vicar or deputy of Christ.

Many may admit the history of the Catholic Church is somewhat dark and oppressive. They say, “Yes, but that was all in the past. The present leaders of the church would not do as their fathers did”. This was the argument presented to Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees. They said, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” (Matthew 23: 30) They were taken aback by Jesus’ answer – “Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then the measure of your fathers.” (Matthew 23: 31) One thing we must not forget in all of this. God does not take lightly the persecution of true followers of Christ. The scriptures are clear: “God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you [true followers of Christ].” (2 Thessalonians 1: 6) Hence, it is imperative that we be not the “children” of those who persecuted the saints.

For centuries, Protestants taught Papacy was the “man of sin” or the “anti-Christ” of Scripture. This view was so

widely accepted that two Jesuits, Ribera of Salamanca, Spain, and Bellarmine of Rome, put forth the view that the “man of sin” was in fact a literal man who would emerge at the end of the age. This latter view divided Protestantism, causing many to believe in a literal “man of sin” and those who still believed the Papacy to be. One of the finest studies on this timely subject is Chapter 9, “The Man of Sin – Anti-Christ” in the book *The Time is at Hand*. Send for your free copy. Click **REPLY**, and send an e-mail asking for the book, *The Time Is at Hand*. Include the name of this publication, your name, and your mailing address. ♦