

Apostate Churches!

Identifying the Fallen Foes of the True Church

Searching for the True Church...

There are thousands of churches in the world today, all claiming to represent the true faith of God. Some of them claim that they and no other are the *true church*, and all who do not conform to them will be lost. It seems a discouraging and impossible task to identify which, if any, is the *true church* of God.

Months of study are required to evaluate adequately even one of these denominations. Even when that has been done, the issue remains whether the evaluation rests on a firm foundation. An experienced seeker knows very well that at one time his personal criteria make him favorable to one denomination and at another time favorable to another. So investigation alone cannot give a definitive answer.

The Bible seems to be an objective and fair criterion by which to judge how well the churches are doing. But in practice, we run against a real problem. First of all, the Bible is so extensive, that it requires more work than is possible to evaluate the various churches. Secondly, the criteria any one person or even committee might establish upon the basis of the Bible is clearly subjective. The Bible is susceptible to many interpretations, and everyone will have his own idea about what is important and what should be included. A thousand "Biblical" criteria of evaluation can well be imagined.

The solution is simply to take those portions of the Bible that give the highest claims to being revealed by God as a comprehensive expression of what human beings are required to believe and do. That way, a brief but comprehensive criterion can be established without introducing subjective aspects. The Decalogue happens to be the only text that claims to have been spoken by God directly, without a prophet, angel, dream or vision, and publicly to an immense crowd of people from all nations. They are reported to have come from the greatest metropolis of human civilization at the time. They numbered at least over two million individuals representing the human race of the time. No other text of classical religious books in all the world makes the same claims to objective revelation. Whether we believe the story to be true or not, the text is unique in its claims, and therefore the best criterion that we have for evaluating the churches.

Another issue makes the use of the Decalogue as a tool of quick and certain evaluation is simply that most of Christianity recognizes the authority of the Decalogue. It is true that a few voices oppose it. But the vast majority of those who claim to be Christians belong to denominations that not only recognize the authority of the Decalogue, but even give the Decalogue a prominent place in their catechisms, their books published to teach their faiths. Such Decalogue-based catechisms exist for Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian communion to mention only a few, and to mention the denominations that make up the vast majority of the Christian population in their constituency.



It is both fair and objective to evaluate the churches and denominations on the basis of the Decalogue. The Decalogue will be adequate to show whether a denomination is fallen or not. There may of course be aspects of a denomination showing its fallen character that do not appear just by investigating the issues mentioned in the Decalogue. There may be unwarranted burdens that the denominations place on their members in the form of beliefs and practices that are not mentioned in the Decalogue. In other words, the Decalogue may not reveal the extent of how fallen the denominations are, but if it reveals them to be fallen, then they certainly are fallen.

From a practical point of view, however, just three commandments suffice: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me; Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; and Thou shalt not kill. There does not appear to be a single church or denomination that upholds even all three of these, to say nothing of the ten.

Is the Roman Catholic Church Fallen?

To be fair, let us examine the Roman Catholic Church by its own version of the ten commandments in Exodus 20 from the Douay-Rheims Version of 1899.

(Exo 20:1) And the Lord spoke all these words:

(Exo 20:2) I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

(Exo 20:3) Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

(Exo 20:4) Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth.

(Exo 20:5) Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them: I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me:

(Exo 20:6) And shewing mercy unto thousands to them that love me, and keep my commandments.

(Exo 20:7) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain.

(Exo 20:8) Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day.

(Exo 20:9) Six days shalt thou labour, and shalt do all thy works.

(Exo 20:10) But on the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: thou shalt do no work on it, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy beast, nor the stranger that is within thy gates.

(Exo 20:11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them, and rested on the seventh day: therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.

(Exo 20:12) Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayst be longlived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee.

(Exo 20:13) Thou shalt not kill.

(Exo 20:14) Thou shalt not commit adultery.

(Exo 20:15) Thou shalt not steal.

(Exo 20:16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

(Exo 20:17) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; neither shalt thou desire his wife, nor his servant, nor his handmaid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

Verses 2 and 3 refer to God by the pronouns "I" and "me". This is an accurate reflection of the original Hebrew. The words are singular. When more than one person is meant, we always use the pronouns "we" and "us" or their corresponding words in other languages. It would be astounding, awkward and highly unusual even for a committee of three to use the words "I" and "me" instead of "we" and "us". The text clearly presents "the Lord thy God" as a single personage. If the Roman Catholic Church, or any other for that matter, either denies the existence of this One God Almighty who is speaking these words according to the text, or make Him out to be a plurality of persons, that is more than one, that is one other than the single speaker here, then it fails the first test in the criterion. That in itself is enough to classify the church or denomination as fallen.

Does the Roman Catholic Church pass the first test? Let us see. Three quotations from among scores of the same kind in the Roman Catholic catechism should suffice. Article 249 "From the beginning, the revealed truth of the Holy Trinity has been at the very root of the Church's living faith,..." Article 258 "The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine persons...." Article 266 "Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal" (Athanasian Creed: DS 75; ND 16)." By this doctrine the Roman Catholic church places itself in conflict with the criterion of the Decalogue and shows itself to be a fallen church. No more evidence is needed than this.

But let us go further. Verses 4 and 5 prohibit making, adoring and serving images. Does the Roman Catholic Church pass this second test? Article 2132 "The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, "the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype," and "whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it." The honor paid to sacred images is a "respectful veneration," not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is."

Just as the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to maintain the oneness of God while imposing a pagan, Trinitarian view, this principle seeks to justify the use of images in devotion by the claim that the devotion is directed to God and not to the image itself. While this is doubtless true, this rather disarming claim does not take into consideration, it seems, the specific requirements of the commandment not to "make, adore, serve". Even if the Catholic argument is accepted, the practice lies somewhere in an undefined area in the word "adore". At least half of the commandment is broken.

Does the Roman Catholic Church measure up to the idea of verse 7? Article 2143 "Among all the words of Revelation, there is one which is unique: the revealed name of God. God confides his name to those who believe in him; he reveals himself to them in his personal mystery. The gift of a name belongs to the order of trust and intimacy. "The Lord's name is holy." For this reason man must not abuse it. He must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. He will not introduce it into his own speech except to bless, praise, and glorify it." This expression seems to adhere to the commandment. Those who interpret the commandment to prohibit swearing altogether, will find fault with Article 2154 "Following St. Paul, the tradition of the Church has understood Jesus' words as not excluding oaths made for grave and right reasons (for example, in court). "An oath, that is the invocation of the divine name as a witness to truth, cannot be taken unless in truth, in judgment, and in justice." And by the same token, there is fault in Article 2155 "The holiness of the divine name demands that we neither use it for trivial matters, nor take an oath which on the basis of the circumstances could

be interpreted as approval of an authority unjustly requiring it. When an oath is required by illegitimate civil authorities, it may be refused. It must be refused when it is required for purposes contrary to the dignity of persons or to ecclesial communion." It is our view that the Roman Catholic Church is correct in its interpretation of the law that swearing may take place. However, there is concern that the dignity of the Church is placed above law. This article would prevent, for example, a person from giving sworn witness to the act of pedophilia perpetrated by a priest. Perhaps the Church makes a distinction in that regard, but in any case, it does so upon authority that is placed above morality. It reserves the right to define morality, and this is not acceptable.

If verse seven is equivocal, so that we might give the benefit of the doubt to the Church of Rome, verses 8-11 are not. The Roman Church clearly sets itself against the literal meaning and practice of the Sabbath commandment through the institution of Sunday. Article 2175 "Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath. In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God. For worship under the Law prepared for the mystery of Christ, and what was done there prefigured some aspects of Christ: Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death."

Even if we accepted the rather irrational quibbling on the matter of the Trinity, the rational quibbling on the matter of images, and the somewhat questionable interpretation of giving oaths, the position in regard to the Sabbath is so hostile to the clear intention of the text that it proves the Roman Catholic Church to be fallen.

While at this point it is not necessary to go further in the investigation, it might be pointed out that for the most part the Roman Catholic Church upholds the rest of the commandments. There is an attempt to bolster its own authority by adding to the meaning of honoring parents. There is the development of the concept of just war, but it is so circumscribed in theory, that the practice ought to be prevented, if the stated position of the Church is accepted in all points. Giving the Roman Catholic Church the benefit of the doubt on all possible points, it still remains fallen on the issues of the oneness of God and the Sabbath, replacing these with the Trinity and Sunday.

There are certainly both mitigating circumstances and damning ones that we have not investigated. But the criterion we have followed adequately shows the Church of Rome to be fallen.

What About the Orthodox Church?

There appears at the moment to be no single, authorized English version of the Bible in the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church bases its Bibles on the LXX in Greek. While the LXX often differs from the Hebrew Bible and consequently from the English King James Version, the ten commandments seem to be quite stable. The only difference of possible significance appears to be the fact that the word Sabbath in verse 8 is plural in the LXX. While this opens the text to interpretation more easily including the annual festivals, it is not necessarily a weakness.

The first sentence in the Orthodox Catechism <http://orthodoxcatechism.org/>, under the article The Holy Trinity is this: "We believe in one God. This God is trinitarian. That is to say, God includes three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." This should be enough to show the Orthodox Church to be fallen.

The LXX uses Greek words in verse 5 that seem more specific than the Douay-Rheims version, and by the same token, the Orthodox tradition retreats from the extent of idolatry found in the Roman Church.

"The truth expressed above, which is revealed in Christianity, thus forms the foundations of Christian pictorial art. The Image (or Icon) not only does not contradict the essence of Christianity, but is unfailingly connected with it; and this is the foundation of the tradition that from the very beginning the Good News was brought to the world by the Church both in word and image.

"St. John of Damascus, an eighth century Father of the Church, who wrote at the height of the iconoclastic (anti-icon) controversies in the Church, explains, that because the Word of God became flesh (*John 1:14*), we are no longer in our infancy; we have grown up, we have been given by God the power of discrimination and we know what can be depicted and what is indescribable. Since the Second Person of the Holy Trinity appeared to us in the flesh, we can portray Him and reproduce for contemplation Him Who has condescended to be seen. We can confidently represent God the Invisible -- not as an invisible being, but as one Who has made Himself visible for our sake by sharing in our flesh and blood.

"Holy Icons developed side by side with the Divine Services and, like the Services, expressed the teaching of the Church in conformity with the word of Holy Scripture. Following the teaching of the 7th Ecumenical Council, the Icon is seen not as simple art, but that there is a complete correspondence of the Icon to Holy Scripture, "for if the *Icon* is shown by *Holy Scripture*, *Holy Scripture* is made incontestably clear by the *Icon*" (*Acts of the 7th Ecumenical Council*, 6).

<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/catechism.html>

The Orthodox position differs from the Roman Catholic in forbidding graven or three-dimensional images according to the commandment. The theological concept of the two-dimensional image differs somewhat as well. A complete parallel is drawn between the icon or image and the Word of revelation, both being seen as of equal teaching authority. In this, as in so many matters, Rome takes an additional step in apostasy, beyond that of other churches. We would be consistent in claiming that Rome is idolatrous in its use of images, while Orthodoxy is not. But by a stricter view of verses 4 and 5, both can be seen as idolatrous.

In terms of verse 7, Orthodoxy appears to measure up to the requirements of the commandment.

But in regard to the Sabbath, Orthodoxy is deficient. Although it does not replace the Sabbath with Sunday, it largely neglects the Sabbath except once a year. "On Great and Holy Saturday the Church contemplates the mystery of the Lord's descent into Hades, the place of the dead." http://lent.goarch.org/holy_saturday/learn/ Holy Saturday is celebrated in the Roman tradition as well, but without recognizing it as the Sabbath.

Orthodoxy, for the most part, supports the rest of the commandments. It too is deficient as a witness against killing in warfare. If one focuses on practice, both the Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox church are deficient in the issue of killing. The Catholic depredations in World War II, perpetrated by the Catholic Croats with the tacit blessing of the Church were the backdrop for the recent Orthodox retaliations in Bosnia, retaliations that the world has judged harshly. A serious consideration for the commandment on either side would have saved lives. But neither church had the moral power nor the theological understanding of the commandment to rise to the challenge of influencing its constituency. Orthodoxy too fails as much as Rome on the commandment Thou shalt not kill.

While Orthodoxy does not attain to the same level of rebellion against God that the Roman Church does, its adherence to the Trinity and its neglect of the Sabbath show it to be a fallen church.

The Coptic Church differs from Orthodoxy mainly in the Monophysite question. The Orthodox belief is that the Son of God has two natures, one divine and the other human. The Monophysite position is that there is just one nature, being both divine and human. In practice this has led to the emphasis of [Yahushua](#) (Jesus) as God rather than human.

The Ethiopian Church differs from the Coptic in observing the seventh-day Sabbath. All of the historical forms of Eastern Christianity have some form of the Trinity. This is true of the Ethiopian church as well, which is also Monophysite. In sum, as viewed by the criterion of the ten commandments, all of the ancient, historical churches are fallen because of idolatry. All take the pagan Trinity. Some more than others engage in highly questionable worship of images. All except the Ethiopian Church neglect the Sabbath, and the Roman Catholic Church actually replaces the Sabbath with Sunday. How clearly all are fallen! These churches numerically make up the vast majority of Christianity today.

Other National Churches

Judged on the basis of the ten commandments, the Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed churches are all fallen. All of them adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity, all of them deny the duty of Sabbath observance, and all of them serve as State Churches and support offensive military action when they consider it justifiable, thus breaking the commandment Thou shalt not kill. To be a member of such a church is to partake in those sins. To remain a member of the Lutheran church, for example, is to partake of the guilt of Lutheran support of Hitler's crimes against humanity and to keep blood on one's hands. (Rev 18:4) "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

In article 85 of The Large Catechism, the Lutherans speak more strongly against the Sabbath than does Rome, for they call the Sabbath observance the creation of "disorder by unnecessary innovation." "But since from of old Sunday [the Lord's Day] has been appointed for this purpose, we also should continue the same, in order that everything be done in harmonious order, and no one create disorder by unnecessary innovation." How anyone can consider the Sabbath an innovation and Sunday valid, after just reporting that the Sabbath was in force under the Old Testament and that Sunday is supposed to have been introduced after the New Testament, goes beyond the limits of reason acceptable to the sane human mind.

At the same time, the catechism, while neglecting the clear words of the commandment, adds its own burdens. The meaning of the Sabbath is not to rest from labor, but to listen to and obey the priest! The entire teaching under the Sabbath commandment in the Small Catechism is reduced to this: "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it." So Sabbath-keeping, misplaced to Sunday, is to go to the Lutheran church, listen to the priest, and "gladly hear and learn it."

In question 103 of the Reformed Heidelberg Catechism, rather than admit the clear import of the Sabbath as a day of rest, they prefer to use it as a vehicle to express their opinions in regard to the subjection of women, by quoting under the question of the Sabbath, the following texts: "1 Tim.2:3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 1 Tim.2:8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. 1 Tim.2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; 1 Tim.2:10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. 1 Tim.2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection." How the Sabbath commandment, which lists subordinates male and female, but never the wife, commands the subjection of women, is difficult reasonably to imagine. Yet the Reformed churches can do so, while denying the very word of the commandment.

The national churches have fallen even further than Rome, in that they are attached to national armies as patrons. The Reformed or Presbyterian church has for several centuries elevated Sunday in place of the Sabbath even higher than has the Papacy, and in that aspect represents a deeper apostasy. All of them have been involved in persecution. Before the Reformation there were many low-profile Sabbath-keeping Christian groups in Europe. In the areas where Lutheranism

gained ground the first action was to slaughter these groups. The Sabbatarians in Selicia, Sweden, Finland and Norway were killed to the last soul.

Three commandments suffice to show all of the official Christian establishment to be fallen. There are scores of thousands of faith-based denominations, and it is not possible even to mention all of them. Of those, Baptists and Methodists form the majority, and they fail on all three commandments with few exceptions of small non-violent or Sabbatarian groups. Among those, none adhere to all three test commandments, to say nothing of all ten.

The confusing mass of small denominations clamoring for attention can be reduced to the simple test of the three test commandments. None of them adhere to all three. Seventh-day Adventists accept the Trinity and thus break the first commandment. They also compromise on the commandment not to kill, sometimes allowing greater participation in the military than even their governments would impose on them. One of the most visible examples is that of the Adventist church in Germany both in World War I and II. The Jehovah's Witnesses fail on the Sabbath commandment, despite their commendable witness on the others. Mormons fail on all three, with their polytheistic system being one of the most startling things Christianity has ever produced.

The number of denominations that pass the three-commandment test is so miniscule, if any exist at all, that they can be evaluated by anyone in some depth and shown on the basis of the Bible to be apostate churches. Indeed, Babylon is fallen. With tears of love, Yahushua calls his own out of the confusion of denominations into obedience to him.