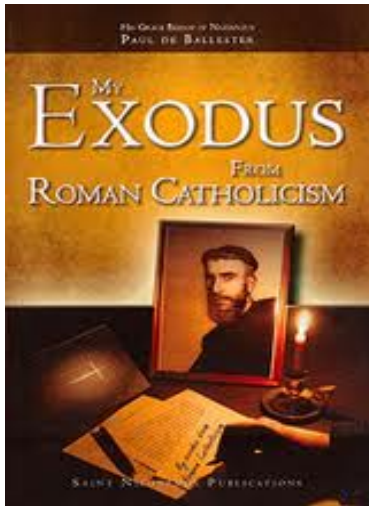


His Grace Bishop of Nazianzus Paul de Ballester, *My Exodus from Roman Catholicism*, Bethlehem, PA: Saint Nicodemos Publications, 2011. ISBN: 0983139607.



By Dn. Lasha Tchantouridzé

In the foreword of this second edition of the book, Bishop Epiphanius of Lidra notes that although *My Exodus* was initially published in 1954, “in a time of feverish ecumenical dialogues, the book’s contemporary value prompted us to republish it, hoping that it will provide much needed wisdom in our new age of globalization and inter-ecclesiastical pursuit of union.” *My Exodus* is a narrative of a former Roman Catholic monk’s life experience. It describes his exit from the Roman church, his subsequent search for a new home through Protestant denominations, and his coming to Orthodoxy. On page 106 the author describes his own narrative in the following words:

This is the story of how and why I abandoned the Church of Rome, whose leader forgot that the kingdom of the Son of God is “not of this world.”¹ The leader of the Church of Rome, by forgetting that “he who was called to the office of the episcopate was not called to be vested by human authority but to serve the entire Church,”² emulated him (Satan) who “in his pride, desiring to be like God, lost true happiness in order to earn a false glory,”³ him who

¹ John 18:36 [this and other footnotes below are found in the original].

² Origen, 6th Homily on Isaiah, I.

³ St. Gregory the Great, *Epistle to Ioannis, Patriarch of Constantinople*.

“sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God,”⁴ and who says in his heart, “I will ascend to haven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”⁵

Paul de Ballester, subsequently His Grace Paul Bishop of Nazianzus of the Church in Constantinople, exited the Roman Catholic Church as a young Franciscan monk after much research, inquiry, and reflection. He left not because something or someone was threatening his place or position within the Franciscan order, but he states that he could no longer in good conscience remain a member of the church, which asserted and promulgated ideas contradicting the Holy Scripture, teachings of fathers of the Church, and the Church Tradition. Monk Paul came to a conclusion that the Roman Catholic Church had been corrupted by Papism – a phenomenon summarized in the passage above.

Paul’s doubts started after research in the library of his monastery just outside Barcelona. He came across a papal decree of 1647, by Pope Innocent X, anathematizing any Christian who would dare to believe, follow or profess the doctrine regarding Apostle St Paul’s authentic apostolic authority. The same document compelled all faithful, under the threat of eternal punishment, to accept Pope’s vision that Apostle Paul had never exercised his apostolic work freely and independently, but only under the constant monarchical authority of Apostle Peter (pp. 18-19). Monk Paul was very surprised by this document, and unable to obtain a satisfactory explanation from senior monks at the monastery, he continued his research that led him to even more outrageous claims by popes and their bishops.

His library and archival investigations convinced Monk Paul that the doctrine of the supremacy of Apostle Peter over the other apostles of Christ, and by extension the belief in the supremacy of the Roman Pope over other bishops was artificially put together and promoted by ideologues in Rome to create

⁴ 2 Thess. 2:4.

⁵ Is. 14:13-14 [Septuagint].

institutional frameworks through which the Pope could claim both universal ecclesiastic and political powers. Upon such precepts were subsequently other extraordinary claims hoisted, such as, the doctrine of infallibility of the Pope. Monk Paul not only found official archival documents and writings contradicting the Holy Scripture and church fathers, but he was also advised by his spiritual father in his Roman Catholic monastery to set aside “the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers” and to confine himself “in strict adherence to the infallible teaching of our [Roman Catholic] church, without delving into much questioning and examining” (p. 30).

Monk Paul, subsequently Bishop Paul of Nazianzus, was not someone who could jump to any conclusion without proper study and reflection. In fact, he methodically researched, investigated and discussed all the major points that he found objectionable in the official teachings of the Roman church. He concluded that the claims of supremacy and infallibility were required to maintain a monarchical structure and powers of the Roman Catholic church:

If the faithful [of the Roman Catholic church] comprehended that neither the Apostle Paul nor the other apostles were under the absolute authority of the so-called first pope, Simon Peter, then the entire edifice of the heavily distorted teaching of Papism would collapse on its own. To prevent this [collapse of Papism], the bishops of Rome never ceased to terrorize, condemn, and anathematize with postmortem punishments all those who dared to express the slightest doubt on this subject (p. 21).

Bishop Paul points out that, according to his research, popes and their supporters pursued the elevation of the papal office to a divine status and punished those who objected with utmost zeal and fanaticism. He himself encountered much hostility and opposition when he decided to leave the monastery in his native Barcelona, and subsequently exited the Roman church altogether. An exemplary monk while in his Roman Catholic monastery, Paul was subsequently condemned and accused of all sorts of sins by various Roman groups, among which “members of the dark order of the Uniates of Greece” (p. 126) turned out to be the most vicious and persistent.

In his search for the true faith, the author discovered Orthodoxy, which “is not a motionless, rigid, and fossilized stance but increasing flow of confession of the ancient faith” (p. 123). It took him a while to come to Orthodoxy, as he carried strong “misconceptions and bias against Orthodoxy” due to his previous education (p. 114). In his narrative, Bishop Paul does not try to hide his pain experienced when exiting the Roman Catholic Church, and especially spiritual turmoil he suffered when leaving his monastic community in Barcelona. However, he saw no other option for him when he realized that the doctrine of Papism was not only incompatible with the ancient Christian faith, but it was also in an active opposition to teachings of Christ, His apostles, and the church fathers.

Bishop Paul only dedicates a short chapter to the Scriptural verses “invoked by Papism as proof and justification of the so-called ‘Primacy of Peter’” (p. 75): Matthew 16:18-19; John 21:15-17; and Luke 22:31-32. According to the author, these are the verses normally and historically invoked by the Roman Catholic Church to justify the claims of infallibility and supremacy of the Bishop of Rome. A prolific writer, Bishop John discussed these verses to some considerable extent in his other writings, and in the current book he only addresses Matthew 16:18-19. This is, probably, the best known verse from the New Testament allegedly proving the supremacy of the Pontiff of Rome: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” – a commonly accepted English translation of the Vulgata: *Tu es Petrus, et super istam petraem aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam*. It is remarkable that, according to the Vulgata, Christ calls Simon “Petrus” (Peter, derived from the Greek word for the rock, *petra*), which at that time was not his name, and since Jesus and Simon most likely conversed in Aramaic, the word would not have made sense in that particular dialogue at all. Had they been conversing in Greek, the feminine Greek *petra*, would not have made much sense either. Indeed, a 10th century Georgian text of Matthew reads: “You are the rock, and on this rock I will build the church” – Jesus is referring to Simon’s faith, “the rock,” not his physical person. However, in western European languages the Vulgate version has become dominant, perhaps with adequate encouragement from Rome. Therefore, Bishop Paul sees it important to refute

Papist interpretations of this verse from Matthew. Further, it is apparent that John 21:15-17 is a reversal of Simon-Peter's thrice denial of Christ, his re-confirmation as His apostle,⁶ and not a proclamation of Simon-Peter's infallibility or supremacy. It is also clear that only when asked the same question the third time, did Simon Peter confess the divine nature of Christ with the words "Lord, You know all things." As far as Luke 22:31-32 is concerned, it is puzzling how this passage could be twisted to justify the Papist doctrine – God could address anyone, apostle or not, with exactly the same words.⁷

Bishop Paul provides logical and historical refutation for the Papal claims regarding the person of Simon Peter and his place in the church. He quotes apostles of Christ, church fathers, and great theologians of the early church, and

The notorious Roman Catholic version of the "You are Peter..." is also absent from *The Didache* (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), from Clement, from Ignatius, from Polycarp, from Barnabas, from the Epistle to Diognetus, from the fragments of Papias, and even from *The Shepherd of Hermas*, whose main objective is the organization and the constitution of the Church.

Consequently, it seems most apparent that the Church of the first two centuries was oblivious to that element, which supposedly serves as "the absolute basis of Christianity" (pp. 81-82).

My Exodus from Roman Catholicism briefly touches upon the doctrine of papal infallibility, and primarily concentrates upon a description of the events that occurred during the first Vatican Synod of 1869, when the infallibility assumption was codified. How could possibly a mortal human person be

⁶ John 21:15-17: "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was very much grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

⁷ Luke 22:31-32: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you return [to Me] strengthen your brethren."

infallible is beyond anyone's rational explanation, for infallibility implies perfect knowledge and wisdom, not to mention absolute moral perfection and universal applicability of one's ethical judgment. His Grace once again addresses this 'scandalous' doctrine with a rational mind and refutes it using historical evidence and logic. However, as he found out, logical reasoning and rational mind were not nearly enough in the debate in which he got embroiled after leaving the Roman Catholic Church, as he had to deal with the arguments following in spirit such disreputable teachings by Roman Catholic theologians or churchmen:

If one day the pope fell into error of imposing sins while prohibiting virtues, the Church would be obliged to believe that sins are indeed beneficial and virtues are bad. Alternatively, she would be committing a sin against her conscience (p. 42).

And

If God and the pope convene at a certain Synod, [...] the pope can do [there] almost anything God can do, [...] and the pope does whatever he wishes, even violations; therefore, he is something more and higher than God (p. 43).

If there are serious people armed with such arguments, and upon exiting the Roman church the author encountered them in numbers, logical reasoning and historical evidence are liable to achieve very little. Hence, upon entering the Orthodox Church, Orthodox bishops advised Paul de Ballester to disengage from polemics with papists that had become an obsession for him. The former Spanish Roman Catholic monk travelled to Greece, and later attended the Halki seminary in Constantinople, where in 1958 he received Master's Degree in Orthodox Theology. He was ordained a deacon in 1953, and then a priest in 1954. In 1959, he arrived to the United States and served in a parish in Scranton, PA. He was named Archdiocesan Vicar for Central America in 1966, and served as an auxiliary bishop to Archbishop Iakovos (Patriarchate of Constantinople) responsible for Mexico and Central America. In January 1984, His Grace was tragically killed by a deranged former military officer in Mexico City. He was 56 years old.

Bishop Paul's book is not a research treatise but a statement of his personal struggles and journey to Orthodoxy. *My Exodus from Roman Catholicism* is a short, but very dense book, replete with notes and references to the Scriptures and church fathers. The book is well written and the arguments put forward are easy to follow. It is highly recommended for those who are looking for a concise compendium of some of the main disputes that separate Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

About the reviewer: Deacon Lasha Tchantouridzé, PhD, teaches church history at the St Arseny Institute, Winnipeg, MB.