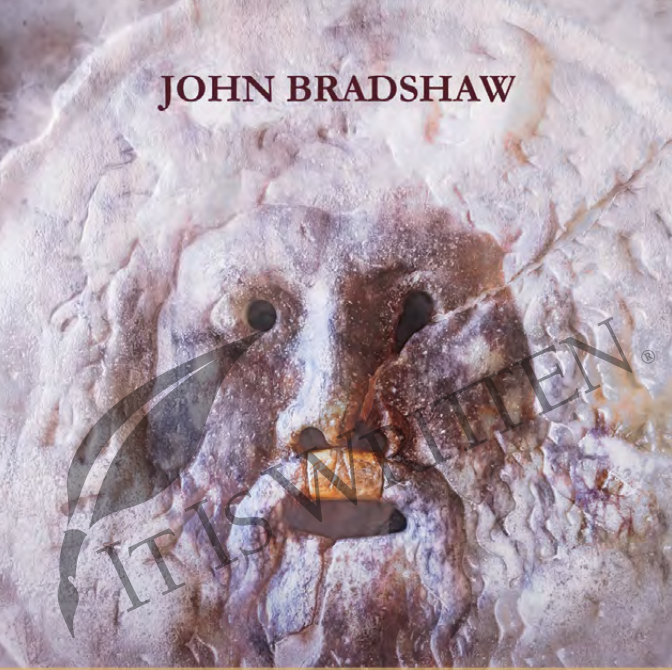
JOHN BRADSHAW



DECEPTIONS IN THE MODERN CHURCH

Deceptions In The Modern Church
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DECEPTIONS IN THE MODERN CHURCH



On January 13, 2012, at about 9:45 p.m., an Italian cruise ship collided with rocks just off the coast of Isola del Giglio, an island ten miles west of Tuscany. There were 4,000 people on board the ship, which was just two and a half hours into a cruise that would visit Italian, French, and Spanish ports in the Mediterranean Sea. A massive hole was torn in the hull of the *Costa Concordia*. Thirty-two people died when it capsized. The ship's captain was sent to prison for 16 years for charges that included multiple manslaughter and shipwreck. It was a colossal tragedy.

The survivors of the disaster had, in many cases, harrowing stories to tell. However, one

survivor had a story he wished had never come to light. Massimo Donghi was a parish priest in a small town near Milan in the north of Italy. He told his parishioners that he was taking time off to spend a week at a spiritual retreat. But instead of dedicating seven days to prayer and meditation, as he said he was doing, Father Donghi was on board the *Costa Concordia*, intent on enjoying a Mediterranean cruise. He was among those who were rescued after the ship ran into rocks. The truth about his "spiritual retreat" emerged when a relative posted on Facebook about the good news of his safe return home.

When asked about this, Father Donghi said, "The judgment of others is not important to me." Nevertheless, one might think the judgment of God would be important to him. After all, it was God who said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." In other words, "Don't lie!"

There have been some very famous lies uttered over the years. "I did not cheat" (Lance Armstrong); "I didn't take performance-enhancing drugs" (Athlete Marion Jones); and a host of others. Pete Rose insisted for over twenty years that

he never bet on baseball, and then later admitted that he had. An actor claimed to have been on the 55th floor of the World Trade Center when it was struck by an aircraft on 9/11. He was not. News reporters have been caught inventing or embellishing news stories.

While in Rome conducting a series of Bible study meetings with It Is Written, I visited a landmark made famous by a 1950s movie that starred Audrey Hepburn. *La Bocca della Verità* ("The Mouth of Truth") is a 2,800-pound marble mask on display at St. Mary's Church next to the Tiber River, a very short distance from the Circus Maximus. It has a prominent mouth. The legend is that if a person who has told a lie puts his or her hand into *La Bocca della Verità*, that person's hand will be cut off!

Thousands of tourists a day prove that the legend has no basis in fact. However, the legend underscores something everyone knows is true: truth matters!

And truth matters to God so much that the importance of honesty is emphasized in the Ten Commandments. The ninth commandment

consists of only nine words, yet those nine words outlaw lying. Dishonesty is inconsistent with the character of God and causes complications, difficulty, and disruption. The book of Revelation says in chapters 21 and 22 that liars will not go to heaven.

You might expect that one place in which truth would be valued is the church. However, the reality is that is not always the case. Down through the years, churches and church leaders have made many statements that are simply untrue, and very often those mistruths are stated openly and obviously.

In Rome, Italy, you do not have to go far to find evidence of deception in the modern church. Approximately two thirds of a mile east of Rome's famous Colosseum is a fascinating monument known as the *Scala Santa*, or the Holy Staircase. It was taught as fact by the Roman Catholic Church for hundreds of years that the *Scala Santa* is the actual staircase on which Jesus walked when He appeared before Pontius Pilate the night before He was crucified.

The *Scala Santa* is made of marble, although the steps have for some time been covered with

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wood to protect them from constant use. Pilgrims come from all over the world not only to see the Holy Staircase, but to ascend it on their knees, praying as they go. The steps are so special to the Roman Catholic Church that in 1817, Pope Pius VII declared that anyone who ascended the staircase would receive an indulgence of nine years for every step.

Twenty-eight steps make up the Holy Staircase. Do the math and you realize that a papal proclamation declared that penitents who pray their way up these stairs will see their time in purgatory reduced by 252 years.

The Holy Staircase is said to be the very staircase on which Jesus walked. In fact, at intervals on the way up the stairs are what is said to be drops of Jesus' blood. With that said, how could it be that the stairs on which Jesus walked the night before He died—in Jerusalem—are now found in a Catholic shrine in Rome, Italy?

The story goes that St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, visited Jerusalem about 300 years after the death of Jesus, located the staircase, and had it transported to Rome. Of