

Finding Christ's Church

All persons have a goal in life. For some, it is advancement in their chosen line of work. For others, it is the building of a happy home, the amassing of riches, the gaining of political influence, the achieving of social prominence and popularity.

Though these objectives may differ widely, there is one goal that all Christian people have in common. It is the salvation of one's soul, the attainment of everlasting life, the achieving of the ultimate end for which every human being has been created by God.

If life's supreme objective is attained, no matter how poor one is or how little success he achieved in business, or how little prominence he gained in society, life is an unequivocal success. He has gained the only victory that really matters: the saving of his immortal soul.

Differ though they may on other matters, Christian Churches are all in agreement upon the clear teaching of Jesus that the saving of one's soul is more important than the gaining of the whole world.

Now you might ask: "How is one to achieve that goal? What are the means which I am to use to achieve it? What is the good of emphasizing the importance of the objective if specific directions are not given to enable me to attain it?"

Christ did not fail to provide a safe guide for man in his quest for eternal life. Christ established a definite institution, clothed it with the power and authority to teach all men His truths, to sanctify them, and to assist them at every step of the way in the saving of their souls. That institution is the Church He founded: the holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, governed by St. Peter and his successors from the days of Christ down to the present time. And Christ wishes, nay commands, that every child of Adam embrace that faith and avail himself of the Church's authoritative teaching and unerring guidance.

Three excuses for noncompliance with Christ

1. All religions are equally good and true; therefore it doesn't really matter which church you choose to attend.
2. Sincerity is what counts with God; believe in any religion, attend any church, as long as you are sincere, you are all right and will be saved.
3. Christ gave us the Bible; we take our own religion from the Bible, therefore, we need no church to guide us in our belief or in our conduct.

Have you not heard one or all of these statements? In fact, they are in the very air we breathe; we hear them on all sides; we think we have encountered them in one form or other a thousand times.

Let us now consider the first of these claims: It doesn't matter what creed a man believes or what church he embraces.

It is a simple dictate of logic and of common sense that contradictory statements cannot both be right. If one is right, then the other must be wrong. We recognize this in the affairs of our daily life and would consign to a sanitarium the individual who reasoned and acted differently.

To illustrate. A teacher takes a piece of white chalk and writes on the blackboard. She asks the members of her class, "What is the color of the writing?" One answers, "purple"; another, "green"; another, "red"; another, "yellow." Finally another replies, "white."

The teacher loves all of her pupils equally. Let us suppose she says, "I love you all equally, so you are all equally correct."

What would you think of such a performance? Would you not say that the teacher has a big heart all right, but a soft head? She can satisfy her desire to agree with all of them only at the expense of intellectual suicide. The student who said it was white was right; all the others were wrong. That is the simple fact.

Now let us apply this line of reasoning to differences in religious belief. We ask, "Was Christ divine or was He merely a man?" The Unitarian replies, "Merely a man." The Methodist answers, "Christ was divine." Can we say that they are both equally correct? No, not without destroying all possibilities of correct human reasoning. Yet differences similar to this exist among all the various creeds and churches. Therefore common sense demands that we reject the assertion that any religion is acceptable.

Christ's command to the Apostles makes His intentions clear: "Go therefore, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The Apostles understood clearly that neither they nor the faithful were to depart one iota from the teachings which Christ commanded them to impart. St. Paul declares, "But though . . . an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema." It is clear, the teachings of Christ and the Apostles reject the claim of those who embrace the notion that any creed is adequate.

Sincerity is not enough

Let us consider now the second excuse offered for failing to comply with Christ's command to believe His teachings under pain of eternal condemnation. "He that believeth and is baptized," said Christ, "shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned." This second theory asserts that as long as a person is sincere in believing, that is all that matters; under this pretext the most fantastic and bizarre doctrines would be justified.

To illustrate: Let us suppose that you the reader are ill, so the doctor has prescribed some medicine which is in a glass near the bed. Beside that glass is another, filled with poison, which the nurse uses to disinfect her hands. She comes into your room at midnight; she does not know for certain which is the medicine and which is the poison. Suppose she says to herself, "I don't know which is which, but I think this is the medicine; I'm sincere about it and that is enough."

Would any amount of sincerity on her part excuse her from the duty of using her intelligence to find out the truth? Does not sincerity imply the duty of doing all in one's power to discover the truth and to act accordingly? Would you not say that such a nurse is exceedingly guilty because she failed to make an effort to discover the objective fact: which glass contained the medicine and which the poison? Without depreciating the virtue of sincerity, would you not feel compelled to say: "Sincerity is an admirable virtue, but it must not be used as a substitute for truth, nor as an excuse for not making every reasonable effort to discover the truth."

If you were taken critically ill, would you call in a sincere bricklayer and accept his sincerity in place of medical knowledge to affect your recovery? No, you would not belittle the virtue of sincerity, but you would say that it must never be used as a substitute for knowledge nor as an excuse for not making an intelligent effort to secure that knowledge.

Such is the position of the Catholic Church. She respects sincerity as highly as any other organization in the world. She merely asks that a person prove his sincerity by making a careful investigation to discover which is the Church founded by Christ. If a person makes such an investigation honestly and thoroughly, and at the outset removes from his mind all prejudice, the objective evidence is so clear and unmistakable that he can scarcely fail to find the true Church.

If, however, because of prejudices which he cannot eradicate or because of other circumstances beyond his control, he does not find the true Faith of Christ but believes in his own creed with sincerity and good faith, then he is not culpable in the eyes of God. Here is a case where sincerity is proved through earnest and reasonable effort to find the truth. In this case, though not a member of the body of the Church, the individual is united to the soul of the Church and will be rewarded by God for his fidelity to the dictates of his conscience—such is the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Most non-Catholics express astonishment upon learning of the Church's teaching on this subject. They were under the impression that the Catholic Church taught that only her own actual members could be saved.

Though she opposes every heresy, as Christ obliges her to do, she loves the heretic. Though she fights sin with all her power and resourcefulness, she loves the sinner and never despairs of winning him to a life of virtue and holiness. She holds open the door of salvation for every human being; only he who acts contrary to the light of his own conscience and who refuses to investigate if he doubts, closes that door upon himself.

IS THE BIBLE ALONE SUFFICIENT?

We come now to the third reason which people assign for not being members of the Church founded by Christ to guide and assist them in the attainment of eternal life: they claim that they have the Bible, get their religion directly from it, and do not need the Church to guide them. How often have we heard a non-Catholic friend say, "I'm a Bible Christian. I get my religion from it without consulting any priest."

The fact is, however, that not one in a hundred such persons has any accurate understanding of the origin of the Bible, particularly of the New Testament which is of supreme importance for Christians. They seem to think that the New Testament existed before the Church and that the latter is its creature, coming into existence in the centuries following the preaching of the word of God. To correct the many faulty understandings which well-meaning and even devout people have on this subject, we have prepared a chart presenting in outline form of how the New Testament came into being. That chart, (inside front cover) *The Making of the New Testament*, will be extremely beneficial.

This chart presents in outline form the essential historical facts about the origin and formation of the New Testament. In showing how it came into being, the chart shows that it owes its existence to the Catholic Church, the Mother of the Bible.

The chart likewise illustrates the following important facts:

1. The New Testament was written in its entirety by Catholics.
2. St. Peter, the first Pope of the Catholic Church, is the author of two of its epistles.
3. The Catholic Church determined the canon or list of books to constitute the New Testament.
4. The declaration of the Catholic Church that the books of the New Testament are all inspired by God constitutes the sole authority for the universal belief of both Catholics and Protestants in their inspired character.
5. The Catholic Church existed before the New Testament.
6. The Catholic Church is the Mother of the New Testament.

If she had not scrutinized carefully the writings of her children, rejecting some and approving others as worthy of inclusion in the canon of the New Testament, there would be no New Testament today.

If she had not declared the books composing the New Testament to be the inspired word of God, we would not know it.

The only authority which non-Catholics have for the inspiration of the Scriptures is the authority of the Catholic Church. If the Church is rejected, there remain no logical grounds for Protestants to claim the inspired character of Scripture.

With the possible exception of St. John, none of the Apostles ever saw all the writings which now make up the New Testament.

If the Church did not preserve the Bible, shielding it from the attacks of barbarians, copying it in her monasteries throughout the long centuries before printing was invented, the modern world would be without a Bible.

The chart shows that the Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ, was teaching and preaching the word of God nine years before a work of the New Testament was written and for 67 years before it was completed. The truths enunciated by her Divine Founder were deep in her heart and fresh in her memory; she was busily engaged in imparting these orally to mankind.

Christ wrote nothing; neither did He command the Apostles to write. He commissioned them to teach His doctrines to all mankind. "Go ye into the whole world," He said, "and preach the gospel to every creature." The Apostles fulfilled the command of Christ by their oral preaching.

Peter, Matthew, John, James and Jude supplemented their preaching by writing. It is well to remember, however, that the Church was a going concern, a functioning institution, teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments, saving souls, before the New Testament ever saw the light of day.

She is not the child of the Bible, as many non-Catholics imagine, but its Mother. She derives neither her existence nor her teaching authority from the New Testament; she had both before the New Testament was born; she secured her being, her teachings, her authority directly from Jesus Christ.

If all the books of the Bible and all the copies were blotted out, she would still be in possession of all the truths of Christ and could still continue to preach them as she did before a single word of the New Testament was written.

Great as is our reverence for the Bible, reason and experience compel us to say that it alone is not a competent nor a safe guide as to what we are to believe.

NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

First, the Scriptures were not accessible to the early Christians. Since the New Testament was not completed till near the end of the first century, it was obviously not available to those who died before that time. Neither was it accessible to the Christians of the first four centuries since the canon or list of 27 books to comprise the New Testament was not determined by the Church till 393. Furthermore, it was not available from the fourth to the fifteenth century because the printing press was not invented until about 1440 and hence it was impossible to provide each member with a copy. Even at the present time, as in all previous ages, there are millions who are unable to read, millions to whom the Bible remains a sealed book.

Secondly, there are many passages in the Bible which are difficult and obscure, not only to the ordinary person but to the highly trained scholar as well. St. Peter himself tells us that in the Epistles of St. Paul there are "certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and the unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction." Consequently, he tells us elsewhere "that no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation."

Luther, in the first years of his separation from the Church, boldly declared that the Bible could be interpreted by everyone, "even by a humble miller's maid, nay by a child of nine." Later on, however, when the Anabaptist, the Zwinglians and others contradicted his views, the Bible became "a heresy book," most obscure and

difficult to understand. He lived to see numerous heretical sects rise up and spread through Christendom, all claiming to be based upon the Bible.

Thus, in 1525, he sadly deplored the religious anarchy to which his own principle of private interpretation of Scripture had given rise; "There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads. This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the Sacrament; a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that Christ is not God; some say this, some that. Reason is lost, if one dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Ghost, and he himself a prophet."

THE BIBLE DOES NOT CONTAIN ALL TEACHINGS

The Bible does not contain all the teachings of the Catholic religion, nor does it formulate all the duties of its members. Take, for instance, the matter of Sunday observance, attendance at divine service, and abstention from unnecessary servile work on that day. This is a matter upon which our Protestant neighbors have for many years laid great emphasis; yet nowhere in the Bible is the Sunday designated as the Lord's day; the day mentioned is the Sabbath, the last day of the week. The early Church, conscious of her authority to teach in the name of Christ, deliberately changed the day to Sunday; she did this to honor the day on which Christ rose from the dead and to signify that we are no longer under the Old Law of the Jews but under the new Law of Christ.

St. John ends his Gospel by telling us "There are also many other things which Jesus did which are not written in this book." St. Paul emphasizes the importance of holding fast to the teachings transmitted not only by writing but also by word of mouth: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word, or by our epistle."

MISUSE OF THE BIBLE

In a leading Protestant weekly, *The Christian Century*, the editor, Rev. Charles Clayton Morrison, writing on the "Protestant Misuse of the Bible," he declares: "Protestantism has put the Bible in the wrong place. . . . It has put it in the place which Christianity accords to Jesus Christ alone."

Here is how they come to make so fatal a mistake. "The reformers," he continues, "reacting violently against the Roman Catholic system with the Pope as its head, were unwisely led to assume that it was necessary to set up an authority other than Christ Himself, which would unite Protestantism just as Catholicism was united under the Papacy. The Bible, newly translated into the vernacular, and made available to the laity by the invention of printing, became this authority. It was to be the supreme tribunal of appeal."

Dr. Morrison points out that Luther had hardly begun his revolt when "the conference of Luther and Zwingli at Marburg, the intention of which was to unify the German and Swiss Reformation, broke down in an unhappy temper over the failure of the two leaders to agree on the interpretation of a single Biblical text: "This is My Body." From that day on the misuse of the Bible has corrupted the spirit of Protestantism, narrowed its vision, immersed it in petty dispute, constantly divided it into sects and corrupted the supreme character of the Bible itself.

Thus, at the very birth of Protestantism the poison of private judgment was injected into the offspring—a poison which has wrought such woeful dissension, strife and chaos within its body ever since.

The simple truth is that the Bible, like all dead letters, calls for a living interpreter. The founding fathers of our republic did not leave the Constitution to be interpreted by every individual according to his whims: that would have spelled speedy destruction to the unity of the infant republic. They wisely constituted the Supreme Court to be the living, authoritative interpreter of the Constitution.

Just as the Supreme Court is the authorized living interpreter of the Constitution, so the Catholic Church is

the living authoritative interpreter of the Bible. She has been the preserver and custodian of the Bible through the centuries, and she interprets it for us in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ.

DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

When after careful consideration one comes to realize that it does matter what one believes, he finds himself confronted with the question: Which is Christ's true Church? If one can discover a Church founded directly and immediately by Christ and authorized to teach in His name, and to which He promised the abiding presence of the Spirit of Truth, then one can be certain that if the true Church is to be found anywhere on the earth, it must be that institution of which Christ Himself is the Founder.

Turn now to the pages of any reliable history, whether written by Jew, Protestant, Catholic, or nonbeliever, and you will find that there is unanimous agreement among all historians that the Catholic Church was founded by Christ. The evidence of the Holy Scriptures, considered simply as historical documents, is too overwhelming to permit any doubt or arguing on this point. Let us look at the solemn words whereby our Divine Savior founded His Church and then clothed it with the power and authority to teach all mankind in His name.

The credentials are not confined to one gospel, but are to be found in all four: the words are simple; their meaning is unmistakable. It is Christ Himself who is speaking to the Apostles: "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send You." All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . . and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

These words constitute the evidence of the Church's divinely appointed mission to teach the truths of Christ to all nations; they constitute the charter which the Church is to present to every generation as the imperishable credentials of her delegation as the duly accredited agency to teach in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ. That the people hearing this divinely authorized teaching are not to regard themselves as free to accept or reject it, is made likewise clear by our divine Master: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned."

With equal clarity, St. Luke presents this same insistence of Christ on the duty of the faithful to accept the gospel because of the authority which lies behind it: "He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me."

The assumption that Jesus placed upon each individual who was to be born into the world the task of ferreting out for himself from the mists of the historic past His precise teachings, and the equally difficult task of interpreting them with unerring accuracy, would have been a procedure which would have foredoomed His enterprise to certain and inevitable failure.

THREE FUNDAMENTAL FACTS OF HISTORY

1. Jesus Christ actually founded a Church.
2. He conferred upon that Church the authority and the power to teach all mankind.
3. The Church which Christ founded and clothed with such power and authority is the Catholic Church.

From the above historical facts, there follows with uncompromising logic the simple conclusion: The Catholic Church is the one true Church, established by Jesus Christ for the salvation of all mankind. Is there any possible escape from this conclusion? While admitting, as all men must admit, that the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ, some have sought to escape from the above conclusion by alleging that the Catholic Church in the course of ages ceased to teach the pure truths of Christ, introduced error, and therefore is not today to be regarded as the true Church.

This however, could be true only if our Savior broke the promises He made to His Church when He said, "And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world, . . . and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If Christ broke those solemn promises, then we can confidently affirm that there is not today anywhere on the face of the earth the true Church of God.

That Christ did not break His pledge is evident from the fact that the Catholic Church is the only institution in Christendom which has come down through over nineteen hundred years teaching the world today the same deposit of divine truth which she taught to the Greeks and Romans, the Medes and the Persians in the first century.

The Church has witnessed the despoliation of her property by Henry VIII and the captivity of her supreme Pontiff by Napoleon Bonaparte. But she has not surrendered one single bit of those divinely revealed truths which Jesus Christ commanded her to proclaim to all the nations of the world until the end of time.

THREEFOLD POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Upon His first priests, Christ confers the threefold power of the priesthood, namely, to preach with authority, to forgive sins, to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Power of Preaching. "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, will be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." *Mark 16: 15-16.*

Power of Pardoning. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." *John 20: 22-23.*

Power of Consecrating. After pronouncing the words of consecration at the Last Supper, thereby changing the bread and wine into His Body and Blood, Christ said to His first priests: "Do this for a commemoration of Me." *Luke 22:19.*

Special thanks goes out to AVE MARIA PRESS for graciously allowing us the privilege of downsizing Fr. John O'Brien's wonderful book *Finding Christ's Church* into pamphlet size for free distribution. ----

THE MAKING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Catholic Church — Mother of the Bible



