

THE CHURCH CHRIST FOUNDED

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WELCOME to you, dear reader. You are interested in Jesus Christ; you wish to follow and love him. My purpose in writing is to help you to do that. Before we go any further it would be a good thing to find out just where we stand in regard to certain fundamentals. You will help yourself to understand what I am going to write later on if you answer which of the following statements you think are right and which wrong.

Right or Wrong?

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1. God exists
2. We must worship God as a matter of strict duty
3. If God has told us how we must worship him, we must do it in that way and no other, once we know that way
4. Jesus Christ is really and truly God, the second of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, become man
5. All that Jesus Christ taught, God wants us to know and believe
6. An important part of Christ's teaching concerns his Church
7. Christ's Church is God's Church
8. To know about the way God wants to be worshipped we must know about his Church, which is Christ's Church

What are your answers? If you agree that each of these eight statements is correct, you accept the fundamental beliefs necessary before you go on to study the kind of Church Christ left behind when he ascended into heaven. God's revelation contains our Maker's instructions for living rightly. We are not free to pick and choose amongst them, accepting some and rejecting others. All are important. God would not have revealed them to us unless they were things he wants us to know. What he tells us about his Church we must accept fully along with the rest. We are bound to regulate our lives according to it.

The vital question is: What sort of Church did Jesus Christ, God, found? Was it one of those organisations we call "the churches" or "the denominations", like the Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, the Anglicans or the Roman Catholics? Almost all Protestants would answer "No" to that question. We Catholics answer "Yes". We know that Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church to which we belong, the Church which has its head in Rome and is governed by Bishops all over the world who are the successors of the twelve Apostles.

WHAT PROTESTANTS SAY

IF PROTESTANTS do not believe that Jesus Christ founded one of the denominations, what do they believe? Is there any alternative? It is hard to answer those questions simply because Protestants differ so much in what they believe, especially about the Church. You may hear some of them saying that one religion is as good as another, that they all stress different aspects of Christ's teaching and that it is for each individual to choose the Church which suits him. Others may say they have no time for organised religion and that it is how you live that counts.

The founders of Protestantism, Martin Luther and John Calvin, taught that Christ's Church consists of all those whom God has predestined to heaven.

More recently Adolf Harnack, a leading member of the so-called Critical School of Protestants, maintained that the important thing was the *spirit* of Christ, the spirit of love for God and men. Those who feel in their hearts what he felt make up his Kingdom or his Church.

High Churchmen, Episcopalians and the Separated Eastern Churches admit that Christ set up a visible organised society, but the common Protestant view has been stated by Charles G. Morrison in a book called *Can Protestantism Win America?*:

"No denomination claims that Christ is the head of its denomination! It may claim that it has 'the truth', that it is 'the New Testament Church', that its creed is the true statement of the Christian faith, and that its practices and mode of organisation conform strictly to the 'pattern' of the primitive church; but no denomination, or only a negligible few, has ever pretended that Christ is the head of its denomination. Such a claim would sound either ridiculous or blasphemous in the ear of any Protestant. Only Rome makes such a claim, and it was against this very pretension that Protestantism revolted."

The main point we have to discuss, then, is not whether the Methodist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Anglican or R.C. Church is the one Christ founded but whether he did, in fact, found any organised Church. Nine out of ten of the people who reject the Catholic Church do so not because they believe that Christ established some other church, but because they believe he established no organised church at all. They think of his Church as a number of souls—how many God alone knows—who believe in Christ's Kingdom and his message but do not necessarily belong to an organised body of his followers. As Morrison writes: "Protestantism thus knows at least this much of the mind of Christ with respect to the differences which divide his church into 'churches': he totally disregards them as having no

relevancy at all in the constitution of his church. Protestants confess that Christ and his church transcend their sectarian contentions and the sectarian ‘churches’ that are maintained upon them. The sheep of other sectarian folds belong to him no less than those of their own sectarian fold.”

It is sometimes maintained, indeed, that a particular denomination is endowed with a certain broadmindedness which, in the providence of God, enables it to include as its members those whose beliefs or methods of worship differ in essentials. These contradictions, such as those which exist in the Church of England between the High Church party and the Evangelicals, are nowadays called ‘tensions’. They will be resolved, it is contended, in time by a normal development and evolution through which the truth will finally emerge.

“I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH”

When, therefore, a Protestant says in the Apostles’ Creed that he believes in the Holy Catholic Church, he may mean that he believes in following Christ in the great unorganised body of Christians, in acquiring Christ’s outlook and living up to his moral teaching in a way his private judgment dictates. He does not believe that his denomination is the Holy Catholic Church. The denominations themselves are not the Holy Catholic Church of the Creed; they are to that church what clubs are to a city. One can be a perfectly good citizen without belonging to the Masons, the Oddfellows, the Rotarians or the Buffalos. The vital thing is to live in the city; it may or may not be useful to join a club. Non-Catholics usually contend that all Christians belong to Christ’s holy Catholic Church, whether they are members of a denomination or not. So it may well be that one church is as good as another. Certainly few Protestants would believe that any church has God’s authority to teach men what they must believe or how they must live.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH NO SALVATION

MOST of them regard it as improper if not quite outrageous to claim to belong to the one and only organisation Christ set up. Some of them still imagine, in spite of the persistency with which Catholics refute the idea, that we believe that all those outside the visible unity of the Church are going to hell.

Unless there are clear indications to the contrary, Catholics regard their separated brethren as being sincere people in good faith. Many of them have a deep, personal love of Christ and regulate their lives according to the highest ideals. God does not blame or punish anybody for what is not his own fault. Ignorance is only blameworthy when it is culpable. Here is what the highest authority in the Catholic Church has written:

“Those who are hampered by invincible ignorance about our holy religion, and live honourably and uprightly, keeping the natural law with its commands (which are written in every human heart by God), being ready to obey God, can attain eternal life with the help of the power of divine light and grace. God clearly sees, searches out and knows the minds, hearts, thoughts and dispositions of everyone; in his great goodness and mercy he will on no account permit a man to be punished with eternal torments, who is not guilty of voluntary sin. (*Pope Pius XI*).

A man may never come into contact with the Catholic faith; or if he does it may be in such a way that it makes no real impact on him. Nothing impels him to study the Church’s claims or if he does study them sincerely according to his ability they do not convince him—such a man remains in good faith. On the other hand there is such a thing as intellectual laziness which masquerades as ignorance. It is expressed in sayings such as: “I am not qualified to settle the differences between the churches or to judge the claims of any one of them”; “There may be something in it but I prefer to stay as I am”; “I am afraid I might be converted and so have to change my life” or “I am too busy to bother about religion.” God alone knows and can judge the consciences of those who subscribe to statements like these; but they seem to express an attitude to God’s revelation which is highly suspect.

ONE RELIGION IS AS GOOD AS ANOTHER

THE NOTION that all religions are equally good, be they pagan or Christian, is quite wrong; for, seeing that some of them were being practised already, why did God become man, establish a new religion and tell his apostles to convert all men to it?

Nor is it true that all Christian religions are as good as one another. They contradict one another in three main and essential points—on what they believe, on how they worship and on the authority they obey. Christ, being God, could not teach contradictories as true. The purpose of any Christian religion must be to teach the full, unaltered religion of Jesus Christ. Seeing that no two of all the Christian denominations agree exactly on doctrine, worship and authority no two can be teaching the integral, unchanged religion of Christ. It is no answer to say that each denomination stresses different aspects of that religion. The fact remains that they do contradict one another in essentials. Some churches are ruled out of court immediately because the contradictions are to be found within themselves. Of the others, if one of, let us say, 250 Christian denominations is teaching just what Christ taught, worshipping in his way and recognising the authority he established, all the others must be wrong, for all of them disagree in at least one of these three vital matters.

THE CHURCH—AN ORGANISED SOCIETY

THE plain, simple truth is that Jesus Christ founded on earth directly and personally an organised religious society which he called his Church. A society is a number of people who work together under the same authority using the

same means towards the same objective. Jesus Christ selected certain men whom he personally trained to govern his Church under one whom he appointed its head. He told them what they were to aim at and how they were to do it, with his help. Years passed and that simple society grew; its organisation became more complex, but we can trace its history through the centuries. Today only the Catholic Church claims, and is able to prove her claim, to be that society.

PROVED BY THE COUNCILS

BEFORE the sixteenth century the Church was always regarded as a highly organised institution. Its supreme ruler was known to be the Pope. Under him were bishops, abbots and priests. All this is clear from the General Councils held from very early times. Bishops from all over the world attended them. They, the local rulers of the Church, assembled together to decide questions of faith and morals. Once the Pope approved those decisions they were binding on Catholics everywhere.

What a contrast with, say, the Lambeth Conferences or the meetings of the World Council of the Churches, where representatives sit together under a chairman who has no jurisdiction over them. The General Councils could, and sometimes did, cut off certain heretics from the Church. The General Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. excommunicated the followers of Arius. Such a thing would have been impossible if all that was necessary to be a member of the Church was belief in Christ and willingness to follow him. The canons of the General Councils—four of them were held in the fourth and fifth centuries, Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451)—demonstrate that the Church was regarded as an organisation embracing rulers and subjects, teachers and taught, working together with the same means, with the same object in view.

The canons of the councils prove that the bishops had supreme authority in their own cities. A person had to obey his bishop if he wished to remain in the Church; disobedience meant expulsion. The bishops themselves, of course, had to obey the rulings of the Church. One of the canons of the Council of Ephesus, for example, reads like this: “Similarly concerning all those who shall attempt to undo in any way any decision of this holy council of Ephesus, the holy council decides that if they be bishops or clerics, they are to be expelled from their ranks (deposed); if laity, excommunicated.” All such decrees prove beyond doubt that the early Church was a well-organised society, strongly knit together by obedience to one authority.

The Pope was the supreme authority. Six hundred and thirty bishops were present at Chalcedon, most of them from the Eastern Empire. In a letter to Pope Leo they wrote: “In your representatives you took the presidency over the members of the Synod, as the head over the members.” The fact was acknowledged by Pope Leo:

“My legates have presided in my place over the Oriental Synod.” At the first session of the Council the papal legate, Paschasinus, declared: “We have a commission from the most holy and most apostolic Bishop of Rome, who is head of all Churches, to see that Dioscorus shall have no seat in the Council, and if he shall venture upon this, that he be expelled.” Dioscorus was the Bishop of Alexandria to whom the Pope objected because he tried to hold a general council “without the consent of the Apostolic See, which had never been done before, and was never to be done.” No bishop questioned the fact that the Pope was the head of all the Churches. It was taken for granted. Thus Dioscorus was denied a vote at Chalcedon.

An even clearer instance of proof that the bishops were present at a general council merely to confirm the decisions of the Pope is the instruction of Pope Celestine to the Council of Ephesus: “The legates (i.e. of the Pope) are to be present at the transactions of the Synod, and will give effect to what the Pope has decided long ago about Nestorius, for he has no doubt that the assembled bishops will agree with this.” No bishop questioned the Pope’s right to direct the Council. In proof of this we quote from the declaration of the Archbishop of Caesarea, Firmus, one of the leading bishops at the Council: “The former letter of the Apostolic See (i.e. the Pope) to Cyril (i.e. St Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria) had already contained the sentence and direction respecting the Nestorian question, and they (the assembled bishops) had.. . only fulfilled this direction and pronounced the canonical and apostolic condemnation of Nestorius”.

The acclamations of the bishops assembled at Chalcedon are well known. After the reading of the Nicene Creeds they proclaimed:

“That is the orthodox faith, that we all believe; into that we were baptised; into that we also baptise; thus Cyril taught; thus Pope Leo believes.” Similarly, when another of Pope Leo’s letters was read the bishops declared: “That is the faith of the Fathers, that is the faith of the Apostles! We all believe thus, the orthodox believe thus! Anathema to him who believes otherwise! Peter has spoken by Leo.” Later, Paschasinus, the Pope’s legate, spoke of Leo as the Archbishop of all the Churches, whose letter showed “quite clearly what is the true faith.”

The records of these and other Councils are facts of history which prove beyond a shadow of doubt that the Church of those days was regarded by all as a visible, organised society, a group of men, with the same objective, using the same means to attain it under the direction of an authority they all recognised. That it was a society bound together by authority is absolutely clear from all the records of the Church from those times.

PROVED FROM THE FATHERS

MUCH information about the organisation of the Church in the early centuries is to be gleaned from contemporary

writings. There seems to be little point in giving here a list of quotations from the Fathers, emphasising the point that it was essentially and by Christ's will a visible organised society, because the fact is so very evident. In his *History of Dogma*, Harnack a Protestant writes: "There can be no doubt that the Gnostic propaganda (i.e. of the second century) was seriously injured by that inability to organise and govern churches which is characteristic of all philosophical systems of religion. The Gnostic organisation of schools and mysteries was not able to contend with the episcopal organisation of the Churches".

It will be of interest to mention just two of the Fathers of the Church, St Irenaeus and St Ignatius. The former had been a disciple of St Polycarp, who in turn was a disciple of St John the Apostle. He was martyred at Lyons in the year 202. His most famous work is called *Adversus Haereses*. Possibly it has been quoted more than any other work of the period as evidence of belief in the supremacy of the Pope. Our present purpose is simply to show what a highly organised society the Catholic Church was at the end of the second century. "In every church, all who wish to know the truth may study the traditions of the Apostles that is known all over the world. In fact, we can tell you the names of those who were appointed bishops in the (various) churches by the Apostles and trace their successors to our own times. And because the Apostles were committing the government of the Church into their hands, they wanted these men, who were to take their places, to be perfect and blameless in every way." Elsewhere he wrote: "One should obey the presbyters who are the successors of the Apostles. . . We should follow those who preserve the doctrine of the Apostles and who are qualified, with the order of the priesthood, to instruct and correct others privately and publicly." St Ignatius wrote his letters about a century earlier. He was on his way from Antioch, where he was bishop, to Rome where he was to be martyred in the year 107. To the Christian communities of the places through which he passed he wrote seven letters. Here is a quotation from what he wrote to the Trallians: "You must continue to do nothing apart from the bishop. Obey priests as apostles of Jesus Christ. Similarly, all should respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, just as they respect the bishop as representing the Father and the priests as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Apart from these there is nothing that can be called a Church."

The same lesson is repeated to the Ephesians and to the Smyrneans. To the former St Ignatius wrote: "If the prayer of one or two men is so powerful, how much more so is that of the bishop and that of the whole Church. Anyone, therefore, who fails to assemble with the others has already displayed his pride and separated himself

Let us be careful not to oppose the bishop so that we may obey God." To the latter he wrote: "Shun schisms as the source of troubles. Follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father and the priests as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would God's command. Apart from the bishop nobody must perform any of the functions that belong to the Church. The Eucharist must be considered valid when it is offered by the bishop or by one to whom the bishop has given this charge. Wherever the bishop appears, there should the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."

It hardly needs to be pointed out that in the year 107 this great martyr took it for granted that the Catholic Church existed as an organised society in all the towns through which he passed. In each place bishops and priests were necessary. There was no government of the Church without them. They had to be obeyed if the faithful wished to be Catholics. They ruled as representatives of our Lord. St Ignatius was the immediate successor of the Apostles. He had known them. His idea of the constitution of the Church must have been theirs. It certainly did not change overnight.

PROVED FROM THE ACTS AND EPISTLES

No sooner had Jesus Christ ascended into heaven than the Church appeared as a visible organised society. There was no interim period; no time lag during which the Apostles organised themselves. Immediately, without any delay at all, they worked together, led by St Peter, as the Church's official teachers and rulers. They did not ask people if they were in charge or if they might appoint deacons. They knew they were and acted accordingly, thus: "Then the twelve, calling together the multitude of the disciples, said: It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying was liked by the multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon and Permenas and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the Apostles: and they, praying, imposed hands upon them" (Acts 6 : 2-6).

If that passage does not reveal the organisation of the Church immediately after Christ's ascension into heaven nothing does. The Twelve Apostles called together the general body of the disciples. They told them to choose seven men. Then these seven were ordained by the Twelve and put in charge of the less important work of the Church.

In the very first chapter of Acts we read how St Peter arranged for the election of St Matthias to take Judas's place. They took it as a matter of course that the man elected would have their powers over the Church. St Paul told Timothy the same thing: A bishop had to be one "that ruleth well his own house... But if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (1 Tim. 3 : 4-5).

Read the whole of the fifteenth chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles* and you will see at once how the Church was governed. You will see how the Christians at Antioch referred their questions to the officials, the apostles and presbyters of the central Church. They sent representatives to Jerusalem who were welcomed by the Church and by the Apostles and presbyters. We see that not only were the Church's leaders well known and organised but the

members as well. The dispute went on until St Peter made his decision. Following his ruling the Apostles made a law for Gentile converts. All this shows that the Apostles were the recognised leaders of the Church, with ruling authority.

Here is an extract, but the whole chapter will be read with advantage: “And some, coming down from Judea, taught the brethren:

That, except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small contest with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of the other side should go up to the apostles and priests to Jerusalem, about this question... And, when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and by the apostles and ancients, declaring how great things God had done with them. But there arose of the sect of the Pharisees some that believed, saying: They must be circumcised and be commanded to observe the law of Moses. And the apostles and ancients assembled to consider this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter, rising up, said to them... Then it pleased the apostles and the ancients, with the whole church, to choose men of their own company and to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas... For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay no further burden upon you than these necessary things” (Acts 15).

It will be seen from the Acts that the Apostles governed the Church under St Peter’s leadership. He it was who directed the election of Judas’s successor, he who preached the first sermons to the Jews, he who judged Ananias and Saphira, he who gave the final word at Jerusalem, as we have seen.

The note of authority was prominent in the Church—just as prominent as it is today. St Paul’s words to the Galatians are well known: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we said before, so now I say again: if anyone preached to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1: 8-10).

Exclusiveness is there, too. “A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, avoid: knowing that he that is such a one is subverted and sinneth, being condemned by his own judgment” (Tit. 3 :10, 11).

Habitual sinners were to be expelled from the Church at Corinth:

“It is absolutely heard that there is fornication among you and such fornication as the like is not among the heathens: that one should have his father’s wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he might be taken away from among you that hath done this thing. I, indeed, absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, him that hath so done. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh... And the rest I will set in order, when I come” (1 Cor. 5 :1-5; 11: 34).

St Paul insisted, too, on obedience. Here is what he wrote to the Hebrews: “Obey your prelates and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls, that they may do this with joy and not with grief. For this is not expedient for you, ... Salute all your prelates and all the saints (Heb. 13:17, 24).

Speaking to the clergy of Ephesus St Paul said: “Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20 : 28).

There are few biblical matters on which so much has been written as the shape, function and organisation of the hierarchy in the Church in the first centuries. It is absolutely certain that this Church had its rulers and its subjects, its officials and its ordinary members, its teachers and its taught, all working towards the same objective; the accomplishment of the mission left to the Church by Christ. Baptism was a public rite; therefore the members of the Church were known. They worshipped publicly as a group. They all believed in the same doctrines. Those who differed from the official teachers were expelled.

If we can trace the visible, organised Church back to the Apostles, we have traced it back to Christ. These men were his friends and disciples for three years; they died for their loyalty to him; there is no where the slightest suggestion that they were doing anything against his known will. It is quite unthinkable that, no sooner had Christ ascended into heaven, the Apostles set up a Church according to a pattern he detested.

Albert Schweitzer is one of those who apparently thinks that God allowed all Christians to fall into error almost from the apostolic age, in spite of his promise that he would be with them all days even to the consummation of the world. Such an opinion is not only contrary to the evidence of the New Testament; it is contradicted by all the weight of nearly twenty centuries of unbroken tradition. Nowadays the vast majority of non-Catholic scholars have been forced to admit, as a result of their researches, that the early Church was Catholic in many important respects. It is also worth remarking that all who try to make a case for the modern non-Catholic position cannot agree amongst themselves upon when the Catholic Church began. Attempts vary from the first to the sixteenth centuries. As G. K. Chesterton said, Dean Inge just about reached the limit, in the popular as well as in the learned sense, when he said that Pentecost was the occasion for the institution of a dogmatic and despotic Church completely opposed to the ideas of Jesus.

Some of our separated brethren have found themselves in a dilemma between the obvious truth of our argument so far and their conviction that the Church of Christ could never be an authoritative, exclusive, organised, visible society. Some solution had to be found; so, in place of a better alternative, they have blamed St Paul and the other Apostles for changing Christianity, in spite of what the great Apostle wrote to the Ephesians: “You are fellow citizens with the saints and the domestics of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the

chief cornerstone, in whom, all the building being framed together, groweth up into an holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are built together into an habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2 :19-22).

PROVED FROM THE GOSPELS

To **CLINCH** our case and refute this last suggestion we have to show that it was indeed Christ Himself, the God-Man, who founded this visible, organised society which he called his Church.

The world was prepared for Christ's Church by the church of the old dispensation. Under that dispensation the Church of God was just as extensive as, conterminous with, the Jewish nation. From among all nations, God "called" the Jews to his unique Assembly. The Jewish Church-nation roughly fore-modelled (to coin a word) the Christian Church which was to follow and replace it. This latter, however, differed in many respects from that which foreshadowed it. It was no longer national, but international; the Holy Spirit dwelt in it now and it was indefectible, infallible and irreplaceable. But the Jewish Church was a visible Society; so was the Church of Christ. Never once did our Lord suggest that there was to be a difference in that essential.

From the beginning of his public ministry he said he was going to establish "the kingdom of God", "the kingdom of heaven" or "my Church". This earthly kingdom was to be a preparation for the heavenly, the means of attaining eternal life. A remnant of the Jews would take part in this kingdom, which had been vaguely described by the prophets.

Jesus firmly resisted any effort to make him a temporal ruler. His was not to be a political kingdom. But it was to be on earth. He said it would be like a field, containing both wheat and cockle, a net, with good fish and bad in it, a bridal party, with foolish virgins as well as wise. It would be one flock from one fold, and Peter would be the shepherd. The final resurrection was to take place at the end and not at the beginning of it.

Jesus described himself as a king going into a far country. While he is away deputies will administer his kingdom. It will grow rapidly like a mustard tree, becoming a leaven for all the human race. The King will return at the end of the world to reap the harvest. He will separate the cockle from the wheat, the bad fish from the good and the goats from the sheep. He will then invite the good to that heavenly kingdom, which is the consummation of his kingdom on earth.

At the centre of this kingdom or Church were the Apostles whom Christ carefully trained. He called them solemnly and officially after a night spent in prayer: "And, going up into a mountain, he called unto him whom he would himself. And they came to him. And he made that twelve should be with him and that he might send them to preach" (Mark 3 :13-14).

These twelve were to be his "fishers of men", the "salt of the earth". He spent most of his time training them. They were to take his place in the world and his message to all men. They were to continue his ministry after his death. They were to reap a great harvest. To them he entrusted the secrets of his kingdom.

This teaching went on for two or three years. Then, just before he ascended into heaven, he sent them forth in his name to teach, rule and sanctify all nations.

"All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptising 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" (Matt. 28 :18-20).

Note the meaning of "therefore". It is because Christ has all power in heaven and in earth that the Apostles are being sent out. Note also the fourfold "all": with *all* Christ's authority, they are to teach *all* his revelation to *all* men for *all* time. St Luke tells us that Christ said to them: "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). It is clear that they are to teach.

Their mission is a continuation of Christ's mission. Not only do they teach, but they teach officially in his name, helped by the Holy Spirit, who will recall and enable them to understand all his teachings:

"These things have I spoken to you, abiding with you. But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (John 14 : 25-26).

They were to govern men, not only teaching them what Christ had taught, but teaching them to obey what Christ commanded. Christ's authority was with them. It was divine authority; it was absolutely binding: "Teaching them to observe (i.e. obey) all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28 : 20); "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. 18 :18); "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10 :16).

In addition to teaching and ruling men spiritually, the Apostles were to make them holy by sacred ceremonies. We have already quoted Our Lord's commission to baptise. On the first Easter day he "breathed on them; and he said to them: 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). And, of course, the night before he died he gave them power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist and ordered them to do it in commemoration of him.

These commands the Apostles carried out. After St Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost "they that received

his word were baptised; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2 : 41). Philip converted the Samaritans: “When they had believed Philip preaching of the kingdom of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.. . . When the Apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For he was not as yet come upon any of them; but they were only baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them; and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:12-17).

Even though the first Gentile converts had already received the Holy Ghost, Peter baptised them (Acts 8 : .12-17). Baptism was always regarded as the ceremony of initiation into Christ’s Church. Until the Protestant revolt it was regarded as a public rite which clearly distinguished members of the Church from those outside.

To the Apostles Christ had promised, as we have seen, his constant divine help. They taught his doctrines everywhere; they ruled according to his commands; they made men holy with his sacraments. They knew that his Spirit was with them, as he had promised: “I will ask the Father; and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever.., he shall abide with you and shall be in you” (John 14 :16-17).

Because of Christ’s promises the Church has always relied on the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide. We saw how in that first Council of Jerusalem the Apostles boldly proclaimed: “It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us. . .“ (Acts 15 : 28). The Church’s decision was the Holy Spirit’s decision. St Paul regarded the Church, therefore, as the pillar and foundation of truth.

CONCLUSION

ALL the evidence at our disposal, of which we have sketched only a brief summary, convinces us that Christ set up over nineteen hundred years ago a visible, organised society. Its objective was to make all men holy and save their souls. The means to that were belief in Christ, reception of the sacraments he instituted and obedience to the authority he established. The members were those who believed and were baptised. The authority was the Apostles under the leadership of St Peter, and their successors.

From the beginning Christ’s Church was a highly organised society. The organisation of its earliest years was preserved and developed. Before the sixteenth century there is no reference anywhere to the notion that the Christian Church consists of all Christ’s followers, whether they are baptised or not, whether they believe in the Sacraments or not, whether they accept orthodox teaching or not, whether they obey the successors of St Peter and the Apostles or not. The idea that the denominations are to Christ’s Church as the clubs are to a city was unheard of for the first sixteen hundred years of the Church’s life. Not only was it unheard of, it was definitely contrary to the belief and practice of all the leaders and members of the Church.

That Christ established a visible organised Church is a truth clearly set forth in the New Testament, completely vindicated by the Church’s history and absolutely reasonable. We cannot be true followers of Christ unless we accept his Church. It is through that Church that he lives on in the world today. It is through that Church that his ministry continues. It lies at the very heart of his revelation to men.

He said in his Sermon on the Mount: “He that shall break one of these least commandments and shall so teach men shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5 :19).

What shall we say of those who, through culpable ignorance, intellectual indolence or moral cowardice, reject the Church God came on earth to found?

Turn back, now, to the first page of this booklet. Look at the last of the eight statements which you stated to be true: “To know about the way God wants to be worshipped we must know about his Church, which is Christ’s Church.”

I hope that now you know what sort of a Church Christ’s is; therefore, what sort of Church you must look for. It is the constitution of the Church that matters. Too much time is spent on bandying texts and arguing about scandals in history. God’s Church is human as well as divine; Christ told us in advance that scandals would come. He chose St Peter, who had denied him, to be the first Pope in preference to St John, the beloved, to emphasise that we must always distinguish between the man and the office or, in other words, between the constitution of the Church and the men who make up the Church.

The short cut to the true following of Christ is to find out what kind of Church His is. We have described it in these pages. In the world today only one Church, the Catholic Church, with its centre in Rome, fills the bill. The crucial question is that of authority. We have seen it at every stage of the Church’s history—in the Councils, in the Fathers, in the Acts and the Epistles, in the Gospels, where it was conferred by Christ himself. That same authority is in the world to-day vested in the Catholic Bishops who are the successors of the Apostles under the leadership of the Pope, who is the successor of St Peter. In a nutshell the final answer is what you say to the question: Where on earth is Peter?
