

The
Correct Conception
of
God's Church



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THE CORRECT CONCEPTION OF GOD'S CHURCH

"The Son of God was made flesh and dwelt amongst us" not only to re-establish the human race in favor with God by obedience "unto the death of the cross," but also to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John xiv, 6) to all people for all time. By the perfection and moral beauty of His own life, and by His positive moral teachings, Christ would be *the Way*, the pattern for people to model their own lives by. By his overthrow of existing pagan errors and His infallible declarations concerning the nature of God, man's precise duties towards God, etc., He would be *the Truth*. And by the divine helps He would supply for man's sanctification and salvation, Jesus would be his very *supernatural Life*.

Our Savior came as TEACHER, and made provision for teaching the nations for all time.

1.

Scattered throughout the world, unreached by the voice of any God-commissioned teacher, all people, save the Jews, so lost definite knowledge of God that, to use the words of St. Paul, "they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things...who changed the truth of God into a lie; and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. I, 23, 25). Along with this lamentable ignorance of God, and naturally resulting from it, existed a universal corruption of morals. Morality must have definite dogmatic truths as a foundation. The learned philosophers in many countries realized this state of affairs and deplored the

same, but they were powerless to remedy it. In fact, several of them taught that matters would grow worse instead of better until a Teacher would come from Heaven, Who could speak with authority on the nature of God, man's precise destiny, and what he must do to reach it.

Christ came with "the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and generations, but now is made manifest" (Col. i, 26). "The people that have walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death light is risen" (Isa. ix, 2). The God-man was to be "the true light to enlighten every man that cometh into this world" (John i, 9).

2.

Now, how was Christ to effect this instruction of all nations, even of those yet unborn? Was He to remain visibly on earth among men until the end of the world? Or was He to found a concrete organization with a *Teaching Body that would be authorized to speak in His name?* Only the latter method would be in accordance with our expectations, and it is the method which both Bible and history show Christ to have adopted. The Mosaic religion was a type of the Christian, and it was a *visible* organization whose members received a definite knowledge of the Almighty's will from teachers authorized to speak in His name.

Open the New Testament or read profane history and you will learn that Christ was visibly on earth but a very short time; that the term of His public teaching comprised only three years; that during this interval He never crossed the boundaries of Judea. His time was occupied chiefly with the instruction of TWELVE men, who, under a chief, were to constitute His first

representative corporate Teaching Body; they would be commissioned by the Son of God to "go forth and teach all nations" in His name. They would have successors in office, since the Kingdom of Christ was not only to be world-wide, but would endure until the end of time; "of His Kingdom there will be no end" (Luke i., 33). And though Jesus would return to Heaven, He would not be dissociated from His visible Teaching Body in the Church: "Behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii, 20).

Just as the visible body and the visible soul are united in one being, so Christ would be the invisible "head of the body, the Church" (Col. i, 18). The Holy Ghost, as the Spirit of Truth, would descend upon the Church to animate her with a divine life, to abide with her forever, and keep her in the way of holiness and truth. Well then does this Kingdom of God upon earth merit the appellation of St. Paul: "The Church of the living God" (I Tim., iii, 5); and how evident that it must be "the pillar and ground of truth (Ibid.)? How plain that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi, 18)? How reasonable: "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican" (Matt. xvii, 15)? How logical: "He that heareth you, heareth Me" (Luke x, 16)?

How could this "Church of the living God" with Christ's identical mission have less authority to teach than Christ Himself? less power to remove sin? how could it lack divine helps to sanctify man? "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you" (John xx, 21).

3.

This sublime nature of the Church Christ founded,

its divine origin, its supernatural character, preclude all possibility of one church being as good as another, of there being any more than *one* church. The most perfect human copy of THE Church will ever be infinitely inferior, it will never be supernatural, it will never be divine. In fact, any religion but His own established 1900 years ago, must be severely condemned by God. "*He that despises you, despises Me*" (Luke x, 16); "*He that is not with Me, is against Me*" (Matt. xii, 30); "*And there shall be one fold and one shepherd*" (John x, 16); "*In vain do they worship Me, teaching doctrines and commandments of men*" (Matt. xv, 9); "*How shall they preach unless they be sent*" (Rom. x, 15); "*But, though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed*" (Gal. i, 8). How could any religious society not founded by God be as good as the one founded by Him? How could contradictory sects separately or collectively all be "the pillar and ground of truth"?

And it ought to be plain to non-members of the Church that if God instituted a Church to represent Himself among men they are not free to remain outside its ranks. With them the whole matter should resolve itself into a *question of Fact*. *Did the God-man, or did He not, establish an organization such as we have described above?* If He did not, then surely no church is necessary, for human churches could not lead to Heaven. But if He did, then man must affiliate with the same or take the consequences.

4.

Such was the Church as Christ founded it; such must it be today; history, for fifteen hundred years, presents no other Church: two-thirds of the Christian

world at the present time regard the Church in this light. If the Bible teaches anything plainly, if centuries of history point out any living fact, it is the *Visibility* of Christ's Church. It is composed of rulers and subjects (Acts xx, 28); its members are admitted by a visible external rite; they must hear, obey. Christ compares His Church only to things visible: a "flock," a "house," a "body," a "city seated on a mountain," a "kingdom;" He calls it "MY" Church, "THE" Church.

If the Church is not a visible organization, what can St. Luke mean by saying: "There were *added* (to the Church) 3,000 souls?" What does the clause in the creed mean: "I believe in the holy Catholic Church?" What does St. Paul mean when he speaks of bishops appointed by the Holy Ghost "to rule the Church of God"?

Yet there are numerous so-called Bible Christians who understand by the Church "the congregation of those whose hearts are with God, who are united to Him by faith and love"; these contend that it matters not to which organization a man belongs, whether Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or what not. Whilst excusing this notion in the generality of Protestants as an inherited impression which it never occurred to them to question, we must attribute bad faith to those who first "led others away by this strange doctrine" (Heb. xiii, 9). Their wish was father to their thought,—they denied the visibility of the Church because they were unwilling to submit to her authority.

A complete definition of the Church might be given thus: An organization or society established by Christ Himself to exist visibly among all nations till the end of the world, and representing God in the capacity of Teacher and sanctifier of nations; an or-

ganization enjoying God's protection, and hence competent to proclaim the whole set of truths taught by Christ in their original genuineness; an organization possessing one grand form of worship (by which God is adequately honored) as well as God-given means of holiness.

By consequence, members of this Church must accept all her teachings, take part in her same form of worship, make use of the means of sanctification she offers, and allow themselves to be governed in spiritual matters by the divinely constituted authority of the Church.

ST. IGNATIUS.

(First Century)

"Do you all follow your Bishop as Christ did His Father? Without the Bishop let no man presume to do any of those things which belong to the Church" (Ep. ad. Smyra.).

IRENEUS.

(Second Century)

"The teaching of the Church is true and stable, showing to all men the same one path of salvation" (Irin. Book V.).

TERTULLIAN.

(Third Century)

"It is not lawful for us to introduce anything of our choice, or even to choose that which anyone may have introduced of his own choice. We have as our authorities the Apostles of the Lord, who did not even themselves choose anything by their own will that they might introduce it, but faithfully delivered over to the nations the doctrines which they had received from Christ" (Apud Marcion, Bk. 4, Chap. 5.).

ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM.

(Fourth Century)

"Guard the Faith, and that Faith alone, which is now delivered to thee by the Church, confirmed as it is by all the scriptures" (Catech. 18.).

REV. A. LEFFINGWELL.

"Am I not well aware that members of the Jewish church
(New Albany, Ind.)

wrote nearly all of the Old Testament; that members of the
Christian church wrote the entire New Testament? Do I not
well know that the Primitive Church was the mother, or
author of the Bible; and not the Bible the author or mother
of the Primitive Church."

GLADSTONE.

(Newby's Life of Gladstone)

"I had previously taken a great deal of teaching direct
from the Bible, as best I could; but now the figure of the
Church rose before me as a teacher too, and I gradually found
in how incomplete and fragmentary a manner I had drawn
divine truth from the sacred volume, as, indeed, I had also
missed, in the Thirty-nine Articles, something which ought
to have taught me better. Such, for I believe that I have
given the fact as it occurred, in its silence and its solitude,
was my first introduction to the august conception of the
Church of Christ. It presented to me Christianity under an
aspect in which I had not yet known it; its ministry of
symbols, its channels of grace, its unending line of teachers
joining from the Head."