

Identifying the Way
(No. IV of series)

GOD'S KINGDOM THERE REACHED THROUGH HIS KINGDOM HERE

by
J. F. N.



OUR SUNDAY VISITOR PRESS
Huntington, Indiana



Deacidified

God's Kingdom There Reached Through His Kingdom Here

In our pamphlet No. III we made it clear that Heaven, the eternal reward offered by God to His children here on earth for faithful service, can be earned by adults only

- (1) On God's terms;
- (2) With supernatural assistance; and
- (3) In a religious society of divine foundation.

Our next step must be to identify this religious society established by God. This done, there will be no further controversy concerning the terms of salvation or concerning the means whereby the necessary supernatural assistance is furnished to souls.

I

Religious organizations abound in the world today, and each is busily engaged in campaigning for members. But by what means may one hope to ascertain with certainty which one among them all had a divine origin, and therefore, a divine commission; which one possesses the full truth and the means of leading people to bliss everlasting? With prejudice laid aside the process of identifying the true Church of Christ should be an easy one.

Confining our investigation to the Christian organizations, our effort will be in great part successful if we find the correct historical answer to the question, "Which among the many claimants has existed in the world uninterruptedly from the time of Christ?" Grant that Christ was God and that He founded a religion to serve mankind until the end of the world, and you must needs assume that His religion, substantially unaltered, is with us in this twentieth century.

"Which is it?" is the momentous question.

We suppose that every Christian in the world will admit that the Church propagated by the Apostles was

the Church founded by Jesus Christ; that everyone will also admit, therefore, that a religious institution which cannot be traced back to the time of the Apostles cannot be the organization of which they were the first missionaries.

CONSULT YOUR ENCYCLOPEDIA

Now get hold of your Encyclopedia and read the historical treatise dealing with any one of the religious denominations in existence at the present time. To facilitate the work you might disregard the one hundred or more organizations which have sprung up during the past century. There are too many links missing to close the gap between the nineteenth century and the first.

If you be already conversant with a little history you must know that even 300 years ago there were only half a dozen Christian organizations in the world, and that, of these, no more than three are 400 years old; one of the three is exactly 400 years old, viz., the Lutheran Church, which definitely dates its beginning as a religious system to the "Augsburg Confession," held in the year 1530.

The Church of England was established by an edict of King Henry VIII in the year 1534. Calvinism, with which the Church of Scotland, the Dutch Reformed Church, and our Presbyterianism and Congregationalism claim relationship, began as a system in the year 1540, at Geneva, Switzerland.

Your Encyclopedia will inform you that Martin Luther was born 1483 years after Christ; Henry VIII in the year 1491, and John Calvin in the year 1509 after Christ. History during the previous fifteen centuries records nothing of these organizations, which today claim millions of adherents.

ALL ALONE FOR CENTURIES

But the Catholic Church, with its seat in Rome, had been functioning during the wide gap, and had been

intimately associated with European history for 1200 years before Luther or Henry or Calvin.

Even the Greek Orthodox Church, as it is known today, is less than 500 years old. It is traceable to the year 1453, when the Sultan of Turkey, Mahomet II, forced Gregory Scholarius on the See of Constantinople. Imagine this Patriarch's jurisdiction coming from a Mohammedan. But the other religious systems considered above also owe their origin and success to kings and princes.

The Catholics of the Near East, who belonged to the Greek Rite, had separated from their brethren in the West, or those of the Latin Rite, as early as the year 867, and then formed a habit of coming back and leaving again. They remained separated from the year 1054 to the year 1274, when there was a reunion. Six years later there was another separation, and sixty years later another reunion. Then there was the final separation, forced by the Turkish Sultan. What if we granted that the Greek Church could be traced back to the year 867, or to the ninth century, would there not still be an impassable gulf to leap, even to come close to the Church of the Apostles?

But throughout the eighth century, and the seventh century, and the sixth century, and the fifth century, and the fourth century, the Catholic Church was not only in evidence, but was civilizing and Christianizing Europe or saving her from a conquest by pagan invaders.

Name a single country possessing Christianity before the fifteenth century, which did not receive its religion from missionaries belonging to the (Roman) Catholic fold. Christian teaching reiterated in Protestant Confessions of Faith was in great part formulated by Bishops of the Catholic Church gathered in Council at Nice in the year 325. Up to that date, beginning with the martyrdom of the Apostles themselves, the Church

flourished, but, owing to the bitter warfare waged against her, owing to her confinement in the catacombs, her part in the making of secular history was not so conspicuous. That the Christians who underwent violent persecution during the first three centuries after Christ were (Roman) Catholics is clear from the fact that twenty-nine among the first thirty Popes were numbered among the martyrs of that era.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION—A COMPARISON

An illustration will probably best serve as an Apostolic Succession argument. The Constitution of the United States, upon which the Government of the United States was formally founded, was drafted at Philadelphia. George Washington was chosen the first President, taking the oath of office in New York in 1789. The fact that the *seat* of government was moved to Philadelphia in 1790, and to Washington in 1800, did not change the government in any sense whatsoever, any more than the moving of his See from Antioch to Rome changed the Church presided over by St. Peter in the first century. Washington *never* ruled from Washington, but Peter did rule from Rome, and died a martyr there in the year 67. Every historian of note now concedes this.

Now suppose the State of Virginia, the native state of George Washington and one of the original thirteen states, had separated from the Union in the year 1850, and represented before the world that it, in its new form, and independent of the other states, was the original government established by the Constitutional Fathers. Its claim would be in keeping with the claim of the Oriental Greeks inhabiting the Near East; with the claim of the Anglicans, who seceded from the Roman Church in England; with the claim of the Germans, who seceded from the Roman Church under Luther and the civil rulers of his day, with the claim of the Swiss, who seceded from the Roman Church under Calvin; with the

claim of the Scots, who seceded from the Roman Church under John Knox. Immediately after Lincoln's election in 1860 five states did secede from the Union, but never claimed that they were the government established by the Constitution of the United States.

Then let us suppose that Oklahoma, which was not one of the original states, never as a matter of fact became a state within the Union; that in the year 1900 its people, through a local leader, declared themselves to be utterly independent of any previously existing government, yet declared their state to be the original United States Government restored, and we would have a claim in keeping with that of a number of denominations which have come into being during the last 200 years. The so-called Christian Church, or that of the Disciples, founded a century ago by Alexander Campbell, claims that it, separated by eighteen centuries from Christ, is His Church *restored* to its original purity. Even a church, to be the same in middle or old age, must have uninterrupted existence.

Let us further suppose that every city and town in our nation claimed to represent the mind of George Washington, the true spirit of the American Constitution, and that all, each with complete home rule, contended that they were the original government of the United States. This claim would be in keeping with that of some denominations, such as the Congregational Church.

Carrying our parallel farther, let us suppose that numerous people in our country professed that true Americanism and true patriotic service consisted not in acknowledging any living authority, but in professing adherence to the *principles* of George Washington, in reading the Constitution of the United States, and interpreting it in any manner which the light of their reason or the tendency of their prejudices moved them to interpret it. This would be in keeping with the numerous ones who maintain that true Christianity consists in

accepting Christ as one's personal Savior, in reading the Bible and interpreting it as they are stimulated to interpret it.

NEW RELIGIONS NOT THE OLD

After the charter of the Christian religion was delivered by Christ to the men whom He had under instruction for three years; after it was formally established in this world on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 people, representing different parts of the Orient, were admitted as members, we had, so to speak, Christian representation from thirteen states. Since the Church was to become international, it later united to itself new countries as the Government of the United States has added to itself new states, until the Church had formed a real United States of Europe and of contiguous countries.

Just as movements toward state independence grew in our own Union, so the spirit of nationalism led several countries to secede in turn from the United States of the Church. Though they became completely independent, they strangely represented that they, the secessionists, constituted the original Church. Though their people had originally received the faith from missionaries sent out from Rome; though their ecclesiastical leaders had all been appointed from Rome; though they had been admitted one by one into the union of the original Christian Church, still *after* their separation, after complete rejection of the authority of the general government of the Church, they still claimed to be THE Church.

No matter what reasons for separation they may have adduced at the time, or what reasons they may offer even today in justification of their secession, the fact remains that they become independent organizations, the old Church which they left enduring as a living disproof of their claims.

Let us suppose, without admitting it, that the universal Church fell into error, or neglected to enforce, as it should, the code of morals of its Founder, no new point in favor of the identity of the modern churches with the original is won. This must become apparent if we continue our parallel. Let us suppose that the Government, of which George Washington and the Constitutional Fathers were the founders, drifted from the high ideals of its beginnings, and that, on this account, Virginia and Alabama, Illinois and Montana, each in turn, seceded from the Union of forty-eight states. Would their excuse for secession justify their claim that they, though each differing from the other in policy, were the government founded by George Washington and the Constitutional Fathers?

Our parallels are certainly apt ones, and should bring home conviction better than any number of mere words that Apostolic Succession is not only necessary for the transmission of Apostolic prerogatives and powers, but for the authenticity and identity of any claimant to original Christianity.

THE WISH FATHER TO THE THOUGHT

When the clergymen of any of the modern denominations belittle the argument of Apostolic Succession; when they make little of the need of antiquity for the Church; when they defend even the small membership which their particular denomination has or its confinement to one or other country; when they repudiate a Pope or any supreme authority in an ecclesiastical organization; when they decry creeds or doctrines, etc., etc., their attitude must be considered in connection with their difficulty in accounting for their separated existence.

In other words, a Church which *could* not claim Apostolic Succession because it had no existence even four or five hundred years ago; a sect which has only a few million members or even less, and is confined, for in-

stance, to English-speaking countries; a denomination which makes each individual his own supreme judge concerning the way to bliss eternal; a religious communion which, acknowledging a lack of authority, is in no position to form a creed or to defend a doctrine—these cannot give a good account of themselves to the unprejudiced truth-seeker.

That the Church of the Apostles had a very definite organization, taught very definite doctrines, and worshipped the Almighty by a very definite oblation, is easily proved. While the Epistles of the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles were written for a different purpose than to defend a creed or to emphasize the need of Apostolic Succession, they furnish all the corroborative proof needed to uphold the arguments of Christian Apologists of the second and third centuries. There were only two or three forms of disagreement, called "heresy" by St. Paul, concerning doctrines or religious practices among the people who had embraced the Christian faith during the life time of the New Testament writers. But during the second and third and fourth centuries, there were many so-called heretics, who, in their writings, attacked early Christian teaching, as promulgated by the Apostles and accepted by the people of their time and immediately after. These errors called for a statement of the real character of the Church, the need of Apostolic Succession, of antiquity, of universality, of oneness of belief. This called for the drafting of creeds for clear statements on such doctrines as the Divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Eucharist, the divinely-appointed eucharistic worship, and on all the things which the Church, even thereafter, has deemed it necessary to emphasize.

THESE DEFENDED THE ONE, ORIGINAL CHURCH

Some of these early Christian writers were **St. Ignatius, of Antioch, and Clement** who lived during the

life-time of St. John the Apostle; Pliny, who wrote about the year 112; St. Justin, martyr, who was converted to the faith about the year 130; St. Irenaeus, who wrote about the year 160; Hegisippus, who wrote about the year 180; Origen, Tertullian, St. Cyprian, who lived in the third century; a whole litany of saints, who began to defend the Church after it was given its liberty in the collapsed Roman Empire during the fourth century, such as Augustine, Basil, Cyril, Athanasius, Hilary, Ephrem, Chrysostom. Then there were numerous ones born towards the end of the fourth century or at the very beginning of the fifth century, who were equally emphatic in the defense of the character of the Church as Catholics hold it to be today, who defend the teachings which we are called upon to defend against non-Catholic Christian opponents, such as Saints Jerome, Ambrose, Gaudentius.

It must be remembered that the Nicene Creed was drafted in the year 325 by Bishops who traced their succession to the Apostles. This creed has not only come down through the centuries, and is held sacred by the Greeks and the Anglicans, but it has entered into the very liturgy of the Church from that time. Liturgy itself speaks a language and not only proves the continued existence of the Mass through the centuries, but the prevalence of other beliefs which Catholics today hold to be of faith.

AN IMPORTANT WITNESS

Turn to your Encyclopedia again and look up the word DIDACHE, which is the Greek name given to a little book in use during the fifth century. Its title might be translated "The Teaching of the Twelve." We find in the writings of Clement, of Alexandria, who died in the year 217, passages taken from the Didache. Eusebius, the early historian, mentions it. Much of it is embodied in the "Epistles of Barnabas." It constitutes a

large portion of the ancient document entitled "Apostolical Constitutions."

A copy of this work was discovered in a Greek Monastery at Constantinople in the year 1875, and is believed to have been written during the life-time of the Apostles. Its author seems to know only of St. Matthew's Gospel, which was written about six years after the Ascension; it does not quote from any of the Epistles, most of which had not yet been written and the earlier ones of which had never reached the writer. On the other hand, the author uses the name "Christians," which was adopted about the year 45 A. D., at Antioch. It is generally believed to have been written between the years fifty and fifty-five. What it contains appears under the heading "The Way of Life and Death," and its contents deal with moral precepts rather than matters doctrinal, yet one can find traces of the beliefs and practices of these first Christians, converts of the Apostles themselves, at a time when nearly all the Apostles were still alive. The necessity of Baptism is emphasized, fasting was a prescribed ordinance, the Sunday was observed instead of the Sabbath as the Lord's Day; the religious life through entire renunciation of "all that thou hast" is recommended in it; the doctrine of the Trinity is assumed; the need of Confession before Communion is stressed; the doctrine of the Eucharist as Catholics believe it is also assumed, as it was assumed by St. Paul when he asked the Corinthians questions about it (I Cor. 11:20-34).

With the help of the DIDACHE and the help of the writings of the Christian Apologists of the early centuries, it is easy to interpret the New Testament in line with practically all Catholic teaching and practice of this age and of every age of the Christian era. Though Paul could rebuke Peter as one Bishop might rebuke another for some imprudent utterance or policy, yet when Peter spoke officially, "all," including St. James in his

own city of Jerusalem, where the first Council of the Apostles was held, "kept their peace" (Acts 15:12).

Paul allowed no secessionists from the one Gospel, even though a different one should be preached by an angel from Heaven (Gal. 1:8). He appealed for unity among all Christians. He would have vehemently scorned those who hold that the Kingdom of Christ might be constituted of all those whose hearts are right, who accept Christ as their Savior, no matter how variant their beliefs. He would have severely denounced those, who hold that any given congregation might be its own authority in religion, and differ from some other congregation which claimed allegiance to Christ. If he did not have much to say about the misuse of the Holy Scriptures, it must be remembered that the New Testament, which is intended for Christians, was only in the making. Half of it was not yet written, and what was written was not accessible to any of the people. They could only hear it read from a church in Corinth, or in Rome, or in some city in Thessalónica or Galatia, etc. He could no more think of permitting people to give a hundred different interpretations to his mind or to the mind of any of the Evangelists, than you could permit of a hundred different interpretations of sentiments of your own mind expressed in a letter which you might have written to a Titus or to a Timothy or to a Philemon. When you write a letter the separate paragraphs usually can have only one meaning, *your meaning*, because you want the recipient of your letter to understand you.

THE CATHOLIC THE HISTORICAL CONCEPT

We have already intimated that if the Protestant concept of the Church is so different from the Catholic concept, it is because in the case of the former it was an afterthought, which proceeded from the necessity of justifying a position different from that of the historical Church. In the fifth volume of the Encyclopedia AMERICANA the difference between the Catholic and the Protestant concept is stated as follows:

“As understood today there are two widely different opinions regarding the meaning of a church, and both claim the New Testament as authority, (1) that Jesus Christ established a definite Church with a code of laws pertaining to belief and government; (2) that he gave us only moral instruction and no definite laws of belief or discipline. Under (1) may be classed those who claim that Jesus Christ established only one Church, and that the churches mentioned by Paul and others of the early missionaries as recorded in the New Testament, were all parts of the one Church. Still others hold that the Christian churches of the New Testament were each separate and distinct in government, but of one faith. The Roman Catholic, Greek, Church of England, and all Christian organizations, with any generally recognized form of government, whether by presbyters or by the congregation, may be classed under (1). Under (2) will come all who hold that to observe the moral code as taught by Jesus Christ is all sufficient, hence this division need not be treated under the head Church.

“The Roman Catholic definition of Church is: ‘The congregation of all the faithful, who being baptized, profess the same doctrines, partake of the same sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head on earth, the Bishop of Rome.’ This implies unity of faith, morals, and government. The Greek definition is the same except they do not recognize as the visible head the Bishop of Rome. The Church of England definition is: ‘A congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered in all those things that are of necessity requisite to the same.’ In the further authorized explanation of this definition it is shown that the government is given to the bishops without any authoritative head. The same definition is in general use by all other Christian churches, but in some the government is vested in presbyters, elders, or officers

acting as elders; in others the government rests in the congregation or members of the Church."—THE AMERICANA.

The *character* of the Church founded by Christ can also be determined historically, as well as from Holy Scripture. Both make clear that Christ established a *visible* society or Kingdom, which was to be propagated *internationally* and into whose membership every human being was to be invited. It was to be a corporate thing in which the Holy Spirit would govern, teach, and sanctify through human agents.

Christ Himself never over-stepped the boundaries of Judea. His time was occupied chiefly with the instruction of the twelve men who, under a chief, were to constitute His first representative teaching body. To them the Master said: "He that heareth you, heareth Me" (Luke X, 16). As the Father had sent Him, so He would send them (John XX, 21); He would be with them "all days even unto the consummation of the world" (Matt. XXXVI, 20); and "of His Kingdom there would be no end" (Luke I, 33); it would always be "one fold under one shepherd" (John X, 16); it would be composed of rulers and subjects (Acts XV, 28); people would be admitted by a visible external rite (St. John 3:5).

Its sameness through the centuries could be maintained only on the supposition that the original Apostles would have successors similarly empowered and commissioned. The Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, must not desert it, for it must ever dispense things supernatural (Col. 1, 18) (Ephes. 2:19-22). It must continue to be "the Church of the Living God" (I Tim. III, 5); then "the gates of hell would not prevail against it" (Matt XVI, 18).

Conceive if you can a corporate body or, in modern language, a corporation, without a *visible* head. Christ's Kingdom must have a spokesman who, when represent-

ing it officially, and speaking in His name, would be protected from error. Otherwise it would not be the "Church of the Living God;" otherwise it would not be "the pillar and ground of truth;" otherwise Christ's words "he that hears you, hears Me" would not be true; otherwise His promise would not be kept: "Behold I am with you;" otherwise His prayer in Peter's behalf would not have been heard: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke XXII, 32). Did not Christ, the Good Shepherd, appoint Peter shepherd in His place: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep" (St. John 21:15-17)? Did not Christ, the Head, deliver the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter (Matt. XVI, 19)?

St. Augustine shows the apostolicity of the Catholic Church in his day:

"Holding, therefore, by these divine promises, should an angel from heaven ask you to quit the Christianity of the whole world and pass over to the Donatists, let him be anathema. For, if it be a question of Episcopal succession, the surest way is to count from Peter himself, to whom, as representing the whole Church, the Lord said: 'On this rock will I build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.' To Peter succeeded Linus; to Linus, Cletuts; to Cletus, Clement; to Clement, Evaristus; to Evaristus, Alexander; to Alexander, Sixtus; to Sixtus, Telesphorus; to Telesphorus, Hyginus; to Hyginus, Pius; to Pius, Anicete; to Anicete, Soter; to Soter, Eleutherius; to Eleutherius, Victor; to Victor, Zephyrinus; to Zephyrinus, Calixtus; to Calixtus, Urban; to Urban, Pontian; to Pontian, Antherus; to Antherus, Fabianus; to Fabianus, Cornelius; to Cornelius, Lucius; to Lucius, Stephen; to Stephen, Sixtus; to Sixtus, Dionisius; to Dionisius, Felix; to Felix, Eutichianus; to Eutichianus, Caius; to Caius, Marcellinus; to Marcellinus, Marcellus; to Marcellus, Eusebius; to Eusebius, Melchiades; to Melchiades, Sylvester; to Sylvester, Marcus; to Marcus, Julius; to Julius, Liberius; to Liberius, Damasus; to Damasus, Siricius; to

Siricius, Anastasius, who now occupies the same See. In this succession no Donatist occurs." (Ep. 53 to German).

Surely there is no difficulty in tracing the succession of pontiffs *since* Augustine's time.

INFALLIBILITY

The delivery of the keys itself indicates the transfer of authority. Since it was Christ's authority which was delivered it must be infallible authority. It was conveyed with the words: "Whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in Heaven." Strong words.

Conceive, if you can, "the Church of the living God" being fallible. Conceive, if you can, a Church commissioned "to teach all nations" subject to no protection against error from the God Who gave the commission.

The voice of him who speaks for the Church of God must be tantamount to God's voice; what he teaches must have the backing of God according to Christ's promise, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew XVI, 18).

Conceive, if you can, God commanding people to listen to the Church, and then allowing them to be taught falsely. Of the Church God says: "He who hears you hears Me, and he who despises you despises Me" (Luke X, 16).

The doctrine of infallibility, while defined by the Vatican Council in the year 1870, was accepted through the centuries. It was defined so late only because it was impugned so late.

We hope it is not necessary to explain to our readers that infallibility as applied to the visible head of the Church does not mean that he is inspired; or that he receives new revelations from Heaven; or that is personally exempted from the power of sin; or that, in his private capacity, he may not be liable to error in religious matters; or that he may speak officially on any subject and be divinely protected from error.

Infallibility means none of these things. Rather it means that the Church herself, or her visible head speaking in the name of the Church, is protected from error in his teaching *when, in the name of God, he defines officially for the people of the whole world what the precise revelation of God has been, or pronounces on matters which relate to faith or morals.*

Anyone who reads the Gospel without prejudice must note that God gave special prominence to Peter, one of the twelve; that He made certain promises to him which he did not make to the others; that He conferred on him certain prerogatives which He did not confer on the others.

Now it would seem out of place to remind my readers that if the Church was to last until the end of the world, Peter as well as the other Apostles must have successors, who inherit the prerogatives conferred on the original teaching body by the Founder of the Church.

If I am reminded that some of the successors of Peter were not worthy representatives of Christ, I would call attention to the fact that the Scribes and Pharisees, as a whole, at the time of Christ, were very unworthy successors of Moses. Christ told the people that they should hearken to the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees because they "sit in the chair of Moses." He told them not to imitate their example while they must "do whatsoever they say to you."

Personal peccability, or the liability to sin, is something entirely different from protection from the teaching of error in an official capacity. When laws are made by the signature of the President of the United States, we do not question their force because, in his private capacity, the President is not a saint.

Give prayerful thought to the instruction contained in this brochure, and I am certain that you will be of the same mind as the author, and will crave for the "peace in belief" which he possesses.

