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Why I Am A Catholic

By
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I

Why I Worship God

THERE are few subjects that excite more general interest among men, than the subject of religion; you know that from your own experiences, from what you hear, from what you read. It may be, unfortunately it is, true that there are very many people in the world who, apparently at least, give very little practical attention to what we call the duties of religion. There are all too many who adopt with regard to religion an attitude of carelessness and indifference, but it is still true that religion is a subject which, considered theoretically at least, holds in the world of thought today, as it has always held, a place that can be explained only by its inherent importance and the almost instinctive recognition of that importance by the mind of man.

MEANING OF RELIGION

And what do men commonly understand by religion? To all, it means in some way or other the relations that exist between God and man. Man's religious convictions mean those views which he holds with regard to who and what God is, with regard to God's nature, with regard to how God has acted respecting himself and the world of his fellowmen. They mean his views with regard to what God's wishes may be, if He has any such wishes, respecting man's actions during this life and as to what God's plan may be, if any, respecting man's future life. All those views, all those convictions, constitute what we call man's religious belief. Further, religious convictions embrace a man's opinions as to his own nature and destiny. Has his life and being come from the hand of God, or is it in its existence quite independent and altogether self-sufficient? Is that living, vital principle within man which we call the soul to live forever or is it to cease to exist at the moment of the body's death? A man's answers to questions like these constitute his religious convictions.

Religious practices on the other hand are all the duties, whether of soul or body, which in consequence of his particular religious convictions a man feels he is obliged to render to God. Religious practices, moreover, consist, in

part though not entirely, in the forms of external reverence or worship by which man strives to give outward expression to his convictions and to the desires and resolves that arise in his heart or form themselves in his will because of such convictions.

ORIGIN OF NAME

I think that such is a fairly accurate and complete description of what is commonly understood by religion, as it is professed and practised by men. And we shall do well to notice here how very well chosen is that name, *religion*, to designate the sum total or complexus of these convictions and practices. The word itself means a rebinding, a new bond placed upon someone. And see how very true it is that these beliefs or convictions and these practices, expressions of our beliefs, do in reality put a new bond upon us.

A new or second bond supposes of course some bond already existing and uniting us to someone. Such a first bond in the case of God and man consists precisely in the relationship of complete and absolute dependence of man, the creature, upon God, his Creator. When, therefore, man comes to recognize by his intellect that relationship of dependence upon God, the very act of recognition serves to unite man in a new and further way with God as the object of his thought and conviction. That is to say, this very act of recognition binds man by a new and second bond—rebinds him, therefore—to God and so constitutes what is properly called an act of religion.

More clearly still is the appropriateness of the name, *religion*, apparent when man deliberately performs the duties which he judges are imposed on him because of his dependence upon God. Such duties, performed as acts of submission to God's authority, as acts of reverence for God's greatness, or as acts of love of God's goodness, surely do put upon the man thus acting a bond which unites him to God in a way different from that inescapable bond of dependence which is his because he is a creature, but nonetheless in a way which is as true as is the union produced by the loving obedience and submission of children to father and mother, a union of minds, a union of hearts, a union of wills.

REASON AND RELIGION

Here, in passing, I think I should call your very careful attention to a point that is of the greatest importance in any discussion of the question of religion, particularly in our day. It is this. Religion, according to the analysis and explanation we have just given of it—and it is our purpose to show that this is the correct analysis and explanation—is not a thing of mere sentiment or feeling or emotion. Feelings and emotions are very real things in our human lives. They are experiences or activities of our nature as God made that nature. They are, therefore, intended to play their own proper part in our lives, to contribute their share in their own proper way to our service of God—and that means, as we have just seen, to religious service.

But feelings and emotions are not the whole of man nor the sum total of man's activities; they are not even most distinctive of man, for man is not a creature primarily of feeling but of reason; man is rational, to be guided, therefore, or led not by feeling or sentimental emotion but by reason. Therefore, to attempt to separate, to divorce religion, whether in its doctrines or its practices, from reason and to ground it upon feeling is to debase it to the level of something not worthy of man's rational nature. We shall have occasion to discuss and refute more at length the contention—very common in our day—that religion is in reality just such an irrational, or rather we might better say un-rational, thing. For the present I merely call your attention to the point because of its importance.

RELIGION TODAY

Now, with these notions of our subject in mind, look about today, listen to what is being said, read what is being written, witness and observe what is going on in the world of thought, the world of expression, whether in public or private circles. You cannot fail to be impressed with the variety and conflicting nature of man's religious beliefs and practices. There is confusion in the minds of men and women as to just what they should think, should believe, with regard to God; as to just how they should act, what practices of religious worship, if any, they should adopt.

Yes, there is untold confusion, worse than this, there is no end of contradiction.

As a striking and well known example—but remember it is only one example—we Catholics maintain that an integral part of religious truth is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God and that He was born of a Virgin Mother. An integral part, therefore, of the true and proper worship of God includes the duty to submit our minds by an act of faith in these truths, and to give to the Sacred Persons of Jesus and Mary a reverence that is in keeping with their respective dignities. This is the clear and unmistakable Catholic doctrine, yet thousands there are who tell us that these are not facts; that Jesus Christ was not God, that Mary, His Mother, was not a Virgin in conceiving and giving birth to her Son. Others again, and their number is ever increasing, maintain that whether Christ's Divinity and Mary's perpetual virginity be facts or not is of no great importance as they do not enter into the question of religion at all.

Such confusion, such contradiction we see in the religious views of men; and we see further, as a result of the confusing and conflicting discussions of religious questions, that there is outside the Catholic Church—for within her fold no resting place for confusion or contradiction can be found, thanks be to God's infinite, merciful goodness for the priceless Faith that is ours—outside the Catholic Church there is, I say, an ever-increasing number of men and women whose attitude towards religious doctrine and religious practice is an attitude of careless indifference. And it is not surprising that it should be so. On the contrary it is the most natural thing in the world to expect to find just such a result from the prevailing confusion in thought and speech on the subject of religion. For if men and women are to form their views in matters of religion upon the advice or the teaching of other men and women, like themselves liable to error, then, when they find such widespread and radical diversity of opinion, they very easily have recourse to some such practical working principle as this: "After all what really counts is that we lead a good life. Certainty and security in religious convictions cannot be had in any case;

so what difference does it make what we believe or what form of religion we profess? All religions are about alike, one is as good as another."

For us Catholics there is no question of having to learn for the first time how to detect and refute the errors contained in all such processes of reasoning. But it is good to refresh our minds with a better knowledge and a clearer understanding of the fundamental notions that are involved in this all-important question of religion.

DUTY OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Let us examine for a few moments just exactly what it is we mean when we speak of our duty of Divine worship, and then examine the ground on which that duty rests. Are we, or are we not, creatures of God made out of nothing, by the exercise of His omnipotent power? Reason answers unmistakably, we are. We are here in this world, blessed with the gift of existence, the gift of life, the gift of intelligence. There can be no satisfactory explanation offered of our possession of these gifts unless we admit the creative act of the infinitely independent Supreme Being, God.

Clearly we cannot in a discussion of this nature, at this time, stop to prove step by step, every element in that particular conclusion. We speak only to those who are willing to admit with us, at least, that fundamental, most fundamental of all convictions that must be at the base of any religion, namely, the fact that we are creatures and works of the hand of God. If there be no God, or if God be not our Creator, then religion loses its only possible meaning and the very subject matter of our discourses is vain.

To be a creature means that God made us out of nothing; therefore, we belong to God, as the things made by our hand belong to us. Have you not the right to do what you want with that which you make yourselves, provided of course, you do not use it in such a way as to harm another? So far as the rights of the thing made are concerned, may not you, its maker, do with it and deal with it as you wish? If you made it, it is yours. It would be most unbecoming, even if it were possible, for such a work of your hand to refuse to submit to your disposition of it; yet you never made,

you never can make, no man can make something out of nothing. But God, the infinite, Supreme Being, made all things out of nothing, and He made them for Himself; to serve Him, to carry out the plan which He had in His infinite intelligence from the beginning. And of all things which God made, all, but one, were made in such a way that they carry out God's purpose to perfection, because they *must*. God gave them a nature which was incapable of resisting His plan, a nature in accordance with which they act as He would have them act, with no power of acting otherwise.

MAN'S FREE WILL

That is true of all the works of God's hands except one, and that one is man. No, we must correct that statement—there was another creature, another class of creatures resembling man in the possession of those two great powers of man, intelligence and freedom of action—free will; and that class of creatures were the first of God's children, as mankind was the second, for man was made a little less than the angels. Inanimate creation, though the work of God's hand, cannot be called the child of God, no more can the flowers of the field for all their loveliness nor the brute creation for all its strength and power. To be God's child the creature must be capable of knowing God's goodness and loving it. If the first of God's children, the angels, made for the glory of highest heaven, could raise their voice in rebellion and say, "We will not serve, we will not do that thing for which God has made us," it was from God they had that very power. God made them free as He made man free, in order that angels and men would not be forced, but would be led to do God's holy will; that they would not be moved by compulsion but attracted by the sweet privilege of cooperating with so gracious a Master. They would be asked to cooperate with God's plan, and therefore, were given, of course, power to refuse cooperation, and the refusal on the part of man to cooperate with God's designs was an abuse of his free will, and constitutes what we call sin. The only intelligent free being, of all visible creation, that can commit a sin is man. By sin man refuses to accept his position as a creature, but that refusal does not destroy the fact.

MAN'S DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Man is a creature; as such he depends upon God with an absolute, inescapable dependence. Man's reason perceives this dependence and, therefore, understands something of the greatness of God—something of God's own independence, God's own excellence and worth. And because he does understand God's worth and his own comparative nothingness, man sees that he ought to reverence God, to love Him, and to subject himself to Him. Now this attitude of man towards God's infinite worth or excellence is just exactly what is meant by Divine worship.

Is such an attitude a duty? Has God—the Infinite Creator—made such an attitude, made Divine Worship, a matter of obligation? Has He the right to make a law prescribing it? His position as Creator is the answer to the question of His right. But has He used His right and made such a law? Consider for a moment, dear brethren, the solid block of marble at the base of one of these massive pillars that are here supporting the roof of the temple of God. Is that lifeless creature obeying a law in its constant task of staying there in the place chosen for it by man? It is. We call it the law of gravity. In reality that is merely a convenient way of stating the well-known fact that all material bodies tend toward the center of the earth. And this tendency in turn merely means that God has made these material things of such a nature that they act in just this way and in no other, and by so acting they render service to man, God's child; they minister to his needs, they lend him comfort and assistance.

Yet these creatures of lifeless stone are no more dependent upon God, their Creator, than is man. No more are the kingdoms of flower and plant and tree, no more the birds of the air nor the beasts of the field nor the fishes of the sea than is man; for like all these other creatures of God man is of himself nothing, and what he is, he is only through the creative power of God. And in bringing man into existence God had in view the same general purpose as in the creation of all other things—the manifestation of His own wondrous glory. Now that this glory be made manifest, it is necessary that the works of God's hands be sub-

missive in all their actions to God's own designs, that they keep the place assigned them in the universe of created things by God Himself. From this law man can no more be left exempt than any other creature. Therefore, since man is by his nature dependent upon God, he cannot, except at the price of rebellion against Supreme Authority, refuse to recognize, either in his thoughts or in outward observance and ceremonial, God's position of infinite excellence; he cannot, without doing violence to his nature, refuse God the Divine worship that is His due.

REFUSAL OF WORSHIP

And why is it that man so often does refuse—that we so often refuse—God our Creator the submission that we owe Him. There are no doubt many causes that operate to bring about this awful result, and these causes vary at different times and under different circumstances. But it seems to me that there is one cause that plays no little part, especially in these days of boasted liberty, in bringing the disorder of sin, rebellion against God's law, into our lives, and it is a cause whose power for evil we may perhaps hope—with God's helping grace of course—to do something to lessen if we try to see it in its true nature. It is this I have in mind, that we are often inclined to fret under the yoke of God's law precisely because we allow ourselves to look upon that yoke as a kind of galling tyranny. We know that it is not so, yet when nature chafes under it we try to shake off what we feel is a burden.

And no doubt this attitude towards God's law may be adopted by us partly because of the all-too-frequent manifestations that we really do meet with of just such tyranny on the part of human law-makers and law-administrators. Are we allowing our ideas of God as the Supreme Law-Giver to be formed and fashioned on the distorted notions of law and justice too often entertained and acted upon by men? If so, we must reverse our process of reasoning. We must remember that God is the first and Supreme Law-Giver; He is, therefore, the ultimate source and the foundation of all just law and of each and every act of lawfully constituted authority, whether in family, State, or Church. When hu-

man law-givers in any of these spheres of human activity overstep their authority or use that authority arbitrarily or tyrannically, to that extent they are falling short of what God, the great and model Law-Giver, expects and demands of them; they are proving false to the sacred charge entrusted to them for the good of others.

On the other hand, when such human authorities make proper and just use of their God-given powers they are merely furnishing us with a feeble reflection of the justice of the all-good and all-loving God, who is our Creator and Supreme Law-Maker. For God's laws have their source in God's Goodness and in God's Love. God's laws are God's way of leading us, His children, home to the Heaven He has made for us. No, God is not a tyrant in imposing His law upon us, not a tyrant, not a taskmaster, only a loving Father. He gave us the power of understanding, of intelligence, and in doing that He made us to His own image and likeness; for the image of God in man's nature consists in that light of the understanding by which man may reach up in his thoughts to a grasp of God Himself. No other of God's visible creatures may do this; no other of His creatures can be said to be made to God's image and likeness. Does this look like tyranny or like love? Is this the dealing of a taskmaster or of a father?

MEANING OF FREE WILL

And free will—man's greatest natural gift—what is that in terms of God's thought and loving Providence? Is it not merely the expression of God's confidence in man, His child? Was not the gift of free will to man equivalent to God's saying to man: "I will not force you as I am forcing other creatures; I will not compel your submission, I will rather invite it; I give you this power of free service that I may be able when the short race of life is run, and your work for Me and My glory is finished, to take you to My Heart, to reward you, not so much as the Creator would a faithful creature, nor a Master a true and tried servant, but as a Father would a loving, obedient child."

For God, in all truth, is not only our Creator and the Supreme Law-Giver; He is our Father, who is in Heaven.

Why I Believe in God

BUT men and women have parted company, have divided into many different classes and schools of thought when they came to answer the question, "What particular form of religious worship am I obliged to give God?" One answer to that question is very familiar to us in these days of boasted liberty of thought. It takes some such form as this: "There is really no particular kind or form of worship that is obligatory on us. Provided that we adopt some form or other, it makes no difference what that form be. Any and every kind of religious ceremonial or worship is a good thing, and so is pleasing to God. When all is said and done, one religion is just about the same as any other."

Now, it is with regard to the subject suggested by this answer to our question that we are to deal now. Are we, or are we not altogether free to choose a particular form of religious worship? Let us see. Religious worship means the recognition of God's supremacy with all that this involves and the willing subjection of man to God because of that supremacy. Now, let us suppose that we have nothing else than our own reason to guide us in determining in just what way that subjection of self to God could or should be made. In such a case, it is quite possible that different people or different races, all of them using the same natural light of human reason, might discover or invent different forms of external worship. And each and every one of these forms might be in itself legitimate and capable of expressing, to a greater or less degree, the fundamental truth of all religion, namely, the subordination of the creature to the Creator. I say this is quite possible, and were it actually to happen what we would have in reality would be two or three, or hundreds or thousands, of different forms of religious worship, all of them in themselves pleasing to God.

SUPPOSITION OF REVELATION

But, now let us make a different supposition. Suppose God Almighty chooses to make known to us that He wishes us to practice some special kind of religious worship, for

example, some special form of religious sacrifice, and that He wishes no other. What, then, of our freedom to choose any form of worship or adopt any kind of sacrificial rite that may seem to us lawful? Is it not clear that in this supposition we must admit that we are no longer free to make such a choice, that, given such an expression of God's own wishes in the matter, we are now bound—have a solemn duty—to fulfil these wishes, to worship Him and to offer sacrifice in just the way He commands?

And is it not also clear that the real reason why we are so obliged to submit to these wishes of God is because of that very same dependence of our being upon Him which is the foundation of all religious duty? In other words, is it not a necessary consequence of our position as God's creatures that we have the duty of hearkening to God when He speaks to us, and of carrying out His Divine will made known to us, whatever that will may be?

OUR DUTY

If this be so, what would be our duty, if God were to make known to us—or reveal, to use a technical but well-known term—not only His wish regarding some particular form of religious worship or sacrifice, but a whole body of religious truths, a whole system of religious practices? Is not the answer to this question just as simple? Are we not in such a case bound by the duty of submission—by our very positions as creatures—to accept as truths this entire body of truths thus revealed, and to practice each and every one of the religious duties thus imposed upon us? You must agree that we are so bound. And now, just what does such a duty mean? To accept a thing as true because of the word of someone whose knowledge and reliability is known to us, is to accept it on faith, it is to believe it—belief is faith. Therefore, to accept a thing as true because God says it is so is an act of Divine belief or Divine faith. And so, if we say that we have a duty to accept as true a body of religious doctrines because they are revealed to us by God, we are saying in reality that we have a duty, when God makes a revelation, to believe God—to make an act of faith—to practice Divine faith.

DUTY OF DIVINE FAITH

It was precisely this duty of Divine faith that we propose to establish now. And the reason why we do so is because the proof of man's duty of faith in God is the second step in the process of reasoning which must lead the sincere servant and child of God into the full possession of his glorious inheritance of eternal truth.

The first step in that process was to establish the fundamental duty of giving God some form of religious worship, and the establishment of that duty showed the impossibility of the position held by those who are furthest removed from us Catholics in matters of religion.

But there is a second class of people who are quite at one with us in profession of the existence of the one true God and His indisputable right to make laws for human conduct, but who say that beliefs, judgments of our mind, truths, doctrines, so-called dogmas are no part of religion at all. To such people religion is merely an interior, subjective emotion by which man is carried toward God; we may believe what we choose, think what we like, if it helps us to realize this emotion. Religion is in their minds altogether divorced from anything intellectual and reduced to a thing of mere sentiment.

BELIEVE AS ONE LIKES?

In the former section I mentioned just in passing this curious attitude of mind toward truth in matters of religion. In other lines of thought and knowledge everybody is right willing to admit that established truth is a thing to be accepted on its face value, yet when there is a question of religious doctrines or truths, very many there are, particularly today, who maintain the most unreasonable and indefensible position that they may believe and do as they like. That this position is both unreasonable and indefensible is clear from the very fact that religion is the homage paid God by men. And that homage can be and should be paid by the intellect of man as well as by his will, the external powers of his body. By our act of intellectual knowledge believing God, we surely do Him an honor just as we honor our fel-

lowman by putting our trust and credence in his word. And because in our act of faith we believe God unhesitatingly, and often despite all appearances to the contrary, and do so purely and solely because we know He is infinitely wise and truthful, that no shadow of error or suspicion of deceitfulness can ever darken His mind or will, the honor we do Him by belief, by faith, is honor supreme.

Again, be it noted, I am speaking of a supernatural revelation merely as a supposition or a hypothesis. Later we shall prove that as a matter of historical fact, such a revelation has actually been made by God through the agency of Jesus Christ. Now, however, my purpose is merely to meet the position of those who are altogether indifferent as to whether the message of Christ be from God or not; for to their way of thinking even if it be from God, it does not demand acceptance, it brings no duty of faith with it.

AN EXAMPLE

To meet this curious position the better, let me ask you to fancy that a little child were to insist upon showing respect and love for its mother or father in only those ways which it chose for itself without regard to the expressed wishes of its parents. Suppose it were to take an attitude, which, put into words, would be something like this: "I see that it is only right and proper for me to show my love and respect and my readiness to obey you, by some external words and actions. But I do not care to give you that particular mark of affection which you say you want. I will not caress or kiss you, yet you can be well satisfied, I am sure, that my love for you is just as real and as tender even though I don't show it in the way you ask, but in some other way of my own choice." It is, of course, almost too ridiculous to imagine even by way of illustration, words like these spoken by a child to its parents, yet the very ridiculousness of such an attitude on the part of the child, makes the illustration more appropriate for our present contention. For such words of child to father or mother are not a bit different in tone and spirit than are the words of a creature, any man or woman, to the Creator—protesting in one breath his or her loving submission to God in general, and in the

next claiming the privilege of refusing to show that submission in the very way which the Creator, through a supernatural revelation of His will, asks.

We push this comparison just a little further and we suppose the little child to say to its parent or to anyone else whose greater age and learning and experience entitles him to that simple trust and credence, which we naturally associate in our minds with childhood: "I will, of course, do what you tell me, but do not ask me to take your word for anything, do not ask me to believe what you say simply because you say it." Is not such a frame of mind even more absurdly contradictory of the relative position of child to parents?

Yet such a frame of mind and such a claim to foolish independence differs from the frame of mind of the man or woman refusing to bow mind and judgment to God's revealed word only in this respect, that the attitude of the creature to the Creator is the more absurd, the more unbecoming, the more irreverent and offensive, just in proportion to the vastly greater distance that separates man from God than that which separates child from parent, for parents have not created their children; we are created by God.

III

Why I am a Christian

WE read in St. Paul (Hebrews, i, 1, 2): "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by His Son." These words of St. Paul are clear and easily understood, and, taken on their face value, in their obvious meaning, they inform us that God Almighty has more than once spoken to mankind by His own chosen messengers. Now, for God to speak to man and tell or teach him something is to make a revelation, for that is what the word *revelation* means—a taking away of the veil that hides something from our view, a veil that keeps our mind from some knowledge or other.

SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

And when God speaks to us or teaches us through the agency of some specially chosen messenger, He is making not only a revelation, a communication of knowledge to us, but a supernatural revelation. By supernatural revelation is meant a revelation or communication made in some way that is different from and higher than the way in which we ordinarily acquire our information. That ordinary way is by the use of our natural powers of sense and observation and through processes of reasoning and reflecting upon what we see or hear or touch. It is an altogether natural way of acquiring knowledge for one human being to be taught by another. But it is not at all due to man's nature that God should Himself directly communicate knowledge, even of religious truths. What is due to our nature, and what God has therefore given us, by His loving act of creation, is the power of perceiving the visible works of God's hands and, through the contemplation and the study of these visible things that are made, to rise to the knowledge of that which is invisible and uncreated. By the proper and diligent use of the powers of body and soul, man could learn all that is essential for him to know in accordance with his natural destiny as a creature and servant of God.

POSSIBILITY OF REVELATION

But surely there can be no hesitancy in admitting that God could if He wished, and at any time that He wished, choose to communicate knowledge to man in a higher way than is natural to man. He could, were He to desire to do so, send either to a particular person, or to the people of a particular nation, or to the entire human race, a messenger with the authority to speak in His name, and to tell His listeners what He would have them know.

Such a method of communication between God and man—such a revelation—is evidently not the method which is proper and essential to man's nature as it has been fashioned by the Creator. Just as evidently it is a method higher and more valuable than the natural method, and therefore properly said to be a supernatural method of communication, a supernatural revelation. It is higher and more valuable since it brings man into closer contact with God, the Source of all knowledge, and makes man's possession of knowledge more certain and secure. For knowledge gotten from the lips of God's own messenger is more securely protected from the danger of error than knowledge which man acquires through the use of his own powers of sense and judgment; these human powers, because they are finite, are always open to the possibility of deception. God's words can never mislead.

In the preceding section, speaking of such a supernatural revelation as a mere supposition, we convinced ourselves of the fact that, were such a supernatural revelation to be made by God to man, man would be obliged to accept it, *i. e.*, to believe it—to put his faith in it. In other words, the relation of man, the creature, to God, the Author of a supernatural revelation, is such that it is the basis of man's sacred duty to practice Divine faith.

FACT OF REVELATION

The question we then left unanswered, was the question of fact. Is God, for a fact, the Author of a supernatural revelation? Has God made a supernatural revelation to man?

The words that I have quoted from St. Paul are unmistakably clear in affirming that He has. Not only once, but often, in the past has He spoken, says St. Paul to the fathers, *i. e.*, the ancestors of the Hebrew people, to whom the Apostle was then addressing himself, and right in our own day, he continues, "God has spoken to us through His Son."

Now, what are we to think of this statement of St. Paul? Must a man accept it as true? That is a matter of considerable importance, is it not? For, if a man does accept it as true, then that man is sure that God has made a revelation, and so, from what we proved before, that man is bound to embrace whatever doctrines and observe whatever laws of conduct are found in that revelation. And if he does not see clearly just what doctrines and what laws are contained in the body of God's revealed truths, then he must bestir himself to find them out. For it cannot be a matter of indifference for a man, God's intelligent creature, to be ignorant of God's own teachings. In such ignorance, man would fail to serve and worship God in the particular way in which God wants to be served and worshiped. Such failure, surely, is not a matter of indifference. Must a man, therefore, accept the statement of St. Paul to the effect that God has actually made a supernatural revelation to man?

If He has, it is a fact that can be verified by man: there must be some reliable testimony to that fact. Is there such? There is, and it is contained like the testimony of any other verifiable fact of the past, in the record of that past, which we call historical documents.

VERIFICATION OF FACT

Now, what and where are these historical documents? They are all bound together as part of one small volume entitled the New Testament. This New Testament contains some twenty-seven different parts or sections, bearing the names of some eight different men. The reason why all these different writings of these different men are suitably joined together in one volume is because they all deal with the same general subject matter, and that subject

matter is the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. These twenty-seven different documents dealing with the common subject matter make up what is called the New Testament. Another and larger collection of documents written by different authors and at different times treating with God's dealings with man prior to the time of Jesus Christ is called the Old Testament and the Old and New Testament together make up what we call the Bible or the Sacred Scriptures.

The word *Bible* meaning the Book, is appropriate for the very reason that the contents of this Book do treat of the all-important subject of God's dealing with man. The title *Sacred* or *Holy Writings*, or *Scripture*, is also appropriate for the same reason because the subject matter is sacred and holy. There are other reasons, too, why these titles are so appropriate, the chief reason is, as we Catholics know, and as very many non-Catholics are also ready to insist, these writings are for a fact inspired, they have God Himself for their principal Author.

NEW TESTAMENT AS HISTORY

We are now to establish the fact that God has made a revelation through the agency of Jesus Christ; and to establish this as a fact of history we are going to draw our evidence from just a little part of the New Testament—the latter section of the Bible or Sacred Scriptures.

And in this task of constructing the reasonable groundwork of our religion, we are going to treat the historical books of the New Testament just as we would treat any other books of history, that is, we can and we do put them to the most rigid and scientifically critical test to assure ourselves first that they are genuine, that is, that they were written at the time or by the men claimed; second, that they have been preserved, substantially incorrupt, that their text has not been in any essential way changed in the course of the years that elapsed since they were composed by the authors; third, that the authors themselves were men well-informed of what they undertook to write about, and of known or proved honesty and character.

Now, to prove that the Christian religion has been

revealed by God there are just two questions to be answered with regard to the Gospel records. First, are these records reliable, trustworthy? Second, do they actually declare that God has made this revelation? To both questions we answer in the affirmative. First, are these records reliable? They are. They were written by eyewitnesses of events they describe.

NEW TESTAMENT AUTHENTIC

Take the Gospel attributed to St. Matthew for example. Matthew was a Jew, and the date and place and original language assigned this work would show that it is a work intended for Jewish readers. Now, is the work itself in harmony with this apparent claim? It is. Witness the intense reverence it shows throughout for the Old Testament—the seventy odd quotations drawn from it; its appeal in proof of Christ's Divinity to the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies made to the Jewish people; its omission of all explanations of Jewish customs and local geography. Besides, the earliest writings of the Fathers of the Church attribute this Gospel to St. Matthew. The earliest heretics quoted from it as the work of Matthew. Now Matthew was a disciple of Christ, and so an eyewitness of what he wrote.

And what this brief examination of Matthew's Gospel discloses as to the identity of its author, similar examination of the other Gospels makes clear as to their authors. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter and so gathered from that great follower of Christ much of the material of his story. Luke was the companion of St. Paul, and so, equally well-informed. John, the author of the fourth Gospel, was himself one of Christ's most intimate disciples.

NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE

Another question of the highest importance remains. Were these authors, men who can be trusted? Have they in these Gospels records told us the truth? To answer that question, apply whatever test you will and the result is the same overwhelming evidence of their sincerity.

Try them by the test of self-love. These authors frankly tell us of their own lowly birth, their stupidity and denseness and dulness of comprehension, yea more, of their very cowardice and their desertion of their best friend in his hour of greatest need. Is this the way of impostors; of men who are writing mere legends or works of fiction in which they themselves play a part?

Put them to the test of hero-worship. They show us their hero in His hour of defeat as well as when enjoying the plaudits of the enthused populace. Falsifiers of history are not apt to write thus. Finally, apply the test of death and what do we see? These men and their immediate followers, who were in the very position in which they could verify the story these men were writing, stood ready to die, yes, and did die, hundreds and thousands of them, rather than desert or be false to the religious convictions grounded on the teachings contained in the Gospel story. Could sincerity of purpose go further than this?

NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

Well, then, grant the reliability of the authors of the Gospel. Are the documents in our hands today the same as the original works of these authors? Or have they in the course of ages been mutilated so that their historical value has been lost? Let us examine this point a moment, for its importance is evident. First of all, there are in existence today over two thousand manuscript copies of the Gospels, written in Greek and the oldest of these was copied as far back as the middle of the fourth century, that is, please notice, about 240 years after the death of St. John, the last of the Apostles to be called to his reward. Now compare for a moment this fact with another fact. The manuscript copies of the great works of literature, bequeathed us as a rich legacy by the genius of Greece and Rome are numbered by dozens or by fifties and the oldest of them are known to have been made at a date ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 years after their original composition. Yet no one doubts, no one could doubt without inviting ridicule upon himself, that when he takes up a copy of the story of Caesar's Wars or of Virgil's thrilling tale of the

founding of Rome, he is in reality reading what Caesar and Virgil wrote.

No, no one doubts this, yet think of the contrast in the matter of solid grounds for our acceptance of these works of profane literature and our acceptance of the four Gospels. Where they can show fifty or one hundred copies of the text we have for the Gospels over two thousand, all recording substantially the same facts, all in essential agreement. Where the classical works of profane literature must be content with tracing back their manuscript evidence to a date not closer than 1,000 years to the time of their composition, the Gospel records are seen to go back without possibility of dispute to a point not more than 250 or 260 years removed from their origin.

Only the lack of time needed for such a complete demonstration prevents us from urging this line of argument farther and showing the full and adequate strength of the case that can be made for the integrity of the four Gospels as we have them in our Bible today. It can be shown, and often enough in printed pamphlets within your reach it has been shown, that the text of the Gospels, known to the very generation linked to that of the Apostles themselves, was substantially identical with that which we read today. Therefore, we are now sure that these four Gospels in our hands tonight are the genuine and unchanged works of authors whom we can trust.

TEACHING OF OUR LORD

Now to our second question. Do these Gospels assure us that God has made a supernatural revelation through the teachings of Jesus Christ? They do. First, they certainly tell us that Jesus Christ lived and taught a religious doctrine. Secondly, they tell us that He claimed over and over again—thirty-two times, according to the account of St. John's Gospel alone—that He was teaching these doctrines in the name of God in Heaven, that He was God's messenger and was speaking not with His own authority, but with that of God who sent Him. Well and good. But what was this claim worth? Were a man to appear and make such a claim today, as reasonable people, we would

first question that claim; we would ask him for his credentials, his proof that he was really what he claimed to be, a witness of God's word to us.

PROOF OF HIS MISSION

And those who heard Jesus Christ make this wondrous claim did just exactly that very thing. They challenged Him, and reasonably, to give proof of His claim. When He drove them in wrath from the Temple of God and addressed them in tones of authority, they demanded by what right He acted so and He met their demand by an appeal to a proof that only the omnipotence of God could furnish; He promised them He would work a miracle, He would work the greatest of all miracles. He would, were they to destroy the temple of His human body, raise it up again. And the day came when they did that very deed of destruction, and by God's power—for none but God has such power—Jesus Christ arose from the tomb in which they had laid that human body.

Was that a proof of the truth of Christ's claim to be God's messenger and to speak and command in God's name? If that is not a proof, then the reason why it fails to be a proof is because God, all-truthful, all-holy, has exercised His omnipotence in favor of an impostor, has borne Divine testimony to a falsehood! Are you ready to accept that alternative? Is any one who believes in God prepared to accept it?

No, it cannot be. The sincere and patient seeker after God's truth must, after inquiry such as we have been making, find the bonds of evident truth drawing him closer and closer and ever more strongly, despite their gentle mildness, to the conviction that God does want, yea, from the depths of a Father's heart He longs for, man's worship and filial service; more than that, the conviction cannot but be ever more and more irresistible that God, in His love, has not been satisfied with leaving man to grope his way haltingly and stumblingly toward the possession of even those truths of God and His Nature which lay within the grasp of reason alone. No, God has been pleased to send His Eternal Son to teach us in a way that we had no

right to expect, a supernatural way, the sweet secrets of that Father's heart of infinite knowledge, and boundless goodness. And when that Son's words are heard, His message received, must we, God's children, hearken and obey? Is faith in God's revelation a duty? It is, indeed. That we proved before. But were it not a duty, would it not still be a privilege, a priceless, precious privilege to put our faith in Him, to serve whom is to reign?

IV

Why I am a Catholic

AT the last moment of His sojourn on earth Our Lord said (Acts i, 8): "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and even to the uttermost parts of the earth." For this historical fact we have the testimony of a reliable, historic document. This book, the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, who is also the author of the third Gospel, can be shown to have the same value as a trustworthy source of knowledge as the four Gospels themselves, of which we spoke above. The same critical tests applied to the genuineness and integrity of the text of this book, and to the knowledge and truthfulness of its author have led all fairminded scientific scholars to admit that the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles is in every sense reliable.

OUR LORD'S COMMISSION

From this source of knowledge, we learn that Jesus Christ, the Divine witness of God's message to mankind—we proved above that He was such—that Jesus Christ, at the very moment when He was to bid a last farewell to those who had walked with Him during the days of His public life, His Apostles, as we call them, made to these chosen followers a wonderful promise, and at the same time gave them a wonderful commission. That promise was that they should receive the power of the Holy Ghost; that commission was that they should be witnesses unto Him, first in the land in which He Himself had lived and taught—in Jerusalem, the Holy City of God,—then throughout the province of Judea in which this city was located, and then outside Judea in the neighboring province of Samaria, yea, even unto the very uttermost parts of the earth. Accepting, then, this promise and this commission of Jesus Christ to His Apostles as a fact of history, it is but natural for us—for any man who like us is convinced of the Divinity

of Christ's person and mission—it is but natural to seek the full and exact meaning of these words.

LIFE OF OUR LORD

To do this, we must recall something of the wondrous life of Jesus Christ as it has been left for us to read in the treasured pages of the four Gospels. To tell the story of that life in a few words would be to bring before our mind's eye the Person of Jesus of Nazareth from the moment He freed Himself from the fond embrace of His Blessed Mother in the holy house of His childhood and youth until that other moment of still more sorrowful yet more sacred embrace when that same Blessed Mother took His lifeless body into her arms at the foot of the Cross on Calvary; and again from that moment of wondrous joy when her Son, no more the Man of Sorrows, but the King of Glory, flashed from the tomb into the presence of the Mother, no longer only Queen of Martyrs but Queen of Heaven, until the next moment of fond parting when Mother and Son embraced for the last time on earth.

During the three years that separated Nazareth and Calvary, and the forty days that marked the lapse of time from the first Easter Sunday until the first Ascension Thursday, Jesus Christ had walked and conversed among men. During the days of His mortal life, He had shown the tenderness of His Heart in His dealings with little children. He had proved the sympathy of His loving nature in giving health to the sick and sight to the blind. But above all this or, rather in and through all this the Gospel story makes it very clear to us He had one dominating purpose in all that He did and said; that purpose was to convince men that He was in reality a messenger from highest heaven, that He was speaking with the authority of God, His Father, and speaking with that authority He was, above all things else, concerned with this: that men should learn from Him the truths which God would have them know.

OUR LORD'S CLAIM

Over and over again, as we noted before, Jesus Christ claimed in unmistakable terms that the doctrine that He

taught was not His, but the Father's who sent Him. Over and over again, when challenged to prove this claim, He appealed not to His words but to His works; and, as we saw, these works of Jesus Christ, the miracles of which we have just made mention, and the more wondrous miracles of the raising of the dead to life and of the prediction of His own triumph over death, and the fulfilment of that prediction—these miraculous works of Jesus Christ must be accepted in reality as His credentials, as bringing to bear upon His words and life the infallible seal of the approval of God, all-holy and all-true.

He had come, He claimed, and proved that claim, to be the Way, the Truth and the Life: the Way that was to lead men back to the God who made them; the Truth that must be accepted by man, long lost in the darkness of error, if he was to be rescued and restored to the knowledge of God, the Source of all truth; the Life on which must be modeled human life if all the days of man's pilgrimage on earth were not to lead to death eternal. All this Jesus Christ, according to the clear testimony of the Gospel story, never ceased to teach by word and by example.

AFTER OUR LORD'S DEATH

But the life of Jesus Christ on earth was to come to an end. His living Voice would no more be heard, His sacred Person no longer seen. What of the men and women even of His own generation who lived far apart from the sacred lands which have heard that voice and been blessed with that Divine presence? What, too, of the generations yet unborn who were in God's Providence to live their lives in this world of sin and passion? How was the message which Jesus Christ had brought from God His Father to be communicated to all these? He had said that "no one cometh to the Father except through Me; no one knows the Father except the Son and Him to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him." What, then, of this vast world of mankind separated from the Person and even the time of Jesus Christ, the great witness of God's revelation? How were they to learn of this revelation of God; how were they to learn of Jesus Christ, the witness of this revelation; how

were they to come to a knowledge of the Father if they were not first to learn of the teaching of the Father's Divine Son?

The answer to this all-important question is also found in these documents which are history's testimony of the fact of God's revelation made through Jesus Christ. And the answer is this: As the Father had sent Jesus Christ, so Jesus Christ in turn chose other messengers and charged them with the sacred responsibility of being witnesses to all mankind of all that He Himself had taught. To eleven chosen disciples He spoke and said: "Go ye into the whole world and teach the gospel to every creature." The Gospel means "glad tidings." These tidings were glad, indeed—they were the tidings, the message of salvation for fallen man. "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth; Going, therefore, teach 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 were the charge given by Christ to His Apostles, and this sacred charge is only that which we have repeated in the words we have quoted from the Acts of the Apostles, "You shall be witnesses unto men."

SENDING OF THE HERALDS

In other words, Christ's mission on earth was to bring a message from God to man. Christ fulfilled this mission partly in His own life and teaching, partly through the life and teaching of others whom He chose to herald that message to all men of all times. I use the word *herald* purposely, for the herald's office is to speak only in the name and with the authority of him who sends him, of him whose message he carries. The herald but bears witness to his master's mind and will, and it is precisely this that the Apostles of Jesus Christ were commissioned to do. They were told to go into the whole world and teach all things that they had learned from the lips of Jesus Christ, to be witnesses unto Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And in this mission of theirs Christ promised them success for, said

He, "I will be with you all days," and that success was to attend their efforts even unto the end of time for "I will be with you all days even to the consummation of the world."

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

Yet the Apostles, like the Master, were to go down to death and, therefore, they could not themselves fully carry out this sacred mission entrusted to their care. What, then, must have been the mind and purpose of Jesus Christ in commissioning them as the first teachers of His revealed religion, the first infallible witnesses of His message from God His Father? Clearly, it must have been this: that they in turn should seek the assistance of other men throughout all the ages to come who would receive from them and hand on to their own successors in the same responsible work of bearing witness to Christ and His doctrines those very doctrines in all integrity and purity.

Thus we see Jesus Christ, God's messenger, and God's own Son, actually established in this world of ours a body of living, infallible teachers and this body as a real, corporate organization, was to last until the end of time, teaching all things whatsoever Christ had commanded His first Apostles, bearing witness unto Jesus Christ to the uttermost parts of the world. Now then, if Jesus Christ spoke and acted in the name of, and with the authority of God in heaven—and we have proved that He did—we must, as men and women of reason, believe that somewhere in this world of ours today that corporate organization of teachers exists and is bearing witness. Where is it, and how shall we be able to locate it?

AN INFALLIBLE CHURCH

Our answer to this question is this—that living, corporate organization of teachers is the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church alone, the Bishops of the Catholic Church, united in faith and by the ties of loving loyalty and humble obedience to the Bishop of Rome whom history proves beyond shadow of doubt to be the successor, in an unbroken line of succession, to the first great Vicar of Jesus

Christ, Peter, once a fisherman of Galilee, afterwards, by choice and gift of Jesus Christ, His own representative on earth, vested with His authority over all men.

This is our answer, the Catholic answer, and we make it, though in no tone of offence or idle boasting, yet without fear or apology. The Catholic Church exists in the world today. It is in reality that visible human society composed of all and only those men and women who are united in one common belief, the belief in all things that the teaching authorities of that Church witness to as part of the message received from God through Jesus Christ. It is the society of all those united in one common form of religious worship and sacrifice, the Sacrifice of the Mass, the worship of the prayers and liturgy approved of by those same teachers. The Catholic Church is the society of men and women who believe in the efficacy of the seven Sacraments and who profess this belief by their practice, their use of these Sacraments. It is the society—the visible, human society—of men and women who recognize the common authority, in matters of religion, of the laws of the Bishop of Rome for all the flock of Christ, and of each of the other Bishops in union with the Bishop of Rome for that part of the flock entrusted to his care.

CATHOLIC CHURCH, CHRIST'S CHURCH

This is the Catholic Church, and this Church and this alone, it is our fearless claim, is the Church founded by Jesus Christ. And because this Church and this alone has been founded by Jesus Christ, she and she alone enjoys the infallible and unending protection promised by Jesus Christ in the all-important mission of bearing witness to all that Jesus Christ Himself had taught. Of this Church, of this body of teachers, it was that Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned."

Now what are the grounds of this clear and far-reaching claim of ours? The world today knows of hundreds of Churches and all of them lay claim, in some degree at least, to the title of the Church of Jesus Christ. Yet the Cath-

olic's unswerving contention is that the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church alone has a right to that title. How does he defend this contention, how does he prove his own exclusive right?

There are various ways in which he might prove it. To be brief, we are forced to choose but two of the many valid arguments at hand. These are drawn from the unity of religious doctrine that must characterize the true Church and from the tone of authority in which the true Church must speak when engaged in her proper and peculiar task of bearing witness to the message she has received from Christ, her Founder.

ONENESS OF DOCTRINE

That Christ's Church was always and everywhere to teach the same doctrine, and in doing so to teach further that it was of its very nature a doctrine which must remain the same always and for all people, is clear from her commission to teach all things, whatsoever Christ had commanded her, and to teach all these things to every creature. The Church was not established by Christ to discover religious truth, but to be the witness of the truth which He had taught her. She does not exist to pick and choose for herself and her members between the conflicting views and opinions of men, but she exists to teach men what are and always will be the truths that God has seen fit to reveal through Jesus Christ and committed to her care to be safeguarded for all time. The proof of these statements is to be found in the very same texts of the Gospel story that we have so often quoted: "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." *All things!* The whole doctrine of Christ, and nothing but that doctrine in its entirety and purity!

Where is there in the world today a Church in which this uniformity of doctrine is found, still more in which such uniformity is insisted on as a part of the very faith of that Church? The answer to this question is easy. Nowhere but in the Catholic Church, whose members, all of them, are united in one common and unchanging and unchangeable creed. Where else is such harmony and uniformity of religious belief found? Nowhere. In all the

other Churches, Christian though they be called, there is no end of dispute as to what Christ really taught or prescribed. Worse than this, such dispute has place in these Churches precisely because of their own fundamental tenets. Even were it true, therefore, that in some one of these bodies there was for a time complete agreement as to the exact content of the revelation made by God through Jesus Christ—I say, even were there agreement in their own ranks for a time, this very agreement is not, according to their own contention, essential to the membership in their Church. No, they are at any moment free, in pursuing their own principle of private interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, or relying on the private inspirations received, as they say, from the Holy Ghost, they are free to desert in whole or in part, to add to or subtract from the creed they now hold and yet remain a member of the Church of Christ! And what would this mean, were it to be admitted as true? Simply this—and this is a flat and evident contradiction—the Church of Christ is by Christ’s approval a body of ever-shifting creeds and practices; a body believing one thing today and its opposite tomorrow. By Christ’s establishment therefore, His Church is not to be successful—despite His promise—in its task of witnessing to all that Christ taught. For success in that task evidently and necessarily involves that the same doctrines be taught in all times and in all places.

AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING

The second argument I wish to outline in proof of the contention of the Catholic Church that she alone is Christ’s Church is this. The Catholic Church alone of all the religious bodies in the world today dares to raise her voice in matters of religious belief and practice, and speak in a tone of authority. No other religious organization is like her in this. In fact many others, though claiming like her to be Christ’s Church, make this very dictatorial and authoritative tone of hers matter of accusation against her. They say she shows thereby that she is intolerant, narrow, unprogressive. This and like charges, it would be easy to meet with satisfying answer did time permit. But I mention such

accusations now, not in order to answer, nay not even to wholly deny them, but merely in further proof of the fact that is all-important for our case, namely that the Catholic Church and she alone does speak, and does claim the right to speak, with authority. And yet Christ's Church, to be true to her Founder, must speak with authority, must she not? Did not Christ Himself speak with authority? And did He not say to the first teachers of His Church, "As the Father hath sent me, so also I send you"? And again, "Go teach" and "He that believeth not shall be condemned."

SUBMISSION PROPER

Can a man be rightly condemned for refusing to believe one who dares not teach with authority? He cannot. Yet Christ said a man would be condemned if he would not believe His Apostles and their successors when they heralded abroad His message. Therefore, Christ's Church must be a Church that does teach, because she must teach, and that too with the absolute and fearless profession of the right to teach and the right to impose the duty upon men to accept her teaching as infallibly true. Christ's Church must do that. And today there is only one Church that dares to do it. Why, there is only one Church which even claims to be infallible and that Church is the Catholic Church. It is our Church, ours not through any merit of our own, but solely through the mercy and love of God, our Father and Jesus Christ, His Divine Son and our own dear Lord.

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