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# WHAT IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

*By Rev. Richard Felix, O.S.B.*

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by

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Rev. Richard Felix, O.S.B.

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# What Is the Catholic Church?

HO is this? What is that? Why? Who or what, and why? These are the questions found first and ever on the lips of the little child. Strangely enough, these self-same queries present themselves spontaneously to the man of maturer reason. He too would know the what and why of everything. Childhood yields to youth, youth to manhood, and manhood to old age; yet throughout, the mind of man puts forth the same persistent inquiries of what and why.

What and why? These are searching questions. They go to the roots of things. Only when they are answered to satisfaction does reason rest secure in certainty and responsive action follow without fail. In studying then the claims of a great institution like the Catholic Church, we can pursue no better plan than that dictated by the very nature of our being.

What is the Catholic Church? To this question we might give many answers, but if I were asked to answer it in one brief statement I should say that the Catholic Church is nothing less than the Mystical Body of Jesus, the Incarnation extended across the universe and adown the ages, Jesus Christ living in the world today—that is what we Catholics understand by the Church.

Jesus came down from Heaven to teach and save all men. In this all Christians are agreed. But



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Jesus died on a Cross nineteen hundred years ago. How then does He teach and save men today? We answer: by means of the Church which is the living representation, the living perpetuation of Himself in the world today. Jesus came into this world in a visible form, a God-man, a Person at once human and divine. Like unto Him, His Church too is something visible, a visible society, a society at once human and divine; human of course in its membership, but its members are members of the Mystical Body of Jesus; divine in its origin and life-giving principle, Jesus Himself. Jesus came to teach men, and the Church, His living Voice, continues to do the same; Jesus came to save men, and the Church in His Name and in His Person fulfills that same office today, applying the merits of His Passion to the souls of men, nourishing them with that life of Grace which He merited for them on the Cross. Let us take up these points somewhat more in detail; perhaps they will become clearer as we go on.

First of all, the Church is a visible society. Without any doubt Almighty God could have saved us in a purely spiritual manner. A simple act of His Will would have sufficed to blot out all the sins of mankind. Although God could have saved us in this invisible manner, as a matter of historical fact, He did not. In His infinite wisdom He sent His only-begotten Son in the visible form of a man, the Word-made-flesh, to redeem us. "There is but one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3, 5).

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Just why God chose to save us through the visible mediation of His Son made man is a mystery, something we are not able fully to fathom. This much however we know for certain, His infinite Mercy and Love lay behind it all. On our part too we can see a reason for it, and that reason is the simple psychological fact that God would save man, and man is not a purely spiritual being. He is a composite creature made up of body and soul and his visible body stands as much in need of redemption as his invisible soul. However we explain it, the fact remains that Almighty God did send His dearly-beloved Son to us on Christmas night in the visible form of a man, and He it is, the God-man, who saves and sanctifies us.

Since Jesus came as a visible mediator, we naturally would expect that the means wherewith He would perpetuate His mediation and apply the merits of the same to the souls of men down to the end of time would likewise be of a visible nature. And what we would naturally have been led to expect we find fulfilled when we see our Divine Saviour making the formation of a visible society one of the chief concerns of His earthly career. One of the first things our Saviour did when He began His public ministry, as all four of the Evangelists tell us, was to call about Him a body of men whom He might instruct in all knowledge and prepare with all care for the work He had in store for them. These men to whom He gave a distinctive name (Luke 6, 13), and a special mission (Mark 16, 15), and from



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amongst whom He chose out one to be their chief and leader (Matt. 16, 15; John 21, 15), were none other than the Apostles. For three long years they were His intimate friends and followers, His officers in training, so to speak. They accompanied Him on His journeys, were witnesses to His miracles, heard His discourses, and were taken apart from the multitude and had disclosed to them more fully the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. To them our Blessed Saviour foretold His bitter Passion and Death. To them He committed His Sacramental Body on the night before He died (Luke 22, 19; 1 Cor. 11, 23). To them He appeared after the Resurrection and during the next forty days instructed them still more thoroughly in the work to which they were called. To them He gave the power of forgiving sin (Matt. 16, 19; John 20, 22; 2 Cor. 5, 18), and then, just before ascending into Heaven He gathered them together for the last time and conferred upon them His final and official commission. What was that commission? St. Matthew tells us (28, 18): "All power is given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." His power divine He delegates entirely to them making them and them alone His accredited ambassadors, the authorized emissaries of eternal truth, and the sole dispensers of His life-giving Grace unto all the chil-



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dren of men; and this new covenant He seals with the promise of His personal Presence down to the end of ages.

How this divine commission was carried out, we know full well. No sooner had they received the Holy Ghost, according to the instructions of the Master, than the Apostles dispersed into the four quarters of the globe bearing the glad tidings of the Gospel to all mankind. St. Peter, as the Acts of the Apostles (ch. 2) informs us, converted three thousand on the first day and five thousand on the second. And with success no less signal labored all the rest of the Apostles in the ministry of the living Church throughout the world. "Going forth," says St. Mark, "they preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed" (16, 20). Here then is an incontestable fact of history. In the light of this fact, we will consider briefly the position of those who maintain that the Bible and the Bible alone is the one and only rule of faith.

Here we have a visible society, a teaching organization established and empowered by Jesus Christ Himself to teach and save all men. This society, this teaching organization called the Church, was in full operation in this world carrying out the command of Christ, teaching and baptizing and saving souls for more than five years before the first book of the New Testament was written; fifty years more elapsed before the last one was completed. This teaching organization called the Church, let me repeat, was

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living and laboring throughout the world saving the souls of men just as she is doing today for fully five years before a single line of the New Testament was written, for more than fifteen years before St. Paul penned his wonderful epistles, for more than fifty years before St. John wrote the last Gospel. What does that mean? That means that the Church is prior in time to the New Testament and does not depend upon it. What is of even greater importance, that means that the Church is not only prior in time to the New Testament but under the guidance of the Holy Ghost is the very parent of the New Testament itself. Had there been no Church, there would have been no New Testament. The New Testament grew out of the Church; the Church did not grow out of the New Testament. Christ Himself wrote no part of the Bible, most of His Apostles wrote no book, and those that did write took up the inspired pen simply and solely as an instrument in their work of the teaching Church, and this they did only after they had been laboring for years already in the ministry of that living Church throughout the world.

I would not be misunderstood. No one prizes the Bible as does the Catholic Church. For her every word of it is sacred, every word of it the word of God. She reveres it, she loves it, she shows her love and reverence for it by the way she uses and respects it. Briefly, the official prayer of the Church, the Divine Office, which the priests and ministers of the Church have to say every day in the year and which takes from one to two hours daily if recited, from

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four to five hours if chanted, as is done in hundreds of religious houses across the country, is taken almost entirely from the Bible. The same holds true of the Mass. We urge our people to read the Bible, and that even those who neglect to do so may still hear something of the Word of God, the Church lays her ministers under strict obligation to read and explain the chief portions of the Scriptures from the pulpit every Sunday. We Catholics do revere the Bible and use it as do no others but that does not blind us to the fact that the Bible is not the only rule of faith. Tradition shares that honor with it. Does not St. John tell us (21, 25) that only the least portion of what Jesus has said and done was written down? Scripture and tradition together then make up the deposit of the Christian faith, and over both, the Bible and tradition, Christ Himself has set that teaching organization called the Church to be His official custodian and interpreter. To that Church alone and not to any book or private individual did He say, "Teach ye . . . I will be with you."

That the Bible itself stands in need of such a supreme and official interpreter, vouched for by Christ Himself, is more than evident if we but look about us in the realms of religion today. There are over two hundred different denominations in this country alone, all of them built upon one and the same Bible yet no two in perfect accord on all points of doctrine. That is what private interpretation means when put into practice. In secular matters men are more wise. The Fathers of our glorious Republic did not pen that

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wonderful document called the Constitution and then leave it to the people at large to interpret as they saw fit. They knew better than that. They set up a Supreme Court for that purpose. And do you think that the All-wise God would be less careful in a matter of so great importance where the salvation of millions of immortal souls is at stake? Most assuredly not! He too set up a supreme court, an authorized interpreter of His Law.\* He Himself refers us to that court saying, "Hear the Church. He that does not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican" (Matt. 18, 17).

It would seem then that our Divine Saviour did not build His religion on a book, even though that book be inspired.\*\* He Himself wrote not a word nor laid He any such charge upon the Apostles. What He did do was to organize and identify Himself with a teaching Church. What He did do was to send the constituted leaders of that living Church out into the world as His personal representatives to preach and teach in His Name telling them, "He that heareth

\*For a more detailed consideration of this subject, read The Apostles' Creed advertised on the last page of this pamphlet.

\*\*The "Bible Only" thesis is equally untenable on other grounds. For instance, it presupposes that all men have sufficient education at least to read the Bible, a supposition quite contrary to fact even in this our twentieth century. Granted sufficient education, it presupposes that all men be able to secure a copy of the Bible. In this day that were an easy enough matter, but in centuries gone by an utter impossibility. It was not till well along in the fifteenth century that the art of printing was invented. Previous to that time, books in the modern sense of the word were not in existence. Everything had to be copied out in longhand. Naturally that was a tedious task, involving an immense amount of time and labor. To possess such a manuscript copy was to possess a priceless treasure. None but the very rich could afford it. And yet the millions of men who lived during those first fifteen centuries of the Christian era had immortal souls to save, souls as precious in the eyes of God as our own. What became of them? For the most part they had no Bibles, and even if they had, they would have been unable to read them.

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you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10, 16). Many years after Jesus Christ had thus organized His Church and sent it forth on His mission to mankind, some of His chosen ones under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote down the main doctrines of the Master and the chief events of His Life which we now know of as the New Testament. The Bible therefore is a real rule of faith, but it is not the only rule of faith. It is a rule of faith, but only in so far as it is used as God designed it to be used, namely, as a textbook in the hands of His teaching Church. Those who wrest it from that place wherein God has placed it and pin their faith to its private interpretation, “wrest it to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3, 16), for “no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1, 20).

The Church then for us Catholics is the Voice of Christ living in the world today, teaching as of yore “as one having authority” (Matt. 7, 29). Such is the Church. But if we stop here in our analysis of the Church we stop far short of the truth. Christ came not merely to teach men but also to save and sanctify men. So likewise His Church. She is the medium through which He applies the merits of His Life and Death to the souls of men.

As the teaching Christ, Holy Scripture presents the Church to us under the simile of a teaching organization; as the Grace-giving Christ, that same Holy Writ presents her to us as a Divine Organism. Every



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organism is made up of two parts, the one visible and the other invisible, and of the two, the invisible is of far greater importance. Man, for example, is an organism. Man is composed of a visible body and an invisible soul; but it is from the soul that he has life, and it is from the soul that all his vital actions proceed. So too in that Divine Organism called the Church. Just as she has a visible body, this visible society of which we have been treating, so likewise has she an invisible soul and that soul is Christ. He is her life and from Him proceed all her vital actions. For this reason the great Apostle St. Paul calls the Church the Body of Christ and says that Christ is its head. "He is the Head of the Body, which is the Church" (Col. 1, 18), "the Head from which the whole Body being supplied with nourishment groweth unto the increase of God" (Col. 2, 19); "the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath made Him Head over all the Church which is His Body" (Eph. 1, 22); "Christ is the Head of the Church; He is the Saviour of His Body" (Eph. 5, 23); "we, being many, are one Body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12, 5); "you are the Body of Christ, and members one of another" (1 Cor. 12, 27); "we are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones" (Eph. 5, 30). Christ Himself, addressing His Disciples, said to them, "I am the Vine, you are the branches" (John 15, 5). Vine and branches grow together, one principle of life pulsating through root and stem and leaf and tiny tendril. What could more clearly express the living and organic union,

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the perfect solidarity existing between Christ and His Church, and the members of His Church one with another!

If then we view the Church in her Head and her Heart and her Soul, she is Christ Himself; if we view her as the Body of the faithful made one in the unity of the Head, she is the Mystical Body of Christ and related to Him as the body to the soul.\* In her soul she is Christ, in her Body she is His Body. The Mystical Body of Jesus, Jesus Christ living in the world today—that is the Catholic Church.

No wonder then that this Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, as we say in the Nicene Creed. The Church of Christ must be One for Christ is but one. He cannot contradict Himself. "Thou art Peter," said the Lord, "and upon this rock I will build My Church"—not churches—"and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16, 18). "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," said St. Paul (Eph. 4, 5). Look about you in the world today and where do you find that unity? In one Church alone, and that the Catholic Church. Her three hundred million children in every part of the universe united and in unison worship the same God, believe the same truths revealed by Jesus Christ, obey the same spiritual authority, receive the same Seven Sacraments.

\*For a beautiful presentation of the Church, considered as the Mystical Body of Christ, read *Christ in the Church*, by R. H. Benson, published by B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, Mo.; price, \$1.50. Msgr. Benson was the son of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, and one of the most noted converts to the Catholic Church during the past generation. He was a brilliant writer, the book indicated above being one of his best. Another book that will repay careful reading is *The Spirit of Catholicism* by Karl Adam (Macmillan Co., price \$1.50).



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Not only are the three hundred million Catholics in the world\* today united in everything pertaining to religion, but they have identically the same beliefs as their forefathers in the faith. The Catholics of today believe identically the same truths as the Christians of the first and the second and the third and the fourth centuries, and the Christians of those early days held fast to the same things as we. Do not take my word for this. We have the writings of all the Doctors of the Christian Church from the very beginning.\*\* Many of them have been translated and published in English. The Catholic Church therefore in time and place is one in Faith, and by that token is the Church founded by Christ.

Look outside the Catholic Church and what do you see? Anything but unity. Denominations without end; one denomination differing fundamentally from the other, and what is even more painful, the various denominations themselves split up hopelessly into conflicting parties. The official religious census

\*According to data gathered by the National Geographic Society of Washington, D. C., the population of the world is estimated at 1,691,751,000. Of this number, 609,414,000 profess themselves Christians. Distributed into three great divisions of Christianity, we have these results: Catholics, 294,583,000; Protestants of all denominations, 194,102,000; Eastern Orthodox, 120,729,000. Cf. *Encyclopedia Americana*, New York, 1920, vol. vi., p. 607.

\*\*J. P. Migne, *Patrologiæ Latinæ cursus completus*, 221 vols.; *Patrologiæ Græcæ cursus completus*, 247 vols.; Paris, 1866. Numerous translations of individual writers have been given us in English. The three most comprehensive series are: The Library of the Fathers, in 45 volumes, by members of the English Church, 1832; The Ante-Nicene Fathers, in 24 volumes, edited by A. C. Coxie, New York, 1889, and the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, in 14 volumes, edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace, New York, 1900. None of these translations are from Catholic pens. They are, however, accurate and well done. With the exception of vicious footnotes and partisan insinuations here and there, they are the best serial translations available.

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of the United States published by our Government\* will verify and substantiate the truth of this statement. To cite a few examples, you will find listed therein twenty-two different kinds of Lutherans, nineteen different kinds of Methodists, eighteen different kinds of Baptists, nine kinds of Presbyterians, five kinds of Adventists and four kinds of Reformed. Anything but unity. And yet unity was to be and is one of the main distinguishing marks of Christ's Church. How earnestly Jesus prayed for that unity on the night before He died. "Father, keep them in Thy Name whom Thou hast given Me; that they may be one, as We also are" (John 17, 11). "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd" (John 10, 16). How insistent is St. Paul on the same eternal truth! Schism and disunion he classes with the crimes of murder and debauchery and declares that they who are guilty of "dissensions and sects shall not obtain the Kingdom of God" (Gal. 5, 21). In his Epistles to the Corinthians and the Ephesians, he repeatedly sets forth the same doctrine, exhorting them to be "careful to keep the unity of

\*Religious Bodies. Bureau of the Census. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1926. 2 vols. The Church population of the United States in 1926 as revealed by this official census amounted to 54,576,346. This figure represents the total membership of the 212 different and distinct religious organizations working in this country. The seven Religious Bodies numbering over a million members each are as follows: Roman Catholics, 18,605,003; Baptists, 8,440,922; Methodists, 8,070,619; Lutherans, 3,966,003; Presbyterians, 1,894,030; Episcopalians, 1,859,086; Disciples of Christ (Christians), 1,377,595. It may be urged that these figures, compiled as they were some years ago, do not represent the present status of the various bodies. That is true. Catholics today number over 20,000,000, and we have no reason to think that the other religious bodies have not increased proportionally. Still, for the sake of reliability, the Governmental Statistics are preferable in that they are non-partisan and official.

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the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4, 3). Such declarations as these coming from the great Apostle are clear evidence of that essential unity which must ever characterize the true Christian Church.

Following in the footsteps of St. Paul, the Fathers of the Church are no less emphatic than he on this matter of unity. Witness the testimony of St. Irenæus\* (writing in the year 166) as spokesman for them all. “The faith received from the Apostles is preserved by the Church with as great care as if she occupied but one house, whereas she has spread over the whole world, and she accepts this faith as if she had but one heart and soul, and she proclaims and teaches it as if she had but one mouth. For although there are different languages, the substance of our tradition is always the same. The Churches established in Germany do not believe or teach anything different from the Churches in Iberia, or Gaul, or in the East, or in Egypt, or in Lybia, or in the centre of the world. But just as there is one and the same sun all over the world, so does the preaching of Truth shed light everywhere, enlightening all who desire to come to a knowledge of the Truth” (Adv. hæ. I, 10). A little further on in the same book (Adv. hæ. III, 3) he tells us that the test of this one true Church in which alone is to be found salvation is its union with the Bishop of Rome. That membership in the church is consistent with differences in faith was unheard of before the rise of Protestantism. That Christian unity is a chimera if it be not a unity

\*Irenæus was a pupil of Polycarp who in turn was a disciple of St. John. He is therefore a direct witness to the teachings of the Apostles.

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centering around Peter and his successors is plain and patent to any one who has observed the futile efforts at unity put forth by those outside the Church during the past few years. Nor could we expect otherwise. In the words of St. Cyprian (in the year 250), "God is one, and Christ is one, one the Church, and one the Chair founded by the Lord upon Peter. Whosoever gathers elsewhere, scattereth" (Ep. XLI, ad Pleb.).

The Catholic Church is One; the Catholic Church is Holy. She is holy because Jesus, the fountain-head of all holiness, is her very life. He is her "head from which the whole body being supplied with nourishment groweth unto the increase of God" (Col. 2, 19). He it is who makes the children of His Love holy with His own holiness, pumping the holiness of His own Sacred Heart through the seven great arteries of the Sacraments into all the members of His Mystical Body. He it is in the fullness of His Divinity who sanctifies the souls of His chosen ones, communicating to them His own Divine Life in the Seven Sacraments of the Church. Would that we could make men appreciate what this Sacramental Life of the Church really means! Would that we could make men realize how Jesus, the Source of all sanctity, gives us His own Divine Self in the Sacraments of the Church making us thereby "participators in His own Divine Nature" (2 Peter 1, 4). Listen to what He Himself has to say about one of them, the Most Blessed Eucharist: "I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven. If any man eat of

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this Bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give you is My Flesh for the life of the world. Except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you. For My Flesh is meat indeed and My Blood is drink indeed; he that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood abideth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and as I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me'' (John 6, 51). Behold what the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist means to us—Jesus giving us Himself as the spiritual food of our souls. And what He does in this adorable Sacrament He does likewise in all the rest for one and all they are His own appointed channels of Grace, and Grace is defined as Divine Life communicated to the soul. The Sacramental Life then is the secret of the sanctity of the Church; Jesus in the Sacraments the source of all our strength. Any one who lives that Life cannot but become a Saint. What is more, only those who do lead that Life become great Saints. Even those outside the fold recognize this fact, for whenever they wish to point to a real Saint they have to come to us. The Benedicts, the Bernadettes, and the Little Flowers of Jesus do not grow anywhere else. Jesus in the Sacraments, let me repeat, is the source of all our sanctity and all our strength. He it is who enables priest and people to lead pure and holy lives. He it is who makes His Holy Church the natural home of Saints.

I scarcely need dwell on the other side of the picture. Ignoring the plain teachings of Holy Scripture



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as well as one thousand five hundred years of Christian history, Protestantism at its very inception ruled five of the Sacraments out of court altogether, namely, Confirmation, Matrimony, Extreme Unction, Penance, and Holy Orders. With the Priesthood went the Mass, and with the Mass the Lord's Supper, in as far as it may be truly called a Sacrament. With equal reason the so-called Reformers might have rejected Baptism and the semblance of the Lord's Supper that they did retain. But even these were quickly shorn of their Sacramental character. Few indeed are they today who look upon the Lord's Supper as anything more than an empty symbol. Baptism fortunately has fared somewhat better, but even here the number of those who consider it a Sacrament in the historical sense of the word grows daily less and less. The Christian idea of the Sacraments as Grace-giving signs that not merely represent but effect redemption is all but lost outside the Catholic Church. Would to God that we could get all good people outside that Church to study this matter and realize this truth! Then instead of the few scattered crumbs that now fall to their lot they would soon be feasting at their Father's table.

Before leaving this subject, I must take cognizance of an oft-repeated objection. We generally meet it in some such form as this: If the Catholic Church be holy, as you claim her to be, how do you account for all the bad Catholics in the world today? There is this fallen priest and that faithless nun and dozens of the laity who are leading anything but holy lives.

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“By their fruits you shall know them,” said the Master. What do you have to say for these? I answer: Certainly, by their fruits you shall know them. But tell me, how do you judge of the fruits of any tree? By the rotten apples on the ground or by the sun-kissed product on the branch above? We Catholics, I am sorry to say, do have our renegades. That is true. Christ had His Judas and the Church has hers. But just as it would have been unfair to judge Christ by Judas, so too is it unfair to censure His Church on the score of those who fail to live up to her teaching. Moreover these so-called bad Catholics can scarcely be classed as Catholics at all. No man is really a Catholic unless he be in living communion with the Church, unless he participate in the Sacramental Life of the Church. He may still profess the name or even go to Sunday services now and then but that does not constitute him a Catholic. Unless he be in Sacramental communion with the Church, he is no more a real Catholic than the fallen twig is a part of the vine to which it once belonged.

The Church of Christ then is One and Holy; the Church of Christ is Catholic. The word Catholic means universal, scattered throughout the whole world. That the Church founded by Christ must be Catholic is amply evident from the explicit promises and instructions of Christ Himself: “You shall be witnesses unto Me . . . even to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1, 8). “Going, therefore, teach ye all nations” (Matt. 28, 19). “Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature”



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(Mark 16, 15). Christ came to save all men. Hence His Church must extend over all the world. Now what Church is and has ever been extended over all the world? Here we are concerned with a simple question of history and geography. Historically we know that none of the denominations round about us were even in existence during the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era. For a very good reason therefore they could not be spread over any part of the earth at all.

Geographically considered, the situation is very much today as it was in the days of St. Augustine. "Heretics," said he, "are everywhere but no particular heresy is everywhere." Today too the sects are everywhere, but taken separately—and that is the only way you can take them if the note of unity means anything at all—no sect is to be found in every part of the world. They are local, national, confined to one or at the most a very few countries. Only one Church is truly universal, and that the Catholic. Go where you will and you will find the Catholic Church there before you. She counts and has ever counted her children by the million in every clime and in every nation under the sun. She alone reaches from pole to pole and belts the globe. Today as in the centuries gone by she alone can lay claim to universality and for that reason she alone is truly Catholic.

The mark of universality is again a matter that the Fathers of the Church stress very much. I cite the testimony of one who is recognized by all as one

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of the greatest minds that ever lived. Setting forth some of the reasons why he is a Catholic, the great Augustine (who died in the year 430) declares that besides the intrinsic acceptability of her doctrine "there are many other things which most justly keep me within the bosom of the Church." After indicating the agreement in faith among her members as well as "the succession of priests from the installation of Peter the Apostle to whom Our Lord intrusted His sheep to be fed down to the present episcopate," he adds, "Lastly there holds me the very name of Catholic—a name which in the midst of so many heresies this Church alone has rightly so held possession of that though all heretics would fain be called Catholics, still to the inquiry of any stranger, Where are the services of the Catholic Church held, not one of these heretics would dare to point to his own conventicle" (Contra. Ep. Fund., n. 5). Would not the same question be answered in the same way today?

Lastly, the Church of Christ must be Apostolic, that is to say, must come down in unbroken line from the Apostles. Any Church that claims to be the Church of Christ must be able to trace its lineage back to Christ and to those upon whom He founded His Church. Now Christ founded His Church upon the Apostles. "You are fellow-citizens with the Saints, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. 2, 20). "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16, 18). That

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Church alone therefore whose genealogy goes back directly to Peter and His Divine Master is truly Christian and Apostolic. Here again we are concerned with a plain fact of history. Study the history of the various denominations, and what do you find? When were they founded? By whom? They were founded, all of them, not by Christ but by men, by weak, fallible men. They were founded not at the time of Christ and His Apostles but quite recently, many of them within the past century (e. g., the Spiritualists, Mormons, Christians, and Christian Scientists), all of them within the past four hundred years.\* None of them come within a thousand five hundred years of Christ. Compared to the Catholic Church, they are as of yesterday.

The Catholic Church alone was founded not by man but by God. She alone goes back historically to Christ. Just as history vindicates to the Chief Executive of our Nation the sole right to sit in the Presidential Chair by tracing his ancestry in that office back through the legitimate incumbents who have succeeded immortal Washington, so in like manner, does history bear witness to the claim of Catholics that the Pope of Rome is the legitimate head of Christ's Church on earth by tracing his prerogative in that office back through the two hundred and sixty Popes who have preceded him in the Chair of Peter. With St. Irenæus (writing in the year 177), "we confound all those who assemble otherwise than as behooveth them by pointing to the

\*The leading religious organizations in our country, their founders, and dates of origin will be found listed at the conclusion of this pamphlet.

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greatest, most ancient and universally known Church of Rome. This Church was founded and organized by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul. The faith and tradition which this Church has derived from the Apostles comes down to us through the succession of her Bishops. With this Church every other Church must be united on account of her preeminent authority." Having spoken of Peter and the foundation of the Church, St. Irenæus goes on to tell us that "the blessed Apostles then committed the sacred office of the Episcopacy to Linus, of whom Paul makes mention in his letters to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus, and after him, the third from the Apostles, who obtained that Episcopacy was Clement, who still had before his eyes the familiar preaching and tradition of the Apostles, and not he only, for many were then still alive who had been instructed by the Apostles. To Clement succeeded Evaristus, and to Evaristus, Alexander. Next to him, Sixtus was appointed, and after him, Telesphorus, who suffered a glorious martyrdom. Then Hyginus, followed by Pius, after whom was Anicetus. To Anicetus succeeded Soter; and to him—the twelfth in succession from the Apostles—succeeded Eleutherius, who now holds the inheritance of the Episcopate. In this order and in this succession, the tradition and the preaching of the truth, which is in the Church, have come down to us from the Apostles. And this is a most complete demonstration that the life-giving Faith is one and the same, which from the Apostles even until now has been preserved in the Church and

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transmitted in truthfulness'' (Ad. Hæres. III., 3).

History therefore tells of one Church only that has come down through the centuries, of one Church only that can go back to Christ in proof of her divine mission and authority. Indeed, the Catholic Church is the one outstanding fact of history. From the day of her foundation she has been the central fact around which all the facts of history have revolved, and without which most of them would be inexplicable and without meaning. She is a continuous, ever-present fact; men and nations come and go, the Church endures; amid all the changes of succeeding generations, she stands intact, one in continuity, identical in delegated power with the Church of the Apostles, as truly the depository of Revelation and the living dispenser of the gifts of the Gospel today as were the Apostles themselves.

Since the Catholic Church alone is Apostolic, the Catholic Church alone is commissioned to carry on the work of the Apostles. To her alone is intrusted the salvation of mankind. Empowered by her authority, the Priests and Bishops of the Catholic Church alone are the legitimate representatives of Christ in this world. They alone are commissioned to preach the Gospel to every creature for they alone have the credentials of that Church which Christ founded upon the Apostles to continue His work. With St. Cyprian (who died in the year 258) they alone can say: "We hold communion with the Apostolic Church, and this is our witness of the truth" (Ep. 55). With St. Jerome, writing to Pope Damasus



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(in the year 376), only they can say: "As I follow no leader save Christ, so I am in communion with no one but your Blessedness, that is, with the Chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the rock on which the Church is built. This is the house where alone the Paschal Lamb can be rightly eaten. He that gathers not with you, scatters" (Ep. 15). And to St. Jerome we are more indebted than to any one else for the preservation of the Bible. The great work of collating and translating the books of sacred Scripture, he undertook only at the express request of the Pope. For him as for us the Chair of Peter was the source and centre of Apostolic authority and whosoever would do the work of the Apostles must needs be in communion with him who sits thereon, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

These then are the four great marks of the Church—earmarks, one of my friends in the West calls them—Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity. The true Church of Christ must possess them all. The Catholic Church alone enjoys that distinction and for that reason is in truth the one and only Church of Christ.

In our day we hear much about the Apostolic origin of the Church. But that the Catholic Church alone is truly Apostolic is freely admitted by no less an authority than the late Dr. Charles A. Briggs of Union Theological Seminary, N. Y. From an article on the Papacy which this eminent Protestant divine contributed to the *North American Review* for February 15, 1907, we cull the following: "The Papacy is one of the greatest institutions that has ever existed

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in the world, and it looks forward with calm assurance to a still greater future. Its dominion extends throughout the world over the only ecumenical Church. All other churches are national or provincial in their organization. It reaches back in unbroken succession through more than eighteen centuries to St. Peter appointed by the Saviour of the world to be the Primate of the Apostles. It commands the greatest central body of Christianity which has ever remained the same organization since Apostolic times.

“The Papacy has a much firmer basis in a number of texts of the New Testament than most Protestants have been willing to recognize. All attempts to explain the ‘rock’ in any other sense than as referring to Peter have ignominiously failed. The early chapters of the Acts represent him as Chief of the Apostolic Community down to the Council of Jerusalem. If we had the continuation of the narrative of St. Peter’s work in Antioch, Western Asia, and finally in Rome, in all probability the same undisputed leadership would appear. It is evident that Jesus, in speaking of St. Peter, had the whole history of His Kingdom in view. We must admit that there must be a sense in which the successors of St. Peter are the rock of the Church and have the authority of the Keys in ecclesiastical government, discipline, and the determination of faith and morals. If the flock continues the chief shepherd must be the successor of St. Peter to carry on his work as shepherd. The Christian Church from the earliest times recognized



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the primacy of the Roman Bishop, and all other great sees at times recognized the supreme jurisdiction of Rome in matters of doctrine, government, and discipline. When Protestants went so far as to deny all the historic rights of the Papacy, Protestantism set itself in a false position which must ultimately be abandoned.”

# WHAT IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

## LEADING RELIGIOUS BODIES\* IN THE UNITED STATES

Name	Date of Origin	Founder
Catholic	33	Jesus Christ
Lutheran	1517	Martin Luther
Episcopalian	1534	King Henry VIII.
Presbyterian	1560	John Knox
Reformed (Dutch)	1563	John Calvin
Congregationalist	1580	Robert Browne
Baptist	1609	John Smyth
Friends	1648	George Fox
Moravian	1722	Count von Zinzendorf
Methodist	1738	John Wesley
Unitarian	1773	Theophilus Lindsey
Universalist	1785	John Murray
Christian (Disciples of Christ)	1809	Thomas Campbell
Mormon	1830	Joseph Smith
Adventist	1831	William Miller
Salvation Army	1865	William Booth
Christian Scientist	1874	Mary Baker Eddy
Spiritualist	1893	Many Collaborators

\*The data here given has been gathered from the Encyclopedia Americana, New York, 1920, 30 vols. The same information may be found in any standard work bearing on the subject.

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