

Jesus Christ announced a fixed code of religious principles and observances, directly opposed to the opinions and practices of the entire civilized world. He appointed and consecrated a special class of men as his agents, representatives and ambassadors, commissioning them to teach, practice and perpetuate His teachings. They were to teach, among other things, the necessity of faith in Him and in all His words and works, however repugnant or confusing to human reason. Christ did not give His priesthood the discretion to submit these precepts to the fallible judgments of their hearers, with permission to accept or reject in part. They were commanded to simply declare the law and the necessity of receiving it without reservation or discussion.

If these doctrines had been submitted to the illiterate, the depraved or the skeptical public during the early and middle centuries of Christianity, not a vestige of the religion would have survived for us. A universal skepticism would have pervaded the world. This is evident from the results of modern Protestantism. It is through the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church, that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church and maintains the historical continuity with Jesus Christ as Head of the Mystical Body. The Magisterium is the guardian of the Deposit of Faith; the body of saving truth entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and handed on by them to the Church to be proclaimed and preserved.

However, the Magisterium is not an entity that in itself has the power to originate doctrine — everything the Magisterium proclaims must be in total submission to the Word of God: Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but it is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and

expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 86).

Without a central authority to guard the truth of Christ, there would be religious confusion or, more than likely, religious chaos. By rejecting the authority of Christ's Church Martin Luther led the way to the religious disintegration that exists in the world today?

Finally, I said, It is the Church and not the Bible that is the Foundation of faith. 1 Tim. 3:15, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

Please keep in mind that the Church referred to was and is the Catholic Church. The thousands of Protestant denominations that exist today did not exist at that time.

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There Can Be But One True Church!

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Not too long ago I found myself in an ongoing discussion with a man named George, who has been teaching Scripture for many years under the auspices of Calvary Chapel Church. One day, our discussion centered on the fact that there are thousands of Christian Churches each teaching something different, and yet there cannot be but one true Church.

It is my contention that Jesus left behind a visible Church, with a visible authority that is described in Scripture for the protection of his teaching. It stands to reason that Jesus set up a visible church for the guardianship and propagation of the His word. Protestants, conscious of their lack of historical continuity, going back to the time of Christ and the apostles, invented the fiction of an invisible Church to justify themselves.

Common sense tells us that no society can endure without a government to make laws for the good of society? The necessity of a superior power, or a form of government, is just as necessary in a religious society as it is in any other.

Can you imagine what state this country would be in if we did not maintain and support a central government? What would happen if we did not have laws to protect citizens or a police force to arrest lawbreakers, or a court of law to decide the fate of criminals? Obviously, no individual would be safe. Well, I said, the same principles apply to the Church.

Do you really think that Jesus taught for three years and then said, 'Now you have the basics, you're on your own?' Don't you think He knew what would happen if everyone

interpreted His words to suit their own purposes? That is why Jesus left behind a visible Church with consecrated bishops, possessing authority to teach and preach a set form of doctrine, including: faith, repentance, baptism and obedience to the commandments. He actually designated a “prime-minister” to this divinely instituted ecclesiastical organization — Saint Peter, who was to preside over the other officers of the Church and to see to it that her disciplines and doctrines were faithfully obeyed.

No one should deny that the chief mission of Christ was to redeem mankind. While on earth, Christ taught a set form of doctrine and founded a visible organization or church, with bishops, priests and deacons to teach and perpetuate this doctrine. It would be unreasonable to suppose Christ established his Church with a positive code of doctrines, principles and ceremonies during his stay on earth, and then on his departure to allow this organization to become corrupt or to disappear.

From the Gospel of Matthew, it is evident Christ consecrated his Apostles, endowed them with the Holy Spirit and conferred upon them the power of binding and loosing from sin. Christ then sent them as his special representatives to teach and practice the doctrines they received from him, which he had received from the Father.

Saint Paul, following the example of Christ, ordained Timothy and Titus and sent them to teach, preach and ordain other faithful men in the service of Christ. Here then was an organized body of men, divinely appointed and ordained to sustain the Church.

From the declarations of Saint Paul and other Apostles, it is clear Christ instructed them and their successors to perpetuate this ecclesiastical organization in order that His Church might be ever visible, immutable and operative. Saint Paul wrote in second

Corinthians God gave us the ministry of reconciliation; and that he and the other Apostles were Christ's ambassadors.

Christ became incarnate for the express purpose of saving mankind. He intended to accomplish this by teaching His holy truths and preserving and transmitting them to future generations through an organized Church.

His love for His Church was so great He willingly suffered and died for it: Ephesians tells us that 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.'

Christ ordained that his Church — its institutions, its popes and its authority — should exist uninterruptedly from the days of the Apostles until the end of time. John narrates the words of Christ: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.'

On one occasion, when Christ was addressing the multitude, He distinctly recognized the superior functions of his Apostles: 'Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak in parables?' And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.'

The fact that the first bishops and priests of the Church did not worship in temples and exercise the authority and functions of the priesthood openly and publicly may account for a hasty conclusion that no ecclesiastical organization or priesthood existed for the first three centuries of the Church. The bishops and priests of the first three centuries had to preach,

teach, practice their religion and preserve the Scriptures in hidden places, such as caves and secluded forests. For the most part, they had to meet by stealth and at the risk of their lives.

Pagan spies were at every door, watching the comings and goings of every suspected Christian, reporting every suspicious word. In this manner, the Coliseum was furnished with an abundance of victims. Was it to be expected that under these circumstances bishops and priests would expose themselves to martyrdom unnecessarily?

Did Christ found his Church upon a rock and give the keys of the kingdom to Peter without any set form of doctrine, rules of discipline or body to exercise pastoral authority over the faithful? If not, it is probable the organization would have ceased to exist. The first Christians composed but a small portion of the population — obscure, poor, despised and persecuted. Any exhibition of Christian faith or any conversion to it was punishable by death. The very fact the Church has survived — notwithstanding the vast powers that were arrayed against her under Emperors Tiberius, Nero, Claudius, Caligula and others — proves not only a continuous Church organization but the sustaining presence of God.

In organizing this Church, Christ did not design His doctrines and sacred truths to be submitted to the people for discussion, criticism or private interpretation. He did not grant the liberty to alter and amend, nor reject them as ignorance, prejudice or whim might dictate. He did not submit his doctrines to the judgments or criticisms of the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers of Jerusalem, nor to the learned governors of Rome. He never sanctioned what would now be termed as *freedom of conscience* and *private interpretation*, but demanded unconditional faith and obedience in his teaching and in the teachings of his Apostles.