

# THE TRUE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

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IT would be useless to speak about the Church of Jesus Christ to those who do not believe in Him. To such as these I do not address myself. I will, however, place before them a few considerations worthy of their careful attention. They will, I presume, scarcely doubt His existence as an historical personage, for, apart from the records we have of Him, surely as weighty and worthy of credence as those which testify to the life character and doings of anyone else in history, it is, moreover, an unquestionable fact that He has exercised and still exercises upon the world an influence absolutely without parallel. It is quite impossible that such a gigantic superstructure should be based upon a myth. Let it be granted, then, that close upon two thousand years ago there was born in Judea a man of Hebrew race, who lived a short life, exhibiting characteristics quite unique, characteristics so imposingly grand and beautiful that He has extorted the admiration even of those most hostile to His claims. He spent His life for others, and for their sakes finally suffered a most agonizing and shameful death. What brought Him to death was His unfaltering assertion that He was God Incarnate. Moreover, it is to be noted that the long series of the prophets of His nation had foretold that God should come upon earth in human guise,

and these prophecies, types, and figures tally most minutely with all that is related of this wonderful being: the time of His arrival upon earth, His birth of a Virgin, the poverty and obscurity of His early years, His life of beneficent toil, the manner of His painful death, His Resurrection and Ascension into heaven—all are foreshown with an astonishing exactness. Furthermore, He wrought mighty miracles, and pointed to them as evidences of the truth of what He taught about Himself and His mission upon earth. There are those who in the name of science airily assert that miracles are impossible. Now, no fact is impossible, and miracles are facts as well attested as any other facts of history. It is the province of the inductive sciences to interpret facts: nothing is more silly and unscientific than to brush aside facts which stand in the way of a cherished preconception. In addition to His miracles we have His own foreknowledge of future events, whether concerning Himself or whether concerning the society instituted by Him, and the course of the world's history until the end of time. His predictions of what would happen to Himself were all fulfilled as recorded in the Gospel narration. His predictions of events affecting posterity have been verified one by one: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the spread of His religion, the persecutions His followers should suffer, all these things have come to pass, and we are thereby justified in believing that all His other prophecies will be realized in process of time.

There are these and many other such proofs which fully bear out the reasonableness of our faith that the Son of Mary is also the Son of God.

If, then, Christ be the Son of God, it follows that all He said must be incontestably true, and that all His commands must be willingly obeyed. To secure the salvation which He has wrought out for us, He imposes the obligation that we should believe all that

He taught and observe all that He commanded (Mark xvi. 16, Matt. xxviii. 20). This involves two things, right faith and right conduct, than which two things nothing could be more important, for upon them depends our eternal salvation. Once we realize this we infer that He could not have made issues of such tremendous import to ourselves depend upon right faith and right conduct unless He had also given to us a means whereby we may know with an infallible certainty what we are to believe and what we are to do. We are not disappointed in this inference, for we find it recorded that He has founded a society to which He promises Divine assistance that it may never lose that precious treasure of heaven-sent knowledge, nor ever err in its interpretation of the teaching He imparted to it.

Which, then, is this society founded by Jesus Christ? Certainly not all the Christian bodies taken collectively, for nothing is more evident than their complete discord as to what Christ really taught. We must search, therefore, amongst them and find out one society which corresponds with the society which He speaks of as His Kingdom and His Church. In fine, there is laid upon us the obligation under most awful responsibility of searching for and entering into the True Church of Jesus Christ.

I will, therefore, endeavour as briefly and plainly as possible to point out certain indications whereby we may know which of all the Christian denominations is the Church founded by the Saviour of mankind. In so doing I shall appeal to no authority except the words of our Lord Himself and of His duly accredited spokesmen, the Apostles.

(A) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be a proselytizing Church.*

Matt. xxiv. 14: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony

to all nations." Mark xvi. 15-16: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." Luke x. 16: "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."

There is a strong tendency nowadays to deprecate anything like proselytizing, not only amongst the Christian bodies themselves, but even as regards Christianity in relation to other religions. Very many people are disposed to say, let us live and let live. One hears it spoken of as matter for commendation that such and such a Christian body is non-proselytizing. This may suit the fashion of the modern mind very well. If, however, we consult such texts as those just quoted, one thing is quite certain, namely, that a form of Christianity which is non-proselytizing is not the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

(B) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be intolerant.*

Matt. x. 14-15: "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words . . . going forth out of that house or city shake off the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgement, than for that city."

Matt. xviii. 17-18: "And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican. Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven."

Gal. i. 8-9: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we said before, so now I say again: if anyone preach to

you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema."

Titus iii. 10-11: "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, avoid: knowing that he that is such an one, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned by his own judgement."

2 Peter ii. 1: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there shall be among you lying teachers, who shall bring in sects of perdition, and deny the Lord who bought them; bringing upon themselves swift destruction."

2 John 10: "If any man come to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house, nor say to him, God speed you."

Ap. ii. 6: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaites, which I also hate."

In speaking here of intolerance, it must be understood that I mean spiritual intolerance; I am not in any way referring to the use of physical force for the propagation or maintenance of religion. We are beings compounded of soul and body, consequently there is in us a rather natural tendency to translate intellectual antagonisms to the physical plane, just as we see that political opponents will sometimes go from words to blows. As regards religion, it is certainly quite contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the spirit of His religion to propagate Christianity by force. How far it may be lawful as an act of self-protection in order to maintain true religion once firmly planted in a nation by the use of the secular arm is a very difficult question to settle. It is very often thrown in the teeth of Catholics that in times past their Church endeavoured to crush out nascent heresies by coercive measures. But it is notorious that those Christian bodies the members of which are most ready to upbraid the Catholic Church on this head, themselves achieved ascendancy by an unsparing use of the sword, the gibbet, and the rack. Every Christian body in its

day of power has to a greater or less degree used force to maintain its position, but we have only got to look at the history of our country to be aware that some forms of Christianity not only maintained themselves when once established by a resort to coercive measures, but actually ascended to power by methods of propaganda which savour rather of Mahomet than of Christ.

But to speak of spiritual intolerance, it is evident that this is a necessary feature of the true Church of Jesus Christ. He said that His word should not pass away (Matt. xxiv. 35); it is a revelation from God, and by consequence cannot tolerate any contradiction. The society to which He committed its conservation must be jealous of it as it must be jealous of God's honour. We must look, then, for a Church which claims that she is the sole depository of revealed truth, the only way of salvation; which will not associate in worship with any other religious body; which holds itself exclusive and aloof; which endeavours as far as possible to withdraw its members from association with persons belonging to other sects and religions; which deprecates mixed marriages; which forbids the perusal of tainted literature; in a word, we must look for a Church which is rigidly intolerant. A Christianity which is undenominational, a Church which is comprehensive, cannot possibly be the Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ.

(C) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be hated.*

Matt. x. 25: "If they have called the goodman of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household."

Matt. xxiv. 9: "You shall be hated by all nations for my name's sake."

John xvii. 14: "I have given them Thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world; as I also am not of the world."

2 Tim. iii. 12: "And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

2 Pet. ii. 2: "And many shall follow their riotousnesses, through whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."

We must look for a Church which is hated and persecuted, not only by the irreligious world, but which all other Christian bodies conspire to decry; a Church which the nations endeavour to drive out from their midst; which is held up to obloquy as the very acme of clericalism, obscurantism, and soul-slavery; which is set down as the foe of civilization; a clog on the wheels of human progress; a kingdom within a kingdom; an enemy to the state; the oppressor of freedom; a blot upon the fair creation. Such as this must be represented the True Church of the persecuted Jesus Christ.

*(D) The True Church of Jesus Christ must claim to be infallible.*

Matt. xvi. 18: "And I say to thee: that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

John xiv. 16: "And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever. The spirit of truth."

John xviii. 37: "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth."

I Tim. iii. 15: "The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

I Tim. iv. 1: "Now the Spirit manifestly saith that in the last times some shall depart from the faith."

Putting these tests together, we gather that Christ came to impart revealed truth to men, that He committed the faith He had taught to the Church

established by Him, to it He promised the ever-abiding presence of the Spirit of Truth, and though the gates of Hell shall war upon the Church and some shall fall from the faith, yet the Church shall not be overcome but will preserve inviolate the precious treasure to the end of time. Many other texts which will suggest themselves to the mind of the reader might have been added to strengthen the argument, but these are sufficient to prove that the Church is an infallible custodian of the faith. Indeed, as I have already indicated, it must be so, for the faith is a revelation of God to men through Christ; He offers it to the world by the mouth of His Church, saying accept it if you would be saved, reject it and you will be damned. Such an utterance would be impossible unless the Church were an infallible exponent of His teaching. It follows that a Christian body that does not lay claim to infallibility cannot possibly be the True Church of Jesus Christ.

(E) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be One.*

John x. 16: "And other sheep I have that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

John xi. 51-52: "He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation. And not only for the nation, but, to gather together in one the children of God, that were dispersed."

John xvii. 20-22: "And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one. . . . And the glory which Thou hast given to Me, I have given to them; that they may be one."

1 Cor. xii. 13: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body."

Eph. iv. 5: "One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism."

It is evident that our Lord founded one fold into



which all men of good will should eventually be gathered. Indeed it seems scarcely necessary to point out that the Church must be one, for since she is commissioned to teach truth with a consistent voice, and truth is by its nature one while error is manifold, it follows that there can be only one True Church of Jesus Christ. Any theory, therefore, which divides the Church into several Christian bodies teaching discordant doctrines, manifestly gives the lie to our Lord's express promises, and outrages the very dictates of reason.

(F) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be the Church of all places.*

Matt. xxviii. 19: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations."

Col. iii. 11: "Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bound nor free. But Christ is all, and in all."

The Church may be crushed out of one place by persecution, she may not yet have succeeded in extending her sway over another place. But she must be Catholic in aspiration and endeavour, proselytizing, militant, indomitable, aggressive. Any body of Christians, therefore, that was founded as a national or local institution, which the world at large does not recognise as Catholic, cannot be the True Church founded by Jesus Christ.

(G) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be the Church of all times.*

Matt. xxviii. 20: "Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."

Mark xiii. 31: "My word shall not pass away."

Eph. iii. 21: "To Him be glory in the Church, and in Jesus Christ unto all generations, world without end, Amen."

1 Peter i. 24-25: "For all flesh is as grass; and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass is withered, and the flower thereof is fallen away. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel hath been preached to you."

2 John ii.: "The truth which dwelleth in us and shall be with us for ever."

Ap. xiv. 6: "The eternal Gospel."

Ap. xiv. 12: "Here is the patience of the Saints, who keep the Commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

See also our Lord's promise to St. Peter and the different parables wherein He represents Himself as one going into a far country and returning after many days to see how His servants have fulfilled **their charge**.

The True Church of Jesus Christ is therefore that Church which has been from the beginning of its foundation on the Day of Pentecost, has endured through every age since up to the present, and will continue till the end of time. It follows that every body of Christians which has come into being as a distinct and organized entity subsequent to the Day of Pentecost cannot be the one founded by our Lord. We must look for a Church which can trace her origin without a break back to the Day of Pentecost if we would find the True Church of Jesus Christ.

(H) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be a Visible Church.*

Matt. v. 14-15: "You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house."

John xvii. 21: "That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me."

We have seen that the mission of Christ's Church upon earth is to offer to men the truth revealed by Him: the rejection of which is a disobedience to God so serious as to be punished by eternal damnation. Obviously she could not fulfil this mission if she were not visible. As such our Lord presents her to us, "a city seated on a mountain." He even makes the standing marvel of her visible oneness a proof to the world of His own Divinity. And surely as we look at the unity of the only world-wide Church to-day, we are constrained to confess that none but God could have cemented in oneness of faith men of all nations and tongues. The "obedience to the faith, in all nations" (Rom. i. 5), as we witness it at the present day, after nearly two thousand years since it was first preached, ought to be enough to convince the veriest sceptic of the Divinity of Jesus Christ who has wrought so great a wonder. Isaias the prophet, speaking of the Church, likens her to "a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein" (xxxv. 8). She must, then, be plainly visible, easy to find by those who will look. Consequently any theory of an invisible Church composed of all good men of every denomination of Christians whose hearts are patent to none but God, does not agree with the Church represented to us in the language of our Lord, nor could such a Church by any means fulfil the mission which was committed by Him to His own True Church.

(I) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be a Kingdom.*

Matt. xiii. 41: "The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity."

Matt. xvi. 19: "And I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Matt. xix. 23: "Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

John iii. 5: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

See also the numerous other passages which speak of the Kingdom of God with evident reference to the Church militant, and consult the many prophecies of the Old Testament which predict the founding by God upon earth of a Kingdom greater and more lasting than all the mighty empires that ever have been or shall be.

Since, then, the Church of Jesus Christ is, as we have seen, one visible Kingdom, and since the Supreme Ruler is no longer visibly with us, it behoves us to look for a society monarchical in constitution, having a vicegerent duly appointed by Him. A Christian society, therefore, the constitution whereof is democratic, stands self-condemned, it is not the True Church of Jesus Christ. There are, however, many Christian bodies with at least, to outward seeming, a monarchical form of government: in their cases we must inquire into how the ruler holds his title. There are some churches which own the temporal sovereign of the realm for their head; he then must show that he has received his title and authority from our Lord. This will be a difficult matter, since in all Christendom there is no dynasty, no throne coeval with Christianity. We must exclude, therefore, the Erastian churches, which, like the Jews of old, have chosen Cæsar instead of Christ. The same with the churches that own a spiritual head; on them also it is incumbent that they should prove that their title has come down to them by legitimate succession: the mandate of their authority having been given to the first of their line by our Lord Himself. Applying this test, we perceive that it can only reside in some episcopal see founded by one of the Apostles; any see which came into existence after the life-time of the Apostles is *ipso facto* excluded from competing. Which of the Apostles

received any such mandate of authority from our Lord? There is only one.

(K) *The True Church of Jesus Christ must be founded on Peter.*

Matt. xvi. 18-19: "And I say to thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven."

Luke xxii. 31-32: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren."

John xxi. 15-17: "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep."

These three principal Petrine texts are so well known as to need no comment. They are so clear that the marvel is that any comment should be necessary. The first implies Papal infallibility, showing that the Church derives her own infallibility from the rock of Peter upon which our Lord founded her. The second shows to what questions Papal infallibility extends, namely the whole of our Lord's teaching as to right belief and right conduct, which is the subject matter of Christian faith. The third shows that the personal backsliding of Peter or any of his successors does not deprive them of their official prerogative. Any Christian body, therefore, which does not claim, or fails to establish its claim, to be in some way founded by our Lord upon the rock of Peter, cannot be the True Church of Jesus Christ. We know of only one that even makes such a claim: the Church whose centre is at Rome, the ancient bishopric of

St. Peter. Other sees have at times risen up against the authority of Peter's see, but the touch-stone of time has always justified our Lord's prophetic words. Take the example of the most illustrious rebel, the Patriarch of Constantinople: compare his past power with his present impotence. Already nation after nation has thrown off his usurped sway. What is likely to happen now that the last traces of the Moslem power, which for its own ends has upheld him, is being swept away? Let me quote the words of a really first-rate authority on Eastern ecclesiastical questions (A. F., *The Tablet*, Nov. 16th 1912.) "Only the Œcumenical Patriarch will suffer badly. He will have no Patriarchate in Europe left. He will keep Asia Minor and his honorary precedence. But for centuries it has been coming to that. He got his high place solely by the grace of the old Emperors: he has always stood solely by the power of his temporal sovereign at Constantinople. As the Turks conquered new territory he quashed the churches of Achrida and Ipek and joined them to his own Patriarchate. So it is but just that, as the Turk retires, the power of the Patriarch should retire too. Long enough has this upstart Patriarch lorded it over his more venerable brothers at Alexandria and Antioch." Compare this with the world-wide sway of the Sovereign Pontiff, a ruler who is not a figure-head: we perceive resident in him the royalty of Jesus Christ. Is the unparalleled power of the Papacy founded on an illusion? Is it the most gigantic fraud the world has ever witnessed? Or is it the throne of Christ's monarchy? One of these three things it must be. I think the conscientious inquirer, who really sets his mind to the question, cannot remain long in doubt as to his answer.

I might, dear reader, have extended yet further our consideration of the characteristics which designate the True Church of Jesus Christ: on those points which I have chosen I might have multiplied

the texts and illustrations. But the space of a short pamphlet would not permit this. I will ask you, however, to consider these characteristics as I have presented them to you, not taking them only one by one, but also collectively, and you will perceive that they are all interrelated and focussed to a single point, which indicates most clearly that the One True Church of Jesus Christ is that world-wide Church which acknowledges the authority of the successor of St. Peter, Pope of Rome. Into this, the fold of Christ, you are under strictest obligation to enter, and the penalty of your refusal is eternal damnation. Only one excuse will avail you at the day of your judgement, namely that you did not know; nor will this always avail, for if it is found that your ignorance is the result of reluctance to inquire or sheer carelessness amounting to great fault, your excuse will not be admitted, you will be irrevocably damned. Whosoever can contemplate the prospect of eternal damnation unmoved must surely be wanting in imagination and intelligence. Hasten, therefore, and let nothing deter you, neither fear of ridicule, nor estrangement of friends, nor loss of fortune, nor that which is hardest of all, your own innate repugnance to bow the neck. Serve we must; it is the necessary lot of human existence, be the man Pope, or Emperor, or simple husbandman. Do not be deceived by those "promising liberty, whereas they themselves are the slaves of corruption" (2 Pet. ii. 19): service is essential to man, and we must choose between Christ and Satan. The evidence is clear which constrains you to acknowledge the truth of Christ's Church: so clear that were it applied to any other matter, no one would doubt for a moment. But this is a question where human reason is insufficient unaided by the light of faith. Nor will that light break in upon a soul which wilfully excludes it: our Lord has told us so—"if thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome.

But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome" (Matt. vi. 22-23). This divine utterance has been pushed almost to the point of exaggeration by such deep thinkers as Pascal and Newman: it is not want of evidence which makes it difficult for us to perceive revealed truth, it is because the right dispositions of soul are lacking. Pride, prejudice, self-interest, the glamour of passion, spiritual sloth—these, and suchlike things, are they that impede the divine light from entering. Sweep them away, then, if you would save your soul. But there is a motive which urges you higher even and more noble than the quest of your soul's salvation. It is a spirit of loving loyalty to the God who "was seen upon earth and conversed with men" (Bar. iii. 38). Surely it is a joy and an honour to fight under the banner of Jesus Christ the Incarnate Creator. Dire, in truth, is the conflict, but short; unending is the reward, bright the everlasting crown. Enter, therefore, the True Church of Jesus Christ, for He has shown to us no other vestibule on earth of the heavenly city to which we aspire "having the glory of God, and the light thereof was like to a precious stone, as to a jasper stone, even as crystal. . . . And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. And the nations shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. There shall not enter into it any thing defiled, or that worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they that are written in the book of life of the Lamb" (Ap. xxi.).