

# **The Catholic Church - Its Origen, Nature And Credentials**

## **The Glories of the Catholic Church.**

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Let us group everything round three big facts. The first is GOD, the second is Jesus CHRIST, and the third is the CHURCH.

### **SUMMARY.**

#### **GOD.**

1. GOD EXISTS.
2. WE MUST WORSHIP GOD.
3. IN THE WAY HE TEACHES US.

#### **CHRIST.**

1. CHRIST IS GOD.

Proved from:

- (a) The Gospels,
- (b) His Miracles,
- (c) Prophecy,
- (d) His Character,
- (e) His Claims,
- (f) The Resurrection.

2. CHRIST'S WAY IS GOD'S WAY.
3. WE MUST ACCEPT ALL CHRIST'S TEACHING.

#### **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.**

1. CHRIST ORGANISED A CHURCH.
2. ONLY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS CHRIST'S CHURCH.

- (a) It is the Scriptural Church.
- (b) It is Apostolic, One, Universal, Holy.
- (c) Its Head is the Successor of the Head Christ Appointed.

3. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH MUST BE ACCEPTED.

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: ITS ORIGIN, NATURE AND CREDENTIALS.**

Every Christian denomination that recites the Apostles' Creed, repeats the words: "I believe in... the Holy Catholic Church." The Holy Catholic Church is the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Christ founded one Church only, with definite doctrine and with a supreme visible head.

For many centuries after the time of Christ, the Catholic Church, with the Pope as its visible Head, was the acknowledged Church of Christ throughout Christendom and was the only Church claiming to be Christ's own Church.

In the eleventh century, the Greeks separated from the Church established by Christ. Their contention was that there was no supreme visible head of the Catholic Church. In the sixteenth century, the Reformers, so-called, separated from the Church established by Christ. Their contention was that the Church founded by Christ had fallen into error. Since the sixteenth century the declinations which sprang from the Reformation have become so numerous that they are counted by hundreds, and have so modified their doctrine, that if the original reformers returned to earth they would not recognise the Churches they founded.

Christendom now presents three distinct religions or Churches:

- (1) the original Catholic Church;
- (2) the later Greek Church;
- and, (3) the modern Protestant Church.

As both the Greek Church and the Protestant Church separated from the original Catholic Church because they maintain that the original Church of Christ had fallen into error, the error so essential as to justify separation it follows that both the Greek Church and the Protestant Church hold different doctrine, from the Catholic Church. Such different doctrine should be labeled Heresy. If the Catholic Church is right, the Greek and the Protestant Churches are wrong. If the Catholic Church were wrong, the original Church of Christ is wrong, for the Catholic is the only Church, which dates its origin from Christ. If therefore the original Church of Christ be in error, Christ's promise has failed, and He was not what He claimed to be. Christ claimed to be God. But God's word cannot fail, if therefore, the original Church of Christ be in error, her Founder's word was false. He was not God, and Christianity is false. (It should be pointed out that the Greek Church's ONLY significant error is a denial that Christ intended there to be a visible supreme head of the Church on earth, namely the successor of Saint Peter. In everything else the Greek or 'Orthodox' Church holds the same doctrine as the Catholic Church.)

It all comes to this, therefore: Was Christ God and did He establish a Church, which was to last forever, and to teach the truth and only the truth in religious matters?

All Christians believe that Christ is God. They affirm this belief when they recite the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." From Scripture it is also certain that Christ established a Church, which was to last forever and to teach His revealed truth always. They who deny that Christ is God are consistent in rejecting the Catholic Church. But, those who believe that Christ is God are inconsistent and illogical in rejecting the Catholic Church. Let me make this plain. If Christ be not God he was a fool or a fraud, and Christianity as a religion is false. But, if Christ is God, His word cannot fail. He gave His word that His Church should never falsify His doctrine. Hence, those who believe that Christ is God, must also believe that the Church He founded can never falsify His teaching.

Consistency demands that we accept the Catholic Church as the living teacher of God's truth, or we reject both her Founder and His religion; there is no midway. If Christ is God, His word is guarantee

of truth, and His word has been given to the Catholic Church — the only one that goes back to Him as Founder. If Christ, however, be not God, then away with Christian belief altogether; for the basis of Christianity is the divinity of Christ, and if the basis be not sound the whole edifice is unsound.

It may be asked: If the case is as stated, how is it that any one can fail to see the logic of it? It is because either environment or education has been such as to put some people into a state of mind by which they are not open to conviction in the matter. The preaching and miracles of our divine Lord were the same for all the people who heard and saw Him, but all did not become His followers. The teaching and miracles which converted those who were open to conviction failed to convert those who were not open to conviction.

There must be the disposition to believe the truth: and the effort to learn the truth; and the determination to pay the price for the truth: if one is to know and to embrace the truth. Christ said: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The Jewish leaders wanted a messiah whose kingdom was of this world, so they blinded themselves to the evidence which Christ presented. But the great body of the people accepted the evidence, and acclaimed Christ as the Messiah as we see from the Bible:

"Many therefore of the Jews, who... had seen the things that Jesus did, believed in Him... The chief priests therefore, and the Pharisees, gathered a council, and said: What do we, for this man does many miracles? If we let Him alone, all will believe in Him... From that day therefore they devised to put Jesus to death"

It is clearly evident, therefore, that the same deeds which converted those open to conviction, only hardened and perverted those who were not open to conviction. These, latter were not looking for the truth, but for what they wanted; they did not have the disposition to believe; but rather the will to have their own way. This we see from the fact that the Jewish leaders plotted murder in order to destroy the evidence, which they did not want to accept.

Hear what the Gospel says in the matter: "A great multitude of the Jews came... that they might see Lazarus, whom Christ had raised from the dead. But the chief priests thought to kill Lazarus also; because many of the Jews, by reason of him, went away and believed in Jesus. And on the next day, a great multitude that was come to the festival day, when they had heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried: Hosanna, blessed is He, that, comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel"

Why were the Jewish leaders not open to conviction, as were the people? Because the ruling element had made up their minds. They wanted a messiah who would confirm them in their worldly ambitions but Christ proclaimed, 'that His Kingdom was not of this world'. So they rejected Him, they not only rejected Him, but, by the vilest propaganda and threats ever employed among mankind, force those who acclaimed Christ as the Messiah on Palm Sunday, to clamour for His death on Good Friday; they who shouted "Hosanna" on Sunday, cried out "Crucify Him, crucify Him." on the following Friday.

Various things can put people into a state of mind in which, like the Scribes and Pharisees, they are not open to conviction. National or racial prejudice will cause people of one race or nation not to be open to conviction with regard, to what concerns the claims of the other race or nation. The World War (1914-1918) affords proof of this. Again, if one's welfare or interests be at stake one will frequently not be open to conviction in the case in question. Lawsuits are proof of this. Neither

party to a lawsuit is ordinarily open to conviction regarding the point at issue. That is why recourse is had to litigation.

And so with regard to religion — circumstances of one kind or another may prevent people from seeing or adopting the truth. Sometimes this state of mind is culpable, sometimes it is not. God is the sole Judge. We know how people act in ordinary matters. If for instance, a person claimed to have the sole title to a piece of property to which another thought he had a claim, the other would undoubtedly look into the legality of the sole claim.

The Catholic Church claims to be the sole institution founded by Jesus and guaranteed by Him to preach His truths to the end of time. That claim is serious and well worth the while to be examined and investigated. Very many of the most intellectual and upright persons of other creeds have examined into these claims of the Catholic Church and have been convinced that her claims are true and been in consequence joined to her communion. This they have done, ordinarily, at the cost of great sacrifice — socially, financially and prospectively. They have found, on investigation, that their previous notion of the Catholic Church was only a caricature of her. They found that their false idea of the Catholic Church was due to the fact that those who separated from her considered it necessary to misrepresent her in order to try to justify their stand. In this way, the information they had of her was poisoned at its source.

It has been said that much of history since the Reformation has been a conspiracy against the Catholic Church. Some people, accordingly, may not be culpable for their hostile attitude towards Christ's own Church. However — when they see the disruption of Protestant belief, and its contradictory ritual and practice, and its drift towards unbelief or paganism; and, on the other hand the definite Creed and rituals of the Catholic Church — they certainly should make inquiries into the credentials of the only Church whose Creed has not changed since it was given to her by her divine Founder, and which claims, and has claimed from the beginning, to be the sole Church of Christ.

Christ is both divine and human. He is God from all eternity, and man from the Incarnation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... all things were made by Him... and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:1-14).

As Christ, the Founder of the Catholic Church, is both divine and human — so also is the Church which He founded. The Catholic Church is divine in that her Founder is divine, and that she has His divine guarantee, and assistance to transmit to the end of time, without error the doctrine He imparted to her. She is human in that men, not angels, are her ministers and lay members. The doctrine of Catholic Church is divinely true; the preachers of her doctrine and the ministers of her sacraments and her members are all human with the weaknesses and passions of fallen human nature.

Christ guaranteed His Church against error — He did not guarantee her members against sin. While promising that He would abide forever with His Church, He also stated that sin would stain her fair name, but He fulminated dreadful threats against those who would be the cause of scandal. The Catholic Church, therefore, although the depository of Christ's truth, and its guardian and infallible teacher to the end of time, is, nevertheless, composed of members — clergy as well as laymen — who are weak human beings as is the rest of mankind.

God, Who permits sin, threatens the sinner with dire chastisement. He permits sin because He endowed man with free will. If man did not have the choice of good and evil, he would not be free, but bound to a certain course of conduct. God so respects man's free will that He allowed one of the twelve Apostles to use it to betray the Divine Master. But although God allowed Judas to use his free will against its Giver, Christ said of the traitor: "It were better for that man, if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24). And so in His Church, although He gives the grace and incentives for holiness of life, He allows man to use the liberty He has given him, either to observe the law or to violate it.

If one of the Twelve, under the very eyes and example of the Master, fell into grievous sin, we should not be surprised that in the course of the ages some of the ministers of His Church should prove false to their holy charge. The clergy have the weaknesses and passions of human nature just as much as laymen have. True, their lofty vocation with its accompanying graces demands higher sanctity of them, but, notwithstanding, they sometimes forget their obligations just as laymen sometimes forget theirs. Sin is greater in the clergy because of their higher ideals, and more abundant means of grace. But human nature is human nature, whether in clergy or laymen. Sometimes those who most severely criticise the clergy are themselves the worst offenders of God's law. However, that does not affect the matter in hand, which is that men — not angels — are the Ministers of God's word, and that, consequently they are not immune from the sins of mankind.

Saint Paul declared that while preaching to others, he feared lest he himself might become a transgressor — "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). If the great Apostle, who saw Christ face to face, did not consider himself to be outside the range of sin, we should not be amazed that in the world-wide Catholic Church there have been, and are those who are unworthy of their sacred calling.

All this has been said in order to make it clear that Christ, Who guaranteed His Church against false doctrine, did not, guarantee her members — neither cleric nor lay — against evil conduct. A judge of the Supreme Court may be a most excellent interpreter and expounder of the Constitution, even though his moral conduct be not in keeping with his judicial status. The Church of Christ although composed of sinful men, is nevertheless, because of the divine guarantee of her Founder, safeguarded against error in proclaiming to the world the truths of Revelation.

Even if Scripture did not explicitly state that the Church of Christ would never err in doctrine, it would nevertheless be evident from the nature of the Church that she should be immune from error in transmitting the doctrine of her Founder. This will be clearly seen if we consider why Christ founded a Church. Christ, as we know, is God.

He became man for two main purposes:

- (1) to atone for sin and,
- (2) to be our Leader and Model.

He atoned for sin once for all on Calvary.

But by His life and teaching, He became the Leader and Model not only for those of His own generation, but for all mankind to the end of time.

But how were His life and teaching to be transmitted down the ages, from generation to generation, until the end of the world?

Christ did not write a book, nor did He leave His message to mankind carved on stone or metal or written across the sky. Yet His deeds and doctrine were not merely for the people of His day. He might have devised any of many ways for the perpetuation of His ministry to mankind. But it is not a question of what He might have done but of what He has done. He established a Church — that is, a corporate body of men, especially formed by Himself — to continue what He had inaugurated. Particularly note that His purpose in establishing His Church was to transmit His heavenly teaching to succeeding ages. His Church was to speak for Him to the generations which were to follow His departure from this world.

Since, therefore, the office of Christ's Church was to represent Him on earth, it is clear that if He wanted future generations to know His doctrine as He delivered it, He must see to it in some way that she truly speaks for Him. Hence Christ declared that by special divine assistance, His Church would be preserved from error in teaching mankind the truths He had revealed to her. Far from being surprised at this, we should rather be surprised if Christ had not done it. If He thought enough of His doctrine to reveal it, He certainly thought enough of it to preserve it intact for those for whom it was intended. If His truths were so necessary to mankind that He declared that on them depended man's eternal welfare, it certainly behooved Him to see to it that these truths reached mankind to the end of the World, exactly as He had revealed them. The means Christ chose for this was the institution of His Church, as we see from the plain language of Scripture. After Peter had solemnly affirmed his faith in Christ as the Son of the living God, Jesus said to him: "You are Peter (a rock); and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This was the promise Christ proclaimed that He was to found a Church and that the gates of Hell — that is, Satan or error — should never have place in it.

Christ also stated how the Church was to be safeguarded against error: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of Truth" (John 14:16). It was humanly impossible for a teaching body not to err. Hence Christ proclaimed that the Spirit of Truth — the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost — should abide in His Church, and preserve His truth intact. Having assured His Apostles of divine assistance in their ministry of proclaiming His doctrine, Christ solemnly commissioned them to go forth as His representatives:

"All Power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, all of you, teach all nations; baptising 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 day, even to the consummation of the world" (Matthew 26:18-20).

Christ made the Apostles His ambassadors, endowing them with power from on high with regard to their office of preserving and teaching the Faith. "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed on them; and He said to them: Receive, all of you, the Holy Ghost" (John 20:21-22). Christ thus conferred on His Apostles the Holy Spirit of Truth Whom He had previously promised them. Thus fortified by divine assistance He made them His ambassadors. This He had particularly emphasised when He said: "Go: I send you... He that hears you, hears Me" (Luke 10:3-16). It was in view of the fact that God made His Church His representative on earth that Saint Paul spoke of her as "The House of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). It was because the Church was the pillar and ground of the truth that, Saint Paul said: "Though an angel from heaven preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema," (Galatians 1:8). Strong words these from the great Apostle. But he states why he is so positive: "The gospel preached by me is not according to

man, for neither did I receive it of man, nor did I learn it; but by the revelation of God." (Galatians 1:11-22). It is because Saint Paul speaks in the name of God and with God's assurance of the Spirit of Truth abiding in him that he declared that the ministers of the Church are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

It is certain that Christ will not permit His ambassadors to falsify Him nor His doctrine. For this reason, Catholics regard the Church as they do Christ Himself. And they do so on His word: "He that hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). This being so, the attitude of Catholics to the Church is that of Saint Paul to Christ as Paul expressed it when he said: "Lord, what will You have me do?" (Acts 9:6.) We have God's authority for hearing the Church as His voice. This is why those of Christ's own Church, have that certainty of belief and that joyousness in worship and that firmness in times of trial which evoke the admiration of the world.

When one says: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" two things are included in this act of faith, (1) belief; and, (2) the Holy Catholic Church.

We must state what is meant by belief, and what is meant by the Holy Catholic Church.

By belief is not meant opinion, nor conjecture, nor view, nor strong persuasion, but absolute conviction. This belief is of such a nature that it admits of no doubt whatsoever, It is as firm as mathematical certainty, and is based on the veracity of God Who has revealed the doctrine of the Catholic Church. This firm conviction does not imply that what is believed is comprehended any more than the physicist comprehends what the force of gravity is. This belief is so firm, that, if need be, believers will die for their conviction. Ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt. Belief is consistent with a million difficulties but not with a single doubt. The astronomer has countless difficulties regarding the firmament — but not a doubt about it as being in motion. Scientists have innumerable difficulties with regard to the nature of electricity — but not a doubt about its reality. Faith may present innumerable difficulties — but it does not admit of a single doubt. He who doubts in matters of Faith has never had real Faith or else has lost it. Faith and doubt are incompatible — just as incompatible as God and error, or, as light and darkness. Catholic belief is based on the veracity of God Himself. That is why it never wavers.

If belief presented no difficulties, there would be little merit in Faith. There is little or no credit in believing what is evident. Faith is a virtue. Virtue which is not tested in some way can hardly be termed virtue. The virtue of courage is tested by danger; honesty, by temptation to steal; truthfulness, by the inducement to lie; and so on. Many people appear to be virtuous until some occasion reveals their real character. Temptation does not make the thief but reveals him. Danger does not make the coward but declares him. And so of every virtue — the proof of it is in its capacity to stand the test. Truth, chastity, justice, and every virtue must rise to the occasion, and be superior to temptation. That is why virtue is so highly esteemed. It is proof that it has stood the test.

Faith also has its test. God reveals what is above our comprehension. He wants us to believe on His word. Belief often implies the acceptance of what, is beyond our understanding. But, nevertheless, we bow down our judgment, sacrificing it on the altar of God's veracity, and thus paying Him the tribute of intellectual submission. That is what makes Faith valuable in God's sight. It is sacrifice of our noblest faculty — our judgment.

The tendency to self-opinion is proverbial. Ordinarily, the last thing a man will renounce is his own opinion. Some persons hold to their own judgment in spite of every valid argument to the contrary.

Now to relinquish one's own judgment on the sole word of another is a great compliment to the character of that other. That is what makes Faith so meritorious. It is the relinquishing of what is dearest to man. This does not mean that Faith is blind or unreasonable. Without understanding his diagnosis, we submit to the judgment of a physician whom we trust. Without understanding how he performs the operation, we place our lives in the hands of a surgeon in whom we have confidence. We entrust our safety to the engineer of the train which we board, not because we understand engineering, but because we have faith in the engineer. And so we submit our judgment to the word of God because we know He can neither deceive nor be deceived. That is good logic. That is no surrender of reason, but a right use of it. Of course, the whole matter reduces itself to this: Has God spoken? Christ is God. Christ has spoken. Therefore, our belief in His preaching is rational and absolutely firm. Hence, Catholic belief is fixed because truth is fixed. Catholics do not have to worry about doctrine. Everything essential has been settled once for all by Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Light of the world. So much for belief.

Let us now consider the Church. When it is said that, we believe in the Holy Catholic Church, we mean by the Church that organisation instituted by Christ for continuing and extending the work which He began. Christ did not write a book, nor did He carve his teaching on stone. Neither did He leave it to chance to reach future generations. He established a society called the Holy Catholic Church, and left with this society not only His teaching, but also His guarantee that His teaching would be divinely safeguarded from error. Unless Christ's own Church had divine guidance and support, it had perished before it had fairly begun. Tradition states that Saint Peter, on his way to preach the religion of Christ to the citizens of Rome, was met by a pagan philosopher. The following dialogue ensued:

"Whither are you bound, Galilean?"

"To Rome."

"What would you in Rome?"

"To teach Christ crucified"

"His doctrine is?"

"That the soul is of more value than the whole world."

"But the Romans love wealth. What else?"

"Self-denial and humility."

"The Romans are proud and honour pride. What else?"

"Renunciation of Worldly Pleasure."

"Go back; you have come to the wrong people: for the Romans are addicted to wealth, and pleasure and enjoyment."

What chance had the Church of Christ against such odds unless God was with her? But because God was with her, she triumphed over every obstacle, making pagan Rome the heart of Christendom, and supplanting the Roman Eagles by the Cross.

The Church is not something in the air — something intangible; but a real organisation of Christ's own founding. Christ established His Church to preach His doctrine and to administer His

sacraments. Such a mission requires human beings and material means. The Church is spiritual in the sense that she employs spiritual motives, and gives spiritual aids, and aims at spiritual welfare. But she is visible and material, also, inasmuch as she is composed of human ministers and employs material agencies. A Church that preaches and administers sacraments must have men to preach and to administer the sacred rites. The doctrine of Christ, and the mode of administering His sacraments were left, not in a book, but with a living organisation. It was this organisation — which Christ called His Church — that He sent forth into the world to preach His religion and to give His sacramental help for its practice. If Christ's teaching was to be kept intact, somebody had to keep it; somebody had to pass it on unerringly by word or writing.

Those, therefore, who say that Christ established a religion but not a visible Church, are like unto those who would affirm that an eloquent discourse was delivered without a speaker. The invisible Church idea was invented in an effort to save Protestantism; for it was clear that no visible Church of Christ would be so contradictory in doctrine and practice as were the various Evangelical denominations. So they devised the theory that the religion of Christ was the spirit of Christ manifesting itself variously in various denominations.

Saint Paul, however, has said that even if an angel from heaven should preach a different doctrine from what the Church delivered, the angel should not be heard, but should be anathematised. When, therefore, the Apostles' Creed states, "I believe in... the Holy Catholic Church," the meaning is, that we believe in her as if we beheld Christ Himself in person addressing us.

In putting this trust in the Church, we are simply doing what Christ has enjoined upon us. He said of His representatives: "He that hears you, hears Me" (Luke 10:16). The resurrected Christ, in speaking to his Church as his representative, said: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). If He Who said these words were not God, then there is no divine Church at all, and there is no use belonging to any Church. But Christ is God; He established a Church; that Church is the Holy Catholic Church — Christ's own Church; and we believe in her as we do in God Himself.

Some denominations recite the Apostle's Creed regularly at their services. They repeat Sunday after Sunday — "I believe in... the Holy Catholic Church." Nevertheless, they do not believe in the Holy Catholic Church.

Catholic is from the Greek word meaning universal. It was applied to the Church of Christ because this Church was not confined to any part of the world, nor to any race or nation, nor identified with any government or class of people, but, existed in every part of the world, and embraced every race and nation, and functioned under every form of government. Yet, although this Church has always been universal, it forms one corporate body, as closely united as if it existed in one place only, notwithstanding the fact that it exists everywhere. The Catholic Church is the only corporate religious body in the world which is not national, racial nor local. By corporate body is meant a society whose members are united in one organisation, just as the members of the human body are, united to form one person.

The Catholic Church is not only universal in the sense that she exists in every part of the world, as one body under one administrative head, but also in the sense, that her teaching is everywhere and always the same. We know how difficult, or rather impossible it is for a local society of any kind to hold together for a long period, and to preserve unity among its members. It is much more difficult for a state or national government to preserve, for long, unity of belief and government.

Christ said of His Church: "I am with you all days" (Matthew 28:20). This explains the universal and perpetual existence of the Catholic Church; and also accounts for the fact that her teaching has always been the truth of God, and therefore always the same, since truth never changes.

The Catholic Church is the only corporate religious society which goes back to Jesus Christ, the Founder of Christianity. The Church founded by Christ was a corporate society with Peter its first head: "You are Peter [a rock]; and on this rock I will build My Church, and the, gates of hell shall not prevail against it," (Matthew 16:18). It is either the Catholic Church, therefore, or the rejection of Christ and His Church altogether, if one wants to be logical and consistent.

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