

Reasons For Being A Catholic

Will Any Religion Do?

By an English Missionary.

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IF you are going to live here for ever, or if when you die, that is the end and there is no hereafter, then perhaps you can afford to live without a religion. Religion is the guide, which teaches you how to live, and what God requires you to do, in order that you may gain a reward when your life is finished, and escape the punishment you will deserve if you have not lived your life aright. Will any religion do to enable you to save your soul and avoid hell? If a friend promises you a present on condition that you paint a picture for him, it will not matter whether the picture is the portrait of a person or the view of a city. But if your friend makes a condition that you shall not have the present unless you paint the portrait of some individual, it will be useless to ask him for the reward if you present him with the picture of a place. Whether any religion will do to obtain the kingdom of heaven will depend on whether God has placed any conditions for giving this reward or not.

Are there any Conditions for being saved?

THAT God has placed certain conditions all are agreed. The Ten Commandments contain some of them, and others are mentioned in Christ's teaching. If we do not fulfil these conditions, can we really expect the reward? Now here arrives our first difficulty. God places certain conditions, which you must fulfil to save your soul, but how are you to know for certain what those conditions are? For different men tell you they lie in different things, some teaching exactly what others deny.

Surely it is rather hard to be told that you will receive a reward provided you take care to fulfil certain conditions, if, when you ask what those conditions are, everyone you speak to tells you something different. Do you think Christ intended this when He founded His religion?

Now the Catholic Church claims to teach you with absolute certainty what the conditions are for gaining the kingdom of heaven; in other words, exactly what the religion is that Christ made when He came to earth. And this is the reason, if you find that claim to be true, why you should be a Catholic.

Who is the Teacher?

IT is assumed that Christians believe that Christ was a Divine Being, that He was truly God, that He took our flesh and nature, and lived for a time on this earth, that He died for the sins of the world on a cross, and that He instructed the disciples He had gathered round Him to go into the whole world and preach the truths that He had taught them. So far, at least, it would seem that all Christians are agreed. The Catholic Faith teaches that this little body of apostles, which Christ chose, and to whom He entrusted the teaching of the religion He founded, was what we call "the Church." This "Church." made by Christ had the following duties and privileges:

(1) It was to be a teacher (Saint Matthew 28:19).

(2) It was to teach all nations (Saint Matthew 28:19).

(3) It was to last until the end of the world (Saint Matthew 28:20).

(4) It was to be kept by the Holy Spirit from teaching error, or decaying (Saint John 14:26, and 16:13).

(5) It was always to be a visible body, and perfectly united in its teaching (Saint John 17:20-21).

If the above statements about the Church as designed by Christ be true, it will follow that it exists today; that it can teach the truths of Christianity with certainty, being guided by the Holy Ghost; that it is teaching all nations; that it is a body that can be seen; and that it is united in its government and religious teaching. Those Christian bodies which do not profess this Catholic Faith say that Christ's promises to the apostles were for their lifetime only, that it was intended they should write the New Testament, and that from it we should learn our religion and what Christ taught; and lastly, that although He intended all Christians to form one united body, this wish is not carried out owing to the wickedness of men. Now put it to your ordinary sense: which of these two plans is the more likely to be true? Remember that Christ was God. As such, He could look into the future, and He could see what men would say about His religion after He had gone back to Heaven. He knew that they could not teach by themselves with certainty, and that as time went on they would be at a loss to know exactly what were the doctrines of the religion which He founded. Also, being God, He had infinite power, and so could design any sort of religion He liked, and could make any kind of safeguards to prevent it from falling into error or decaying.

Christ having infinite knowledge and infinite power, what sort of a religion would you expect Him to found? Is it not more probable that He left "a Church" — that is, a teaching body that cannot teach wrong — to instruct you, than that He left a book out of which you were to help yourself?

Objections to a Divine Teacher.

OUR reason seems to tell us therefore that Christ instituted a "Church" to teach men His religion, and that He made this teacher so that it could not teach anything but what He wished. At this point, the following objection is often made "Christ did not teach anything at all, and therefore there is nothing to believe. He said: 'Believe on the Lord and you shall be saved,' and 'Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'; and this shows that mere believing on Christ is enough to save our souls, and if we succeed in doing that, we don't want anything more." Are you quite sure that we do not want anything else? Christ told His disciples to "go into the whole world," and, "to preach the gospel to every creature; he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be condemned." Here we see that Christ says that besides believing, it is of importance to be baptized, and this proves at once that He taught some doctrine. If you again object that those words do not really mean that men must be baptized in order to be saved, this only proves in another way what is being said about the need of a teaching body to tell us, truly, what Christ intended us to believe and do. For if I allow your objection to the full, namely, that Christ never taught anything at all, still we want someone to teach us that much, and to teach it so that we may be absolutely sure that the statement is true. For supposing we are believing that Christ never taught any particular doctrines, and all the time we are mistaken on this point, what may happen to us? If baptism is of importance, if without it we cannot be saved, what will be our fate when this life is over?

Is not the Bible the Divine Teacher?

ONCE more, you object: "Surely if I stick to the Bible and believe all that it teaches me, I cannot be wrong. It is inspired, it is God's Word; what can you want better than that?" What the Bible says cannot possibly be wrong, because, as you say, it is inspired; but what you and your friends make the Bible say may not be correct. Being a written book, it can be explained in different ways, and you know that persons so explain it that they make it teach opposite doctrines. It cannot therefore be the sure and certain way to know what Christ taught, and what we must believe in order to be saved. Nor is it true that it is only on little and unimportant things that men explain the Bible differently. As an example, take the text on baptism, of which we have been speaking. The Church of England says it means that you cannot be saved unless you are baptized. The Non-conformists teach that it means nothing of the kind, and that men can be saved without baptism. Both cannot be right; and whoever is wrong, is wrong on a matter so grave that it affects eternal salvation. A book, however good, cannot be your sure and certain teacher, because you can interpret what is written by your own ideas. Only a living teacher, with a living voice, that stands in the place of Christ Himself, can speak to you in a way that you cannot misunderstand.

How to find the Divine Teacher.

IF Christ laid down conditions for gaining the kingdom of heaven, and if He wishes everyone to obtain that reward, it will follow, as we have seen, that He must make some sure and certain means, by which we may know what those conditions are.

And not only must He make these certain means for teaching us how to save our souls, but more than that, He must show us how to know these means when we see them. In other words, it will be no use to tell you that a person can direct you with certainty to the house you want to find, unless you are told at the same time how to find or know the person who can give you this direction.

When therefore, Christ made His Church to teach men what to believe and do in order to save their souls, He was bound at the same time to point out this Church by some certain mark, so that all might know where to get this necessary information.

First Mark of the Divine Teacher.

THERE are two signs or marks (among others) set by Christ upon His Church so that all might know her. First, she was to teach all nations: "Teach ye all nations" (Saint Matthew 28:19) was Christ's command to His apostles, or the "Church," as it is called. Now the only religious body in the world that "teaches all nations" is the Catholic Church. It is true that Protestantism, in its different forms, is very widespread, but you will find, with slight exception, that the Established Church and the various Nonconformist sects follow the English race, and, as a rule, are only the religions of those countries belonging to England. These sects are not the religion of all nations, but chiefly of England and its foreign possessions, and of the English people. And they have only been the religion of England for about 380 years (roughly since 1540), for up to that time this country of England was as Catholic as any other, and in full communion with the Roman Church. They are clearly, therefore, not "teaching all nations." (Similarly, we see various forms of Lutheranism and Calvinism and American revivalism and Pentecostalism confining themselves, in general, to German or Swedish or Dutch or French or American 'spheres of influence'.) The Catholic Church exactly fulfils this command of Our Lord: "teach all nations." There is no country in the civilized world where you do not find this Church, and find it claiming to "teach."

Second Mark of the Divine Teacher.

THE second mark by which to know the true religion is unity. After the Last Supper Our Lord prayed for His disciples that they might remain united in one teaching, and He gives as His reason that the world might believe that He was sent by God (Saint John 17:17-21). The whole object then of this mark of unity was to prove to the world the truth of Christ's work.

And it does prove it clearly, for the reason that no one but a Divine Being could make a body of men who should all teach the same thing. "So many men, so many minds," is a common saying, and we all know that "opinions differ." Now Our Lord seems to say: "If I can make a body of men who shall all teach what I have taught them, in exactly the same way, without addition of their own, or changing My words according to their opinions, then, because no human being can do this, I shall be showing the world that I came forth from God".

The Work of a Divine Workman.

REMEMBER that the teaching of the Catholic Church is the same throughout the world. Wherever you may go, you will find each doctrine of the Catholic Faith being taught and believed in exactly the same way. Bishops and priests, no matter what their race or language, can celebrate at the altar of a Catholic church anywhere in the world-and everywhere the laity will find the same holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the same Sacraments. Even with our diversity of rites, such as the Maronite, the Melchite, the Latin, the Ruthenian, the Ukrainian, and so on, you still witness the same unity, the same Sacraments and the same Mass, in different languages. Here then is a perfect unity of faith and unity of organization, so perfect in fact, that the ordinary Protestant refuses to believe that such a unity exists on earth. Surely, the Catholic Church is thus showing the world that she is the handiwork of a Divine Being.

The Work of Human Workmen.

COMPARE this unity of the Catholic Faith with the disunion to be found in the Protestant sects. Each Protestant believes what he likes, and there is no "Church" or teaching authority to say to him, "You are believing what is right," or "You are believing what is wrong." At once, you find that Protestantism is split into sects of all kinds, and these sects again are split up among themselves. Take the Church of England as an example. It is divided into at least two parties, the High and the Low Church. The former teaches among other things, that after the words of consecration in their Communion service, Christ is truly present in the bread and wine. The Low Church section deny this altogether, and say that the bread and wine remain after the consecration as they were before and that no change takes place. You may therefore have a High Church minister giving what he calls the Body of Christ to a Low Church communicant, who receives it saying it is only bread. Or you may have a Low Church minister giving what he declares to be merely bread to a person who receives it as the Body of Christ. As one or other of these statements is false about a most serious matter, surely, if an authority able to teach exists, here is a place where it should make itself heard. But no authority exists among those outside the Catholic Church that ventures to "teach," even in so grave a case as this.

Hence, you can find Protestants of all kinds of religious opinions in this country, some of them holding things to be necessary for salvation which others say are of no consequence. This want of unity of belief among those outside the Catholic Church makes the world ask whether the Founder of Christianity could possibly have been divine if His work could become such a failure; and thus, on account of these divisions, Protestantism cannot possibly be the witness to mankind that Christ was the Son of God.

Can the Divine Teacher Fail?

YOU have but one excuse, if you agree so far, for not being a Catholic. It is this: "Christ," you say, did indeed make His Church as you describe; He told it to teach all nations, He gave it the Holy Spirit to prevent it teaching wrongly, and He gave it the mark of unity that all might easily know it. But although the Church was formed perfectly, in course of time it failed; owing to the wilfulness of men, they split the Church up, and now she exists in pieces only; and being in pieces, she cannot act any longer as the teacher of the world."

This objection is common enough, and it really means that Christ did not make a perfect Church, but that He made it so weak and imperfect that under the first strain it broke up. Do you not think it would have been better if He had never made a teaching Church at all than to have made one such as you describe? What was the use of Christ adding fresh conditions to those already given for obtaining the kingdom of heaven, if a few years after His death there was to be no certainty as to what those conditions were? We were better without such a Church. And can you not see that a guide, to be of any use at all, is most needed in times of difficulty and danger, not in times when things just go smoothly and with ease? If a friend undertook to guide you to a distant place on a dark night, and went on before with a lantern to show you the way, what would you think of him, if, just when the road became dangerous and there was a chance of making a false step, he blew out the light and went back to his house and left you to your fate? Yet this is what those say who admit the Church was to be the guide of men, but state at the same time that when in the past certain difficulties arose, then the Holy Spirit ceased to protect the Church and left her to her fate, and since that time she has not been able to teach the world. A little thought ought to show that this so-called objection is not one at all, and cannot be used as a reason for your staying outside the unity of the Catholic Church.

Suffering and Sacrifice.

AND there is one more matter that requires consideration, if, from what you have read you see that you ought to be a Catholic. It is possible that if you make this great change in your religious belief, you will have to suffer for it. Our Divine Lord has told us plainly what it means if we would "be His disciples." In the early ages of Christianity, the death penalty was the frequent reward of those who became converts, and although today this extreme punishment is not likely to be yours, still you may be made to suffer keenly if you become a Catholic. "A man's enemies shall be those of his own household," said our Blessed Lord, and those words of His are often true now. If you had wished to leave the religious body to which you belong, in order to become a member of some sect probably you would have met with little opposition. Possibly had you wished to be a Jew or even a Mahometan follower of Islam, less objection would be made to your taking such a step as to your becoming a Catholic. Hundreds of converts in this country (and certainly throughout the United Kingdom) have been turned out of their homes, deprived of their livelihood, prevented from inheriting family estates, and otherwise cruelly treated by their relations and friends, for no other crime than that they wished to practise the Catholic religion.

Why is it that this religion is thus singled out and treated so differently from other bodies calling themselves religious?

It is because it claims to be the one true religion; and hence, if this claim be correct, none of the sects have standing room, and they resent it accordingly. Yet is not this treatment exactly what we should expect, if the Catholic Faith is the true religion? Our Blessed Lord said to His disciples:

“They will put you out of the synagogues; yea, the hour comes that whosoever kills you will think that he does a service to God.” He has told us, “Ye shall be hated by all men for My name's sake,” and that as He was persecuted, and as all manner of things were said against Him falsely, so would the world persecute and vilify His followers, for “the servant is not to be above his master.” “If the world hate you, know that it has hated Me before you.” Hence, our Blessed Lord has promised you persecution if you become a member of His Church. But He has promised you a great reward as well: “There is no man who has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake and for the gospel, who shall not receive an hundred times as much now in this time... and in the world to come, life everlasting.” So that if by becoming a Catholic you may be called on to make great sacrifices, you see it is worth it; and to refuse to submit to the teaching Church when your mind and heart are convinced of the truth of her claims is to run a very grave risk, for “what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Conclusion.

LASTLY, you should bear this in mind. Difficulties of all kinds about the Catholic religion will present themselves. “How am I to believe in prayers to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, or in purgatory, or in confession, or a dozen more things?”

This you exclaim. The answer is very simple. Does the Church exist today, which teaches you with perfect truth? If it does, then you have only to believe humbly what that Church teaches, as you would have listened to one of the Twelve Apostles telling you what you had to do in order to save your soul without question and without doubting. Whatever that Church says to you must be true because, as we have seen, Christ planned it for the very purpose of teaching you with absolute certainty what it was needful you should know to gain everlasting life. If this teaching Church does not exist somewhere today, then it does not much matter what you believe. You may make up a religion for yourself, with bits from the Bible, and bits from history, and bits from your own fancy; but, at best, it will be only guess-work, and you cannot say with certainty, “This is necessary for me to use to save my soul.”

And the strongest argument of all that can be put forward for this Divine Teacher, the Catholic Church, is that she, and she alone of all the religions you will meet with in this country, in England, or, indeed, anywhere in the world, claims not only to be the descendant of the apostles, but the divinely-inspired teacher of Christianity to mankind. No other religion dares to make this claim, and she has made it for full nineteen centuries [and now more] and defied contradiction. If, then, you are in earnest to find the true religion which was taught by the Twelve Apostles, you must search in the first place for the Church which to-day claims to teach “all nations.” If you use a religion which is local, which is used by those only who are of your own country and race, you ought to begin to suspect that you have not the religion of “all nations.” And further, if you find you are uncertain what to believe about the greater doctrines of Christianity, and that those who belong to the same religious body as yourself differ widely from you in many things which they hold or deny, then you may feel certain that you are outside that Church whose unity of doctrine was to last till the end of the world. (Moreover, having humbly accepted the truths taught by Christ’s own Church, you will soon find that a little enquiry and research will demonstrate the sanity and reasonableness of hitherto ‘strange doctrines’.)

Finally, you must pray for that great gift, “the obedience of faith,” as Saint Paul calls it, by which we are enabled to submit our proud wills to the sweet and easy teaching of Christ, as made known to us by that Church which He left on earth to show men the way to Heaven with perfect confidence and safety.

A Prayer to ask for the Grace of Divine Faith.

O LORD, who has said “Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven,” make me, I beseech You, as obedient as a little child in submitting my will and understanding to the teaching authority of Your Church, that so I may merit to obtain this kingdom which You have promised.

Amen.
