

I Must Obey The Church

By Rev. Dr. Rumble, M.S.C.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.0667a (1934)

I write in a spirit of reparation and gratitude, At one time I was amongst those who entertained an unreasonable enmity towards the Catholic Church, an enmity which does little real harm to the Church, but which does cloud one's vision of the city set upon the hill of the centuries. My one-time enmity demands reparation. And one who has gladly entered within the city's gates cannot but be filled with a sense of deep gratitude to God. As one who abandoned Anglicanism over twenty years ago, I write chiefly for those who still lack the explicit and the authentic directions given by God to men through the Catholic Church; that Church which alone can tell men the things that are to their peace. Yet descriptions of that wonderful city of God, with which they have long been familiar, can never lose interest even for Catholic hearts, above all when those descriptions come from the lips of those who have known what it is to be without the faith. I cannot, of course, describe the full appeal of Catholicism in so brief a booklet. But I take what is to me the most outstanding characteristic of Catholicism — the sense of law and order which prevails in the Church, and the spirit of obedience to be found amongst Catholics as among the members of no other religion.

I.

WHO FOUNDED THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

I remember having studied Ransome's Short History of England during my schooldays, rather proud of "Bluff Old Hal's bout with the Catholic Church. We were told that the Pope had, until then, been head of the Church in England, and that Henry had won liberty for himself and for his people from Papal domination. To my schoolboy enthusiasm it had seemed a brave thing to have accomplished, and it awakened the loyal strains of "Britons never will be slaves" within my patriotic heart.

The ecclesiastical significance of the step never entered my head. The fact that England had been under obedience to the Pope was quite clear; but it was obvious that it ought never to have been so subject. As for the continuity of the Anglican Church, that theory would have robbed the whole proceeding of its chief glory. The splendid discontinuity was the thing that appealed. Henry VIII had grown tired of slavish subjection to Rome, and had built for his English subjects a new and independent Church, to be the splendid privilege of the British race. It differed from the religions of the benighted foreigners on the Continent, whether Catholic or Protestant; and I could never understand the disloyalty of both Catholics and Protestants in England who refused to accept the Royal Supremacy.

But my chief point here is the fact that historically we were clearly told the names of those who had inaugurated the new religious movements. Henry certainly was the founder of the Church of England; John Knox, in Scotland, countered by organising the Presbyterians; and each new phase of the religious variations could likewise be traced to some given individual. But the Catholic Church seemed to fade out of the picture and lose interest by the mere fact that it was not in contact with

later English history. At most it seemed a lingering influence, to be noted and dismissed with relief with each crushed rebellion or conspiracy; or to be made an occasion of a vague gratitude to God that I was born of Protestant parents, when I read of its wretched subjects in such books as "Westward Ho." Later on, however, the problem of the origin of the Catholic Church presented itself to me in a way which would admit of no shirking. Who was the founder of the Catholic Church? I had never been told. It was in the world, and seemed to have been in the world a mighty long time. But I had just taken this for granted as a fact, and a sad one at that, with a touch of the bogey thrown in. Certainly Christ had nothing to do with it. It was an anti-Christian institution of human, or even of diabolical, origin, and not for the descendants of Old England. But this boyish view could continue to exist only by refusal to think. The view is still met with among certain types of people with whom English sentiment as a form of snobbery has usurped the place of religion, or with those whose religion has been built upon obscure and mystical passages of Scripture wrapped around the Second Coming of Christ. George Tyrrell's mother objected to his becoming a Catholic because he would have to attend the same Church as the cook; whilst a Judge Rutherford, the self-constituted witness of Jehovah, knows that every form of organised Christianity is simply due to the instigation of the devil. In these types an obsession renders any other point of view invisible. What of the man without such an obsession.

Since my ordination as a Priest I have frequently entered into discussion with various Protestant clergymen, met as fellow travellers on trains and boats. In response to my enquiry as to their views concerning the origin of the Catholic Church, I have met with surprising replies. Not one, of course, would admit that Christ personally established a society such as is the Catholic Church today, intending and actually prescribing its present constitution. One said that Jesus did not really intend to establish a new and distinct Church at all, and that St. Paul took it upon himself to rebel against the Synagogue and to organise Christians in a separate body, though with no notion of an institution such as the Catholic Church today. He found difficulty in explaining Our Lord's prediction, "They shall deliver you up to councils, and in the Synagogues you shall be beaten." Mk. 13: 9. Separation from and opposition to the Synagogue was certainly in Our Lord's mind then. Still greater difficulty did this clergyman find in attempting to justify his position as minister in a Church separated from the Jewish religion owing to the influence of St. Paul against the intentions of Christ.

But the majority of those with whom I have conversed on the subject have fallen back upon the magic word evolution. Christ taught moral principles only. St. Peter and St. Paul, who believed in Christ, persuaded others to do so also, regarding their converts as friends and brothers, equal in authority and standing to themselves. The Apostles never thought of legislating for their supposed subjects. Practical needs led later Christians to adopt a discipline and create Bishops, Priests, and Deacons for themselves. In fact, not until the 2nd century did anything like the present Catholic Church manifest itself. It is no use trying to prove that Christ intended to establish an organised society such as the Catholic Church when the early Christians simply knew nothing about it! "What were the ideas of the early Christians on the subject?" I asked one such clergyman. "Well," he replied, "I think they were simply a group of pious Jews who believed in Christ, and that was all. Their only rule of faith was Scripture, each reader depending upon private guidance by the Holy Spirit. Certainly they had no set doctrines, no regulated worship, and no idea of organised Apostolic authority."

Now, granted acceptance of the Gospels, it is most difficult to understand how men can really advance the theory that the Catholic Church as it is to-day was quite unexpected by Christ, even

apart from the fact that He was God, with a clear knowledge of all future events. Such men also have their obsession that every-thing must be attributed to evolution. "Even the religious spirit of man," they say, "is in constant evolution, and the present Catholic Church is the result of purely human and natural factors. By further evolution men will outgrow it, and arrive at better things." So they insist upon interpreting all in the light of this their first principle. Yet what avails a preconceived theory against the facts? Things are not true because I would like them to be true. The theory that Christ could not have established such a Church as the Catholic Church today because it had to evolve, and the thought that the early Christians could not have known such a Church because evolution demands time, avail nothing against the fact, if it be a fact, that Christ did establish just such a Church, and that the early Christians were quite aware of it.

Catholics hold that God sent His only begotten Son into this world for the redemption of mankind, and that that Son established His Church, commissioning it to teach all nations. But was He the Author of the essential constitution which we find in the Catholic Church today? The evidence that He was is overwhelming. He called the work He came to establish a kingdom, and a kingdom means organised unity, not anarchy. To establish that kingdom was one of the cardinal points of His mission. "I must preach the Kingdom of God, for therefore am I sent." Lk 4: 43. That kingdom He identifies with His Church in this world. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom." Matt. 16: 18. Peter, the rock, was obviously a foundation in this world. In any case, when Our Lord compared His kingdom to a net holding good and bad fish, He was speaking of an earthly kingdom, and not of heaven, where no bad fish are to be found. Moreover, He prescribed its teaching, worship and authority He told His Apostles, "All things whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known to you." Jn 15: 15. He commanded them, "Go, teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. 28: 20. The essential rites of Baptism, forgiveness of sins, and of Eucharistic worship were clearly prescribed by Christ personally; and whatever the nature of their powers, the Apostles were evidently to be rulers. The power to bind and loose on earth can have no other implication; and this is confirmed by the very serious words, "He who despises you, despises Me; and he who despises Me, despises Him that sent Me." Lk. 10: 16. And, notwithstanding all theories to the contrary, the early Christians were quite aware of all this. "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2: 42.

But the theory of the evolution of the Church led me to a deeper study of the early Christian Church than perhaps I might have undertaken had I not met these Protestant- clergymen. Most of them admitted that the Catholic Church existed with the essentials of its present organisation by the end of the 2nd century, the authority of the Bishops and Priests being evolved as a practical measure to cope with heresies and also in some degree in imitation of the organisation of the pagan Roman Empire. Alas for the theory! A deep study of the early Christian writers of the second century, writers, who lived in different and far apart localities, and who could not have known each others' works since they were contemporaries, shows that they were familiar with a Church rejoicing everywhere in the same doctrine, worship, and form of government. The same new idea could not start simultaneously in all sections of the Church at once. One has but to notice all the varying forms of teaching, worship and government which arose in different localities under the influence of Protestantism. And we know how the new ideas of one section led to violent opposition from other sections, the world of the 16th century seething with controversies, not only between Protestants and Catholics, but between Protestants themselves. But where were the controversies amongst the early Christians concerning the introduction of a newly usurped authority, and a newly

imposed organisation within the Church? They were non-existent. As a matter of fact, even the very earliest forms of the Apostles' Creed demanded an act of faith in the Church just as they demanded faith in God and in Christ. It would be ridiculous to ask a well-read man of the 2nd century to make an act of faith in the divine origin of the Church as it then stood if an obviously natural, human, and merely historical evolution were responsible for its being.

It would have been so easy to prove the opposite. I do not say that the constitution of a society could not be changed within a space of 150 years. But such a change would be known to all, and no one would admit that the new condition was the original condition. If Ireland becomes a Republic, Irishmen will not be so foolish as to say that Queen Victoria gave them their republican constitution. Nor will they say so in 150 years time. But the whole process of reasoning adopted by these men is based upon supposition that Our Lord did not establish the Catholic Church as it is at present constituted. It is a mere supposition, based in turn upon nothing save a desire to avoid submission to that Church. They have not a sound historical argument to produce. They seem unconcerned that, in order to develop their theory, they must even ignore historical facts. They are undismayed by the dreadful consequence that they impute to St. Paul, and to the Bishops who were trained by the Apostles themselves, the gravest of sins — the deliberate perverting and distorting of the work of Christ for their own ends; and this by men, most of whom died as martyrs for the love of Christ. They care not that they attribute to the faithful of those early times a bland indifference to things that mattered enormously, and a folly which would submit to so fraudulent and dishonest an imposition as it grew and intensified step by step. I have pointed these things out to many a non-Catholic with whom I have discussed these matters. In many cases such discussions have led them to the faith. But in others they have failed.

A Priest can explain the faith, but he cannot give it. God reserves that to Himself. And very often a man who has a theory before he starts can see all that fits his theory, and be quite blind to the most obvious facts which militate against it.

Yet to the question as to who actually founded the Catholic Church as that Church is at present constituted, there is but one answer worth consideration.

Christ personally did so. He who denies this fact must either deny existence to the Catholic Church or must call the problem insoluble merely because he has buried his head in the sand, refusing to face the problem at all. But the Catholic Church cannot merely be taken as an existent fact and left at that. She did not just grow as did Topsy. She was established by Christ, given all the necessary information by Him, and sent to teach the nations with His authority vested in the Apostles and in their successors.

II.

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

Every institution has some system of discipline and management. We cannot do without officials. Anyone who so much as starts a club will draw up a constitution of some sort, and assign to some individuals official duties. Even the Soviet, with its hatred of kings, emperors, presidents and rulers, has had to create its very officious officials. It is a fundamental law of any society, and the natural dictate of ordinary human prudence. And Christ, Wisdom itself, established a Church for men which was perfectly adjusted both to the spiritual welfare of humanity and to natural human propensities. In any case He would not want chaos. Somehow or other the faithful must be united in some order, those in control being endowed with the necessary authority by the Founder personally.

The supreme officials in the Catholic Church are the Bishops, and we say that they constitute the hierarchy. But the very word “hierarchy” means a sacred body of rulers, and once the sacred element enters into a question; feelings are apt to run high. Rulers in matters of religion seem so opposed to liberty of conscience, according to the notions of a world badly infected by Protestant principles. For the consecrated officials claim not only the right to dispense information to enquirers as to the route to heaven. They claim the right to issue orders to all who are subject to them, and also the power to fit their subjects spiritually for the heaven they wish to attain.

Outsiders, of course, regard the Catholic system as a system of despotism. I remember so well the idea prevalent amongst my own circle of pre-Catholic friends, an idea of priest-ridden Catholic countries, and the slavish subjection of the masses. All priests were born tyrants. I am a Catholic priest today, and I am sure many of my Protestant relatives and old-time Protestant friends would be surprised to learn that I do not belong to the Church-teaching, but merely to the Church-taught, and that the Bishops alone constitute the Church-teaching. The authority of the Church is vested in them, and delegated according to their discretion to simple Priests. It is true that I am separated from the laity by my ordination. I have the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, and the duty to explain Catholic doctrine; but all my activities as a Priest are subject to the authority and directions of the Bishops, who alone are rulers in the strict sense within the Kingdom of Christ. However, even this humble avowal will not pacify all.

The vast majority of non-Catholics will have nothing to do with priesthood or episcopacy. They say that such spiritual domination is not only not the will of Christ, but that it is directly opposed to His principles. There is no such thing as distinction between Priest and layman. If there be any spiritual power in the Church, it is given to every Christian. All alike must possess it, and it cannot be the prerogative of an ordained clergy. It is true that the Anglican Church, to which I belonged, has kept an outward semblance of Bishops and Priests, but apart from the recent High-Church movement, ardent Protestant sentiment denied any real priestly power to Anglican ministers. They were not to be considered priests in the Catholic sense of this word. As late as 1925 the Anglican Bishop Knox wrote in the “National Review,” Sept. issue, p. 73: “The Pope refused to recognise our Anglican orders on the ground that our Church does not ordain Priests to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. In spite of the attempts made by our Archbishops to conceal this defect, the Pope from his point of view was unquestionably right.” And the very Bishops, whatever their outward status, certainly lack authority in the Church. A Protestant-minded Bishop cannot control his Catholic-minded clergy. Some years ago I met a High-Church Anglican minister who confided to me that he said Mass every morning out of a Latin missal, and that he was, therefore, as Catholic as I was. I pointed out to him that his Bishop was quite opposed to such proceedings.

“Don’t you obey your Bishop?” I asked. “Oh, yes,” he replied, “I do — when he is right.”

But leaving the Anglican Church, which does retain an outward hierarchical semblance without possessing the priestly reality, what of the non-conformists? Amongst them we find a repudiation of Bishops altogether, and no pretence to a priesthood in the strict sense of the word. Many ministers go so far as to wear a Roman collar, but others disapprove even this distinction from the laity and insist upon a collar and tie. The more Protestant, the less priestly is the rule. And of course that means also the less authority. Years ago I remember the indignation of a good Congregationalist concerning the presumption of his minister. I was an Anglican at the time, and rather sympathetic. It appears that the minister in question was an ex-Catholic Priest who had violated the discipline of the Catholic Church, and had betaken himself, not happily, elsewhere. Unable to dig, and ashamed

to beg, he became a Congregationalist, before passing to the Presbyterians. But, alas, he still spoke as one having authority, only to find himself waited upon by representatives of the congregation, who informed him that he must preach what they wanted, not what he thought best. He had believed that he could behave still as an authorised guide, but he had joined a Church where the sheep are the leaders and the shepherd must follow. The Catholic notion of the hierarchy is not acceptable to Protestants.

I have lately read a Seventh Day Adventist treatise, setting forth a widespread view of the Catholic position. "The Priest of Rome," it says, "presumes to fill the office Christ alone can occupy. The Papacy has tried to rob Christ of His continual mediation. Thus Rome destroys the very essence of Christianity. What a frightful tragedy is the attempt of the Roman Catholic Church to interpose its system of priestly mediation between man and his God! Direct communion with God through Christ, without the intervention of Pope or Priest — such is the true message of Protestantism."

But do they know the true essence of Christianity? And what if the Christ they would worship insists upon Pope and Priests? Surely He has the right to decide upon the way in which they will come to Him, not they!

It is certain that, by terming His Church a Kingdom, Christ implied an organised society with ruling officials distinct from those to be ruled. And His actual selection of some men rather than others, upon whom He conferred His own mission and authority, leaves no possible doubt. "You have not chosen Me; I have chosen you." "As the Father has sent Me, I send you." "He who hears you, hears Me." "Whatever you bind on earth is bound also in Heaven." The texts flow on, all converging to the one conclusion that Christ appointed certain rulers, endowing them with sacred and spiritual power to guide the faithful and minister to the worship of God. They were to have magisterial power to teach all nations; sanctifying power to baptise, forgive sin, offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, and, as St. Paul expresses it, to dispense the mysteries of God, disciplinary authority, demanding that their subjects observe all that Christ had commanded, and making further use of their legislative power according to the needs of the times. St. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Obey your prelates, and be subject to them." He did not hesitate to excommunicate the scandalous Corinthian.

It is all in keeping with sound reason, and with what we already know of God's ways. I would find it indeed hard to understand why God should depart from His love of order where religion is concerned. In regulating the universe He has ordained a hierarchy of planetary and stellar systems all subject to law. All through nature we find secondary ruling causes adapted to particular and effectual control of other beings. And in the spiritual order we will find a reflection of God's normal providence in the natural order. He is the same God whose touch we can recognise when we find Him using secondary agents for the instruction of men in the Gospel; for their direction and sanctification.

Then, too, man is a social being. Whilst the dignity of the individual demands that he must co-operate personally in the work of his salvation, it is also fitting that the race as a whole should co-operate in the service of God. By social organisation true progress comes in the natural order. Experience shows that men attain an end more successfully by such means. Societies are organised for the promotion of all kinds of objects, civil and religious. Why should the whole Church of Christ, ordained to the chief end of all, the salvation of souls, lack so useful a means? Will not souls be saved more surely by social co-operation, some men being endowed with power and authority? As a matter of fact, those Churches which have renounced an authoritative hierarchy have failed to

keep the faith intact, and lack all real power to maintain Christian standards in moral matters. Yet, notwithstanding the success of the Catholic Church in holding her people, ever expanding without loss of unity, and in retaining standards of Christian virtue which other Churches see abandoned without daring to protest, few aspects of the Church are attacked as this hierarchical character of Catholicism.

The objection proceeds from misunderstanding and from wrong principles. Protestants do not understand the Catholic position. They seem to think that the hierarchy can decide as it pleases what is right and wrong. No such claim is made by the Church. The Church claims the right to explain God's laws, and to make her own laws within the limits of the jurisdiction given her by Christ; and that means that she can make and impose no law which conflicts in any way with divine positive legislation, or with the principles of natural morality. Wrong principles contribute to the opposition. Protestants insist that each man's own conscience must be his guide. No one must be told what to do by any hierarchy of Bishops. But such independence is against all the laws of moral behaviour. There must be absolute standards apart from our own personal judgment. For conscience is simply man's intelligent judgment applied to moral matters, just as the same faculty is applied to mathematics or literature. And it is human to err. If a man's judgment can be at fault where literary ideals are concerned, it can be at fault where moral ideals are in question. Conscience can be right or wrong. It is certainly wrong if it bids one do what the known law of God forbids. A right conscience is one perfectly adjusted to God's laws. If a Protestant tells me that he has at least the ten commandments, I can but reply that even these commandments need interpreting every bit as much as civil law, and that, in the name of liberty of conscience, Protestants have come to the most contradictory conclusions in moral matters. Catholics at least have a consistent guide to help them to form their conscience correctly. God has given moral precepts which stand out as signposts along the track to heaven, but He has also given us an authoritative Church to explain and conduct us along that track.

I am quite certain that my own spiritual welfare and ultimate salvation is the more assured the more faithful I am to the directive precepts of the Catholic Church, whether in my private or social life. And that applies to every single Catholic. Christ instituted an authorised teaching and ruling body in the persons of the Bishops of the Catholic Church. Obedience to their authority is the outstanding characteristic of Catholics. It is the contrast between Catholicism and Protestantism. Even in Anglicanism, with its apparently hierarchical constitution, a secular parliament can forbid a prayer-book; and lay-representation can out-vote the shepherds of the flock.

Rebellion against the authority of the Catholic Church did not bring a blessing to the sects which departed from her principles and authority. Nor can it ever bring a blessing. Apparent benefits prove in the end to have been but apparent. If I have any hope of God's blessing, I can expect it in proportion to my submission to the guidance of His Church in all religious matters, and even in temporal concerns where moral principles are involved. That is the conviction of every truly Catholic soul. For the Catholic Church is God's authentic bureau on earth for the dispensing of religious truth to mankind, and her Bishops have been commissioned by Christ to regulate and to conduct to their eternal happiness the souls confided to her care. But if the Catholic Church claims the right to rule over her subjects, she also claims the power to sanctify them, preparing them for the Vision of God even as she conducts them towards that wonderful goal. And this is a still more arrogant usurpation of the prerogatives of Christ in the eyes of those outside the Church. It demands our consideration.

III.

THE POWER TO SANCTIFY.

Christ founded His Church to continue His work through the ages, the redemption and the sanctification of souls. The Church must not only teach the truth; she must destroy the sins of men in the confessional, and nourish their spiritual lives with the very Bread of Life in Holy Communion. The Catholic Priest, under the direction of the Bishop, is not only guide, but father. Catholics lovingly and reverently call him "Father," to the horror of those brought up in alien religions. When I was out in the cold as a Protestant, the term jarred upon me as it does upon most non-Catholics. Yet the Priest is commissioned by Christ to fulfil all parental duties in the spiritual sphere. By his agency at the baptismal font the children of the Church acquire the very life of grace. He instructs and educates his flock, in the truths of religion; binds up their spiritual wounds; provides the food of their souls; and stands at their death-bed, seeing each soul safely off to God.

Such ideas are foreign to Protestants, owing to their strange upbringing. They do not even regard their ministers as agents of sanctification. They do not even regard their Church, as a rule, in the light of a really sanctifying power in this world. For them, such an association is useful for the regulation to some extent of worship, and for the exchange of views. I have heard more than one minister of modern evolutionary tendencies say that the Church has no purpose except to foster and develop the collective instinct of religion. Each one's religious consciousness will thus evolve and progress more perfectly. But the Church has no direct power to sanctify souls by destroying sins and conferring grace; nor is it really necessary to join any Church at all in order to attain salvation. The work of sanctification must ever be God's own personal and immediate work. It could not be delegated to men.

What would be my personal work? Believe! Have faith in Christ my Saviour!

I must admit — that, even before I became a Catholic, this always seemed to me vague. I had often noticed the Axiom, "Believe in Christ, and be saved" painted on tree-trunks and fences, whirling past the windows of trains in which I happened to be travelling. Precisely what it meant baffled me so much whenever I bestowed any thought upon it that I just gave up thinking about it at all. Was there nothing to be done? Was Christianity so indefinite? Could the repetition of a formula save anybody? Of course I knew that many people obtained some deep interior conviction on the subject, and that Christ personally meant very much to them. But if all the food in the world were piled up in front of a man, he would starve if he did no more than believe that it was there.

Then, too, the idea of "being saved" was puzzling. Was it possible for any man to say that he was already saved while still in this life? What was it like to be among "the saved"? Yet again, some people have the intense conviction that they are bound to attain to salvation, and that there is no possibility of forfeiting their eternal happiness. This attitude of mind, or rather of religious sentiment, I found well illustrated by an incident which I heard some few years ago from the lips of a very holy, old Priest.

He was travelling to a distant place in order to give a retreat, and the only other occupant of the compartment was a fervent young lady of Protestant persuasions. She was impressed by the old Priest's absorption in his Breviary, and when he had finished timidly spoke to him of the Christ she undoubtedly loved.

"And oh, sir," she said, as she poured out her heart, "isn't it lovely to be saved?"

“And are you saved?” asked the old Priest gently.

“Why, yes!” she replied.

“Then you are very fortunate,” the old Priest answered, “and I wish I were as certain as you. But I am not saved yet. Meantime, what did St. Paul mean when he said that he who thinks himself to stand must beware lest he fall; and why did he fear lest, having preached to others, he himself might become a castaway? He even spoke of those who were once illuminated, and who had tasted the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Ghost, yet who had fallen away!”

Her only reply to this was the pathetic plea, “Oh, sir, don’t rob me of the lovely feeling I have!”

Unconsciously she fell back upon the basic foundation of her comfortable persuasion, religious sentiment, and where mere sentiment is concerned, self-deception is almost second nature to man. But it is not difficult to understand that people imbued with such ideas of immediate uplift to Christ will resent the intervention of any third party. Christ is the immediate object of their faith, and if nothing more is required save to believe in Him, if there is nothing more concrete to be done for sanctification and salvation, the Priest is certainly unnecessary.

Yet surely, in the end, it is for Christ to dictate the conditions of salvation, and He did not restrict Himself to the words, “He who believes shall be saved.” He established a Church which He identified with Himself in almost every possible way. When Saul persecuted members of the Church, He made the startling protest, “Saul, Saul, why persecute you Me?” That Church received identity of mission, doctrine and authority. What was the purpose of Christ? “The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.” To the Church He said, “As the Father has sent Me I send you — whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven.” And these words He said to her in the persons of His selected apostles. They were to continue His redemptive work.

St. Paul demanded that the early Christians should regard him as set apart for this purpose. “Let men esteem us as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God.” (I. Cor. 4: 1.) The Catholic Priesthood still dispenses sacred and mysterious gifts of God to men. Under the direction of the Bishops, they teach, rule, and sanctify souls. And in order to sanctify, they must have at their disposal a certain control of divine grace, the only means towards the attaining of a supernatural holiness. The Church does not exist merely in order to produce natural goodness and to stimulate humanitarian activities. She exists in order to produce supernatural virtue, and eternal salvation. She exists to destroy sin, and to infuse grace into the souls of her children.

It is absurd to quarrel with the Church for not smoothing out all individual and social troubles in this world, as if her mission were to establish an economic paradise on earth. The communist who objects to the Church on the score that she offers you “pie in the sky when you die” is more intelligible, for he at least has a more correct idea of her mission. She is there to prepare men for a supernatural, eternal, and unearthly destiny. And her work is to sanctify us now, through her sacraments and priestly directions, in order to secure our salvation and the glory of God.

I know well the host of objections which arise in the non-Catholic mind when it is suggested that Priests can forgive sins and confer grace. But these objections all arise from the false premises of Protestantism, or from a misconception of Catholic theology.

It is a false principle to say that Christ has paid the price for our redemption, that He has expiated our sins, and that nothing more is required. There is a difference between the paying of the price in general, and the application of it to individual souls. Christ has paid sufficiently and perfectly. But it

does not follow that all men by that very fact participate in the benefits of Christ. He sent His Church to apply His merits, already acquired, to the souls of men. She continues His mediation and His redeeming work.

The very word, mediation, however, awakens the stock objection that Christ is the only mediator, an objection which derives its force solely from a misconception of Catholic teaching. "The Priest," men say, "arrogantly usurps the place of Christ!" Did he do so, it would be unpardonable. But no Catholic has ever believed that he could do so. No Priest claims to exercise his power as being proper and natural to himself. He has a very secondary place. Christ is the principal source of all sanctity and grace, and He has the right to make use of human agents as instrumental means. The work is as much His as ever. My pen is utterly incapable of writing a letter by itself. I am the cause of the letter I write, and the fact that I am using a pen does not render me any the less the cause of my work. The human being who happens to be a Priest is utterly incapable of forgiving a sin as a merely human being. But as a Priest he is, the instrument of the Priesthood of Christ, has been incorporated in Christ by Christ in an altogether special way, and fulfils the will of Christ at the bidding of Christ. And far from coming between the soul and Christ, or hindering union with Christ, he removes and destroys the one obstacle to union with Christ by absolving the sins of his penitents, and urges access to Christ, making such access possible at the altar rails in the Catholic Church as it is possible in no other church. It is the thought that the Priest claims to act instead of Christ rather than on behalf of Christ that causes the difficulty in so many Protestant minds. And if we add the prejudiced caricature of Priests which is latent in some Protestant minds, the difficulty becomes formidable indeed. If I think that this man claims to possess in his own right the power to sanctify others, and I also think this man to be evil in himself, I am naturally puzzled as to how such a wicked specimen could give what he does not possess. If he be not merely the channel, but the source of grace, and he be evil, how can it be? I do not say that all Protestants believe Priests to be evil merely because they are Priests. But that is because 100 per cent. Protestantism is on the wane. Luther called all Priests agents of the devil. Judge Rutherford teaches the same today. I certainly absorbed the tradition as a boy.

One of my own earliest and most unreasonable efforts at versification was based upon a vague and instinctive suspicion of the "Roman Priest." I was but fourteen at the time, and had no personal knowledge of Priests. Protestant novels, and perhaps tendencies inherited from remote ancestors, prompted these lines: —

There was a Priest,
A wretched beast,
Quite subject to the Pope;
He'd cast his spell,
And threaten hell,
But never would use soap.

I record the words in a deep spirit of contrition, and as a groundless and sinful calumny for which perhaps I have somewhat atoned by becoming a Priest myself. But what I would like noted is that in each line save the first I managed to embody a definite characteristic of the dread being I thought I was describing — every Priest is an object of contempt, cringing and subservient, given to magic, trading on fear, and a complete stranger to the Englishman's morning tub! How difficult for one

with such impressions to imagine a Priest as the sanctifier of souls! And, above all, when the Priest is imagined as the supplanter of Christ.

People who labour under such a delusion should awaken, not indignation, but an immense and surging compassion in every Catholic heart. But I have said that such an attitude towards things Catholic is dying rapidly.

But I must return to our principles. The Catholic Priest is not the source of grace, but the channel of grace. Were the Priest the source of grace, his personal worthiness or unworthiness would affect his ministry. But Christ is the source of grace, dispensed by His own Priesthood operating through those whom He has called to receive it within themselves. And the Priest operates, not instead of Christ, but on behalf of Christ, and in the name of Christ. St. Paul describes the priestly office in the Church as being “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all meet in the unity of faith, and that henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” (Eph. 4: 12-14). The Church must conduct to their eternal salvation the souls of men. Her Priests must teach, preserve from error, and sanctify those entrusted to their care. So great is the scope of the Catholic Church. No one can wilfully ignore it, or refuse to comply with its requirements, without definite spiritual loss, and the endangering of his salvation.

IV.

THE THREE GUARANTEES

That I obey the Catholic Church supposes an immense confidence in the trustworthiness of that Church as my guide. Is that confidence justified? At one time, of course, I thought that the last thing to be reposed in the Catholic Church was trust. The Catholic religion was to me the symbol of all that was disloyal, antisocial and decadent. The first two of these three notions are almost inevitable amongst Protestants. The third is prevalent amongst those who are particularly blind, and who are characterised by an almost total lack of thought upon the subject. Looking back now, I am able to analyse with some degree of clarity my typically Protestant obsessions.

The impression of Catholic disloyalty was due to both the nature of Catholicism itself and to my own extraordinary confusion of religion with national patriotism. If a man is taught and becomes firmly convinced that loyalty to the king demands acceptance of the religion of the king, then he is bound to think those who reject the religion of the king to be disloyal. And then, too, it is a fact that Catholicism, as an international religion, cannot be subject to any individual earthly rulers. My ideas of the anti-social character of Catholicism arose from the fact that I attended as a boy a large city state school. Amongst the hundreds at that school, as far as I remember, there was but one boy who was known to be a Catholic. As a body we were all Protestants. Catholic boys would pass our school, and go on further to a school of their own. They were a class apart. However wrong my ideas on the subject, there was some reason behind the impression of the anti-social character of Catholicism. Catholics would associate neither with the irreligion of our State schools nor with the religion of our churches. That this was due to some wrong element in our schools and churches I did not then, of course, realise. That the Catholic Church was doomed to decay was an impression due solely to tradition, and to an obvious blindness to the continual growth and activity of the Church in all spheres, educational and charitable.

In this analysis I have been led to indicate three outstanding characteristics of Catholicism. I call them the “Three Guarantees,” guarantees which Christ included in the very charter He gave to His

Church. The Church established by Him was to be independent of every other earthly society; infallible in its guidance; and indestructible, quite unable to decay from within, or be suppressed from without. Let us take each of these three guarantees in turn.

The Catholic Church is a society independent of any other social organisation in this world. New South Wales is a State society, with its own State laws and governing body. But it is an integral part of the Commonwealth of Australia. It is not completely independent and self-sufficient. The United States of America is a complete and independent society. It needs, certainly, the help of other nations by trade relations; but it has its own proper constitution and regulates its own right to secure what it deems necessary to its well-being. The Catholic Church is a complete and independent society in this latter sense. It is independent of all other societies, subject in no way to their jurisdiction. Such independence appears chiefly in the character of a society's ruling power. Does the prince, governor or administrator owe allegiance to any other power? That is the end of real independence. Now the Catholic Church has defined that the Pope has supreme jurisdiction over the faithful. There can be no appeal to any authority higher than his. And in the matter of Church affairs, no civil authority has the right to define the limits within which she must confine her activities.

I am sure that it is not difficult to see how such claims cannot but arouse the indignation of ardent Protestants. Protestantism has always shown an immense respect for, and subservience to, civil authority. To them the Catholic claims seems outrageous. They denounce this independence. I have just read a Protestant booklet on the solution of the "Roman Question," proving to the author's satisfaction that the Pope is undoubtedly "The Beast," lustful of power, because he refuses to be a subject of Italian civil authority, and has at last secured an acknowledged independence. At the time of my conversion to the Church, the "Ne Temere" dispute was in full swing in Australia. The whole trouble was simply that the Catholic Church here in Australia regarded her legislation concerning the Sacrament of Marriage as independent of and unaffected by any legislation to the contrary made by a civil parliament. In America, this Catholic claim to independence was made the stock argument against the candidature of Al. Smith for the presidency [in the elections of 1928], and the charge that it was impossible for a Catholic to be loyal succeeded in defeating his cause.

And yet, this aspect of independence is one that most appeals to all who can think sanely on the question. A parliament consisting of Catholics, Protestants, Jews and complete unbelievers, which can prescribe the doctrines and services of Anglicanism, rejecting as unsuitable a prayer-book sanctioned by the Anglican Bishops, provokes smiles the world over. And such a state of affairs is the logical outcome of the denial of independence. Such a denial, too, is so opposed to the very concept of the true Church of Christ. How can that Church be subject to any civil power when no civil power had anything to do with its origin? Christ certainly founded His Church independently of any civil power. He simply said, "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth." He did not even consult civil authority. He bade his apostles go and teach all nations. And far from accepting authority from earthly rulers, they were to ignore any legislation opposed to their mission.

The charge of disloyalty was bound to come. And Our Lord said clearly, "They shall deliver you up to councils — you shall stand before governors and kings for my sake." Mk. 13: 9. Catholics will be forced to cry at times, "We ought to obey God rather than man!" Acts 5: 29. After all, since the purpose of the Church is to guide men to heaven, and no natural and human legislation can do that, her legislative power must be independent of human parliaments. Then, too, being universal, she cannot adapt herself to every whim and caprice of local human legislation. The Catholic Church,

therefore, has the right given her by God to exist anywhere, and freely to fulfil her duties. She must be legally free, and any civil legislation opposed to her mission is simply invalid and not binding in conscience.

If this principle leads to the persecution of the Church, it is due to the false principle of her adversaries that all things are under the control of Caesar, and that there are no rights independent of civil power. 'Even religion must be but an aspect of patriotism, and the Church a branch of the civil service.' It won't do. I am a Catholic precisely because my religion has to do with God, and must be independent of any earthly allegiance. Yet I am not less patriotic than those who talk much of patriotism, but who know not how to distinguish between the things that belong to God and those to which Caesar may rightly lay claim.

If independence, however, was included in the charter of the Catholic Church as a thing to be guaranteed by Christ, so, too, was infallibility. This was simply a gift of God by which the Church, through the perpetual assistance of the Holy Spirit, is preserved from teaching error in matters of faith and morals. In other words, the true Church of Christ issues instructions of which it is quite certain. And Catholics naturally insist upon learning those instructions, and as decidedly refuse to follow guides who ignore or contradict them.

And if those instructions cannot be learned in State schools, and are violated in Protestant churches, Catholics sedulously keep away from both State schools and Protestant churches. In a Protestant environment, where Catholics are in the minority, the majority are almost bound to cry out, "Be sociable. Come with us!" Catholics cannot do so, and what I once believed to be the anti-social character of Catholicism is really the penalty of infallibility. Such a claim, of course, appeared to me in my Protestant days to be arrogant assumption; the death of free thought and human liberty; and anyway quite opposed to facts.

I did not know much about such things then. But I laboured under the idea that the Catholic Church simply conferred upon herself any prerogatives she wished — which would be arrogance. I had no knowledge of her humble admission that she had no power to give herself anything, and that all she had, she had to receive from Christ.

I did not see that all freedom implies restriction. No one can be free in all directions. If I am free from error I am "shackled" by truth. The conviction that the world is a globe takes away my freedom to believe it flat. My freedom from gaol means that I am content to submit to the restraint of civil law. The normal man does not want to be free to fall into error, or to go to gaol. But multitudes are not normal where religion is concerned. They denounce interference with their liberty to believe any absurd error in this matter. And as an infallible church takes away the freedom to think erroneously, they won't have it. But this view did not occur to me in the days when I entertained the strange notion that Catholicism meant the death of free thought, a phrase which sounded a glorious vindication of human liberty, yet which really meant simply freedom from thinking at all where religion was concerned.

That infallibility was opposed to facts was a theory linked with my school-day history of Joan of Arc. The Catholic Church burned her as a witch and then turned right round and canonised her as a Saint. My "fact," of course, was not a fact. The Church did not condemn Joan. A renegade Catholic Bishop, in the pay of the English, did so; but his action was not in accordance with, but a violation of the laws of the Church. Within the lifetime of Joan's own mother, Pope Callixtus III had declared

her mock trial null and void, and rehabilitated her reputation and orthodoxy. But our school histories did not tell us that.

If, however, at one time I felt rather appalled by the arrogant claim to infallibility, today I would be appalled did the true Church not make such a claim. A fine sort of a guide to our eternal destiny would have been given us by God if that guide had to admit that she was not sure of the way herself! As has been so often pointed out, the Church was endowed by Christ with the essential notes of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church is an expression familiar to all. Yet not one of these characteristics could persevere were not the Church infallible. Unity would soon go if the Church could teach erroneous doctrine; the sin of heresy would deprive her of her essential holiness as an institution; the separation of groups would destroy utterly the catholicity of one single Church; and the self-same faith and authority derived from the Apostles would be lost. Anyway, Christ included the gift of infallibility in the charter of His Church. His promise that the gates of hell, or the forces of evil, would never prevail against His Church can only mean that His Church will last just such as He established it, ever retaining the faith He committed to her care. His promise of the perpetual presence of the Holy Spirit, and that He Himself would be with her “all days even till the end of the world” suppose also infallibility, or inability to teach a doctrine which is not identical with principles laid down by Himself. Above all it is inconceivable that Christ would send a church to teach all nations, putting an obligation upon all nations to be taught by her, and even making eternal salvation dependent upon one’s submission to His Church, saying, “He who does not believe will be condemned,” if that Church could possibly teach doctrines in conflict with His!

I turn to my last thought of days gone by, that the Catholic Church is but a decaying relic of medieval times. I was familiar with the view that she is a purely human organisation, bound to collapse in due time. But the facts are against this idea completely when one looks into them. The fact that she is still standing is proof enough that she is bound to last. Not of itself, of course. But when I consider her teachings, her difficult moral obligations, and the obstacles she has met and overcome, I am certain that no natural reasons can account for her vitality. She demands so much that human nature dislikes. I can find a reason for the perseverance of pagan religions, or for Mohammedanism, or for Protestantism. Man is naturally religious, and deprived of Catholicity, will have some form of religion. But in substitute religions most of the things difficult for human nature have been abolished. No religion on earth demands the consistent virtue, the humility, mortification and rigid duty to God imposed by Catholicism. But we have merely to turn to the Gospels to discover the secret. Christ’s promise of the perseverance of the Church to the end of the world is enough. Her vitality is not linked with any natural factors, nor even with the zeal, wisdom and virtue of her members, whether clerical or lay. It is based upon the divine protection promised by Christ.

Foolish in the extreme are the thoughts of those who imagine that the general disruptive forces of these times can threaten the existence of the Catholic Church. To doubt is to doubt the promises of Christ. And, anyway, the Catholic Church has been through worse times than those of to-day, and where empires and civil governments have crashed, she has ever survived with renewed vigour and vitality. The Catholic Church is still here, and with a glad heart I accept from that Church just the same instructions as she has been giving to humanity for the last 2,000 years — instructions the worth of which is guaranteed, if by nothing else, by the Saints of the centuries, who, though wayfarers like myself, have attained with certainty the heaven we all wish to see. And as there is no

reason why the Christian of the 20th [or 21st] century should be dispensed from all that was necessary for the Christian of the 10th, but every reason why he should have to submit to exactly the same conditions of salvation, so in the 30th century, or the 300th century, should the world last so long, the Catholic Church will still be there, dispensing the same information and prescribing the same essential conditions to all who apply to her for that instruction and guidance they cannot safely do without. The Catholic Church is indestructible. She cannot fail.

Thus “The Three Guarantees,” Independence, Infallibility and Indestructibility, are stamped upon the charter of the Catholic Church, given her by the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And under her control, I am able to render to God the things that are God’s; I am preserved from all freedom to make vital mistakes; and I inherit a firm hope of that immortality in heaven which she alone reflects upon earth.

V.

OBEYING THE CHURCH

After all that I have said about the establishing of the Catholic Church by Christ, the commission He gave to her, and the guarantees with which He endowed her, it should not be surprising to learn that wayfarers to eternity have an obligation to submit to her directions. If they are obliged to save their souls, they are also obliged to take the means with which God has provided them for this purpose.

It is necessary, then, that men should join the Catholic Church. Before I became a Catholic, I knew that the Church did make exclusive claims, though I did not see their force, and thought it most intolerant, with the consequent doctrine that outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation. Why should all Protestants be lost? I had no idea at that time of the true position. It is certain, of course, that Christ must insist upon our joining the true Church. His very command that we must “hear the Church” indicates a grave obligation. And if He says, “He who despises you, despises Me, and he who despises Me despises Him that sent Me,” we are forced to the conclusion that contempt of His Church is contempt of Almighty God. And His Church happens to be the Catholic Church. How could anyone knowingly and wilfully refusing to join the Catholic Church hope for salvation whilst continuing in such dispositions? Once a man has sufficiently perceived that the Catholic Church is indeed the true Church of Christ, he has no means of salvation apart from that Catholic Church. I know that in my own case now I would simply forfeit my hope of salvation did I leave her. My eternal welfare is bound up with my strict fidelity to her.

But what I failed to notice in my non-Catholic days was the sense of the words “knowingly and wilfully.” God will not blame a man for anything for which he is not responsible. If a man is faithful to his conscience and dies repenting of his sins, he at least dies with the will to do God’s Will, and if he does not demand reception into the Catholic Church, it can only be because he does not advert to the fact that such is God’s Will. In this case, God will take his will for the deed as far as adherence to the Catholic Church is concerned, and he will be judged on other factors. On the supposition that all is well in other directions, he will certainly be saved in spite of his not professing the Catholic faith. Yet the fact remains that the Catholic Church is a society necessary for the salvation of all those who have ever received the grace to discern the truth of her claims to be the divinely authorised guide of mankind in matters pertaining to religion.

Whether any given individual has attained to the required interior conviction necessary to render his separation from -the visible Church gravely sinful no man has the right to say. God alone can read

the hearts of men. I know that I certainly have such a degree of conviction. But I cannot say that any single Protestant still outside the Church has actually attained to a similar conviction, and is guilty of grave sin by his refusal to submit to the Church.

I think it was R. H. Benson, himself a convert to the Church, who ventured to express an opinion concerning G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton had written much with a very Catholic tone prior to his conversion. Benson remarked once, "I do not think Chesterton will ever become a Catholic." Chesterton became a Catholic later, when he was conscious of his obligation. No one can safely judge as to the mental state of another. And Catholics are forbidden to judge concerning the responsibility of Protestants before God. Robert Hugh Benson, of course, had no desire to judge rashly concerning the possible moral guilt of Chesterton. He was interested in the problem of conversions, and was expressing his opinion that not always those who seem nearest to Catholicism are amongst those who are actually converted.

I suppose it seems paradoxical to say that some people are too close to Catholicism to be really near it. Yet in a way that is true. In my own experience with converts I have always found it much easier to instruct the man who bluntly declares himself to be a Protestant rather than the High-Church Anglican who has thought himself to be a Catholic, and boasts that he has little to change and still less to gain by becoming a Catholic in actual fact, submitting to the jurisdiction of the Pope. He is so wrapped up in external similarities to Catholicism that he is far less likely to advert to the obligation of submission to the true Church than the plain blunt Protestant. And from this point of view, though apparently closer, he is much farther removed from Catholic obedience.

Obedience is most essential. We went from God by disobedience. The only way back is to retrace our steps by obedience. And if religion is to get us back, the essential thing in the true religion must be obedience. And it is certainly the essential thing in the Catholic religion. Since the Church is a society with an organised hierarchical constitution, she must possess authority to rule her subjects. And the power to rule must include the power to make laws, to judge concerning the observance of those laws, and to enforce those laws by suitable penalties. The civil State could not get on without a legislative body, a court of justice, and a penitentiary. And the Church is not less a self-contained society than any national civil State.

I scarcely know of any other aspect of the Catholic Church which is so alien to the Protestant mind. Most Protestants are horrified by the authoritative manner of the Catholic Church. The idea that Catholics "have to do this" or are "forbidden to do that" is sufficient condemnation of the whole Catholic system for them. And the idea of an obligation of obedience to their own ministers scarcely ever enters their heads. It certainly did not enter my own.

At one time, many years ago now, I was attending an early Mass at a Catholic Church and going to a later service in an Anglican Church. The rector was a very good man, and told me that I "couldn't do it." He gave as his reason that, whilst he did not mind much, those Catholics who might see me at Mass and later entering the Anglican Church would be most disedified. It would be a scandal which he could not permit. But his forbidding me to do it carried no weight at all. When, however, I saw things at last through Catholic eyes, the fact that the Catholic Church forbade my attendance at the Anglican service was a very different matter. For it is a fact that Christ gave His true Church the authority to make laws binding us in conscience, to judge concerning their observance, and to enforce their observance.

“Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven” gave her the right to legislate according to the necessities of the times in which she exists. The basic constitution of civil society does not obviate the necessity of particular laws in particular circumstances. So, too, in the Church. If Protestantism arises in the 16th century, the Church can make laws to preserve her children from the contagion of Protestantism. If Communism asserts itself in the 20th century, she can forbid her subjects to have anything to do with Communism. And she has judicial power.

“Tell the Church, and if a man will not hear the Church, let him be as the heathen.” (Matthew, chapter 18) The Church has the right to judge. For legislative power is absurd without the power to decide practical cases. Imagine a State with legislative power only, yet with no courts for the administration of its laws!

Nor is it enough to be able to say, “You are innocent” or “You are guilty.” There must be coercive power, a power to prevent continuance in what has been judged to be wrong conduct.

I am not a Bishop in the Catholic Church. I have “no axe to grind” in maintaining these powers in the Church, for they are powers to which I have to submit, not powers which I am commissioned to exercise. I am not a “ruler” in the Church. — But I state the simple truth because it is the truth.

St. Paul was a Catholic Bishop. He knew what authority he had received from Christ, and he did not hesitate to use it. He legislated, judged, and punished.

He wrote to the Corinthians in his first Epistle, “What will you? Shall I come to you with a rod? Or in the spirit of meekness?” I. Cor. 4: 21. He gave them their choice between obedience and disobedience. But some of them took his threat of severity too lightly, and in his second Epistle he wrote, “Men say that I threaten in my epistles, but that my bodily presence is weak and contemptible. But what I am in my epistle when absent, that I will be when present. It is not wrong of me to insist upon powers which the Lord has given us for your edification, and not for your destruction.” II. Cor. 10: 8-11. In the same epistle he adds, “I tell those who sinned before, and all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare” (12: 2). He excommunicated the incestuous Corinthian without a scruple. He ordered the Thessalonians, “If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and do not enter into his company, that he may be ashamed.” II. Thess. 3: 14. How unlike anything to be found in Protestantism it all is! And yet how Catholic!

Through the ages the Church has been conscious of this power. She is conscious of it today. I know that if, as a Priest, I rebel against the laws of the Church, I am quite liable to be brought before the ecclesiastical courts, and to be suspended or excommunicated. I know that the Church has the right to impose penances, which are but penalties, such as fasting, almsgiving, prayers, or pilgrimages. She has even the right to appeal to the civil power in Catholic countries to support and enforce her legislation, if her spiritual authority fails to do so. And if any Church be not conscious of such powers, I know that it forfeits all claim to its being the Church Christ established.

But a most practical conclusion follows. We Catholics owe obedience in thought, word and deed to the laws of the Catholic Church. She has not only the duty to teach and instruct us. She has the duty to rule and control our conduct. She has not only to tell us what to believe. She has the duty to tell us what to do. If she had not that authority it would be impossible for her to maintain unity and discipline. In his book, “The Things That Are Not Caesar’s,” Maritain, a layman, rightly says that the virtue of obedience “extends not only to the express commands of the Church, but also to her counsels and advice. Taking lightly her recommendations in matters of education, prohibited books, and such kindred matters, even where explicit censures are not ignored, always implies a

diminishing of faith and a fault of disobedience.” A filial spirit of obedience is essential in a good Catholic, based upon the conviction that whatever injures the Church injures Christ.

However acute the human opposition, the programme of Catholics in every department of life, even from the social standpoint, should be characterised by unqualified adhesion to every Catholic direction. This is not a matter for Priests and Religious only. It is a matter for every single member of the Catholic Church. We shall participate in all that Christ promised through the Church according to the degree of our submission to the Church. And we must submit to the laws of the Church, because they happen to be the laws of the Church, not basing our obedience to these laws upon our own approval of them, thinking ourselves free to disobey, when we think them perhaps unwise. That implies an act of confidence in our own judgment, but no faith in the Church. It is the Protestant, not the Catholic outlook.

If I obey, it must be not because the wisdom or prudence of ecclesiastical legislation appeals to me, but because of the authority of Christ, vested in His Church. Nor is the Church obliged to give me the reasons why she has thus legislated. Once she makes a law it binds me in virtue of obedience by the very fact that she has made it. “He who hears you, hears Me” is the clear doctrine of Christ, and He has also said, “He who is not with Me is against Me.” The conclusion remains that he who is not with the Catholic Church is equally against Christ, unknowingly in the case of Protestants, but knowingly and guiltily in the case of those who profess the Catholic Faith.

For two thousand years the Catholic Church has been conducting souls to their eternal destiny. She knows every inch of the ground; and the Saints, who have most carefully followed her directions, are a living guarantee of her reliability. We Catholics accept her guidance in this twentieth [and twenty-first] century, but we must remember that she is the guide. Our safety and ultimate arrival at the destination we hope to reach depend upon our obedience to instructions. He who obeys the Church in all her precepts and recommendations will never be lost.
