

Do You Know The Church?

By a Benedictine Nun.

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— “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18).

— “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me.” (John 14:6).

Introduction.

THE Catholic Church stands forth today, as she has in every period of her existence, as the Rock upon which all heresies and schisms are wrecked, as the Rock which has always withstood every kind of persecution, and will always continue to do so, even to the end of the world, according to the promise of her Divine Founder, Jesus Christ, that — ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against her’.

At no time since the foundation of the Church has her history been more replete with wonderful events than at the present. The age in which we live is one of exceptional interest. In some countries, the Church is passing through an ordeal which, if her origin were not Divine, would end in her total annihilation. (Think of Spain, Mexico, China, Communist Russia, Arabia, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and of all the efforts being made to liquidate or subjugate the Church.) But the persecution she is now suffering in European countries (by the attacks of the ungodly combinations of Communists, Nazis, Fascists and secularists and hedonists), instead of diminishing her strength will only increase it; and the wounds inflicted by her enemies, instead of proving fatal, will not even disfigure her, but will only serve to render her more beautiful and glorious.

Moreover, while religion is being assailed in different countries, the world itself is undergoing a change in the social and economic order. Where will it all end? No one can tell. Will there be a social upheaval, accompanied by a general destruction of churches, and confiscation of church property, even as in Soviet Russia today? No one knows. But even should that come to pass, deplorable as it would be, even that would be only a passing disturbance. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church He founded will endure, according to His promise, — ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18). Governments may change and do change, kingdoms fall, old traditions are swept away, the social order may be reconstructed, but the Church of Jesus Christ remains forever, unchanged and unchangeable. Her doctrines, her means of sanctification are from God, and like unto God Himself, imperishable. Her origin is Divine and — ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.’

Unlike the founders of the empires of this world, unlike the Alexanders, Caesars, and Napoleons, whose empires crumbled at their death, Jesus Christ, the Divine Founder of the Catholic Church, still lives and reigns in her! In her are verified those sublime words of Saint Paul, — ‘Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today, yes, and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8). In vain, have the rulers of this world assailed and persecuted the Church of Christ for nineteen hundred years and more. The blood

of the countless multitudes of her martyred children has been, through the centuries, the fruitful seed which propagated the Faith of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Church is a Divine institution, and the only one which will always fulfill and verify the words of Christ, — ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus Christ, Redeemer of Man and Founder of the Church.

THE central, the greatest event in the history of mankind, is the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the redemption of the world by His Passion and Death on the Cross. This is the central fact round which all the other facts of history are grouped and without which most of them would be meaningless and inexplicable. From this outstanding event, even time is reckoned — before or after Christ (B.C., A.D.).

The prophets of the Old Testament foretold the coming of the Redeemer and the establishment of His Church. Even Protestantism does not dispute the fact of this Divine revelation. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came from heaven to teach and save all mankind. On this point, all Christians are agreed.

The Church in Promise.

The religion which Jesus Christ taught, and which the Catholic Church teaches today, did not appear just a few centuries ago. Properly speaking, it dates back to the creation of man. Its first seeds were planted in Paradise when God promised a Redeemer to our first parents after their fall; and the whole of the Old Law, with its sacrifices and wonderful events was but a figure of the New Law which contains the fulfillment and accomplishment of the Old. The Old Law believed in a Redeemer to come, and the New believes in Him as already come. But it is the same belief in the same Redeemer. Wherefore the Jewish religion was the only religion of the true God, until it was superseded by the Church of Jesus Christ. At the death of Christ, it ceased to be the true religion, because it was only the promise and figure of what was to come. God had ordained the Old Testament worship of the Jewish synagogue and Temple as a prelude to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth which was to be its fulfillment. When, by the Death of Christ, the Redemption was accomplished and His Church established, the promise and figure gave place to the reality. The patriarchs and prophets of the Old Law and the saints of the New — the just on both sides of Calvary, — constitute one glorious kingdom, the Church of the living God.

Though the Temple worship, with its ceremonial laws was abolished when the Temple of Jerusalem ceased to be the House of God, the Ten Commandments and the moral code of the Jewish covenant were not abolished, for Christ came, as He Himself declared, — ‘not to destroy but to fulfill’ (Matthew 5:17). Christ came not to destroy those laws but to perfect them.

While the true religion is thus coeval with the creation of man, yet its beginnings are not lost in obscurity. On the contrary, its truth is evident and obvious to all. For it exhibits from the remotest times even down to the present, an uninterrupted series of public and universally known facts and events, which agree perfectly with one another and with all the monuments of past ages. They have been so often and so indisputably proved, that he who would not believe them might just as well deny any other fact of authentic history. We count the generations as they succeeded one another from Adam to Christ (Luke 3; Matthew 1) and all the Supreme Pastors or Popes from Saint Peter to our present Holy Father, Pius XII, [or now, Benedict XVI] now gloriously governing the Church established by Jesus Christ. What a wonderful chain of events! What an unparalleled succession!

Even the Jews (or at least their leaders), the most relentless opponents of the Church of Christ in its early centuries, bear witness to its truth. For they and their followers carefully keep on record in their Holy Books the whole history and all the prophecies of the Old Testament to which we appeal in order to prove the Divine origin of Christianity; so that no one can suppose that Christians have perverted or invented such passages of the Old Testament as refer to Christ.

With the destruction of Jehovah's temple, the divinely ordained worship of the Old Law ceased forever, to make room for the New Law of which it had been the type. (We will use the English word 'Jehovah' to indicate the revealed name of God in Hebrew, as 'the One Who Is'.) Since that time, Israel was exiled from the Land of Promise, its priesthood was and is extinguished, and its sacrifices are at an end, as Malachy foretold. Israel has lived dispersed among the nations of the earth. But Divine Providence keeps it in existence, an unwilling witness to the revelations, prophecies and judgments of God, until shortly before the end of the world, when God in His mercy will lead back His repentant people to the Faith.

The Promised One.

— "When the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law' (Galatians 4:4). God fulfilled His promise and the prophecies about the Redeemer to come, when He sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary in a stable at Bethlehem, nineteen hundred years or more ago. (This event occurred about the year 4 B. C. according to our present method of reckoning time. Denys the Little, in the sixth century, began the custom of dating history from the birth of Christ. But he thought that Christ was born in the year 754 A.U.C. (from the building of Rome) and so he made that the year 1 of the Christian era. Later researches have placed the birth of Christ several years earlier, so that Christ was really about four years old, in what we call the year '1'.)

For thirty years, Christ lived in seclusion and prayer, preparing Himself for His Divine mission. Then He was baptized by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13), and entered upon His public life, during which He selected His Apostles, taught His Divine doctrine, established His Church, and finally, accomplished the redemption of mankind by His Passion and Death on the Cross.

Christ proved that He was really man by dying on the Cross. Jesus Christ claimed to be God, equal to the Father in all things. He was not content with mere declarations; He established His claim by undeniable proof. He changed water into wine (John 2), calmed the waves and the winds (Matthew 8), fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes (Matthew 14), healed the sick of all kinds of diseases (Matthew 15), cast out devils (Matthew 8), and called the dead back to life (John 11). As a climax, He Himself rose from the dead after three days in the tomb. The resurrection of Christ is the most glorious event of His life, the most conclusive proof of His Divinity, and the foundation of our faith. — 'If Christ has not risen, vain then is our preaching, vain too is your faith' (1 Corinth 15:14).

Christ remained on earth forty days after His resurrection to show that He was truly risen from the dead, to instruct His Apostles, and to confer upon them His final and official commission. Then He gloriously ascended into heaven from Mount Olivet, in the presence of His Apostles and disciples, to whom He promised to send the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5-8).

Knowing, then, that Christ is truly God, we simply ask ourselves whether He really founded a church, and which one it is.

From all history, both sacred and profane, as well as from the Bible considered merely as an historical document, we learn that Christ established a church, which is called after Him the Church of Christ, or the Christian Church. This, the establishment of His Church, was part of His Divine plan in order to insure to the whole world and to perpetuate to all time the fruits of His redemption. The Church, therefore, is the continuation of the life and work of our Divine Lord Himself. It is His permanent, visible presence in the world today; it is the continuous verification of His words — ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail.’

It is all-important, therefore, that we should know which is the one, true church — for there can be only one — Yes! — ‘Upon this rock I will build My Church,’ said Christ, not churches. If once we admit that the Catholic Church is that one, true Church established by Christ to teach men infallibly the way to heaven, and that He has commanded all men to belong to it, our way is clear. But if we do not know which is the true Church, we shall have no guide as to what we must believe and do, in order to secure the eternal salvation of our immortal souls.

The invisible Son of God came into the world in a visible, human form, a Divine Person who took to Himself a true and tangible human nature. And during His life upon earth, we find that one of His chief concerns was the formation of a visible society to perpetuate His work. This society is His Church, and like unto Him, it is a visible organization, a society of which He Himself would ever remain the invisible Head and life.

One of the first things Jesus Christ did when He began His public ministry, as all four evangelists tell us, was to select a body of men, to form as it were, an Apostolic College and to instruct these men in all knowledge and prepare them for their sacred ministry. Christ taught a body of religious truths and precepts to these, His chosen Apostles; He trained them, and commanded them to go and preach His doctrine to all nations. He gave His Apostles power to teach and baptize (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16); to offer sacrifice (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinth 11:23-25); to forgive sins (John 20:23; Matthew 16:19; 2 Corinth 5:18); and to rule the Church (Matthew 18:17-18; Acts 20:28); and to one of them, Peter, He gave the primacy (Matthew 16:17-19; John 21:16-17). He sent them forth to teach all nations, promised salvation to all who would believe what they taught and threatened with damnation those who refused to believe their teaching (Mark 16:16). Finally, He promised to be with His Church to the end of time. — ‘And behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.’ (Matthew 28:20).

The Threefold Office of Christ.

Hence, Christ delegated His own threefold office and character, namely His teaching office, His priesthood, and His pastoral authority, to a number of chosen men, in union with whom He continues to act as Teacher, Priest, and Pastor to the end of the world.

It was in this threefold character that Christ effected our salvation. He redeemed us as teacher, as priest, and as pastor; as teacher by preaching heavenly wisdom; as priest by the atoning sacrifice of the Cross; and as pastor by enacting laws and commandments. As teacher, He rescued us from spiritual blindness by giving us the light and truth of Divine revelation; as Divine-human priest, He redeemed us from sin by offering Himself in sacrifice on Mount Calvary; as God-man pastor, He saved us by His doctrine and precepts from the folly and wickedness of the world.

Christ Still Our Teacher.

This triple office, as said before, He solemnly committed to His chosen Apostles shortly before His departure from earth, as is plainly proved by Holy Scripture. The Divine Teacher sent these His Apostles forth to preach to all nations, to teach all truth as He had imparted it to them, and to teach it with the same authority and infallible certainty as He Himself had taught it. — ‘He who hears you hears Me; and he who rejects you, rejects Me; and he who rejects Me, rejects Him who sent Me’ (Luke 10:16).

Christ Still Our Priest.

Our Divine High Priest, on the eve of His Passion, instituted and offered up, in a mysterious manner, and by anticipation, the saving sacrifice of the Cross, saying, — ‘This is My Body, which is being given for you; this cup is the new covenant in My Blood, which shall be shed for you.’ He committed to the hands of His Apostles for all time, this holy sacrifice of His Body and Blood, saying, — ‘Do this,’ which I have just done, — ‘in remembrance of Me.’ He gave the Apostles power to consecrate, forgive sins, and bless, in a word so to dispense graces in His Name, so that these same Apostles were able to say later of themselves with all truth, and with full conviction of their own power and dignity, — ‘Let a man so account us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God’ (1 Corinth 4:1).

Christ Still Our Pastor.

Finally, our Divine High Priest and Pastor transmitted His spiritual prerogatives and authority to His Apostles with the words, — ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me’ (Matthew 28:18). — ‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’ (John 20:22). It was in virtue of this charge that the Apostles prescribed for all nations to which they preached, all those laws and regulations, and established all such institutions, as they deemed necessary for the spiritual welfare, or conducive to the eternal salvation of men. (Note: these laws and ordinances of the Apostles and their successors relate to things spiritual, and not to civil affairs or civic regulations. If, therefore, the management of political affairs has sometimes been in the hands of ecclesiastics, it was in consequence of Divine Providence, and because of the confidence which Catholic princes and peoples placed in their clergy.)

From all this we see clearly that although Christ has returned to heaven, He has not abandoned His Church but has been pleased to remain mystically with her, carrying on, through His Apostles as His chosen instruments, His threefold Teaching, Priestly and Pastoral office to the end of time. In union with Saint Peter, their visible head, the Apostles were to traverse the earth preaching, dispensing grace, ordaining and becoming — ‘fishers of men,’ in order to bring all men to share in the benefits of truth, grace and salvation through Christ. They were to unite them to Jesus Himself in oneness of life, and to join them together into one great and glorious mystical body, of which Christ Himself is the invisible Head.

Such was the duty imposed by Christ on His Apostles. But the Apostles were mortal and died, one after another, during the first century of Christianity, while the threefold office of teacher, priest and pastor committed to them by Christ should endure to the end of time. Hence, it is clear that when the Divine Founder of the Church imparted this threefold power to His Apostles in order to perpetuate His work and His Church, He meant not only the twelve standing then and there in His presence. His Divine gaze extended to all their lawful successors in the hierarchy, the popes, bishops and priests to the end of the world, as if they all stood in His presence when He spoke. In

this sense it was, that He said to them all, — ‘Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world’ (Matthew 28:20).

The Apostles, therefore, and their lawful successors, are the persons to whom Christ entrusted the duty of forming in His Name, among all nations, and in all ages, a spiritual society; or rather, of extending and strengthening the original society established by Himself.

This spiritual society, consisting originally of the Apostles, disciples, and a few devout believers, became, like the mustard seed of the parable, a great tree, whose branches are spread over the whole earth. And this is the universal, the Catholic Church, in which Christ perpetuates forever His work of salvation, and applies to each individual soul, His truth, His saving grace, His redeeming sacrifice, all His merits as God-man, from His birth to His death, — these are the glorious treasures of this society, the riches in which each member, who has been duly admitted by baptism has a right to participate.

If the Church were only an association of persons holding the same tenets, and differing in no way from any other human society, it would not be the mystical body of Christians united to Christ. But — the ‘Church’ embraces not only the visible body, that is, the laity of all nations with their ecclesiastical superiors, but also the invisible spirit and life; namely, Jesus Christ, her invisible Head, with all His merits and the merits of all His saints; the treasures of truth and grace and holiness, as well as supernatural guidance. It thus becomes a sublime mystery of faith; hence, the Christian can truthfully say, — ‘I believe in one, holy, Catholic Church.’

The Church, a Society both Human and Divine.

As Jesus Christ is true God and true man, a person both human and Divine, so likewise this His Church is a society both human and Divine. For the Church is an institution consisting of men, but possessing the abiding presence of Jesus Christ and the continual assistance of the Holy Ghost. The Divine element appears in her indestructible existence throughout all ages; in her unchanging and infallible teaching of Divine truth; in her uninterrupted dispensation of God’s grace, by which innumerable souls attain holiness; and in the countless miracles marking her career throughout the world.

The human element in the Church is continually thwarting the Divine, and yet the omnipotence of God is continually making use of the same human element in helping the Church to accomplish her Divine destiny.

The human element of the Church appears in the weaknesses and shortcomings of many of her children, especially in the scandals and sins committed by her unworthy members. Christ foretold that scandals would come and He tolerated Judas among His Apostles as an example and a warning. But even this, will not prevent the Church from accomplishing her Divine mission. In spite of sin and scandal, in spite of the law of death and decay overruling all things human, the Church continues forever in her constitution and in her sacred ministry of grace and truth. This is another proof of the Divine element within her. According to His promise, Christ is always with His Church: He teaches, gives grace and rules through her; and she shares with Him the hatred of hell and the opposition and persecution of the world, but she is also destined to share His eternal glory in heaven.

Now, as Jesus Christ lives in His Church, we would naturally expect the life of the Church to reproduce or reflect the life of Jesus Christ Himself. And such, indeed, it does. The life of our

Divine Redeemer on earth was one of continued struggle and suffering. The same is true of His Church, and herein lies a powerful and undeniable proof that she is His — the one and only true Church. And just as Christ, in the midst of opposition, persecution and suffering, constantly manifested His glorious Divinity, completed His work, and triumphed over death and hell, so does the Church exhibit to us, in the midst of persecution, conflict and martyrdom, the triumph of truth and grace over the powers of earth and hell.

Let us now see how the Apostles carried out their Divine commission. After Jesus had ascended into heaven, Peter and his companions returned to Jerusalem, meditating on the last words of Jesus, — ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). That they, poor men, destitute of learning, science, money, and influence, should preach the Gospel to the whole world, and offer to the veneration of the Jews and pagans the Cross on which their Master had lately breathed His last, surely seemed a most impossible task — so much the more, as the powers of the world would not spare the disciples any more than they had spared their Divine Master. But they trusted in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, who was, as He promised, to teach them all things. And Jesus would never abandon His envoys; He would transform them into His other self by endowing them with the Holy Spirit, — ‘not many days hence’ (Acts 1:5). Wherefore, they retired to the Supper Room to prepare themselves by seclusion and prayer whilst awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Church Revealed.

The great day of Pentecost dawned, on which the Israelites celebrated the promulgation of the law on Mount Sinai. Multitudes of Jews from every region filled the Holy City. Jesus chose that day to reveal His Church to the nations of the earth and to inaugurate the New Law.

The Apostles and disciples, assembled in the Supper Room as commanded by Christ, — ‘with one mind they continued steadfast in prayer with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus’ (Acts 1:14). Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a violent wind coming and it filled the whole house; and parted tongues as of fire, settled upon each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign tongues (Acts 2:1-4). The Apostles were instantaneously transformed and made new men. Filled with celestial strength and inflamed with Divine fire, they proclaimed the greatness of God, and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Soon they were surrounded by a great multitude, who listened to them in amazement. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, addressed them with such supernatural and convincing power that three thousand were converted. This number was increased soon after by the addition of five thousand more, when Saint Peter healed the lame man at the Temple gate called the Beautiful. Not only Peter, but all the Apostles preached the resurrection of Christ with great power, and did many signs and wonders among the people.

But the high priest and their adherents, seeing all this, were filled with rage and envy. They had the Apostles seized, cast into prison, dragged before their chief council, and would have put them to death had not Gamaliel, a Pharisee and doctor of the law, greatly revered for his virtue and learning, counseled moderation. — ‘If this plan or work is of men,’ said he, — ‘it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it. Else perhaps you may find yourselves fighting even against God’ (Acts 5:38-39). The authority of Gamaliel was so outstanding that his advice was followed. Nevertheless, to satisfy their revenge, the Jewish leaders condemned the Apostles to be scourged, and then commanded them to cease preaching. — ‘So they departed from the presence of

the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been accounted worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name of Jesus. And they did not for a single day cease teaching and preaching in the temple and from house to house the good news of Jesus as the Christ' (Acts 5:41-42). The number of those who presented themselves for baptism increased exceedingly every day, for no earthly power was able to prevent the spread of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

The Crucified One had triumphed! In a few days, thousands had been enrolled under His standard. Jerusalem seemed fast becoming the center of His kingdom, and who could tell where the new conquerors would stop? The Jewish leaders saw clearly that the work was Divine; but contrary to Gamaliel's wise counsel, they resolved not only to check its progress, but even to annihilate it completely by putting the Apostles to death even as they had done their Divine Master. But they were about to learn at their own expense what becomes of a nation combating against God. — Its destruction is inevitable!

As almighty God turned the 'deicide' of the Jews (or at least of many of their significant leaders) to the salvation of the world, and the impenitence of the same Jews to the conversion of the heathen; so does He daily make use of the design of the wicked to glorify His Church.

The new converts in Jerusalem and its vicinity formed the first Christian community called the Church. The Apostles presided over this Church as Christ had ordained. The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles, and all their Epistles, bear witness that they not only preached and baptized and administered the other sacraments, but also ruled their communities in every way. They made regulations and laws; they threatened, judged, and punished. The number of believers grew daily and the Church spread rapidly over Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and into the surrounding countries, — and that even in spite of the bitter opposition of the Jews which soon broke out in open persecution.

The stubbornness and persecution of the Jewish leaders, and still more the express command of Jesus, Go, teach all nations, had early determined the Apostles to turn their attention to the Gentile world.

Saint Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, besides being the first to establish the Church of Christ among the Jews, had also the privilege of founding the first Christian congregation among the Gentiles. Enlightened by God in the three visions of unclean animals (Acts 10), Peter went and preached before the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household, concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. The Holy Spirit came down upon all those who were listening to the Apostle's inspired words and they were converted and baptized. Thus he, to whom the keys of the kingdom of heaven had been given, was the first to open the doors of God's kingdom on earth, not only to the children of Israel, but also to the Gentiles.

Inseparably associated with the glorious name of Peter is the illustrious name of Paul. Known as Saul of Tarsus, he was a young Pharisee of fanatical zeal, the most furious enemy and rabid persecutor of the Christians. This man of wonderful mind and indomitable energy, struck by the grace of God and miraculously converted, became — a 'vessel of election' and the great Apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9). Thus did Jesus baffle the Jewish leaders by taking their best soldiers to make them His best officers. With what astonishment and anger they looked upon this once bigoted Pharisee and bitter foe of Christianity as he went into their synagogues and with superhuman eloquence preached that the crucified Nazarene was truly the Messiah!

Rome Becomes the Center of Christianity.

The larger portion of the Jews had rejected Jesus. They also rejected His apostolic chief and vicar. Wherefore, displacing the religious center of the world, Saint Peter left Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity. Soon after we find him presiding over a large congregation at Antioch, where the followers of Christ were first called Christians. In the year 44, he arrived in imperial Rome, the city of the Caesars, destined by God to be the city of the Popes. Here he established his See and ruled the Church of Christ for twenty-five years; here, together with Saint Paul, he suffered a glorious martyrdom under Nero in the year 67. Sanctified by the blood of the twin Apostles, Rome has ever since been the capital of the Christian world.

Persecuted Christianity spread everywhere with unheard-of rapidity. On leaving Jerusalem the Apostles dispersed to the different countries of the world, preaching Christ's doctrine, baptizing the believers, laying down precepts to be observed, organizing local bodies of the faithful, and finally, with prayer and the imposition of hands, ordaining priests and bishops to instruct and govern the new congregations. Thus, in the prominent cities of the Roman Empire, we find Christian communities over which the Apostles placed their disciples as bishops; and from these centers, the Christian religion was spread in every direction. For example, Saint Paul appointed his disciple Titus bishop of the island of Crete, and instructed him to ordain and send bishops to other districts; Saint Peter sent his disciple Saint Mark to Alexandria, whence Christianity spread over all Egypt; Saint John ordained Saint Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, and Saint Ignatius bishop of Antioch. (Theodoret says he was appointed to this position by Saint Peter.)

The labors of the Apostles collectively are thus briefly summed up in the words of Saint Mark, — 'They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the preaching by the signs that followed' (Mark 16:20).

Here, then, we have authentic facts of history. In the light of them, let us briefly consider the position of those who hold that the Bible and the Bible alone, is the sole and only rule of faith.

The Bible Not the Only Rule of Faith.

We see the Church founded by Jesus Christ a well organized society, in full operation, laboring for the salvation of mankind and converting the nations of the world, as Christ had commanded His Apostles, by teaching and preaching, and not by writing and distributing Bibles. Christ Himself never wrote a line of Holy Scripture, but He did go up and down the hills and dales of Palestine, teaching and preaching the kingdom of God. And very evidently, He intended His Gospel to be propagated by the living voice of His Apostles and disciples; otherwise, the art of printing would have been of greater assistance than the gift of tongues!

He did not command them to write, but He did say, — 'Go teach,' — 'Go preach,' — not a word about writing! Of the twelve Apostles, the seventy-two disciples, and early followers of Our Lord, only eight have left us any of their sacred writings. Mark well, their Divine commission was to teach and preach the Gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). And we find them acting in strict accord with their instructions.

As a matter of fact, the Church of Christ had been evangelizing the world for about ten years, Saint Stephen (+ 36) and Saint James the Greater (+ 44) had been martyred, and the persecution of the Jews had passed, before the Apostles began to write. The Gospel of Saint Matthew, the first part of the New Testament ever written, was not compiled till between the years 42 and 50; that of Saint John, about the year 96, or near the close of the first century. All the other books of the New Testament were written in the intervening time. Hence, the Church came first, not the Bible, and

there is not the slightest evidence to show the substitution, in later times, of a lifeless book for the living voice of Christ's teaching Church.

Origin of the Bible and Tradition.

During the space of three years, Jesus preached His saving doctrines of salvation in the cities, towns and hamlets of Judea. Although great crowds heard His voice, the Apostles and disciples were the most favored witnesses of the truth and sanctity of His heavenly doctrine. These He instructed more fully and apart from the multitudes, in all the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Much of what He taught was afterwards written by the Apostles and Evangelists, and carefully preserved in the Church as Holy Scripture. Much, too, was handed down merely by word of mouth, and formed what is known as Tradition. In the course of time, this was gradually committed to writing by the early Fathers of the Church.

Not only did the Church exist before the New Testament, she is truly the very mother of the New Testament, because it was written by that same teaching body which Christ had divinely commissioned to establish and perpetuate His Church. The Church, then, is earlier in point of time as well as mother of the New Testament. Had there been no Church there would have been no New Testament.

When, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles did write, it was only to confirm and supplement their teaching; never was there the slightest evidence that Christianity was to rest solely on a Bible foundation. Their Gospels and Epistles were written on the occasion of some emergency, and were addressed to particular persons or churches and never intended to take the place of that Divine and infallible teaching authority established by Christ; but only to explain or supplement some doctrine already preached. They do not contain all that Jesus did, much less all that He taught (John 20:30; and 21:25).

There is nowhere in the New Testament a clear, methodical statement of all the teachings of Christ. It was never meant to be such. Neither does the Bible set forth any formulary of belief, as a creed or catechism. For the Bible alone does not contain all the truths a Christian is bound to believe, nor does it explicitly command all the duties he is obliged to practice. Hence, it cannot be the sole and only rule of faith. If it were, the Bible itself should record it somewhere, but there is not a single line in the Old or New Testament that declares any such principle. On the contrary, Saint Paul says—that 'faith depends' not on reading but — 'on hearing' (Romans 10:17). But the Bible and Tradition, both infallibly interpreted by the Church, are the right rule of faith.

Christ bade His Apostles teach men — 'to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matthew 28:20). And Saint Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, bids them, — 'hold the teachings that you have learned, whether by word or by letter of ours' (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15). And again to Timothy, he writes, — 'The things that you have heard from me through many witnesses, commend to trustworthy men who shall be competent in turn to teach others' (2 Timothy 2:2). These passages point plainly enough to a Tradition, or a handing down by word of mouth of doctrines taught by Christ and His Apostles. Thus, the Church and Tradition both existed before the New Testament as such.

Now, however, all or nearly all the truths of Tradition have been recorded in written books. They can be found chiefly in the decrees of the popes and councils; in the sacred liturgies; and in the writings of the Fathers, Doctors and great theologians of the Church.

We have said the Bible does not contain the entire revelation of God to man. It nowhere tells us how many sacred books there are, nor what they are, and if we did not know this for certain from Tradition, we should not even have a Bible. If we consult the Bible only, without Tradition, we ought for instance, still to keep holy the Saturday with the Jews, instead of Sunday, for there is not a single line in the whole Bible authorizing the sanctification of Sunday.

The Church, the Guardian and Custodian of the Bible.

Whoever accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God, does so in the first place, on the authority of the Catholic Church, because she was its sole guardian and custodian for fifteen hundred years, and is so still.

It is well to remember the Bible was not always the neatly bound volume we now have. For many years after the Epistles and Gospels were written the knowledge of them was confined to the churches to whom they were addressed. As time went on they were copied from the originals and sent to other churches, and were always held in great veneration as the Word of God. Thus for several centuries these sacred writings were scattered over Christendom.

Meanwhile some false copies, as well as many spurious writings purporting to be Scripture, were circulated among the faithful, causing great doubt and uncertainty. It was then that the Church collected all the manuscripts, and by her authority from Jesus Christ as custodian and teacher of His doctrine, separated the true from the false, and declared which were inspired, and which spurious. Only an infallible Church could do this; there is no other authority on the Bible, for the Church is the only Divine and infallible witness of Jesus Christ. Thus it was at a Roman synod in the year 382, that Pope Saint Damasus, the supreme head of the Church, declared the canon of the Scriptures, that is, the official list of inspired books which make up what we now know as the Bible.

From the second century, lists were being compiled and much was being written on the canon of Scripture. Great Catholic saints and scholars made it their study, among them Saint Justin Martyr, Saint Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo. The most complete list after the 382 Roman list was drawn up at the council of Hippo in the year 393 and reaffirmed at the third and fourth councils of Carthage in 397 and 418. To this list was appended a request that it should be sent to Rome for approval and confirmation, preferably, it said, "to holy Boniface, bishop of Rome." On such an important matter, it was felt that authority, in the person of the Pope, must speak.

At about the same time, we find that Saint Exuperius, the bishop of Toulouse had written also to the Pope (Saint Innocent I) asking formally for a list of the true books of Scripture. In 405 Innocent replied, and the list he sent was the same as that of the councils of Hippo and Carthage.

The same canon was confirmed by a solemn decree of the Council of Trent, April 8, 1546 and of the Vatican, April 24, 1870. It consists of the forty-six books of the Old Testament, and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, contained in the Latin Vulgate of which the Douay Bible has long been the approved authentic English translation.

The Church included in her canon the inspired books of the Old Testament, as revealed by God to the prophets, and preserved before Christ by the Jews; and as recognized and approved by Christ and His Apostles as the Word of God and sanctioned by the councils. These the Church has always kept intact and preserved as sacred and inspired, together with the New Testament.

At this time, the Bible was not a 'book' and not printed as we have it, but a complete collection of manuscripts, originally written in Hebrew and Greek. About this time also (382), Pope Saint Damasus ordered a new and complete translation from the oldest manuscripts, to be made into Latin, which was then the living language, not only of Rome and Italy but of the civilized world. This gigantic task he assigned to Saint Jerome, the most learned Hebrew scholar of his time, who devoted more than thirty years to this work. His translation, called — the 'Vulgate', because written in the vernacular or vulgar tongue, was widely circulated throughout Christendom, and is still the approved Latin version with which all Catholic translations must agree.

From the early fifth century, many translations were made into the different languages then used by the people, all written by hand and all by Catholics. The Bible was well known and well preserved. Copies made by hand were multiplied, and learned monks devoted a great part of their lives to this work. Many of their hand-copied Bibles, artistically illuminated, are still extant.

Little do we realize in our age of electrical machinery what labor and care it cost the Church to preserve and perpetuate the Bible before the invention of printing. In England alone, there were ten translations in whole or in part, and the whole Bible existed in English long before Wycliffe was born (1324). After the invention of printing in 1440, copies were multiplied by thousands. Before Luther's translation of the New Testament into German in 1521, there were several hundred editions of the Bible, all Catholic; and nearly two hundred of them were in the languages of the laity. Of these, fourteen complete editions were in German prior to Luther's; nine before he was born! How false to say Luther brought the Bible to light! (Protestantism got the Bible from the Catholic Church and borrowed from her translation. Some Bible scholars even maintain that Luther had the old German Catholic Bible of 1483 before him when he was making his translation. How false to say — Luther 'discovered' the Bible for the first time at Erfurt about 1507, and gave it to the people in his translation made in 1521!)

Thus history bears witness that the Catholic Church preserved and gave to mankind the most imperishable book of all times. Truly no sect, no other denomination ever did for the Bible what the Catholic Church has done. And as she preserved it in the past so she defends it today; she esteems and reveres it as no other denomination. To her, every line of it is sacred, the inspired Word of God. But that does not blind her to the fact that it is not the sole and only rule of faith. For the Bible and authentic Tradition together contain the full — 'deposit of faith' as transmitted by Christ and His Apostles and over both the Bible and Tradition Christ Himself has placed His Church as official guardian and infallible interpreter.

Christ did not leave His children dependent on the leaden types of a book, but referred them to His Apostles and their lawful successors. He did not appoint a written or printed book to be the infallible guide of mankind, but founded for that purpose a living and speaking infallible Church. She alone has the authority and the power to explain and impart to men the true meaning of the Bible, and the sense of oral and written tradition.

The Church has always recognized and used the Bible, in as far as it goes, as a duplicate on parchment, of the doctrines which Christ Himself inscribed with Divine fire upon the hearts of His Apostles.

The Church, the Official and Authentic Interpreter.

The very nature of the Bible itself ought to convince every thinking man that it stands in need of an official and authentic interpreter vouched for by Christ Himself. It is not a clear and simple volume,

easy to understand, but a collection of sublime and mysterious books dealing with the revelations of God to Man, and often very difficult to comprehend. Saint Peter himself tells us that in the Epistles of Saint Paul — ‘there are certain things difficult to understand, which the unlearned and unstable distort, just as they do the rest of the Scriptures also to their own destruction’ (2 Peter 3:16). And elsewhere in the same Epistle he says, — ‘You must understand first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation’ (2 Peter 1:20).

The illustrious doctor Saint Augustine says, — ‘What else gives rise to so many heresies, save that the Scripture, which is good in itself, is ill understood?’ For the Bible is not its own witness. It does not, in obscure and doubtful passages, decide upon the true meaning of its own words. Without an infallible interpreter, the Bible can be the most misleading book ever written. All the sects have always appealed to the unchanging Bible to prove their ever-changing and contradictory doctrines — each one of them pretending to have hit upon the true meaning! In our own day there are hundreds of different denominations, all of them built upon the same Bible, yet contradicting one another on every possible point of doctrine. Such divisions in the Christian family are a scandal, and the greatest obstacle to the conversion of pagan peoples, who might well say to their Christian teachers that they had better stay at home, till they agree among themselves upon Christ’s teachings.

Obviously, Jesus Christ cannot be the author of such contradictory doctrines. Certainly, then, He must have left in His Church the only means of preventing it, that is, some judge perfectly qualified to decide with infallible authority, on all religious doubts and controversies, and to point out with absolute certainty the true meaning of the inspired Volume. This is the only possible way to safeguard unity of doctrine, which is such a glorious mark of the Catholic Church alone.

Now, the judge, perfectly qualified to decide all doubts and controversies, is none other than the teaching body of the Catholic Church, in other words, the Pope and bishops collectively, united in general council, or in their Sees throughout the world, with the Pope at their head; or the Pope alone, when he decides officially, on matters of faith or morals as teacher of the whole Church.

As in civic affairs, a case at law could never be terminated if the council were allowed to appeal to the law books alone, without a presiding judge, lawfully commissioned and fully qualified to interpret the text of the law, so too, religious controversies can never be settled by an appeal to the Scripture alone, without a divinely appointed judge to decide authoritatively on all religious disputes, and interpret with infallible authority, the true meaning of Holy Scripture.

Fallacy of Private Interpretation.

Look about you in the realm of religion today. Everywhere you see scores and scores of Protestant denominations and sects. They cannot agree among themselves about the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity. What is their fundamental principle? Any well-informed Protestant will tell you it is the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, and that self-interpreted. With no central authority to decide upon its doubtful and obscure passages, no one has any right to dictate to them what any scriptural text may or may not mean. Each individual must read and think it out for himself, and draw his own conclusions. With them no pope, no church is infallible, but every individual is infallible! It is this pernicious principle that has set up church after church and sect after sect. It is this principle that teaches one that Christ is Divine, that is, true God and true man, and teaches another that Christ is not Divine, but only human. And strangely enough, both will defend their contentions by the Bible.

The idea of private interpretation was a thing unheard of before the religious revolution of the sixteenth century. If this same principle were applied to the laws and constitutions of a country, it would spell anarchy and ruin! We would rather be out of that country!

If the enemies of the Catholic Church could find one weak spot in the armor of infallibility, the Catholic Church would be as changeable and unstable as any human organization, and very like unto the many sects and denominations we see around us in the world today.

But there are other arguments against — the ‘Bible only’ rule of faith. Historically, we know for certain that the Bible has never been the way to learn Jesus Christ and His Divine doctrine, because the Bible could not, at any period, have been accessible to all Christians. As we have seen, the Christian religion had been spread, and flourished before the books of the New Testament were written. And even after they had been written there were millions of Christians who lived and died without so much as having seen a complete collection of its several parts, much less the whole Bible.

The Voice of the Church, the Infallible Authority.

What guide, then, had these Christians of the first, second and third centuries, a period of persecution so violent that only the omnipotent power of God could enable them to withstand it? Certainly not the Bible! Yet this might be called the Golden Age of Christianity when several millions of every age, sex, and condition sealed their faith in Jesus Christ by a glorious martyrdom. They learned, as Christ and His Apostles declared all Christians must learn, not from a book they did not have, but from the voice of that Divine and infallible authority Christ commanded all men to hear (Luke 10:16; Matthew 28:17).

Or again, from the fourth to the fifteenth century, how utterly impossible to supply every Christian with a copy of the Bible! Books, in the modern sense of the word, did not exist before the invention of printing in 1440. The labor of writing them was so great, that they were very expensive and only the very wealthy could afford a book of any kind. During that long period, the Bible had to be copied by hand and though hand-written copies were multiplied, their cost put them beyond the great mass of the people. They were chiefly in the hands of the clergy and the learned.

Even today, many are too poor to have a Bible. What countless multitudes of Christians, then, down through all these nineteen centuries have had no Bible? — And what about those who could not read or understand it if they had a Bible? What of the illiterate of our own and other times? For even if the Bible were at all times accessible to all, how many millions there are, and always have been, in every age and in every country, who are not accessible to the Bible, because they cannot read! In actual practice, then, the Bible never has been and never can be, a universal guide to the knowledge of Christ and His Divine doctrine. Hence, the theory of private interpretation must always be untenable.

Are Catholics Allowed to Read the Bible?

Before leaving this subject, we must take notice of a question often asked, namely, — ‘Are Catholics allowed to read the Bible?’ Most certainly they are, and not only allowed to read it, but urged to do so. But as the heretics of every age, and especially since the appearance of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, have always sought to defend their errors by perverting the sacred text, therefore the Church is bound to protect and warn her children against erroneous translations which are often designedly offered to the ignorant.

Hence, the Church does not permit the people in general to read Protestant Bibles because they contain many errors and false doctrines regarding even the most fundamental truths of Christianity. However, educated Catholics who for controversial purposes wish to read the Protestant Bible, may do so with the permission of their bishop. Aside from this restriction, the Church does allow and encourages the use of the Bible in editions that are duly authorized and accompanied by explanatory notes. With this precaution, the Church has never at any time, been opposed to the devout reading of the sacred Scriptures; and, she desires most earnestly that all, even the laity, should know it and meditate upon it. The New Testament, especially the four Gospels, are best suited for this purpose. It has always been a Catholic tradition that the Bible should have the place of honor in the home, but today few homes have a copy of the holy Bible. Therefore, it is important to urge that at least a copy of the New Testament be found in every Catholic home. Its doctrines are the foundation of our Christian, devout life. Its Divine message was meant for us today, even as it was for the peoples of ages past. We are moved by it today even as Christ's hearers were by the simplicity and sincerity of His words, not less than by the beauty and sublimity of His doctrine. Its message has a charm that touches the soul and raises our thoughts to the contemplation of supernatural and eternal things. We read it that the teachings of Christ may fill our hearts and purge our minds of sordid thoughts and worldly cares; that we may learn to know Christ, and knowing Him, may love and serve Him. We read it to calm our troubled souls, and quiet the restless activity of our distracted minds; we read it for truth, for tidings of eternity.

The official prayer of the Church, commonly called the Divine Office, which all the clergy are bound to recite, and which requires from one to two hours every day of the year, is taken almost exclusively from the Bible. The same is true of the Mass, the highest act of worship that can be offered to God; and that the faithful may the more fully enter into the spirit, of this sacrifice, the Church provides missals having the Latin and the vernacular of the sacred rite, arranged in parallel columns. [Since Vatican II, it even permits the entire liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular tongues.]

So anxious is the Church that her children should know and love Holy Scripture that she makes it the duty of her priests to read and explain some of the most important parts of it to the people every Sunday. The truth is, the Catholic Church makes more and better use of the Bible, and has done more to preserve and defend it than any other denomination in the world, or even all of them together have ever done; so that many sincere Bible lovers, even outside her fold, have come to recognize her as its only rational and adequate defender.

Dear Reader, you have learned from this booklet that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of man and Founder of the Church. He has been presented to you as Teacher, Priest and Pastor in His Church, a society both human and Divine. You have been convinced that the Church He founded is the guardian and custodian of the Bible, likewise its authentic interpreter.

The Catholic Church invites all Christians to return to the great Mother Church which teaches today the same unchanging doctrine taught by Christ and His Apostles (Matthew 28:19-20). Those who condemn her for not changing her doctrines should condemn the professors of mathematics for not changing the multiplication table. Truth cannot change. Of its very nature, it is absolutely unchangeable. The multiplication table was formulated centuries ago, yet no educated person ever accused it of not being — 'up-to-date'. So, too, the doctrines of the Catholic Church were formulated centuries ago, and no educated person ever accused them of not being — 'up-to-date'.

All the Church desires is that her doctrines be investigated. If you do not find the same infallible certainty for them as for the truths of mathematics, do not accept them. Catholic truths have stood the test of human reasoning and investigation for more than nineteen hundred years. If they were not reasonable, they would have been rejected centuries ago.

Prayers.

The Sign of the Cross

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Indulgence of 100 days. 300 days if made with Holy Water. ("Preces et Pia Opera, 631.) [Since Vatican II, the Church classifies all indulgences as either 'Partial' or 'Plenary'. All former indulgences listing times are now 'Partial'. Do not forget, however, that God is never outdone in generosity.]

We profess our Catholic Faith chiefly by the Sign of the Cross. By it, we call to mind the chief mysteries of our holy religion, the existence of God, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the incarnation and death of the Son of God.

The Cross is the principal emblem of the Catholic religion. It is the symbol of our faith, the source of our hope, the incentive of our love, the sign of our redemption, and the pledge of our salvation. It is at once a beautiful prayer and a powerful weapon against evil.

The Apostles' Creed.

I BELIEVE in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

A Christian's Act of Faith.

I BELIEVE in one God. I believe that in God there are three Divine Persons — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

I believe that God the Son became man, without ceasing to be God. I believe that He is my Lord and Savior, that He died on the Cross for the salvation of all mankind, that He arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in heaven and hell — that God will reward the good with perfect happiness forever, and punish the wicked with never-ending pain. I believe everything else that God has taught and revealed.

O my God, who are all-good and merciful, I hope to be saved and want to do all that is necessary for my salvation according to Your holy will. I have committed many sins in my life, but I detest and hate them, and I am sorry, very sorry for all of them, because by them I have offended You, my God, who are all-good, all-perfect, all-holy, so merciful, so kind, who did die on the Cross for me

and whom I love with all my heart. I ask Your pardon, O my God, and I promise You, by the help of Your grace, never to sin again.

Prayer to Jesus Crucified.

O JESUS, my Crucified Lord, look down with pity and compassion upon sinful man; suffer not those souls for whom You did die upon the Cross to be lost to Your heavenly kingdom, and to be punished eternally.

By that compassion which moved You to raise Your adorable head crowned with thorns, and agonizing with pain, to listen to the prayer of the good thief, have pity on us; and out of that immense charity which consumed You on that Cross, pardon us!

Let not Your Precious Blood be shed in vain, O Lord, but may each drop fall with mercy upon all poor sinners, for whom You did suffer and die!

Take us, O Jesus, within Your fond embrace, and let those wide-extended arms press us to Your adorable Heart, burning for love of sinful man, even amidst Your excruciating tortures upon the Cross! May those sacred flames consume in us all that is opposed to the reign of Your love; and by the fruits of our Redemption may we become one in You, our crucified Lord, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the ever-blessed Three in One. Amen.

Prayer for the Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

O SPIRIT of Wisdom, preside over all my thoughts, words and actions, from this hour till the moment of my death.

Spirit of Understanding, enlighten and teach me.

Spirit of Counsel, direct my inexperience.

Spirit of Fortitude, strengthen my weakness.

Spirit of Knowledge, instruct my ignorance.

Spirit of Piety, make me fervent in good works.

Spirit of Fear, restrain me from all evil.

Heavenly Spirit, make me persevere in the service of God, and enable me to act on all occasions, with goodness and benignity (kindness), patience, charity and joy, longanimity (trustfulness), mildness and fidelity. Let the heavenly virtues of modesty, continency (self-control) and chastity adorn the temple You have chosen for Your abode. O Spirit of Holiness, by Your all-powerful grace, preserve my soul from the misfortune of sin. Amen.

Act of Oblation to the Holy Ghost.

ON my knees before the great cloud of witnesses, I offer myself, soul and body to You, O Eternal Spirit of God. I adore the brightness of Your purity, the unerring keenness of Your justice, and the might of Your love. You are the strength and the light of my soul. In You I live and move and am. I desire never to grieve You by unfaithfulness to grace, and I pray with all my heart to be kept from the smallest sin against You. Make me faithful in every thought, and grant that I may always listen to Your voice, watch for Your light, and follow Your gracious inspirations. I cling to You, and give myself to You, and ask You, by Your compassion, to watch over me in my weakness. Holding the pierced feet of Jesus, and looking at His five wounds, and trusting to His Precious Blood, and adoring His open side and riven Heart, I implore You, adorable Spirit, Helper of my infirmity, so to keep me in Your grace, that I may never sin against You with the sin which You can not forgive.

Give me grace, O Holy Ghost, Spirit of the Father and of the Son, to say to You always and everywhere, — ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears’. Amen.

Prayer to Christ the King.

O JESUS CHRIST, I acknowledge You as universal King. All that has been made, has been created for You. Exercise all Your rights over me. I renew my baptismal vows, I renounce Satan, his pomps and his works; and I promise to live as a good Christian. And in particular do I pledge myself to labor, to the best of my ability, for the triumph of the rights of God and of Your Church. Divine Heart of Jesus, to You do I proffer my poor services, laboring that all hearts may acknowledge Your Sacred Kingship, and that thus the reign of Your peace be established throughout the whole universe. Amen.

Plenary indulgence, once a day, under usual conditions. (“Preces et Pia Opera, 254)

An Act of Consecration.

O SOVEREIGN and true leader, O Christ, my King, I kneel before You here like a vassal in the old feudal times to take my oath of fealty. I place my joined hands within Your wounded hands and promise You inviolable loyalty. I dedicate to You all the powers of my soul, all the senses of my body, all the affections of my heart.

Prayer to the Holy Ghost for Guidance.

By Cardinal Manning.

O HOLY Spirit of God, take me as Your disciple, guide me, illuminate me, sanctify me, bind my hands that I may not do evil, cover my eyes that I may not see it; sanctify my heart that evil may not rest within me. Be You my God, be You my Guide; where-so-ever You lead me, I will go; whatsoever You forbid me, I will renounce; and whatsoever You command, in Your strength I will do. Lead me, then, unto the fullness of Your truth. Amen.

Prayer for the Return to the True Fold.

O LORD Jesus, most merciful Savior of the world, we beg and beseech You, through Your most Sacred Heart, that all wandering sheep may now return to You, the shepherd and bishop of their souls, to You who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.

My God, unite all minds in truth and all hearts in charity.

Indulgence of 300 days each time. (“Preces et Pia Opera, 10)

A Prayer for the Conversion of Unbelievers.

O HOLY Spirit of Truth, we beseech You to enlighten the minds of unbelievers, to inspire their hearts, to receive Your word and to believe the teachings of the Church; to give them courage to accept the faith and openly profess it; that they may come into union with You and the Father through Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Lead, Kindly Light.

(By Cardinal Newman before he became a Catholic)

LEAD, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.
I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Should lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on.
I loved the garish day; and, in spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.
So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angels faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.
That in all things God may be glorified.

Holy Rule of Saint Benedict.

(Thanks to Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, Missouri.)
