

# I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

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## CHAPTER NINE

### MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

HOW MANY TIMES I had repeated the marks of the true Church, when I referred contemptuously, or with a certain feeling of pity, I admit, to what I considered to be the miserable heretical sects, until I realized that in the Gospel such marks are not given.

Then I asked myself, "From where did the Catholic apologist get them, for no one but CHRIST or the Apostles has the authority to declare what are the characteristics of the true Church?"

I saw that such marks are good, even though they are not in the Scriptures expressly referring to one church to distinguish it from others that are not true. But this does not mean that these are the only marks: and of course they aren't.

Let us examine them.

If a church had them it would not mean that it is therefore the only true church, even though it would be good and favorable to the believers who belong to it. But does the Catholic Church have them?

We can conclude, then, that it is not enough for a church to possess today the marks that the Catholics say ought to characterize the true Church, but it must have possessed them always.

#### Unity

History tells us that Innocent II and Anacletus II (A.D. 1240) were popes at the same time, part of the faithful following each one, as is natural. Clement III, Victor II and Urban II held the pontifical chair at the same time and excommunicated each other and the followers of the other. The same thing happened with Urban VI and Clement VII. Do the Catholics call this unity?

## **Universality**

Its very name of Roman denies this, since what is local can't be universal. Besides, there have been and still are many places where there is not a single follower.

## **Apostolicity**

Where does the Catholic Church get its apostolicity? Don't repeat the statement about the uninterrupted succession of popes, or about the inheritance that Peter never had and so could never leave to the bishops of Rome.

I don't want to be the one to answer this point. I prefer to let the Fathers of the Church themselves do it.

Irenaeus says, "The principal succession is true doctrine in word and deeds; he who doesn't have this is outside the truth" (6:33).

Lactantius says: "Where there is the same doctrine, there is the same see; but where there is opposition to the doctrine, there is opposition to the see. He who corrupts the doctrine does not succeed except in the same way that sickness succeeds health, or darkness light" (in a work by Athanasius).

They all reach the same conclusion: even if the popes were the successors of Peter and the bishopric of Rome - an idea that has already been refuted before - that didn't give them any authority; the see or place is not what gives one the right to be called or to be a successor, but identity in doctrine.

Unfortunately for the Catholics they must recognize that between the doctrine they profess and that of CHRIST which is set forth in the New Testament there is not only lack of identity but opposition.

## **Holiness**

This mark is even more difficult to show, for if a Catholic wanted to argue about the matter, citing to me some lists of saints of ancient time. I could show him that most of them lived at a time when the Roman system had not yet worked out, so the saints mentioned didn't belong to that church but to Christianity in general.

On the other hand we are definitely able to present a list of periods closely attached to the Roman clerical system, since they occupied no less a place than that of its infallible head, who were not exactly renowned for their holiness and virtue. I am giving only names since the acts are more than known in history and so there is no need to soil these pages with shameful stories.

Here are some names with the dates when they lived:

- John VIII (850),
- Sergius III (900).
- John XII (950),
- Boniface VII (980),
- Benedict IX (1030),
- Gregory VII (1052),
- Innocent II and Anacletus II (1240),
- Innocent IV (1250),
- John XX (1330),
- John XXII (1410),
- Sixtus IV (1480), and his successor Innocent VII,
- Alexander VI (1500),
- Leon (1520).

If the Roman Church doesn't fit into the characteristics that she herself has made, much less would she be identified with those that are drawn from the Holy Scriptures.

**The true Church of CHRIST is any group of two or three or more disciples (saved persons, Acts 2:4) gathered in the name of CHRIST (Matthew 28:20), where the Word of GOD is preached without adulteration (II Corinthians 4:2), where prayers are offered to GOD in the name of JESUS (Acts 1:14; Matthew 28:19).**

The Evangelical churches fit into what the Holy Scriptures tell us the churches of CHRIST should be. As to the Roman Catholic churches, any reader who knows history can make his own comparison.

If the great Roman Church is not the true Church of CHRIST; if it is true that it has departed from the original teachings and does not teach according to the Gospel - this thought horrified me - in what other church could I find the authority that would grant and guarantee me the salvation of my soul? But little by little I became convinced that the idea of a church that is indispensable for salvation is entirely foreign to the Holy Scriptures, the only source by which we are enabled to know the plan of GOD for the redemption of the world.

Whenever the Holy Scriptures speak of the salvation of the soul, they ascribe it exclusively to CHRIST. See John 3:16: "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" In a word, so as not to perish and to have eternal life, I must believe in the Son of GOD. But it doesn't say anything to me about the church.

The Scriptures themselves reject the idea that anything could influence my salvation apart from CHRIST, for they say: "**Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none' other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12).

The Apostle Peter, when he affirms that there is no salvation in any other, excludes both people and societies.

The Archbishop of Barcelona quotes these four texts to show that the Catholic Church is indispensable for salvation:

**"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you . . . He that heareth you heareth me . . . He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life . . . I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."**

The first of these texts refers only to the testimony that the disciples were to give in the world, and the last two confirm what we have been saying, that salvation is only in CHRIST.

Nothing is said here about an organized hierarchical institution. It is true that the one who rejects or doesn't listen to the messengers of the Gospel condemns himself. But this is true about anyone who proclaims the true word of the Gospel. It doesn't have anything to do with churches or sacraments.

Let us suppose a Hindu into whose hands a New Testament has come.

He reads it, he believes in JESUS CHRIST as the Son of GOD and accepts Him as his Saviour. He tries to conform his life to the teachings contained in it. Will GOD have to close the doors of Heaven against him because in this life he had no priest or pastor to give him the sacraments? Our conscience rejects such a supposition. Are we more just than GOD?

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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