

The Real Catholic Church Of Christ



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THE DOGMATIC BELIEFS and ritualistic ceremonials of the Roman Catholic Church are sustained by a thinly-intellectual veneer, called the Scholastic system of reasoning. Everything taught to and practiced by Catholics is supposed to be proved by the syllogisms of this specialized system of philosophy. It was borrowed from the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but has been so corrupted that it now has only a bare resemblance to what Aristotle taught.

Nothing has contributed more to discredit belief in God and the redemptive work of Christ than this attempt of Roman Catholic theologians to prove them by their trick syllogistic reasoning. It has driven many to atheism or complete agnosticism. Worst of all, it has caused many millions of well-intentioned and sincere seekers after God to lapse into religious indifferentism. Of all the inadequate metaphysical yardsticks to measure the immeasurable immensity of the deity and explain Christ's way of salvation, none is less satisfying and more harmful than the Scholastic syllogism of the Roman Catholic medieval reasoners. It proves nothing beyond what is already known or believed. It begins with the assumption of the proof it pretends to show. It uses the old trick of the stage magician who only takes out of the hat what he first puts into it unknown to the audience. But it suits perfectly the structure of Roman Catholic law and theology, since nothing in Catholic teaching and practice must ever be proved to be different from what has been already established. In this way Catholic Church dogmas remain forever immutable and unquestionable.

No one was more opposed to the absurdity of trying to convert people to Christianity by trick syllogisms than Cardinal Newman, who is boosted as the Catholic Church's greatest convert in modern times. In his *Grammar of Assent* he says:

"Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot around a corner, and you may not despair of converting by a syllogism. Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences; we shall have never done beginning if we are determined to begin with proof; we shall turn our theology into inferences and our divines into textuaries. Logicians are more set upon concluding rightly than upon right conclusions. They cannot see the end for the process."

Few Roman Catholics know that **Cardinal Newman was very unhappy after he became a Roman Catholic**. He made honest efforts to awaken Roman Catholics to the need of finding first-hand proof of God's existence and knowledge of salvation from the Bible. For this he was distrusted and persecuted by the Roman inquisitors. In his *Life of Cardinal Newman*, his Catholic biographer¹ quotes from a letter of Newman to H. Wilberforce as follows:

"However honest my thoughts, and earnest my endeavors to keep rigidly within the lines of Catholic doctrine, every word I publish will be malevolently scrutinized, and every expression that can possibly be perverted sent straight to Rome..." "I shall be fighting," he adds, "under the lash, which does not tend to produce vigorous efforts in the battle, or to inspire either courage or presence of mind."

The chief engineer of this structure of Roman Catholic philosophy was St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the thirteenth century. It was he who fixed the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in their syllogistic molds, as they are known and used to this day. He gathered together all the beliefs and practices that had developed in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the preceding centuries and tried to prove them all by his special system of medieval reasoning. He called his finished work the *Summa Theologica*. His aim was not to find out the truth about the teaching of Christ as contained in the Bible and New Testament. His task was to find reasons (or excuses) for the beliefs and practices already existing in the Catholic Church and to fix them forever as immutable dogmas that must never be questioned. He sought for conclusions to the logic of words, not for the spiritual power that makes men the children of God through Christ. Like the logicians Cardinal Newman berated, he was more set on concluding rightly than upon right conclusions.

The lack of true spirituality in the religion of Rome to this day can be traced to this juggling of words by Thomas Aquinas to sustain the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church. Like Anselm before him, Aquinas was a clever apologist for the paganization of the Christian religion before his time. He made no attempt to reform the abuses that had multiplied in the Church for over a thousand years. All he did was to brace up the structure of the papacy by the formulations of syllogistic logic. He closed his eyes to the fact that the entire foundation of the Roman religion was corrupted and eaten away. The patch-work of Aquinas made the task all the more difficult for the Protestant reformers, three centuries later, when they set forth to restore the true teachings of Christ to the world. It made it necessary for them to overturn the whole structure of the papacy from its very foundations.

The philosophical formulations of Aquinas' work were concerned particularly with sustaining the main dogmas on which the Roman Catholic Church rests – the sacrifice of the mass, with its doctrine of transubstantiation; purgatory; confession; saint worship, and indulgences. His plan of the Incarnation and Redemption was borrowed from St. Anselm of Canterbury (A. D. 1033). To Aquinas alone goes the praise for the elaboration of such peculiar doctrines as transubstantiation. The very word itself was his own invention. Against all the principles of physical laws, he laid it down that in the mass, the substance of the wafer of bread is transmuted by the words of a priest into the living flesh of Jesus Christ. Neither Aquinas nor anyone who

has come after him has ever explained how this happens, or what becomes of the substance of the bread in the wafer. It was something that was believed long before the time of Aquinas, and he found a magic word for it. He reasoned out and proved the other great dogmas of the Roman Catholic religion in the same way. Papal specifications called for an actual corporeal presence of Jesus Christ in the wafer of bread. Aquinas made up the formula, into which certain quotations from the Bible were conveniently fitted. His papal masters also called upon him to supply syllogistic formulas to substantiate the Catholic practice of confession and priestly absolution for sins, for the existence of purgatory, and saint worship. Aquinas gave them all they asked for. His magic syllogism, like the prestidigitator's hat, produced them all – because they were all first put into it.

It was this engineering of an unreal and forced alliance of Christianity with the mere chance historical development of power in the Roman Catholic Church that has been responsible for the three great perversions of Christ's true teachings. These three perversions are: ecclesiasticism, sacramentalism and dogmatism. They are three aspects of the papacy's betrayal of the redemptive work of Christ. They are the three means by which the people have been robbed of religious and civil sovereignty. For these three perversions have sustained religious and civil dictatorship for nearly two thousand years. They destroy the innate rights of the common people to form a true Christian democracy.

Christianity, as rightly taught, can have nothing to do with autocracy of any kind, ecclesiastical or civil. Its development can never be stilted by cramping dogmatism. It is also opposed to sacramentalism, which injects into religion an un-Christlike notion of sacrifice with an accompanying priestly caste.

The teaching of Christ disclaimed all compromise with autocracy, and denied all need of further sacrifice after His universal sacrifice on the cross. The only sacrifice it demands is the collective burnt-offering of all the ignorance, superstition, conventional formalism, of the mass of half-truths and compromise which have heretofore stood in the way of man's liberation. "You shall know the truth," said Christ, "and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:22). Man's redemption and liberation is not a problem that can be solved by metaphysics. If it were it would be unjustly confined to a favored few. Christianity is the spirit of adventure, free to all men in the great open spaces where men congregate. It ought never to have been shut up within the academic circle of the classroom, nor in the choir stalls of cathedrals.

The Christian Gospel proclaimed the good news that a man had been born who was of the same nature as God. Accompanying this message was the assurance that all men might, if they would, share the life of this man, even to the partaking of his flesh and blood. "As many as received, him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13).

It was by this road that liberty came into the world, not as the privilege or the accomplishment of superior persons or of any ecclesiastical trust or

monopoly, but as the right of every man by virtue of his very humanity. This is the pivotal point of Christianity and of all human history. If a man is just a mere creature of God, the quintessence of dust, he must be ruled, like the animals, forever by external law and dictatorship. In that case, the sovereignty of absolutism, based upon the foundations of economic and defensive necessity, would be irrevocably established. This is what Fascism and Nazism tried to make the world believe, and it is thus no wonder that their contentions were supported by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

On the other hand, if it be true, as Christ taught, that a man may become the kin of God, then for a certainty the sovereignty of the people will be established, even though it may take many more centuries of tragedy and failure to make it come to pass. It can never be established, however, by brute force, but only by the free association of enlightened and spiritually consecrated people.

The allotted work of the Christian Church was to attain this end by coordinating and 'catholicizing' the wills of the people for their ultimate governance of the world. It had a duty gradually to reduce the economic and police forces to a relation of organic subordination to this ideal. It would in the end abolish forever the infidel empire of musts and must-nots, since all the people, having been "born again" as sons of God would need no outside force to keep order among individuals or nations. Christianity was therefore intended to establish a universal order in the spirit of democracy, to be, in other words, the genesis of the American ideal.

The fact that Christianity has so far failed in this is the tragedy of history. And the blame for this tragedy rests on the Roman Catholic Church, which has persisted in preserving the absolutism of an imperial Christianity. In the beginning, it took the place of the decayed Roman Empire, and acted as the necessary carrier-body of man's redemptive spirit. But it has become a monster in this, that, being only a body, it has usurped unto itself the functions of spirit. Its head, the pope, claims to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost and the vicar of Jesus Christ. It naturally could not produce the fruits of the spirit. Instead, it produced, as it only could, the fruits of legalism, externalism and a mere corporate unity welded together by the evil force of papal absolutism. Bound to the Roman curia, Christianity could not be expected to bring forth the truth and freedom promised to mankind by its founder Jesus Christ. Truth and freedom are correlative: truth cannot be obtained by force and metaphysical reasoning; neither can liberty be granted by charter of any corporate system.

The modern democratic conception of liberty is nothing newer than the Christian teaching of inalienable individual rights and the mystery and awe of co-creatorship with, and sonship of God. More than ever before, it is now being realized that such an idea of liberty cannot come to terms with any kind of ecclesiastical trust or spiritual monopoly. Only recently have thinking people begun to understand that real liberty cannot be created by any system of government or legal corporate entity; that it can never be a thing hammered into shape by obscure, undefined terminology and clamped down upon people in the mass. They are beginning to see that not upon the fixity

of philosophical and theological codes, but upon the sound relations of a lot of private individuals to the universe as made by God, can the expectations of the coming justice and beauty for men on earth be realized.

Liberty can only be built up synthetically by units, by individuals brave enough to find God for themselves; who do not try to shift the responsibility for their salvation to priests of any Church; who are courageous enough to reject the claims of priests that the Church is a kind of 'spiritual insurance society' that can guarantee them against loss of salvation in the next world; who are fully convinced that there is no human person or power, religious or legal, that is able to assume their souls. This liberty will increase when enough people fully understand that God has appointed no earthly agents with power of attorney to act for him, and that the only true sovereignty is in their own souls, not in those who sit on the thrones of kings or popes. In spite of all its grandiose claims, a Church system like the Roman papacy can excommunicate but can never exclude from salvation; the State likewise can execute, but cannot convict. A true Christian obtains the grace of salvation by himself through Christ; the sinner convicts himself by his own crimes.

The Roman Catholic Church is irrevocably bound to its medieval philosophical and theological code, which denies this conception of liberty. Its autocratic, juristic system is the enemy of every true witness of this spirit of liberty the moment he attempts to assert it. Christian democracy therefore cannot stop even to argue with the Roman papacy. Nor should it fear its threats or hesitate to prevent repetition of its political intrigues with those who, even after the defeat of Fascism and Nazism, may still try to rob the common man again of hard-won religious, economic and civil liberties.

For a fuller treatment of the development of Christianity into the communal ideology of modern democracy, see *The Religion of Democracy*, and *The Affirmative Intellect*, by Charles Ferguson, published by Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1906.

1. Cf. Ward's Life of Cardinal Newman, Vol. II, p. 252.↵