



The Church is no more than a human invention

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If someone could take a jump back into history, to the year of the crucifixion, he would make astonishing observations. Eleven frightened apostles, who do not know what to do after the shattering of their master. These eleven ran away, filled with anguish, hopeless, and they met again behind closed doors. Only one woman, Mary, the mother of the crucified, seems to hold this poor band together. A little later, the women arrive and say that he, whom they had believed was dead, is living. The rumor begins to spread that he had afterwards shown himself to these poor fishermen. One amongst them, who was not with the others when the master appeared, refuses to believe if he does not see with his own eyes.

Later, the traveler in time heard that he who was claimed to have risen from the dead had ascended into heaven. And again, in ten days time, a new surprise awaits him. He hears a loud noise, sees flames of fire and the men, who shortly before were afraid, come out of their hiding place and climb onto the roofs to preach. The most inept of them, one Peter, who before was called Simon, speaks like a mad person and immediately three thousand people link themselves to this group of eleven charismatics. According to the reports of witnesses, all these people asked for and received baptism. They say that this was the time of the birth of the Church.

The traveler in time can now move ahead more quickly into the future and visit different places: Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Athens and lastly Rome. Everywhere he finds small groups of

people who receive baptism, who gather together to speak of Jesus Christ, of all which he has taught and done, of his miracles and his mysteries, and who afterwards preach the Gospel.

There is no disjunction between the life, the death, the message of Jesus and the preaching of His disciples after Easter and Pentecost. One can never say that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God, while His apostles afterwards announced Jesus and then, lastly, the Church would start being the center of conversation. The life of Jesus continues in the preaching and the mission of the Apostles who establish the Church to perpetuate the work of Jesus. Jesus was much more than a master, more or less obstinate, and, when He vehemently criticized the scribes and Pharisees' strict and ruthless interpretation of the law, He never wanted to be a revolutionary. He never sought to drive the scribes and Pharisees from their platforms. And never did He rise up against Roman politics.

Jesus – we may thus say – was a surprise! A figure that no one expected. All of Israel was waiting for a prophet, a messiah of this world. But the Incarnation of the Son of God for them was a scandal. Likewise, His death on the cross and the empty tomb three days later. No one expected that. Only through the enlightenment of the Resurrection and from the Holy Ghost who appeared at Pentecost did the disciples learn that Moses and the Prophets of the Old Testament had spoken of Him, just as the disciples at Emmaus had learned it when Jesus accompanied them and spoke to them. After their heart

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was inflamed, their eyes finally opened and they recognized Him.

It is impossible to find, during this phase of the Church, "the inventor of Religion". The faithful did not live in a thought factory, whose aim was to formulate a new religion and to invent an alternative liturgical practice. They found themselves in the time of history which sent Jesus on their paths. He helped them to find their bearings in life, to find a purpose in their life. They formed of themselves a community of men who believed in Jesus Christ, in the Church which transmits this treasure that Jesus entrusted to it. Only faith in Jesus Christ makes it possible to know and to understand the nature of the Church and precisely this faith in Jesus Christ makes us enter into the community of believers; our charity for Him incorporates us into His Mystical Body. And this is true even today. The English theologian, Cardinal John Henry Newman, said: "It is not the Church which compels us to have faith; it is our faith which compels us to believe in the Church."

Where could we go, if we seek faith in Jesus Christ, if not to the Church? It is useless to look for the Son of God in our heads, in churches decorated with a layer of religiosity or amongst the gurus, who open up suspicious centers of meditation. Those who would seek Jesus must look for Him amongst the faithful, that is, in the Church.

"Yes, to the God of the Christians; No, to the Church", is a saying that makes no sense. To say: "Yes, to Christ; No, to the Church" is as false as to say: "Yes, to Mozart; No, to his music".

The Church has grown and developed in the course of centuries. There are more than one who believe that She has changed during the centuries, that She has betrayed her promises, that She has transformed the original doctrine of Jesus Christ, that the theologians and the popes, according to their own needs, have made the Church what She is today, but this is not at all in agreement with that which was the initial idea of Jesus Christ.

During the reign of emperor Constantine, Christians could finally leave the cata-

combs. Their faith became – under the Christian emperors – the religion of the state. The Church had to define her place in this new situation. She emerged from the catacombs and constructed basilicas. Though before She was everywhere persecuted and denied, now She brilliantly shone everywhere through her law of faith and charity. But very soon, facing new circumstances, theologians and representatives of the Church found themselves obliged to react. After the conquest of Rome by Alarich, king of the Goths, they had to respond with written guidelines; again it was necessary to readjust, broadening the view of the Church with regard to these events in history. St. Augustine (354-419) wrote "The City of God" to verify how this catastrophe did not come upon the city of Rome because it had turned away from its pagan gods. It is owing to this book, "The City of God", that Christianity has obtained the most profound treatises on the independence of the Church from all temporary circumstances.

When, during this last century, the Church was freed of all dependence on political forces, She consequently merited a new moral authority. Today, She is present in all sorts of governments, always in conformity with her distinctive nature: in monarchies, in democracies, even in countries with a totalitarian government. And the law of the Church – it is Jesus Christ!

We find that this existence of the Church, established by God as a supernatural society, poses an enormous problem for the majority of modern men. In our century, when world conceptions are created in an office, where the ideologies originate from universities, contemporaries have difficulty to accept the idea of an intervention from on high. The existence of the Church, the society instituted by God, the institution which has received all its laws from above, is for them unacceptable. They act as if the doctrine of the Church must adapt itself to modern times, as if we could change her laws like we change the manner of running a Tim Hortons or a McDonald's. The Church is a historical fact; it is therefore concrete, incarnate and real. But over and above its corporal reality, it is a divine institution with laws which men cannot regulate. It surpasses man; it is shielded from man's influence. Jesus Christ instituted it, its clergymen continue it, and no one will ever change it!