

Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

Chapter II The Church



Revelation 17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, ...

This is the continuation of [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter I](#)

1 Definition

The Bible teaches that Christ founded His church, the Christian church, and that He is both the foundation on which it rests, and the head of the church which is His body: "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11); "...being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20); "And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22-23); "...Christ also is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23).

The church is composed of all who are true Christians, those who have been "born again," or "born anew" (John 3:3), from all nations and denominations. Local "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) are congregations of Christians who gather together for worship and for missionary activity. And, while they are many, they are all members of the one church of Christ: "For even as we have many members in one body... so we, being many, are one body in Christ" (Romans 12:4-5). This is the true church.

A truly broad and charitable definition of the church is given for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says: "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world, that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (XXV:2).

And the Larger Catechism, in answer to the question, "What is the visible church?" (Q. 62), says: "The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children."

The marks of a true church are:

- The true preaching of the Word of God.
- The right administration of the sacraments. And,

- The faithful exercise of discipline.

John Calvin insisted repeatedly on “the ministry of the Word and sacraments” as the distinguishing marks of a true church. To these are generally added the exercise of proper discipline, although minor errors and irregularities of conduct do not in themselves give sufficient cause to withhold acknowledgment of a true church. Dr. Louis Berkhof says concerning the faithful exercise of discipline: “This is quite essential for maintaining the purity of doctrine and for guarding the holiness of the sacraments. Churches that are lax in discipline are bound to discover sooner or later within their circle an eclipse of the light of the truth and an abuse of that which is holy” (Systematic Theology, p. 578).

In the Bible the word “church” never means a denomination. The Bible has nothing to say about denominations. Whether a local church chooses to remain strictly independent, or to enter into a working agreement with one or more other local churches, and if so on what terms, is not discussed in Scripture, but is left entirely to the choice of the church itself. And we find that in actual practice churches range all the way from those that remain entirely unrelated to any other, to the other extreme of those that subject themselves to some hierarchy of denominational overlords who own the property and send the minister. Surely the local church should own the building and grounds that it has developed and paid for. Such ownership serves as a shield against undue denominational pressure being brought to bear upon it. And, as it has the right to decide whether or not it will join a denomination, so it should have the right to withdraw from the denomination if it so chooses.

Usually the word “church,” as used in the New Testament, means a local congregation of Christians, such as “the church of God at Corinth,” “the church in Jerusalem,” “the churches of Galatia,” “the church in thy house.” At other times it may refer to the church at large, as when we are told that “Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it” (Ephesians 5:25). Or again it may refer to the whole body of Christ in all ages, as when we read of “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). When our Lord prayed for unity, “that they may all be one” (John 17:21), it was primarily a spiritual unity, a oneness of heart and faith, of love and obedience, of true believers, and only secondarily a unity of ecclesiastical organization, that He had in mind, as is made clear by the fact that He illustrated that unity by the relationship which exists between Himself and the Father—“even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” Unity of faith must be achieved before there can be unity of organization. The ideal, of course, would be for the church to be one in both faith and organization. But it clearly is not yet ready for that. Much work remains to be done in teaching God’s Word before that can be accomplished. As Christians become more closely united in doctrine they work together more harmoniously and want to be united more closely in organization. But unity of doctrine must always remain primary, for that relates to the very purpose for which the church was founded. The alleged tragedy of disunity of organization is more than offset by the real tragedy of disunity of doctrine that results when conservative and modernistic churches are combined in one organization.

It is just here that the Romanists, who claim to be the only true church, err

in attempting to bring all churches, even to force all churches, into one external and mechanical organization. The oneness for which Christ prayed was not external and visible, but spiritual and invisible. There can be and actually is real spiritual unity among Christians apart from organizational unity. The church is not a mechanism, but a living organism, whose head is Christ; and any unity that is mechanical and forced is bound to hinder the very thing that it is designed to promote. When we hear the pope and occasionally other church leaders talk about uniting all churches into one super organization, the words they employ and their method of approach make it clear that what they have in mind is not a spiritual unity of believers but an ecclesiastical and mechanical unity of believers and unbelievers, designed primarily for what they think would be greater efficiency of operation.

And, after all, perhaps the diversity of churches, with a healthy spirit of rivalry within proper limits, is one of God's ways of keeping the stream of Christianity from becoming stagnant. History is quite clear in showing that where there has been enforced uniformity the church has stagnated, whether in Italy, Spain, France, or Latin America. The confinement of religious life to a dead level of uniformity does not solve our problems.

2 "Catholic"

Something should be said concerning the meaning of the term "catholic," which the Roman Church tries to appropriate exclusively to itself. Dr. J. G. Vos, editor of *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, gives this definition: "THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: The universal church of God, as distinguished from a particular branch, congregation or denomination of that church." "The Church of Rome," he continues, "has wrongly appropriated to itself the term 'Catholic'; it is self-contradictory to call a body 'Roman' (which is particular) and at the same time 'Catholic' (which means universal)."

A *Catholic Dictionary* gives this definition: "*Catholic*. The word is derived from the Greek, and simply means universal."

Dr. John H. Gerstner, Professor of Church History in Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, in a booklet, *The Gospel According to Rome*, says:

"Strictly speaking 'Roman Catholic' is a contradiction of terms. Catholic means universal; Roman means particular. It is the Protestant and not the Romanist who believes in the catholic church. Protestants believe the church is universal or catholic; Rome cannot discover it beyond her own communion. Our formula is: '*Ubi Spiritus ibi ecclesia*'—'Where the Spirit is there is the church.' Her motto is: '*Ubi ecclesia ibi Spiritus*'—'Where the (Roman) church is there is the Spirit.'

"It is because of the proper historic use of the word 'catholic' that Protestants do not hesitate to recite it in the Apostles' Creed. We cling to the word because we cherish the concept. Rome has no monopoly on it; indeed, as we have suggested, it is a question whether she has any right to it" (p. 14).

All those who believe in Christ as Savior, regardless of what denomination

they belong to, are in fact members of the Christian catholic church. Evangelical Protestants are the truest "catholics," for they base their faith on the New Testament as did the early Christians. The Roman Church has added many doctrines and practices that are not found in the New Testament, and anyone who accepts those becomes, to that extent, a Roman catholic, and by the same token ceases to be a Christian catholic. Since the word "catholic" means "universal," the true Christian catholic church must include all true believers, all who belong to the mystical or spiritual body of Christ ("the church, which is his body"—Ephesians 1:22-23). But there have been, and are, millions of Christians who have never had any connection with the Roman church. The Roman Church, is, after all, a local church, with headquarters in Rome, Italy and is limited to those who acknowledge the authority of the pope. Even in her most extravagant claims the Roman Church claims only about one in eight of the population of the world, and in the professedly Christian world she has cut herself off from and broken communion with perhaps more than half of Christendom, so that there are probably more professed Christians who reject her authority than acknowledge it. And geographically she fails utterly to prove her claim to universality. Even in the nominally Roman Catholic countries such as Italy, France, Spain, and Latin America, Rome today probably does not have effective control of more than fifteen percent of the people. In any event the Roman Church clearly is not universal, but is only one among numerous others and is outnumbered by the effective membership of the various Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Bishop J. C. Ryle, of Liverpool (England), has well said:

"There are many 'churches,' but in the New Testament only one true church is recognized. This true church is composed of all believers in the Lord Jesus. It is made up of God's elect—of all converted men and women—of all true Christians. It is a church of which all the members are born again of the Holy Spirit. They all possess repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of life and conversation. They all draw their religion from one single book—the Bible.

"It is the church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, vestments, organs, or any act or favor whatever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it. This is the universal church of the Apostles' Creed, and of the Nicene Creed. This is the only church which is truly universal. Its members are found in every part of the world where the Gospel is received and believed."

And Rev. Stephen L. Testa, a former Roman Catholic, and founder of The Scripture Truth Society, has said:

"The Lord Jesus Christ founded His church (Matthew 16:18), which was evangelical Christian. He was to be the Head, the Holy Spirit the Guide, and the Bible the only rule of faith and practice. It was made up of His followers who were born again and pledged to continue His work of redemption in the world. It was *catholic* in that it was *designed for all the people of the earth*. The church remained pure and faithful Gospel for to the about 300 years, which was the golden age of martyrs and saints, who were persecuted by pagan Rome. After the so-called conversion of emperor Constantine (A.D. 310)

Christianity was declared the state religion, and multitudes of pagans were admitted to the church by baptism alone, without conversion. They brought with them their pagan rites, ceremonies and practices which they gradually introduced into the church with Christian names, all of which corrupted the primitive faith, and the church became Romanized and paganized. What makes a church truly catholic is its adherence to the Gospel of Christ and the Apostles' Creed. The Roman Church has added popery and so many other pagan doctrines and practices that many people think it no longer either Christian or catholic.

"The Reformation of the 16th century was a protest against those pagan doctrines, a wholesale withdrawal from the official church and a return to the primitive catholic Christianity of the New Testament. The Roman Church today can become again a truly catholic church by renouncing popery and those dogmas and practices which are contrary to the Word of God and holding fast to its primitive foundation, on which basis the reunion of all Christian churches could be realized. The name 'catholic,' when applied to the Roman Church exclusively, is a misnomer, for it befits better those Protestant churches which hold fast to the Bible and the Apostles' Creed without any additions whatever. 'For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book' (Revelation 22:18-19).

"The true church of Christ is invisible, made up of truly converted people who are to be found in all the visible churches and whose names are written in heaven, and the visible churches exist to train saints for the kingdom of Christ" (booklet, *Is Romanism in the Bible?* p. 3).

3 What Is a "Sect"?

Another trait of the Roman Church is her attempt to brand all other church groups as "sects," and as schismatic. First, let us fix clearly in mind precisely what a "sect" is. Dictionary definitions tend to emphasize the divisive, schismatic, heretical elements in defining a sect. Hence we would define a sect as a group that shuts itself in as God's exclusive people, and shuts all others out. By its exclusiveness a sect cuts itself off and isolates itself from the main stream of Christian life. On that basis the Roman Church, with its bigoted and offensive claim to be "the only true church," its readiness to brand all others as heretics, its anathemas or curses so readily pronounced against all who dare to differ with its pronouncements, and its literally dozens of heresies and practices which are not found in the New Testament, automatically brands itself as the biggest and most prominent of all the sects.

This sectarianism is shown, for instance, in statements such as the Syllabus of Errors, issued by Pope Pius IX, in 1864, and still in full force where the Roman Church can enforce its will. The hierarchy in the United States plays down this Syllabus, and for many years has conducted a subtle campaign designed to hide many of its distinctive doctrines and so to gain favor with

the American public. But here are its claims in plain language. Some of the most distinctive articles in their affirmative form are:

15. "No man is free to embrace and profess that religion which he believes to be true, guided by the light of reason."

17. "The eternal salvation of any out of the true church of Christ is not even to be hoped for."

18. "Protestantism is not another and diversified form of the one true Christian religion in which it is possible to please God equally as in the Catholic Church."

21. "The Church has power to define dogmatically the religion of the Catholic Church to be the only true religion."

24. "The Church has the power of employing force and (of exercising) direct and indirect temporal power."

37. "No national Church can be instituted in a state of division and separation from the authority of the Roman Pontiff."

42. "In legal conflict between Powers (Civil and Ecclesiastical) the Ecclesiastical Law prevails."

45. "The direction of Public Schools in which the youth of Christian states are brought up... neither can nor ought to be assumed by the Civil Authority alone."

48. "Catholics cannot approve of a system of education for youth apart from the Catholic faith, and disjointed from the authority of the Church."

54. "Kings and Princes [including, of course, Presidents, Prime Ministers, etc.] are not only not exempt from the jurisdiction of the Church, but are subordinate to the Church in litigated questions of jurisdiction."

55. "The Church ought to be in union with the State, and the State with the Church."

57. "Philosophical principles, moral science, and civil laws may and must be made to bend to Divine and Ecclesiastical authority."

63. "Subjects may not refuse obedience to legitimate princes, much less rise in insurrection against them."

67. "The marriage tie is indissoluble by the law of nature; divorce, properly so called, cannot in any case be pronounced by the civil authority."

73. "Marriage among Christians cannot be constituted by any civil contract; the marriage-contract among Christians must always be a sacrament; and the contract is null if the sacrament does not exist."

77. "It is necessary even in the present day that the Catholic religion shall

be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship."

78. "Whence it has been unwisely provided by law, in some countries called Catholic, that persons coming to reside therein shall enjoy the free exercise of their religion."

80. "The Roman Pontiff cannot and ought not to reconcile himself to, or agree with, Progress, Liberalism, and Modern Civilization."

These statements are from the pope who just six years later established the doctrine of papal infallibility! The Roman Church here condemns freedom of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, the separation of church and state; asserts the authority of the church over the state and of the pope over civil rulers, the right of the church to direct all education, the right of the church to suppress other faiths; condemns the public school system, and many other things which are integral parts of our American way of life. Let no one say that this Syllabus of Errors belongs to a former age and that it is not to be taken seriously. Even today it forms a part of the ordination vows of every Roman Catholic priest in the world. Every priest takes an oath on the Bible that he believes and will defend the eighty articles of this Syllabus. No part of it has ever been repudiated. Hence it contains official Roman Catholic doctrine. With the church committed to this Syllabus, *how can anyone at one and the same time be a member of the Roman Catholic Church and a loyal American citizen?*

In this Syllabus the Roman Church displays a bitter, sectarian spirit in its relations with other churches. In every local community Roman Catholic priests refuse to join ministerial associations or to cooperate with ministers from other churches in any form of religious observances, and they not infrequently refuse to cooperate even in non-religious community projects.¹

¹ Since the Second Vatican Council the priests have been given more freedom to cooperate with other ministers and to take part in some community projects.

On the other hand most Protestant churches are remarkably free from sectarianism. Most of them take a broad, tolerant attitude in acknowledging as true Christians any of their fellow men who base their hope for salvation on faith in Christ and live a good Christian life—in which case, as we have just seen, they are "catholic," ecumenical in the best sense of the term.

It may be charitably assumed that there are good Christians in all denominations, including the Roman Catholic. For any one branch of the church to claim that those within its fold alone constitute the body of true Christians is both crude and impudent, and is inconsistent with the principles of love and charity so clearly commanded in the Scriptures.

The intolerance and sectarianism of Romanism is also shown in her attempt to use the word "church" for herself alone, as a synonym for the Roman Catholic Church, thereby unchurching all others, and by referring to Protestants as "non-Catholics." Protestants are too lax in allowing the Roman Church to

deprecate them with terminology which implies that they have no place in the church universal. The correct meaning of the term "church" and "catholic" should be pointed out, and doctrinal and historical evidence cited to show that the Roman Church herself is the church of schism and innovation, that by adding a host of unscriptural doctrines she has departed from the simplicity of the Gospel and from apostolic practice. It can be shown that more than half of Rome's present creed was unknown to the early church. Consequently, she has neither the moral nor the logical right to appropriate to herself the terms "church" and "catholic."

We suspect that it is just because the Roman Church knows that so much of her doctrine and so many of her practices are unscriptural or anti-Scriptural that as a matter of self-defense she attempts to appropriate these terms to herself. A more appropriate name for this church, one that we have used frequently, is, the Roman Church, or the Church of Rome. These terms are accurate, and moreover they are terms which appear frequently in her own literature, written by representative Roman Catholics. Hence Protestants do that church no injustice in speaking of it under these terms.

Furthermore, in its official title—the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church—the Roman Church seeks to appropriate the word "apostolic." But again she has no right to call herself apostolic, since she bears so little resemblance to that church, more than half of her present doctrines and practices being unknown to the apostolic church. She applies to herself the term "holy," but the fact is that through the ages and in her official capacity the Roman Church has been guilty of the most atrocious crimes, practiced in the name of religion, including murder, robbery, persecution of all kinds, bribery, fraud, deception, and practically every other crime known to man. Such crimes have been practiced not merely by church members, but by popes, cardinals, bishops, and priests who, as a study of church history will show, undeniably were evil men. Those crimes still are practiced where the Roman Church is attempting to suppress Protestantism—in Colombia, for instance, since 1948, when the liberal government was overthrown and a new government came into power with the support of the Roman Catholic Church and a concordat with the Vatican, 116 Protestant Christians have been killed because of their faith, 66 Protestant churches or chapels have been destroyed by fire or bombing, over 200 Protestant schools have been closed, and Protestant work of any kind forbidden in approximately two thirds of the country which has been designated "mission territory" (see *Report of the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia*, Bulletin No. 50, June 26, 1959).

The assumption of Roman Catholic writers that theirs is the true church, and that it is the same orthodox, martyr, missionary church of apostolic times is manifestly false. The claim that the popes are in the direct line of succession from St. Peter—even if such a claim could be proved, which it cannot—would mean but little without imitation of the lives of the apostles and conformity to their doctrines. Jeremiah rebuked the foolish confidence of the Jews in his day who cried, "The temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah... are these" (7:4), and called on them rather to prove their devotion to God with righteous and holy living. Caiaphas was in the line of Aaron and was the successor of many pious priests, but that did not make him and the Jews who

crucified Jesus the true church. John Calvin called the Church of Rome in his day a foul harlot rather than the spouse of Christ, because of the low moral standard practiced and tolerated by her priests. Her pretensions to be the true church of Christ were shown by her actions to be false. How could she be the kingdom of Christ when her way of life was at such variance with His Word?

4 Church Government

As Protestants we believe in and practice democracy in Church government as well as in state government. We have local organizations in which ministers and laymen with equal voting rights handle local church problems, and for the denominations at large, general assemblies or conventions or conferences, composed of ministers and elders, usually in equal numbers, who are the elected representatives of the churches. Both the New Testament and the history of the church during the first four or five centuries make it abundantly clear that Christianity is essentially democratic in tendency. That tendency becomes manifest wherever the spiritual life of the church is free to assert itself.

The New Testament church was an organized band of baptized believers practicing New Testament ordinances and actively engaged in carrying out the Great Commission. Of that organization Christ alone was the Head. Believers were related to Him and to each other as members of the body. Each local church appears to have been a self-governing body. As the church in Jerusalem grew and needed more organization, that was provided, not by hierarchical appointment, but in a democratic way without consulting any other church. We read: "The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, "...Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report" (Acts 6:2-3). There was no dictation by Peter, nor by any other apostle, nor by the apostles as a group. Rather it was "the multitude of the disciples," that is, the membership of the church, who made the decision. Likewise, the church at Antioch sent out missionaries from its own membership (in this instance, Paul and Barnabas), without seeking permission or advice from any other body (Acts 13:1-4).

But while the New Testament churches were autonomous, there were certain ties which bound them together, such as that of maintaining doctrinal purity, for which purpose the Jerusalem conference was assembled (Acts 15:1-29), that of ministering to the material needs of the saints in sister churches in time of crisis (Acts 11:27-30, 2 Corinthians 9:1-5), and a fellowship of worship (Acts 2:46-47, 20:6-7; Hebrews 10:25). A study of the church as it is set forth in the New Testament shows that it was absolutely dependent upon the Word of God for its existence. It was, therefore, completely subordinate to that authority in matters of doctrine.

The fact of the matter is that we are told but very little about the organization of the early church or about the relations that existed between the various bodies, no doubt because the new congregations started in an elementary way and the problems that developed within the congregations or between congregations depended upon local circumstances. Elders were appointed in all the churches, and these had the general oversight of their

respective churches as regarded teaching, preaching, and the administration of congregational affairs, including their relations with other congregations. We are inclined to believe that the early church was neither Episcopal, nor Presbyterian, nor Congregational, but a combination of all three, and that local churches then as now may have differed considerably in their manner of government. In any event it is quite clear that the Roman Catholic Church, with its hierarchical form of government, was not the New Testament church, for the institution of the papacy, with a sacrificing priesthood, did not develop until some five centuries later.

The spurious logic of the hierarchy through which it lays claim to supreme authority over all Christians finds no support in Scripture. In fact the idea of a totalitarian church in which the layman has no vote and no voice in the formulation of doctrines, laws, and policies, a church in which he is told what to believe and what to do but in which he is never invited to discuss or help work out those beliefs and practices, seems to be the extreme opposite of that set forth in the New Testament.

It is a basic tenet of Protestantism that the Word of God as given in the Scriptures is to be put into the language of the people and that it is sufficiently clear so that the individual Christian has a responsibility to read and to think for himself. He has the right of private judgment in spiritual affairs. He cannot surrender his conscience to the church or to a priest, but must think, speak, worship, and act in such a manner that he can give an account to God for what he is and does. This does not mean that he is to ignore the teaching of the church or the rich heritage of theological knowledge that has been accumulated over the centuries. Rather within proper limits he will seek the fellowship of the church with its accumulated wisdom and will further his spiritual life in that atmosphere of mutual love and helpfulness which comes through association with other Christians.

In the typical Roman Catholic countries the essence of the church is composed of the bishops and priests, to the exclusion of the laity which, while expected to provide the financial support, is kept in the dark and in abject subservience to a power-hungry hierarchy. The lay people are purely passive in the life of their church; they have no say in the choice of their priests and almost no say in the administration of the material possessions of the church. Very little emphasis, if indeed any at all, is placed on Bible study. Instead, moral standards are inflexibly set by the church. The individual must submit his conscience and his intelligence to this external authority, which tells him what is right and what is wrong. From childhood he is trained to accept the domination of the priest over the whole realm of his moral, social, and political life. He is told what to do and how to do it, even as regards personal and family affairs. Needless to say, not all Roman Catholics obey these dictates, particularly if they have some contact with Protestant ideals of freedom of religion and conduct. But the attitude of subservience is the ideal which the hierarchy seeks to maintain in its people. Few Roman Catholics, even in a Protestant country such as the United States, realize what a great debt they owe to Protestantism. Instead they support their church in fighting Protestantism.

5 The Church in Politics

The Protestant ideal is that church leaders and church assemblies are altogether distinct from the civil magistracy, and that they have no jurisdiction whatever in civil and political affairs. It is, however, the duty of the church to teach her people, through her ministry and laity, their duties in the state as Christians. Her ministry as regards the state focuses at that point, and stops right there. She does not seek to become a political power rivaling the state, nor to become a state within a state. She must not allow herself to be used as a pressure group for the securing of certain rights and temporal benefits for men, nor to pressure the state for reform measures, even though such reforms may be needed and desirable from the Christian viewpoint. Christians as individuals are indeed to work for whatever reforms may be needed. But the church is not to do so in her corporate capacity. Such action on the part of the church almost invariably will detract from her primary mission of the proclamation of the Gospel and ministering to the spiritual needs of men, and will tend to give people a wrong conception as to what her true mission really is. And finally, she must not pressure the state for public funds to support her local churches, schools, and other institutions.

The Westminster Confession of Faith sets forth the role of the church in these words: "Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate" (XXXI:4).

Protestantism asks nothing of the state except such liberty and independence as it already enjoys in most Protestant countries, and which, chiefly through Protestant influence, the Roman Catholic Church also enjoys in those same countries.

In almost total contrast with this, the Roman Catholic Church seeks to exert a controlling influence in both the church and the state. This has been well expressed by Avro Manhattan, a critic of Romanism, in *The Vatican in World Politics*:

"The better to exert its double activity (religious and political), the Catholic Church has two facets: first, the religious institution, the Catholic Church itself; secondly, the political power, the Vatican. Although they deal separately, whenever convenient, with problems affecting religion and politics, the two are in reality one. At the head of both stands the pope, who is the supreme religious leader of the Catholic Church as a purely spiritual power, as well as the supreme head of the Vatican in its quality of a world-wide diplomatic-political center and an independent sovereign state" (p. 19; Gaer Associates, New York; 1949).

The Roman Catholic Church is both a church and a political system. As such it attempts to exert its influence in every sphere of human activity, expediency alone determining whether it moves as a religious institution or as a political institution. These activities may be exercised separately or in

unison, depending on the purpose to be accomplished and the type of people with whom it has to deal. On the lower level, through its local congregations, it presents itself as a religious organization, and its appeals for money and support and public trust are made on that basis. But in its higher branches, as its influence is exerted through the hierarchy, it becomes increasingly a political organization, until in the Vatican it is concerned almost exclusively with political affairs and seeks to exert a controlling influence over the affairs of nations. It has a Papal Secretary of State who visits other governments and functions in much the same way that our American Secretary of State functions in Washington. It sends ambassadors and ministers to other nations, and receives ambassadors and ministers from other nations. All of this political activity is, of course, utterly without Scriptural support, and is in fact contrary to what the New Testament teaches concerning the nature and purpose of the church.

C. Stanley Lowell, associate director of Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, has recently said: "The fact is that the Vatican is a state-church hybrid which alternately poses as a church and as a state depending on which will prove the more profitable at the moment. The Vatican claims all prerogatives as a state, but denies all responsibility as a state because it is a church" (*Christianity Today*, February 1, 1960).

To describe this activity there has been coined a word, "clericalism," meaning the organized political power of the higher clergy exerted in the affairs of a nation. This preoccupation of the hierarchy with temporal affairs has led some to declare, with good reason, that the Roman Church is not a church at all, but primarily a government, a political-commercial system which cloaks itself with religion to give it an air of respectability. The fact is that the Roman Catholic Church professes to be a state, without accepting the responsibilities of a state government; and at the same time it professes to be a church, without accepting the limitations which the New Testament sets for the church.

This double function has led to the conception of the Roman Church as an institution needing rulers after the manner of the state. Hence the concentration of power in the hands of the priests, bishops, and particularly in the hands of the pope as the coordinator of this vast world system, and the blind obedience expected from the laity in all countries to a foreign potentate of a clerical-fascist state.

A specific example of what papal control can mean is seen in the issuance of a directive, in April, 1958, by the pope to all Roman Catholics in Italy, just prior to the election in that country, forbidding them to vote for any party or candidates not favored by the Roman Catholic church and declaring that anyone who did so vote would be subject to excommunication. The important thing about that directive is the principle involved. If the pope can issue a political order telling the Roman Catholics in Italy how to vote, he can do the same thing to those in the United States or in any other country. They all owe him the same kind and degree of obedience. The pope himself, of course, is the judge as to what parties or candidates are "Communitic" or otherwise not acceptable to the Roman Church. In Latin

American Roman Catholic propaganda has long sought to identify Protestants and Communists as one and the same. That again serves as a clear warning as to what can happen here if Romanism comes into a position of dominance.

6 A Church under Foreign Control

It has been 186 years since the United States gained her independence. While all other American churches that were in existence at that time have long since been granted their independence or have declared their independence from the parent churches in the country of their origin, the Roman Catholic Church remains as firmly as ever under the control of the pope in Rome. Furthermore, there are no democratic processes of any kind in the Roman Church by which the people can indicate their preferences or desires to the Vatican, nor even so much as express to the bishop of their diocese a choice regarding their own local priests. Everything is autocratically controlled by the hierarchy. However, it is true that while the local congregation has no official part in the matter of choosing a priest, as a matter of practical church management the wishes and advice of members of the congregation often are sought and taken into consideration.

At the head of this organization, with almost unlimited power, is the pope. The next ranking officials, the cardinals, often called the "princes of the church," are appointed by the pope. There is no veto power, either in the district or country over which the cardinal is to preside, or anywhere else in the church, by which his appointment can be rejected or even questioned. If the cardinal was a bishop or archbishop before his appointment, he continues to hold that office and to exercise that authority after his appointment.

The number of cardinals has varied somewhat, the full number having remained at 70 for the past several centuries, until Pope John XXIII, in 1960, increased the number to 85.² The pope alone decides how many cardinals there shall be. Throughout most of history, a majority, often a large majority, have been Italians. At the present time the Italians number 33 (several of those are from the city of Rome), still far more than any other country, the next highest being 8 from France, then 6 from the United States, 5 from Spain, 4 from Germany, 3 from Brazil, 2 each from Britain, Canada, Portugal, and Argentina, and 1 each from 18 other countries—surely not a very representative arrangement either numerically or geographically. While only 6 of these are Americans, an increase in 1959 from 4, the American branch of the Roman Church is by all odds the strongest and most influential and, from all indications, furnishes considerably more than half of the world revenues of the Vatican.

² The number was increased to 134 by Pope Paul VI, in 1969, ten of whom are Americans.

At the death of a pope, the cardinals meet in Rome in the so-called College of Cardinals, and elect a new pope. This is their most important function. Usually one is chosen from their own number. After the election of a new pope, the cardinals individually pledge their complete allegiance to him, even to the extent of prostrating themselves on the floor before him and kissing his foot as a symbol of submission. What a servile act that is! They

then disband and return to their respective countries. They have no authority to re-assemble, or to remove a pope from office no matter what he may do. In the meantime they remain subject to him, and can be removed from office by him at any time, without any explanation whatever if he so desires.

Bishops are usually nominated by the archbishops but receive their appointments directly from the pope and remain immediately subject to him. Each bishop is required to appear before the pope in Rome for ordination and to make his vows of allegiance personally to him. They too pledge complete allegiance in an impressive and colorful ceremony, also prostrating themselves before him and kissing his foot. They are the pope's chief liaison officers through which he maintains contact with the church throughout the world. Each reports regularly to the pope concerning the affairs of the church in his diocese, that is, the district over which he has charge, and each must present himself in person to the pope at least once every five to ten years.

Next step down the ladder are the priests. They are immediately subject to the bishop of the diocese. The bishop supervises their course of training, inquires into the fitness of candidates, chooses those who shall be ordained, ordains them, assigns them to churches, transfers them, and removes them from office as he sees fit, without explanation if he wishes. Each priest pledges complete allegiance to his bishop, and submits reports to him. No priest who has had difficulties with his bishop will be accepted for work in any other diocese until he has made satisfaction to his own bishop. He must at all costs remain on good terms with his bishop, otherwise he is helpless.³

³ Since Vatican Two, some priests' organizations have been formed in the United States and in a few other countries, but for the most part their actions are merely advisory.

The people in turn are expected to obey the priest, and to support him and the church through their services and money. They are trained and disciplined to that end from childhood. No one is to question the authority of the priest, even in domestic or family affairs. Democratic processes are discouraged. Lay organizations have only very limited scope, usually are not encouraged, and are excluded from authority in the church at large. Such lay organizations as do exist have clerical sponsors.

While in Protestant churches the people usually have the final say in regard to the choice of ministers and the powers granted to them, in the Roman Church the laity has no part at all in the ordination and calling of the clergy. The Council of Trent, in a decree directed in part against Protestantism, placed that power safely in the hands of the clergy, with the pronouncement: "In the ordination of bishops, priests, and of the other orders neither the consent nor vocation nor authority of the people... is required" (Sess. XXIII, Ch. 4), and even pronounced a curse upon anyone claiming such rights for the laity (Canon 7).

The Roman Catholic Church is, therefore, a totalitarian, autocratic organization from top to bottom. And the pope, claiming jurisdiction over from 300 million to 450 million Roman Catholics, the owner of fabulous wealth, and holding life tenure in his office, is by all odds the most

absolute ruler in the world. And through the years, the people, even in freedom-loving America, have shown amazing docility in accepting the rule of the hierarchy.

In every Roman Catholic diocese, unless there are special corporation laws in the state favorable to the hierarchy, the title to all church property—grounds, churches, schools, monasteries, convents, cemeteries, and commercial businesses and properties owned by the church—is held by the bishop as an individual, often as a “corporation sole,” which is a legal device by which he is permitted to hold church property. He can mortgage, lease, or sell such properties at will without consulting the people or the local church or diocese, nor does he render any financial report to the people concerning such sales or transactions. He reports only to the pope in Rome. Local church finances are in the hands of the priest, or of the bishop to whom he reports. Control of church finances and property by lay trustees such as is the custom in practically all Protestant churches is forbidden, having been abolished by papal decree in the last century. The bishop in turn, under Canon Law, that is, Roman Catholic Church law, holds the property in trust for and subject to the control of the pope.

The purpose of the Roman Church in having all such property recorded in the name of the bishop rather than treating it as a corporation is to avoid the necessity of making public financial reports. Canon law does not permit the incorporating of such properties unless the laws of the state are so drawn that they grant special favors to the hierarchy— which in this Protestant country they usually do not.

Where the money comes from, and where it goes, is all a deep, dark secret—enabling the hierarchy to accept money from various sources and for various causes which if known might subject it to public criticism, also enabling it to channel money into various projects at home and abroad to suit the purpose of the hierarchy without the criticism that would be sure to arise if it were generally known how the money was used. The implicit trust demanded by the Roman Church extends not only to theological and ecclesiastical matters, but to financial matters as well.

In contrast with the secrecy practiced in the Roman Church, most Protestant churches voluntarily make public reports at least once each year of all funds received and expended, both locally and in the denomination at large. These reports are included in the annual minutes, and sometimes are published in newspapers and magazines. If anyone doubts that the finances of the Roman Church are a closely guarded secret, let him try to find out how much money is received, where it comes from, how it is expended in the local church, how much is given to the bishop, and how much is sent to Rome. He will find that the priest reports only to the bishop and that the bishop reports only to the pope. Ironical as it may seem, this nation, mostly Protestant, is the main support of the Roman Catholic Church in her world work. But it does at least point up the fact that Roman Catholicism does better spiritually and economically where it has to stand on its own feet, where it is not supported by the state but is in competition with other churches.

In regard to the ownership of church property, a present day case that has

attracted considerable attention is that of the De La Salle Institute, of Napa, California. There a group of Roman Catholic monks producing wine and brandy operate the largest brandy distillery in the United States, under the trade name Christian Brothers. Until recently they had not paid income taxes for thirty years. They have an outlet through the Seagrams company, one of the largest whiskey distributors in the industry. The Bureau of Internal Revenue has ruled that this company is subject to income tax, the amount involved being more than \$1,840,000. The Christian Brothers have claimed exemption from corporate taxes on the profits of this commercial liquor business on the ground that the distillery is church property, "an integral part of the Roman Catholic Church," held in trust for the benefit of the pope in Rome. When this case was given some publicity Christian Brothers paid part of the tax, \$490,000, for the years 1952, 1953, and 1956, then filed a claim to recover the money. But after a prolonged court trial the claim was rejected. Net corporate profits in the three years involved were \$3,250,000. See *Church and State*, July-August, 1961.

Various other church businesses over the country come under this same classification, two prominent ones being a radio and television broadcasting station in New Orleans, which accepts commercial advertising, operated by Jesuit priests at Loyola University, and another in St. Louis, also operated by Jesuit priests. Exemption from taxation, of course, gives such companies a substantial advantage over other companies that pay taxes. Such exemption is discriminatory and unfair and is an offense against all people and corporations that do pay taxes.

7 The Unity and Diversity of Protestantism

It has long been Roman Catholic policy to represent Protestantism as composed of many denominations which are hopelessly divided and constantly quarreling among themselves. In view of the Romanist emphasis on unity and solidarity, the Roman Catholic laity has indeed found it hard to understand how there can be various Protestant denominations, and this has presented a real stumbling-block to many who are inclined to leave the Church of Rome. They have been taught to believe that each Protestant denomination claims to be exclusively the true church (as does their own) and that one cannot be saved unless he belongs to that church. The puzzle looks insolvable. They simply would not know where to turn.

It is true, of course, that the right of private judgment or private interpretation, which is claimed by all Protestant churches, has resulted in the rise of a great many denominations. But the remarkable thing is that in Protestantism there is a strong undercurrent of spiritual unity. Mechanical and organizational unity is a secondary thing with them. The great proportion of Protestant denominations do not claim to be the only true church, but readily and gladly acknowledge that salvation is to be found in any church where the Gospel is faithfully preached.

The various Protestant denominations agree quite fully on practically all of the essentials of the faith. They believe that the Bible and the Bible alone is the Word of God, and they accept it as the authoritative guide in church affairs. They believe in the deity of Christ, in His sacrificial death on the

cross as a substitute for those who place their faith in Him, and that He alone is the Head of the Church. They are in general agreement concerning the meaning of the sacraments, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. They believe in the personal and visible return of Christ, the resurrection of the body, a future judgment, heaven and hell. Their ideas concerning moral character, spiritual life, and the relationship that should exist between church and state are quite similar. Whether called Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, or what not, they all belong to one body, the church of Christ, just as the 50 states of the United States have various names and local governments but all belong to one nation. Their basic attitude toward one another is not that of opposition and competition but rather of cooperation and friendship. Ministers of one denomination are often invited to speak or to conduct the entire service in churches of other denominations, and the laity is free to attend churches of which they are not members. Union services, particularly in evangelistic meetings, are common, often with all of the Protestant churches in a city cooperating, as witness the famous Billy Sunday evangelistic campaigns of a few years ago and the Billy Graham meetings in more recent years. On various radio programs the listeners are scarcely aware of the denomination to which the speaker belongs. Protestants thus acknowledge fellow Protestants in other denominations as true Christians. And they are united in rejecting what they believe to be the errors of the Roman Church, such as the priesthood, mass, confession, purgatory, worship of the Virgin Mary, etc.

On the other hand, the teachings that divide Protestants, while sometimes important in themselves, are minor compared with their differences with Romanism. They may differ in regard to the form of baptism or the Lord's Supper; some are Calvinists while others are Arminians; their form of church government may be Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. But when the Bible is taken as the authoritative guide, the liberty that each has to think through his own religion and arrive at conclusions for himself does not make for such sharp divisions as some might expect.

No one has expressed more beautifully the unity of the Protestant churches than that venerable Presbyterian theologian, Dr. Charles Hodge. Said he: "These separate churches remain one: (1) because they continue to be subject to the same Lord, to be animated by the same Spirit, and to possess the same faith; (2) because they recognize each other as churches, just as every Christian recognizes every other Christian as a fellow believer, and consequently recognize each other's members, ordinances, and acts of discipline; (3) they continue one body because they are subject to one common tribunal. The tribunal at first was the apostles, now the Bible and the mind of the church as a whole, expressed sometimes in one way and sometimes in another" (article, reprinted in Eternity magazine, June, 1958).

The unity of spirit among Protestants minimizes very substantially the denominational differences. Consequently, when Roman Catholics leave their church and become Protestants, they usually are surprised at the unity of faith and worship which they discover. The fact is that there is often more unity in Protestantism than in Romanism. The rivalry that for centuries has existed between the Dominicans and the Franciscans, between both of those

orders and the Jesuits, and between various orders of monks and nuns, especially in countries in which there were no Protestant churches, has often been sharp and bitter. Such rivalries, however, usually are suppressed by the pope so that they do not come to public attention.

Listen to the testimony of a former priest, now superintendent of Memorial Hospital, Phoenix, Arizona, concerning the unity that he finds in Protestantism and the contrast between Romanism and Protestantism as regards the participation of the laity in church services. Emmett McLoughlin, in his best seller book, *People's Padre*, which was published in 1954 and which now has passed the 250,000 mark, says:

"To me the differences among Protestants, though doctrinal, are superficial and non-essential. Their unity is greater than their divergency. ...

"To me, the outstanding characteristic of all Protestant forms of worship is their enthusiasm. Whether in a revival tent, in an ivy-covered church, or in an impressive cathedral, the members of the congregation show a spontaneity in praying, singing, and listening that does not exist in Roman Catholic churches. The reason is obvious: Most Protestants go to church because they want to; Catholics generally are there because they are afraid not to be. Missing mass deliberately on only one Sunday is for Catholics a mortal sin and damns their souls to hell. The mass is a stereotyped Latin ritual that somehow is supposed to placate God. Protestant services of any denomination, even the silent Quaker service, call for an active and voluntary participation of all those present. ...

"The Protestant clergy—and I know many of them intimately—seem far more sincere and personally dedicated than the average Roman Catholic priest. This is probably because they are in the ministry through adult choice, not drawn into it when too young to know better. Protestants remain in the ministry because they wish to, not because they are bound irrevocably by laws of their churches or because of threats of divine and human reprisals if they leave the ministry" (pp. 272-273).

And Walter M. Montano, a former editor of *Christian Heritage*, and also a former Roman Catholic, says:

"One of the outstanding marks of Protestantism is its unity in diversity. This is a characteristic inherent in its very nature, but unfortunately, is poorly understood by many of its beneficiaries.

"This diversity creates and stimulates freedom of action within the limits of what is right before God and man. The dissenting groups or congregations, when released from their Roman shackles, learn for the first time the blessings of freedom of expression. Diversity blocks the road to any religious monopoly, and prevents any man from standing in the place of God to rule the community with that totalitarian despotism that in the lexicon of the Roman Church is called 'papal infallibility.'

"In this concept of Protestantism there is no room for anyone with the investiture of a pope, and for this very reason, organic unity is a foreign element to Protestantism. The lack of organic unity is the strength, not the weakness, of Protestantism, and assures to us our freedom before God. ... Unity

and liberty are in opposition; as the one diminishes, the other increases. The Reformation broke down unity; it gave liberty. ... America, in which of all countries the Reformation at the present moment has farthest advanced, should offer to thoughtful men much encouragement. Its cities are filled with churches built by voluntary gifts; its clergy are voluntarily sustained, and are, in all directions, engaged in enterprises of piety, education, mercy. What a difference between their private lives and that of ecclesiastics before the Reformation!

"Unfortunately, Protestants themselves at times succumb to a superficial criticism of our lack of organic unity without realizing that it is the safeguard of our liberty in Christ. We deplore the fact that in some isolated quarters there exist ideas and ambitions to establish a 'superchurch' with a Protestant hierarchy and its well constituted ecclesiastical army. This will never happen as long as Christian Protestants remain loyal to the principles upon which Protestantism was founded. There is an essential and vast difference between organic unity, the boast of the Roman Church, and the spiritual unity, which identifies Protestant Christianity. Organic unity produces a machine which is an end in itself. Spiritual unity, on the other hand, the unity of the one true church of Jesus Christ, binds the hearts of all under one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, while at the same time preserving the identity of each member" (*Christian Heritage*, October, 1958).

Unfortunately among Protestants there are some who are so absorbed with the idea of church union that they even hope for an eventual union with the Roman Catholic Church. Concerning these Dr. Montano says:

"These are foolish men who choose to walk in darkness. They cannot see the right path because they have chosen to be blind to the evils of the Roman Church, both past and present. Both of these concepts, the desire for a Protestant 'super-church' and the desire for union with the Vatican, are the very antithesis of Protestantism and will destroy the very thing that gave life to the Reformation. ... Only a militant Protestantism can save America and the world."

It is not surprising that there are many branches of the Christian church. The process of division started even in apostolic times, for we are told that Paul and Barnabas, though loyal friends and faithful coworkers in the church, disagreed because Barnabas insisted on taking Mark with them. In Acts 15:39 we read: "And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other."

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians Paul complained about divisions in the church because some said, "I am of Paul... I am of Apollos... I am of Peter... Is Christ divided?" (1:12-13). That process has been going on through the centuries. The church has never been one solid organization. From the first centuries there have been schisms, and what are called heresies. Furthermore, those often arose not outside of but within the Christian church and were defended by members within the church. The church still has a long way to go before spiritual unity becomes a reality. In the present state of the church it is inevitable that there should be divisions. In answer to the Roman Catholic claim to be the one true church, we reply, Nonsense! The Roman Church is only one branch of a much larger body. The Eastern Orthodox Church

is older and has a more direct connection with apostolic Christianity than does the Roman. Each Protestant denomination is as much a unit within itself as is the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church. And most Protestant churches have a record of much truer devotion and loyalty to the Scriptures, and of having produced a higher morality and spirituality among their people than does either the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church.

There is but one way to prevent divisions in the present day church, and that is by making unity a higher virtue than truth. The Roman Church achieves unity by eliminating religious liberty. A member of that church who will not subordinate his judgment to that of the pope is excommunicated. But that kind of unity has no attraction for men of strong religious convictions. When that alternative was presented to Martin Luther he promptly showed his contempt for a church that would make such a demand by burning the papal bull and denouncing the pope who had issued it as Antichrist.

It is to be acknowledged that many of the divisions that have occurred in the Christian church have been unnecessary and that some have been detrimental. Some have arisen because of evil motives on the part of certain groups, or because of the personal ambitions of strong-willed leaders. But many others have arisen because of natural circumstances, such as those of race, language, nationality, geography, or honest difference of opinion. If we have true spiritual unity, the lack of outward unity will not seriously hamper Christian life and practice. The spiritual unity that characterizes evangelical Protestants is more important than the organizational diversity that places them in different denominations. Religious liberty by its very nature is sure to bring some degree of disunity, precisely as political liberty does, for we do not all think alike or act alike. But to suppress that liberty is to destroy the very basis for evangelical theology.

It is also true that this freedom on the part of Protestants has often placed them at a disadvantage as they are confronted by an aggressive Roman Catholic Church under unified leadership. But that is precisely the same problem that we face in the political realm. It often happens that in local, state, or federal government a well organized minority pressure group pushes through its program and imposes its will on an unorganized majority. We have seen that particularly in the big city political machines where time and again and sometimes for long periods of time corrupt and unscrupulous minority groups have been in control. But nowhere is such action more reprehensible than in the church as minority pressure groups intimidate elected assemblies, the press, radio, television, the movies, and other media that can be used to their advantage. The remedy for such abuse, however, is not to abolish liberty, but, in the state, to inform and arouse the electorate so that it will choose clean, honest officials; and in the church, to so evangelize the membership and develop a wholesome Christian conscience that such abuses will be impossible.

The primary point of cleavage between the Roman Catholic and the other churches seems to be the fact that the Roman Church is hierarchical and authoritarian in its form of government, while the others are essentially democratic and place the control of church affairs in the hands of the people. It was the Vatican Council of 1870, with its pronouncement of papal

infallibility, that sounded the death-knoll of any democratic processes in the Roman Church and placed it irrevocably on the road to totalitarianism.

(Continued in [Chapter III The Priesthood](#))

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