

WHY YOU SHOULD BE A CATHOLIC 2

By The Most Rev. John F. Noll, D.D. LL.D.

Dear Reader:

Represent yourself as unaffiliated with any church, but disposed to listen to the Catholic as well as the Protestant claims. Follow the line of reasoning in these pages.

“Be sure you are right, then go ahead,” is an excellent maxim to follow. Because you were born of Protestant parents would be a poor reason for you to “go ahead” unless “you were sure you were right.” There would have been no Christianity had the apostles, the first Christians, not left the religion of their parents.

Ask converts the specific reasons, which led them to seek admission into the Catholic Church, and their replies will be various. All roads lead to Rome.

One will tell you that he was a patient in a Catholic hospital, and the kindness and charity of the sister nurse, as well as the heavenly peace he could read in her countenance, spoke to him louder than words that the religion which animated her must be divine. Another: I attended a funeral in a Catholic Church, and I was so pleased with the consolatory doctrine preached (that the dead could be assisted in prayer), that I was prompted to study the religion in which it was claimed I could help my deceased parents. A traveller will say he was moved to look into the Catholic religion by the impression that the Universality of the Church made on him—it being the only Church which exists in all nations. A college student’s reply would be: I received my first impulse to study the Catholic religion by learning that my religious teachers were the very opposite in character of what Protestant books led me to believe they were. Many are led to the Church by reading a plain exposition of Catholic belief and practice in a Catholic book. Many are also led to the Church by books written against the Church: the terrible accusations they contain against clergy and religious, and the plain misrepresentation of Catholic belief, etc., have led thousands to discredit the book and investigate for themselves, with the result that they embraced the Church which, like Christ, is calumniated and persecuted.

The majority, particularly of the learned class, including ministers of every denomination, reach the Catholic Church by sound philosophical reasoning! and it is my purpose to show you that a man earnest in his investigation and logical in his reasoning must embrace the Catholic religion if he be led by the kindly light. I am going to argue from the standpoint of an educated man, of the man who is a little acquainted with history. Let the reader assume the attitude of one who is a member of no church, but who is most anxious to arrive at the truth, and the following line of argument ought to bring conviction.

1. Whereas, there are 70,000,000 Americans, who, like myself, belong to no church. I know that religion is as old as the world, that there was never a nation without it, that the very existence of God, which no sane man dare doubt, makes religion imperative, since the creature was made for the Creator. I know that the natural bent of man’s mind and the natural longing of his heart is towards religion of some kind; that all these 70,000,000 including agnostic and infidel, feel at times a void in their hearts that nothing on earth can fill, a frequent feeling of loneliness, of unhappiness, which they try to rid themselves of, or which they try to relieve in some other manner than by striving for union with God.

2. Then it occurs to me that the Father, Who is in Heaven, would want to be known alike and served alike by His whole human family; if so, He must make a revelation to man.

3. I feel prompted to read the Bible, which I am told contains that revelation, but I can gather no connected religious system from it. I see that it was not written at one time nor by one person; that St. Peter tells us some, of St. Paul’s letters are difficult to understand, and that many “wrest them to their own destruction.” I surely do not want to do that; so I next—

4. Investigate the claims of some of the present-day religions, which claim to follow that holy book. I cannot help noticing the very large religious body called the Catholic Church, but I have heard so much about that Church’s

superstitions and corruption's, that I overlook it and begin with Protestantism; but where should I begin? and how to discern the true from the false? I am perplexed at the sight of 400 sects, one affirming what the other denies, one contradicting, excommunicating and anathematizing the other, yet, strange to say, all basing their views on the Bible. In fact, aside from their opposition to the Catholic Church, this is the only point they are united on. They all say, "use your reason and search the Scriptures to find out what to believe and to do to be saved." This principle strikes me to be very wrong, even in the abstract, but more wrong in the concrete, for it does not work out well.

(a) Wrong in the abstract, for how could all get their religion in that way? In the first place there was no New Testament to search until Christianity had existed half a century; then there was no Bible in its present form until four centuries had elapsed, yet the whole western world was Christian. Ten million who never saw the Bible had given up their lives for the Christian faith; it was the golden age of Christ's Church. Then during the next thousand years the Bible was not within reach of the people, for the art of printing was not invented until the year 1438. Even today, in this enlightened twentieth century, one-half of the world's people cannot read, and more have not the learning to get the faith from the Scriptures on the principle of private interpretation.

(b) Wrong in the concrete, for the principle of each person "searching the Scriptures," when carried out, makes Christianity a Babel of confusion, and is the fruitful source of what it tries to overcome, viz.: agnosticism, infidelity and indifferentism.

The agnostic prefers to doubt God's existence rather than to believe Him to be the author of hundreds of contradictory sects, wrangling with each other and hating each other for love of Him.

The infidel would rather believe that God made no revelation at all than to believe that the most opposite doctrines can be supported by a divinely inspired book.

The indifferentist believes that it is just as good and just as safe not to affiliate with any church as to join one which requires the minimum of belief and which may be the wrong one, for the 400 conflicting sects cannot all be right. When Christ said: "Search the Scriptures," He could not have meant the New Testament, for not a word of it was then written. Christ addressed those words to the doctors of the Jewish law with a view to refer them to those passages of the Old Testament which testify to Him as the promised Messiah.

I believed in the Bible as God's revealed word; I believed, too, in "searching the Scriptures" if by the phrase you mean "read the Scriptures." But I could not lead myself to believe that God wanted me to get my religion, a knowledge of His will, by searching the Scriptures myself. I had seen it a bad principle to go on; for instance: Mr. A searches the Scriptures prayerfully and discovers that there are three Persons in God; Mr. B searches the Scriptures and finds no such thing; he declares that there is but one Person in God. Mr. C, by searching the Scriptures, has arrived at a firm belief in the divinity of Christ. Mr. D accuses Mr. C of blasphemy. He sees in Jesus of Nazareth the most perfect man that ever lived, but no more than man. Mr. E pronounces the Bible to be the word of God' from cover to cover, whereas Mr. F finds in it many fables and even contradictions. Mr. G learns from the Scriptures that baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, even for infants, and Mr. H denies that it is necessary for any one, that it is no more than a mere ceremony. Mr. I finds no stress laid on baptism itself, but much stress on the manner of baptizing, but Mr. J concludes that immersion, whether forward or backward, once or three times, or even pouring or sprinkling, is a valid baptism. Mr. K warns people to be careful, for the Scriptures speak of a hell or place of eternal punishment, and Mr. L declares that there is no hell at all, and that heaven is easily attainable. Mr. M finds that "faith alone" is the all in all for salvation. Mr. N say's it matters little what you believe, only lead a moral life. Mr. O finds allusion to a millennium; Mr. P laughs at him. Mr. Q finds a command for all to wash other people's feet, and Mr. R says St. Paul requires you to "shake" if you desire salvation, etc., etc. I could run through the alphabet in this way three or four times.

Is it not plain that something is wrong, either with the Bible or the principle of private interpretation? And it is just as evident that not the Bible, but the principle is at fault.

5. I would stop my investigation, but in my Bible reading, I ran across many inspired passages which certainly imply that the truth can be found. I read: "God wills all men to come to the knowledge of the truth," therefore it must be possible

to find the truth. I read: "Without faith it is impossible to please God," and "he that believeth not shall be condemned," therefore there must be a way of arriving at the truth with certainty. I read of a *church* which the apostle declared to be "the pillar and foundation of truth;" and of a church which Christ promised to build on a rock, which He promised "to be with all days;" to which He promised to send the Holy Ghost to safeguard its stability in truth, which He commanded me to get my faith from: "If he will not hear the Church, let him be as the heathen and publican." This last text furnishes me with a better means of arriving at the truth than the principle, "search the Scriptures."

The apostles were eminently fitted to represent Christ in their teaching; they were instructed by Him for three years, were protected by the Holy Spirit and had a plain commission to establish Christ's Church in every land.

God's works are perfect, hence I would be positive, even apart from Christ's explicit promise, that the Church would still be on earth, speaking in God's name and enjoying His protection lest the gates of hell prevail against it. I see the apostles arranging for the perpetuity of the Church—they elect Matthias in Judas' place, ordain Titus, Timothy and others, bishops, declaring that these, like themselves, were placed in office by the "Holy Ghost to rule the Church of God."

I say my own reason would dictate that the Church must still exist in its primitive purity of doctrine, for if Christ be God, then His Church is divine, and could not fall into error. Christ calls the Church His body; He is the head—then Christ and the Church, the head and body must fall together. The apostle urged husbands to love their wives as Christ loved His Church and died for her. Christ's love for His Church would not be very strong if He left her or allowed her to leave Him. And Christ's promises are so explicit: "Upon this rock I shall build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her;" "Behold I am with you all days, even to the end of the world." "I shall ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever,—The Spirit of Truth."

It is true, I had often heard that, whereas the Catholic Church was God's Church for a few centuries, it fell into error. Then Christ fell with it, the head and the body! then Christ is not God, for He broke His solemn promises; then the Holy Ghost was not with the early Church. Whom will you believe, Christ and your sound reason, or fallible men who declare that despite Christ's promises the Church deviated from the original teaching of the apostles, became corrupt, etc., etc.? I examined the charges of image-worship, Mariolatry, selling licenses to sin, etc., imputed to Catholics and found them to be gross calumnies made years ago by the Church's enemies and accepted by the non-Catholic world as true without proof: Catholics no more worship images than you worship the pictures in your parlor. An indulgence is not a license to commit sin nor even a pardon of sin, and if John Tetzel told them, he was not the Catholic Church.

I am not surprised to see the Church persecuted, calumniated, and misrepresented, for Christ, her Founder, declared that she would be: "They have persecuted Me, and they will persecute you too;" "Blessed are you when they shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil things against you untruly," etc.; "if the world hates you, know that it hated Me first."

To be brief, I reason thus: Fallible men say the Church fell into error; infallible Christ says she never would, and sound reason cannot conceive of God's work coming to naught.

If salvation depends upon believing truths, is it not absurd to suppose that God would leave to each individual to determine what these truths are?

In the kingdom of heaven there are no sects, but perfect unity; in fact the most perfect unity and harmony exist in all God's works, yet His kingdom on earth, established by His own blood, should be a "house divided against itself."

The apostles, at the council of Jerusalem, in the year 51, declared that they believed in the "Holy Catholic Church."

St. Ignatius, disciple of one of the apostles, and who was martyred about the year 100, calls the Church he belonged to the Catholic Church.

In the year 325, when the whole western world was Christian, the bishops of the Church met in council at Nice, and in explaining the Apostles' Creed declared that they believed in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."

St. Augustine, at the beginning of the fifth century, proved by an argument that could not be upset, an argument that converted Cardinal Newman, that the Church known as the "Catholic Church" was identical with the Church of the Apostles' time.

How could a church of recent origin bear testimony to the correctness of revelation made nineteen hundred years ago?

How could doubts, disputes, be settled if there was no divinely constituted authority outside the Bible—for people make the Bible mean anything?

If the saints returned to earth, where would they go to worship? For most of them lived before any of the Protestant sects existed.

If the Catholic Church fell into error, how am I to be sure that any of the reformed religions is correct, and which?

Only an infallible authority could show that one of the Protestant denominations is correct, and none of them claims such authority.

Was it not from the Catholic Church that the nations first received Christianity, as per Christ's orders?

That Church today alone can be God's Church which is in all the nations, for "God wants all men to come to the knowledge of the truth;" which though universal, is one; which is 1930 years old; whose bishops can trace their succession by an unbroken line back to the apostles.

These and many other irrefutable arguments make it plain to me that the Catholic Church is the true Church or none is; if the Catholic Church is not the true church, then the "gates of hell have prevailed against the Church;" then Christ has not kept His most solemn promise; then He is not God, and all forms of Christianity are impositions.

AN HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

Revelation by Jesus Christ was made nineteen hundred years ago. The oldest Protestant church must admit that its memory can go back but a few hundred years; that it can testify only through the Catholic Church or history, concerning what occurred five hundred and six hundred years ago, and especially concerning revelation made nineteen hundred years ago. Schlegel, an infidel philosopher, who entered the Catholic Church, tells us that he found the testimony of the Catholic Church to be the greatest historical authority on earth for the events of the past. Now, reject this greatest historical authority and what evidence remains beyond it? No authority outside that of this Church can be any higher than human, and it can be only borrowed authority.

No man living today heard the revelation with his own ears; no recently founded church witnessed it; and no historical evidence could be trustworthy enough in a matter of so great importance other than the evidence of the Church to which the revelation was entrusted, which was an eye and ear-witness; the Church which Christ promised to be with, which the Holy Ghost was promised to; on which He actually descended on Pentecost; which sat sovereign among the nations continuously since Christ's time; which in every century asserted the doctrines of Christ in General Councils; which, with the written diary, is better able to tell us what it, the same moral person, saw and heard nineteen hundred years ago than an old man is able to tell what he saw and heard in childhood.

The witness of a Protestant church can be only borrowed testimony, and its statements can be accurate only in so far as they agree with the Church which was on the field before it.

LACTANTIUS

(Fourth Century)

"The Catholic Church, therefore, is the only one that retains the true worship. This is the source of truth; this the dwelling place of faith; this the temple of God; whosoever does not enter this temple, or whosoever departs from it, stands a stranger to the hope of life and eternal salvation."—*Divine Institutions, Book 4, chapter 80.*

EUSEBIUS

(Fourth Century)

"For the inventions of the enemies soon disappeared, being refuted by the truth itself; because while sect after sect appeared with their innovations, the earlier ones always passed away and splitting up into numerous and manifold forms would go to ruin in one way or another; the only true, the glorious, the Catholic Church, on the contrary, remaining ever

firm and ever the self-same in all things, still went on increasing and developing; and showed forth in brilliant light the venerableness and the purity of its divine doctrine and mode of life.”

—*Eccl, Hist., Book 4, chapter 11.*

ST. ATHANASIUS

(Fourth Century)

“But it will hardly be out of place to investigate likewise the ancient traditions, and the doctrine and faith of the Catholic Church, which the Lord communicated, the Apostles proclaimed, and the Fathers preserved; for on this has the Church been founded, and if one falls away from this he can by no means be a Christian or even be called such any longer.”—*First Letter to Seramon, n. 28.*

ST. EPHRAEM

(Fourth Century)

“Blessed be the chosen one, who has chosen the Catholic Church, that holy lamb which the devouring world has not consumed * * * Give heed, therefore, to my instructions, as my disciples, and depart not from the Catholic faith, which I also, having received in my boyhood, have preserved immovable; neither turn aside from it in any doubt.”—*Book 2, Testament, pages 242-248.*

ST. JEROME

(Fourth Century)

“My resolution is, to read the ancients, to try everything to hold fast what is good and not to recede from the faith of the Catholic Church.”—*Letter 119, to Minervius, no. 11.*

ST. AUGUSTINE

(Fifth Century)

“The agreement of peoples and of nations keeps me; an authority begun with miracles, nourished with hope, increased with charity, strengthened by antiquity, keeps me; the succession of priests from the very chair of Peter the Apostle—unto whom the Lord, after His resurrection, committed His sheep to be fed—down even to the present pontificate keeps me; finally, the name itself of the Catholic Church keeps me,—a name which, in the midst of so many heresies, this Church alone has, not without cause, so held possession of, that, though all heretics would fain have themselves called Catholic, yet to the enquiry of any stranger: Where is the assembly of the Catholic Church held? no heretic would dare to point out his own basilica or house. These ties of the Christian name, therefore, so numerous, so powerful, and most dear, justly keep a believing man in the Catholic Church.”

ST. VINCENT OF LERIN

(Fifth Century)

“Again in the Catholic Church itself, very great care is to be taken that we hold that which hath been believed *everywhere, always, and by all men.* For Catholic is truly and properly that, as the very force and meaning of the word declare, which comprises all things in general, after a universal manner; and this is thus, in fine, attained,—if we follow *universality, antiquity, consent.*”

REV. B. F. DIMMICK

(Methodist—Columbus, Ohio)

“For centuries the Roman Church was the only organized representation of Christianity in the world.”

REV. T. B. THOMPSON

(Congreg.—Chicago)

“As an institution she is the most splendid the world has ever seen. Governments have arisen and gone to the grave of the nations since her advent. Peoples of every tongue have worshipped at her altars.”

DR. MARTINEAU

“It carries its supernatural character with it; it has brought its authority down with it through time; it is the living organism of the Holy Spirit, the Pentecostal dispensation among us still. And if you ask about its evidence, it offers the spectacle of itself.”
