



## THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH – III

The exact year in which other non-Catholic bodies arose can be given and their founders can be named. A few weeks ago I purposely put up the article “How Old is Your Church?” to prepare for this article on the Marks of the Church. You just need to look there to find out the age of the different denominations. The earliest of these Churches were established by men who had been Catholics; some of the reformers were even priests of the Catholic Church, as was Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism. However sometimes reformers reform the wrong thing. Martin Luther tried to reform the Faith rather than the discipline within the Church. The Faith was perfect. It was discipline that needed reformation.

The Protestant Christian Churches, consequently, are at most 450 years old; their founders were men, many of whom had been Catholics. Since they cannot possibly trace their origins back to the days of Christ, it is difficult to see how Christ could have established them.

It is impossible to account for Christianity between the days of Christ and the sixteenth century if the truth of the Catholic Church be denied. If Christ’s religion did not come into existence until the rise of Protestantism, what happened to it during the first fifteen hundred years after Christ? Certainly Christianity did not disappear from the earth for that length of time, only to be revived by the reformers! Rather, it functioned in the Catholic Church which was the only Christian Church in existence. Christianity became a house divided only after the Reformation. History vindicates the claim of the Catholic Church. It alone is the true Church of Christ because it goes back to the days of Christ.

### The Marks are Sign-Posts

The approach to the Church of Christ by way of the marks employs a process of verification. We first need to inspect the Church which Christ established and then we compare modern Churches with it. The reasoning is as follows: Christ established a Church which bore certain, well-defined, and verifiable characteristics. Any Church which claims to be His Church must possess those characteristics today. The Church which carries these marks bears evidence that it is the genuine Church of Christ. If no other Church bears them, then it alone is the one true Church established by Christ.

The process of verification is used constantly in daily experience. If we have reason to suspect a twenty dollar bill of being counterfeit, we immediately verify it by handling the bill carefully, inspecting its texture, the engraving, the signature, and the silk-colored threads which run through it. If these things are in order, we conclude that the bill is genuine; if they are missing, we reject the bill because it does not bear the marks of genuine currency. A Secret Service Agent once told me that they are trained to detect counterfeit bills by studying the true currency, not all the false ones. They know the proper currency so well that a red flag goes up when they find one that is “off.”

The truth of the Church can be verified in much the same manner. In founding His Church, Christ gave the world a society which was one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic. The genuine Church of Christ must be so today. Consider the marks which Christ’s Church possessed:

- 1) **Unity.** Christ established a Church that had a texture of complete and integral unity. He gave it one faith, one baptism, one constitution, one form of government, and one system of worship. He demanded and prayed for unity in His Church, just as He warned against division, as we have previously seen.
- 2) **Holiness.** Holiness was etched in every line of the Church which Christ founded. His Church came from Himself – it was brought into existence by the hand of God. He gave it a holy doctrine and He endowed it with the means of sanctifying its members by the administration of the Sacraments.
- 3) **Apostolicity.** The Church’s signature is to be found in the mark of apostolicity. Christ founded His Church upon the Apostles; He gave it an apostolic constitution, for the Apostles with Peter at their head were placed in charge of the Church. They were commanded to guard the doctrine which they had received and to spread the faith to the ends of the earth. The authority which Christ gave to His Church was vested in the Apostles. His Church was certainly apostolic.
- 4) **Catholicity or Universality.** Christ’s Church was a universal Church. All of the different races, nations and cultures were intended to run through the Church of Christ. His Church was to be the Church of all men, women and nations. No one was to be excluded. It was to hold the full truth of Christ in readiness for every person who would accept it.

These four marks belonged to the Church which Christ established. The Catholic Church today, in claiming to be the Church of Christ, confirms her claim by showing that she possesses there four characteristics just as clearly as did the Church of the first century. Final part next week.

