

The Authority of the Church

Christ is God and God is Truth. Therefore, His teaching, whether communicated through His physical body or through His Mystical Body, must be necessarily true, or infallible. It remains now to show that what is true of Christ as Teacher is true also of Christ as King.

When He came to earth in the form and likeness of man, He exercised the power and authority of God as King not only of men, but of all created things. He showed His power over nature, as He stilled the seas and the wind, and made the dead walk in the newness of life; He showed His power over angels, as He told timid apostles that He could summon legions of them to His assistance. He promised to exercise this power later on through another body, the nucleus of which would be the apostles under the headship of Peter, who were to be made one with one another and one with Him by the descent of His Holy Spirit. As unto that body and His Vicar, Peter, He communicated His Truth, so unto it He communicated also His

power and His authority.¹ "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. . . . Going therefore teach ye all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." "As the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I." "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me."

When this apostolic body under the headship of Peter on the day of Pentecost exercised authority, they did so in the name of Christ.² The ascension and glorification of Christ at the right

¹ What is indeed remarkable about our Lord communicating this power to the Apostles is the similarity between it and the conferring of infallibility on Peter. All the Apostles were present on that occasion, but our Lord addressed Peter in the singular, "And I say to thee: thou art Peter . . . and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . . and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (*Matt. xvi. 18, 19*). The keys were given to Peter alone; Peter alone was to be the rock; he alone was to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep; he alone, would be preserved from errors of faith by the prayer of Christ, but the authority which Christ gave him as Head would be shared by the other apostles as long as they were with him and under his headship. And so it is that we find our Lord saying to the other apostles the plural of one of the injunctions to Peter alone: "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be found also in heaven; and whatsoever you will loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven: (*Matt. xviii. 18*). The same words, but they were first said to Peter alone, apart from the other apostles; then they were said to all the apostles, but united to Peter—hence the Vicar of Christ cannot be separated from the Bishops, neither can the Bishops be separated from the Vicar of Christ. They are united and dependent. Such is the meaning of the hierarchy of the Church. Peter was chosen and then the Church built upon him. The Church was not founded and then Peter taken from it. The foundation rock is first, then the edifice. It is in union with Peter that the Church derives its visible unity. The principle of unity precedes the things to be unified; the subject of a painting is chosen before the colours; the idea comes before the words to express it, and the plan before the building. The other apostles were one with Peter. The mission of all of them was the same; they were all divinely chosen, but they were not all of equal authority.

² The apostles accordingly acted in His name (*Acts ii. 23, viii. 12-16; Eph. iv. 7-11*). More particularly they exercised the triple power: legislative, judicial, and executive in His name. Legislative: "For it hath seemed good to the

hand of the Father did not mean that He relinquished His power and his authority any more than He relinquished His truth. It only meant that instead of governing through an individual human nature, He began to govern through co-operative human natures: His Mystical Body, the Church. While living in His physical body He exercised His power through the touch of a finger, the motion of His hand, the sound of His voice, all of which were acts of God.

Now that He lives in His Mystical Body, His power and authority remain the same; the only difference is that now He manifests it through human natures such as the apostles and those who have succeeded them even to our day, namely, the Bishops of the Church. They are to Christ in His glory much like His physical body was to Him during His earthly pilgrimage. In those days the power of God rang out in a voice to the storming sea: "Be calm"; in our day that same power rings out in the voice of a successor of the apostles—the power behind the voice remaining always the same. If the Kingship of Christ could be hidden in the form of a helpless babe, why can it not be equally hidden in the form of a Peter, a James, or a John? If God can communicate His power to a human nature made one with His Divine person in the Incarnation, why can He not continue to communicate it through other human natures made one with him by the unifying Spirit of Pentecost? Is God so limited by His creation that He cannot act through a corporate body as well as through a physical body? If men were pure spirits without bodies, then the Divine Son would never have taken on a human nature to have revealed only through the material, God revealed His invisible power through a visible human nature. But are we who live posterior to the Incarnation

Holy Ghost and to us, to lay no further burdens upon you" (*Acts xv. 28*, see *Matt. xxviii. 18-20*). Judicial: "And Jesus said to them: Amen I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the seat of His Majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (*Matt. xix. 28*). Executive: "I have told before, and foretell as present and now absent, to them that sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare" (*2 Cor. xiii. 2*). "And if he will not hear them: tell the Church. And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican (*Matt. xviii. 17*)

in any less need of a continued visible revelation of that power than was those who saw Him in the flesh? If God has chosen to reveal His invisible Divinity through a visible body, why should He suddenly stop that condescension? Once that human nature was glorified in heaven, why should He not continue to manifest Himself through other human natures made one by His Spirit of Truth? His Mystical Body, the Church, is therefore the very thing we should expect of a goodness of God, for it is modelled upon the plan of the Incarnation. It, too, is a union of the Divine and the human, the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the material, in which Christ is the Eternal King and the Power of God.

If I am scandalized at the thought that Christ gives His power to the apostles and their successors, why should I not be more scandalized that the power of God once manifested itself in a human nature that could be nailed to a cross? If I am scandalized that the bishops of the Mystical Body exercise power in His name, then why should I not be scandalized that the power of God should teach the doctors of the law in the form of a child only twelve years of age? How else could this power and authority be preserved except by communicating it to a new body which would preserve it because it was filled with His Holy Spirit? A book could not preserve His authority, for the book needs interpretation, and who would interpret it? There has never been a society without a government, a family without a head, a nation without a ruler, or a body without a brain; and in each instance the authority is vested not in a code or a constitution, but in a person who safeguards, applies and judges it. Only a living body united with Christ as branches and vine can meet the demands of living men and women. And there is no more reason for doubting the authority of the bishops of that body, to whom the fulness of His power was communicated, than there is for doubting that the voice of Christ, who once spoke a crude Galilean dialect to His fishermen, was in very truth the Voice of God.

The Church is not a vague brotherhood or a vacuous "good fellowship" without external ties; it is a Divine-human society, a hierarchy, a spiritual organism with a subordination of part to part under the headship of Christ. The authority of this body is