**Is the Catholic Church the Church of the New Testament**

*by Tom Bunting*

We hear many claims that the Roman Catholic Church is the church of Christ. Is this statement true? How can we decide on the answer to such a question? Obviously it is a question of identity. A statement from Catholic works puts the problem very clearly before us.

"If it is not identical in belief, government, etc. with the primitive church, then it is not the Church of Christ" (*Catholic Facts*, 27).

That really makes the problem quite simple to solve, if an organization's worship, government, membership requirements, or doctrine is in any way different from what it was in the New Testament church then it cannot be the church of Christ. For any religious organization to be the church of Christ it must be identical in belief, government, worship, name, membership requirements, etc. However, Catholics admit that they are different from the primitive church, and therefore not the church of Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church was organized four hundred years too late according to their own record.

"At the end of the fifth century the Roman Church was completely organized" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, IX, 61).

We see then that the Roman Church is not the New Testament church because it was four hundred years too late. The New Testament church was established A.D. 33 (Acts 2). Congregations were completely organized during Paul's missionary journeys (Acts 14:23). The church at Ephesus was organized (Acts 20), and congregations were organized at the time of Paul's writing the letter to Titus and the church at Philippi (Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1).

The use of incense is another difference between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. Incense was not used in the early church. Catholics admit that it was added sometime after the establishment of the church of Christ.

"When, exactly, incense was introduced into the religious services of the church it is not easy to say. During the first four centuries there is no evidence for its use" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 716).

"The religious use of incense was unknown in the primitive church" (*Catholic Dictionary*, 437).

Incense, "unknown in the primitive church," "no evidence of its use for four centuries," but now used in the Roman Catholic Church. There is a difference in the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church in the use of incense. How different the worship (incense, candles, holy water, etc.) in denominations today is in comparison to the simple worship of the New Testament church (Acts 2:42; John 4:22-24). If the primitive church didn't have these things and we do them, we are not the church of Christ!

What about Lent? This is surely a popular doctrine (season), for many denominations now observe it. Can we read about the New Testament church observing Lent? No, you can't read about Lent in the New Testament. Lent is not an apostolic institution. Catholics admit this:

"Writers of the fourth century were prone to describe many practices (i.e. The Lenten Fast of Forty Days) as Apostolic institutions which certainly had no claim to be so regarded" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 111, 484).

You may read your Bible from beginning to end and never find the "Lenten Fast" mentioned. The early church did not observe it – the Roman Catholic Church does observe it. Then, if one observes it and the other does not, they are not identical. Therefore the Roman Catholic Church is not the church of Christ.

There is another difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the primitive church. The mode of baptism in the Roman Catholic Church is different from the mode of baptism in the New Testament. Catholic works admit the same:

"Baptism took place by immersion in ancient times" (New Interpretation of the Mass, 120).

"Catholics are fully aware that the early practice of the Church (cf. the baptism of Christ, Matt. iii.16; Mark 1.10; that of the Eunuch, Acts VIII, 38, 39; and St. Paul's symbol of burial and resurrection, Rom. vi. 4; Col. ii. 12) was to immerse, and that this custom prevailed in both East and West in the solemn administration of the sacrament till the end of the thirteenth century" (Question Box, 364, 1913, edition).

"The present mode of pouring arose from many inconveniences connected with immersion, frequent mention of which are made in the writings of the early Church Fathers" (Question Box, 366).

The scriptures used in the above quotation are sufficient to prove that the baptism in the New Testament was immersion. The mode of baptism in the New Testament is immersion but due to the "inconveniences" they (Catholics) changed it to pouring or sprinkling. So now the Catholic doctrine of baptism is not the same as the teaching of the New Testament. Since they are different in doctrine they are not identical. If not identical then the Roman Catholic Church is not the church of Christ.

We could go on from their own works showing that they admit celibacy, purgatory, Crucifix, infant baptism, and the things already mentioned were not in the New Testament church. If these things which are now in the Roman Catholic Church were not in the early church then the two are not identical. Going back to their statement:

"If it is not identical in belief, government, etc. with the primitive church, then it is not the Church of Christ" (Catholic Facts, 27).

They are admitting they are not identical to the primitive church and therefore not the church of Christ.

We do not say these things because we have animosity in our hearts for Catholics. We have some wonderful Catholic neighbors. We say it because we love the souls of men, and we want to see them saved. We want to see the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17). We want to encourage people to return to the primitive church, a complete restoration of the church of Christ. How can this be done? By being identical in belief, government, work, worship, etc. with the New Testament church. Remember, Christ only promised to build one church (Matthew 16:18) and "every plant that the Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13).