

HOW I THINK PROTESTANTS AND EVANGELICALS SHOULD THINK OF ROME.

By: Brett Radar

There seems to be much confusion today from both Catholics and Protestants on how to view the Roman Catholic Church. Is she Christian? Is she apostate? Is she merely a false religion from the beginning decorated with Christian trappings?

The purpose of this post is not to spur further debate from Catholics and non-Catholics on the issues of orthodoxy, but rather to help define where we see each other as Christians. I have been most influenced on this issue by the 19th century Presbyterian, Charles Hodge, in this article, *Is The Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?* (Princeton Review, April 1846) See: Appendix 1 for the article.

Many of my assumptions and understandings are discussed in this article. Remember, this is primarily a discussion about how the RCC relates to Protestantism, and not a proof of Protestant doctrine.

First of all, I would dismiss the latter possibility as purely cultish drivel, for if the Visible Church has never been visible, what do we make of Christ's promise that the gates of Hell would not prevail? I don't think that is a conceivable conclusion from a confessional Trinitarian Christian. On the other hand, it seems to be a serious mistake to say that the CC is merely another denomination as She does not consider herself to be such. The Catholic Church teaches that those under the pope are the most full and clear manifestation of the true Church. She holds the keys, and thus it is her councils and decrees that are binding.

Anyway, I believe there are three questions when dealing with the RCC. First, does the CC essentially hold to the Christian faith? Are the essential doctrines of the faith contained in teachings of the RCC? Secondly, should we reckon the RCC as heterodox in faith and practice? Does their system of doctrine contain elements that contradict the Gospel if taken to their logical conclusion? Thirdly, how do we reckon the Catholics that we meet on the Street? Do we call them brethren? Do we presume them to be unregenerate, and in the state of denying Christ?

I think the first question is the most important question, and one that would be very difficult to deal without many words or making assumptions. So, I will make some basic assumptions here:

My first assumption is that the essentials of the faith can be found in the ecumenical creeds dealing with the nature of God, nature of Christ, and the nature of man. These things speak directly to the God we worship, how salvation

comes to man, and the facts of the Gospel. These are objective things about God, and about our standing with God that must be believed in order that we have the Biblical Christ and that we truly can be said to believe on Christ for our salvation. This assumption seems to hold some water when reading Scripture, the Early Church Father's, and especially the Reformers. IOW, it shouldn't be thought that the doctrines of justification and predestination are essential doctrines as their contrary teachings have existed through Church history. It is these contrary teachings that became so vocal in a terribly corrupt Church that prompted and justified the reformation. However, I don't believe that Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin would have said that believing these doctrines are essential to the Christian faith. I conclude then that the RCC holds to the essentials of the faith, and are thus essentially a Christian Church.

Having said that, I do believe that the RCC has as its official doctrine, many heresies in faith and practice. Without a large discussion of each issue, I will list a few. Transubstantiation, sacerdotalism, justification by infused righteousness (especially the condemnation of the true doctrine of justification in Trent), the rejection of Augustinian, and even Thomistic doctrines on soteriology, as well as prayers to the saints, Mary, etc.

Sacerdotalism carried to its logical consequence can have the affect of one placing their belief in the sacraments to the exclusion of what Christ has done. This is a great heresy that can be damning as if it is truly embraced (the logical consequences of the mass, confession, etc) necessarily excludes the very simple and important belief that "Christ died for my sins". Not only that, the understanding of Grace in the RCC world is that we use the sacraments to channel grace rather than them being unmerited favor bestowed on the Christian without merit.

The soteriology of the RCC almost certainly heretical in its current form as it teaches that our free will is an essential part of our ability to come to believe in Christ. This contradicts clear scripture as well as that of councils of the Early Church (orange). To say that men have ability and are somehow responsible in their own salvation is to make God a lesser god, and to elevate sinful man above the fall. Furthermore, the teaching that our infused or ontological righteousness in part justifies us clearly contradicts Paul's letter to the Romans, and logically posits the theory that man's works can be good enough to merit salvation since they are done through us, by Christ. The problem is that this denies that man remains a sinner. Clearly then, the soteriological doctrines of the Church demonstrate that she is heterodox by the standards of the confessional Protestant, and especially scripture. Of course, this could be said about much of the "evangelical" Church today also. The difference would be in the "evangelical church" rejects sacerdotalism, with the exception of those that believe that methods such as the altar call, sinners prayer, etc are an effective means of grace.

The practical question is then, how do we interact with our Catholic friends? First, we must realize that the RCC in America contains a large block that are not born again Christians in a state of grace. I say this not from merely from a Protestant or evangelical viewpoint, as this is also true according to official RCC doctrine. The number of RCCs that are living in mortal sin without confession may in fact outnumber those that are in good standing (i.e. Church attendance). This failure in the RCC to discipline those that show fruit opposed to the Christian life is very telling in my view. If we don't consider those people, we have left those that are serious Catholics that believe the doctrines of the Church and basically practice the "prescribed" Christian life. I think the real question is, how do we interact with these, and do we call them brothers. While I believe the RCC is essentially Christian, and that there are true believers in the RCC, the doctrines and practices (prayer to the saints, veneration of idols, etc) seems to be so heinous as that we should not call these brethren, but rather should urge repentance in hope that they would leave this organization and her many false doctrines. To fail to do this would be to relegate many in the Church to a life of false assurance. Having said this, I have met some RCCs, including some here that I believe are true believers. I say, how much better it would be for them to come to a more full understanding of the truth of the Gospel, unmixed with law! Oh, what joy and assurance they can find when they shed the trappings of the RCC religion in favor of the unadulterated Gospel once delivered!

I pray this is edifying to both Catholic and Protestant.

Appendix 1

Is The Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?

by: Charles Hodge

(*Princeton Review*, April 1846)

It is very plain that our remarks, in our number of July last, in favor of the validity of Romish baptism, have not met the approbation of a large portion of our brethren. This, though a matter of regret, is not a matter of surprise. The large majority of the last Assembly by which the resolution pronouncing such baptism null and void was carried, as well as other indications of the public mind in the church, made it plain from the beginning that we should be for the present, at least, and probably for some years, in a small minority on this question. Our confidence, however, in the correctness of our position, has not been shaken. That confidence rests partly on the conviction we cannot help feeling of the soundness of the arguments on which our conclusion rests; and partly on the fact that those arguments have satisfied the minds of the vast majority of the people of God from the Reformation to the present time. We have, however, waited, with minds we hope open to the conviction, to hear what was to be said on the opposite side. The religious papers early announced that full replies to our arguments would speedily appear. Providential circumstances, it seems, have prevented, until recently, the accomplishment of their purposes thus early announced. All that we have seen in the shape of argument on the subject, are two numbers of a series of articles now in the course of publication in the *Watchman and Observer*, of Richmond, and the essays of Theophilus, in the *Presbyterian*. Our respect for the writer in the *Watchman*, and for the thoroughness and ability which distinguish his opening numbers, imposes on us the duty of silence as to the main point in dispute, until the series of articles is completed. It will then be time enough to decide whether the discussion can with profit be further continued in our pages. We are also as yet without any light from Theophilus. After writing ten weeks he is but approaching the subject. he closes the tenth number with saying: "We are now prepared to begin the argument." All that precedes, therefore, is not properly, in his judgment, of the nature of argument; though doubtless regarded as pertinent to the discussion. Under these circumstances it is obvious that the way is not open for us to attempt to justify our position. We gave the definition of baptism contained in our standards--and then endeavored to show that Romish baptism falls within that definition. Neither of these points has, as yet, been seriously assailed. This is what the writer in the *Watchman and Observer* proposes to do, and we respectfully wait to hear what he has to say. In the meantime the topic discussed by Theophilus in his eleventh and twelfth numbers, is so important in itself and so intimately connected with this whole subject, that we have determined to devote a few pages to the consideration of the question, Whether the church of Rome is still a portion of the visible church of Christ?

Those taking the negative of this question, have every advantage of an adventitious kind in their favor. They have no need of definitions, or distinctions, or of affirming in one sense and denying in another. The round, plump, intelligible no, answers all their purposes. They make no demand upon the discrimination, or the candor of the public. They deal in what is called plain common sense, repudiating all metaphysical niceties. They have in this respect the same advantages that the ultra temperance man and the abolitionist possess. The former disembarasses himself of all need of distinctions and qualifications by affirming that the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is sinful; not sometimes right and sometimes wrong, according to circumstances, which implies the necessity of determining what those circumstances are which give character to the act. He takes the common sense view of the case; and asserts that a practice which produces all the drunkenness that is in the world, and all the vice and misery which flow from drunkenness, is a sinful practice. He therefore hoots at those who beg him to discriminate between the what is wrong in itself and universally, and what is wrong only in certain circumstances; and cries them down as the friends of publicans and sinners. The abolitionist is still more summary. Slavery is a heinous crime; it degrades human beings into things; it forbids marriages; it destroys domestic relations; it separates parents and children, husbands and wives; it legalizes what God forbids, and forbids what God enjoins; it keeps its victims in ignorance even of the gospel; it denies labor its wages, subject the persons, the virtue, and the happiness of many to the caprice of one; it involves the violation of all social rights and duties, and therefore is the greatest of social crimes. It is as much as any man's character for sense, honesty or religion is worth, to insist that a distinction must here be made; that we must discriminate between slavery and its separable adjuncts; between the relationship itself and the abuse of it; between the possession of power and the unjust exercise of it. Let any man in some portions of our country, in England, in Scotland, or Ireland, attempt to make such distinctions, and see with what an outburst of indignation he will be overwhelmed. It is just so in the present case. Rome is antichrist, the mystical Babylon, the scarlet woman, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints. What room, asks Theophilus, is there for argument here? Is Babylon Zion? Is the synagogue of Satan the church of Christ, the scarlet woman the bride of the Lamb? Woe to the man who ventures to ask for definitions, and discrimination; or to suggest that possibly these antagonistic designations are not applied to the same subject, or to the same subject under the same aspect; that as of old the prophets denounced the Hebrew community under the figure of an adulterous woman, and almost in the same breath addresses them as the beloved of God, his chosen people, compared to the wife of one's youth; so it may be here. The case is pronounced too plain for argument; the appeal is made at once to the feelings of the reader, and those who do not join in the cry are represented as advocates of popery, or at best very doubtful Protestants.

We do not mean to complain of anything of this kind we may have ourselves experienced. We gratefully acknowledge the general courtesy of Theophilus and the Christian spirit and gentlemanly bearing of the writer in the *Watchman*. Our object in these remarks is to call attention to the fact that there is very great danger of being carried away by the mere sound and appearance of argument in all such cases, and that while an easy triumph may be gained for the moment by taking things in the gross, and refusing the trouble of determining accurately the meaning of terms we use, yet that the evils which flow from this course are often serious and lasting. We have seen churches rent asunder by the anti-slavery agitation, when it is probable, if the different parties had calmly sat down to compare their views and define their terms, it would have been found they were substantially of the same mind.

It is neither by research nor argument the question whether Romanists are members of the visible church to be answered. It is a simple matter of definition and statement. All that can be done is first to determine what is meant by the word church; and secondly what is meant by Rome, church of Rome, Romanists, or whatever term is used, and then see whether the two agree, whether Rome falls within or without the definition of the church.

By a definition we do not mean a description including a specification of attributes which properly pertain to the thing defined; but an enumeration of its essential attributes and of none other. We may say that a Christian is a man who believes all that Christ taught, who obeys all that he commanded, and trusts all his promises. This, however, is a description of an ideal or perfect Christian. It is not a definition which is to guide our judgment, whether a particular individual is to be regarded and treated as a Christian. It is not a definition which is to guide our judgment, whether a particular individual is to be regarded and treated as a Christian. It is not a definition which is to guide our judgment, whether a particular individual is to be regarded and treated as a Christian. We may say that a church is a society in which the pure word of God is preached, the sacraments duly administered, and discipline properly exercised by legitimate officers. This, however, is a description of a pure and orderly church, and not an enumeration of the essential attributes of such a body. If we use that description as a definition, we must exclude all but orthodox Presbyterians from the pale of the church. The eastern churches, the church of England, the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists would without exception be cut off. Every one of these classes of Christians fails, according to our standard, in some one or more of the above specifications. They are all defective either as to doctrine, or as to the sacraments, or as to the proper exercise of discipline, or as to the organs through which such discipline is exercised. This distinction between a description and definition, between an enumeration of what belongs to a pure church, and what is necessary to the being of a church, is often disregarded. We think Theophilus overlooks it. He quotes largely from Turretin as sustaining his views on this subject; whereas Turretin is on precisely the opposite ground; affirming what Theophilus denies, and denying what Theophilus affirms. Turretin expressly

makes the distinctions between "a true church," *i.e.*, a church which conforms of the true standard of what a church ought to be, and a heretical, corrupt, and apostate church. True, in his use of the term, corresponds to orthodox or pure; not with real. A body, therefore, according to him may be a church, and yet not a true church. We adverted to this fact in our former article, and referred so distinctly to the statements of Turretin that we are surprised to find Theophilus quoting from him as he does. "Since the church of Rome," says Turretin, "may be viewed under a twofold aspect, either in reference to the profession of Christianity and of the evangelical truths which she retains, or in reference to her subjection to the pope, and to her corruptions both in matters of faith and morals, we can speak of her in two different ways. under one aspect, we do not deny she retains some truth; under the other we deny that she is Christian and apostolical, and affirm her to be anti-christian and apostate. In one sense, we admit she may be still called a CHRISTIAN CHURCH. 1st. In reference to the people of God, or the elect, who are called to come out of her even at the time of her destruction, Rev. xviii. 4. 2d. In reference to external form, or certain elements of a dispersed church, the vestiges of which are still conspicuous, as well as regards the word of God and the preaching thereof, which she still retains, although corrupted, as the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism, which as to its substance is there retained in its integrity. 3d. In reference to the evangelical truths, as concerning the Trinity, Christ the mediator, God and man, by which she is distinguished from a congregation of pagans or infidels. But we deny that she can be properly and simply (*i.e.*, without qualification) be called a true church, much less the only and the catholic church, as they would wish to have her called."

In the next paragraph but one, he explains what he means by *verity* as affirmed of a church, when we say she is *vera ecclesia*. It includes "verity in faith," or freedom from heresy; purity, or freedom from all superstition and idolatry; liberty in government, freedom from servitude and tyranny; sanctity of morals, as opposed to corruption of manners; and certainty and consolation, or freedom from doubt or diffidence.

Again, in answer to the objection that if Romanists have true baptism they must be a true church, as far as Christianity in the general is concerned, as opposed to a congregation of infidels; but not as it relates to pure Christianity, free from heretical errors; since true baptism may be found among heretics, who are not a true church."--P. 151.

It is very evident, therefore, that Rome, according to Turretin, is to be viewed under two aspects; under the one she is a church, *i.e.*, a body in which the people of God still are; which retains the word of God and the preaching of it, though corrupted, and the sacraments, especially baptism. Under the other aspect, *i.e.*, as a papal body, she is not a church; *i.e.*, her popery and all her corruptions are anti-christian and apostate. She is not therefore a *true* church, for a *true* church is free from heresy, from superstition, from oppressive regimen,

from corruption of manners, and from doubt or diffidence. Whether Theophilus approves of these distinctions or not; whether he thinks that the English word *true* can be used in the latitude which Turretin give the Latin word *versus*, or not; still he ought to give the Geneva professor the benefit of his own statements and definitions; and not represent him as denying that the church of Rome is a church, when he denies that she is a *true*, *i.e.*, a pure church. Turretin says that Romish baptism is valid. Theophilus says it is not. Both however agree that if Rome is in no sense a church, her baptism is in no case valid. It is obvious, therefore, that Turretin admits her to be a church in the sense in which Theophilus denies it.

Professor Thornwell very correctly remarked, in his effective speech before the General Assembly, that it is very plain that though the Reformers denied Rome to be the true church, they admitted her to be in some sense a church. The fact is, they used the word *true* as Turretin does, as implying conformity with the true mode or standard. They made a distinction between a description of a church including all the excellencies such a body ought to possess; and a definition including nothing but what is essential to the being of a church. It is to the danger of confounding between these two things, that the foregoing remarks are directed.

The real difficulty in the case, is that it is impossible to give any one definition of a church, except in the most general terms, which includes all the established uses of the word. Among Congregationalists a church is a number of persons giving credible evidence of regeneration, united by a covenant for the purpose of Christian worship and mutual watch and care. It is not to be denied that such a body is a church; it falls within the legitimate sense and wider definition of the term. This narrow sense has gradually diffused itself through our common modes of speech. We talk of man's being admitted to the church, or excluded from it, meaning by the church the body of communicants, to the exclusion of the great body of the baptized. To those accustomed to this use of the term, no body larger than a single congregation can be a church, and none composed in great part of those who give no evidence and make no profession of regeneration. Men possessed with this idea of the church, and unable to get a wider conception of it, ask with confidence, can a corrupt, wicked, persecuting body be a church? Of course not. No such body falls within their definition of the church; and if they can prove that that definition of the church is the only proper one, there can be no further dispute about the matter. But the *usus loquendi* neither of the Bible nor of the English language is determined by Congregationalists. It is an undeniable fact that we speak and speak correctly of the Reformed Dutch church; of the Episcopal church, and of the Presbyterian church, without intending to affirm that the several bodies thus designated are composed of persons giving credible evidence of regeneration, and united by covenant for worship and discipline. It will not do therefore to conclude that the church of England or that of Scotland is no church, because it does not fall within the New England definition of a church.

When we turn to the Scriptures and to the common language of Christians, we do not find the word church used in senses which admit of being embraced under one definition. In other words, the essential attributes of the church, in the established sense of the term, are not its essential attributes in another equally authorized sense. Thus we are told that the church consists of the whole number of the elect who ever have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof. In this sense of the word, it is essential to the church that it consist of the elect only, and that it should include them all. That this definition is sustained by scriptural usage cannot be disputed. It is in this sense the church is the body of Christ, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. It is by the church, thus understood, God is to manifest to principalities and powers his manifold wisdom. This is the church which Christ loved, and for which he gave himself that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church. It would of course be absurd to contend that no society is a church which does not come under this definition.

Again the word is often used as equivalent with saints, believers, the true people of God, existing at any one time on earth, or in any one place. The word is used in this sense when Paul exhorts us to give no offence to the church, *i.e.*, the people of God; and when he says he persecuted the church. In like manner, when we pray for the church, either in the whole world, or in a particular country, or city, we surely do not mean the Presbyterian, or Episcopal, or Methodist church, or any one organized body. We have in our mind the true people of God, scattered abroad it may be, existing in every Christian denomination. In this sense of the word it is essential to the church that it consist of true believers.

A third sense of the word is that in which it is used when we say the church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. This is a legitimate established meaning of the term. In this view of the church, nothing is essential to it but the profession of the true religion; and in this sense every individual making that profession is a member, and every society composed of such individuals is a portion of the church or is included in it.

Theophilus expresses great surprise that we should venture the assertion that organization is not essential to the church. He ridicules the statement, and appeals to the language of the Psalmist when he bids us walk about Zion and tell the towers thereof, as sufficient refutation of it. By organization we meant, and it is very evident he means, external ordered union. We presume Theophilus himself will not maintain that in either of the three established senses of the word above state, organization is among its essential attributes. It is not enumerated in the definitions as given from our standards and from Scripture; nor is it necessarily included in the complex conception which we give the name church. When we conceive of the whole body of the elect, which have been or are to be gathered into one under Christ, it is not as an external organized body furnished with ministers and sacraments, but simply as the great body of the redeemed united to Christ and to each other by the indwelling of the Spirit. So too when we

speak of the church as consisting of true believers, we do not conceive of them as an external organized body. We pray for no such body when we pray for the church of God throughout the world. The word is equivalent to the true Israel; Israel [according to Spirit--tr. from Greek] as distinguished from the Israel [according to flesh]. In like manner, when the word is used for all those throughout the world who profess the true religion; the idea of organization is of necessity excluded from that of the church. The visible church catholic is not an organized body on any but Romish principles. We are therefore surprised that Theophilus should be thrown off his balance, by a remark so obviously true, and of such constant recurrence in the writings of Protestants.

There is a fourth established meaning of the word church, which has more direct reference to the question before us. It often means an organized society professing the true religion, united for the purpose of worship and discipline, and subject to the same form of government and to some common tribunal. A multitude of controversies turn upon the correctness of this definition. It includes the following particulars. 1. A church is an organized society. It is thus distinguished from the casual or temporary assemblies of Christians, for the purpose of divine worship. 2. It must profess the true religion. By the true religion cannot be meant all the doctrines of the true religion, and nothing more or less. For then no human society would be a church unless perfect both in knowledge and faith. Nor can it mean all the clearly revealed and important doctrines of the Bible for then no man could be a Christian and no body of men a church, which rejects or is ignorant of those doctrines. But it must mean the essential doctrines of the gospel, those doctrines without which no man can be saved. This is plain, because nothing can be essential, as far as truth is concerned, to a church, which is not essential to union with Christ. We are prohibited by our allegiance to the word of God from recognizing as a true Christian, any man who rejects any doctrine which the Scriptures declare to be essential to salvation; and we are bound by that allegiance not to refuse such recognition, on account of ignorance or error, to any man who professes what the Bible teaches is saving truth. It is absurd that we should make more truth essential to a visible church, than Christ has made essential to the church invisible and to salvation. This distinction between essential and unessential doctrines Protestants have always insisted upon, and Romanists and Anglicans as strenuously rejected. It is, however, so plainly recognized in Scripture, and so obviously necessary in practice, that those who reject it in terms in opposition to Protestants, are forced to admit it in reality. They make substantially the same distinction when they distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion, and between those truths which must be received with explicit faith *i.e.*, known as well as believed) and those which may be received with implicit faith; *i.e.*, received without knowledge, as a man who believes the Bible to be the word of God may be said to believe all it teaches, though it may contain many things of which he is ignorant. Romanists say that every doctrine on which the church has pronounced judgment as part of the revelation of God, is a matter of faith, and essential to the salvation of those to whom it is duly proposed. Anglicans say the same thing of those doctrines which

are sustained by tradition. Here is virtually the same distinction between fundamental and other doctrines which Protestants make. The only difference is as to the criterion by which the one class is to be distinguished from the other. Romanists and Anglicans say that criterion is the judgment of the church; Protestants say it is the word of God. What the Bible declares to be essential to salvation, is essential: what it does not make absolutely necessary to be believed and professed, no man can rightfully declare to be absolutely necessary. And what is not essential to the true church, the spiritual body of Christ, or to salvation, cannot be essential to the visible church. This is really only saying that those whom Christ declares to be his people, we have no right to say are not his people. If any man thinks he has such a right, it would be well for him to take heed how he exercises it. By the true religion, therefore, which a society must profess in order to its being recognized as a church, must be meant those doctrines which are essential to salvation.

3. Such society must not only profess the true religion, but its object must be the worship of God and the exercise of discipline. A church is thus distinguished from a Bible, missionary, or any similar society of Christians.

4. To constitute it a church, *i.e.*, externally one body, it must have the same form of government and be subject to the same common tribunal. The different classes of Presbyterians in this country, though professing the same doctrines and adopting the same form of government, are not all members of the same external church, because subject to different tribunals.

Now the question is, Is this a correct definition of a church? Does it omit anything that is essential? The only things which we can think of as likely to be urged as omissions, are the ministry and the sacraments. Few things in our July number seem to have given Theophilus more pain than our saying that the ministry is not essential to the church. With regard to this point, we would remark. 1. That we believe the ministry to be a divine institution. 2. That it was designed to be perpetual. 3. That it has been perpetuated. 4. That it is necessary to the edification and extension of the church. But we are very far from believing the popish doctrine that the ministry is essential to the being of a church, and that there is no church where there is no ministry. Officers are necessary to the well-being of a nation, and no nation can long exist without them. But a nation does not cease to exist when the king or president dies. The nation would continue though every civil officer was cut off in a night; and blessed be God, the church would still live, though all ministers should die or apostatize at once. We believe with Professor Thornwell, and with the real living church of God in all ages, that if the ministry fails, the church can make a ministry; or rather that Christ, who is in his church by the Spirit, would then, as he does now, by his divine call constitute men ministers. It strikes us as most extraordinary for a Presbyterian to say the ministry is essential to the church, and that it must enter into the definition; when our own book makes provision, first, for the organization of a church, and then for the election of its officers. A number of believers are constituted a church, and

then, and not until they are a church, thy elect their elders and call a pastor. Every vacant church is a practical proof that the ministry does not enter into the definition of the church. Theophilus amuses himself at our expense for our venturing to say, "Bellarmine has the credit of being the first writer who thus corrupted the definition of the church," that is, by introducing subjection to lawful pastors as part of that definition. We were well aware of the danger of asserting a negative. We knew that we had not read every writer before the time of Bellarmine, and that we could remember very little of the little we had read. We were, therefore, wise enough not to say that no man before the popish cardinal had perpetrated a like interpolation into the definition of the church, but contented ourselves with the safe remark that he has the credit of being the first who was guilty of that piece of priestcraft. That he has that credit among Protestants can hardly be disputed. Dean Sherlock says: "I know indeed of late the clergy have in a great measure monopolized the name of the church, whereas, in propriety of speech, they do not belong to the definition of a church," any more than a shepherd to the definition of a flock, which is his illustration. "The learned Launoy," he adds, "has produced texts of Scripture for this definition of the church, viz.: that it is the company of the faithful; and has proved by the testimony of the fathers in all ages, even down to the Council of Trent itself, that this was the received notion of the church, till it was altered by Canisius and Bellarmine," the former "putting Christ's vicar into the definition," the later, subjection "to lawful pastors." "Whereas," continues the Dean, "before these men, neither pastor nor bishops, much less the Pope of Rome, were ever put into the general definition of a church" [1]. Very much the same complaint is uttered by Dr. Thomas Jackson, against "Bellarmine, Valentia, Stapleton, and some others," for troubling the stream of God's word as to the nature and definition of the church [2]. It surely does not become Presbyterians to exalt the clergy beyond the place assigned them by these strong Episcopalians, and make them essential to the being of the church, and of course an element in the definition of the term.

Very much the same remarks may be made in reference to the sacraments. We of course believe, 1 [sic] That the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are of divine appointment. 2. That they are of perpetual obligation. 3. That they are signs and seals of the covenant, and means of grace. 4. That the observance of them is a high duty and privilege, and consequently the neglect or want of them, a great sin or defect; but to make them essential to the church is to make them essential to salvation, which is contrary to Scripture. If baptism made a man a Christian, if it communicated a new nature which could be received in no other way, then indeed there could be no Christians and no church without baptism. But such is not the Protestant or scriptural doctrine of the sacraments. The Hebrew nation would not cease to be Hebrews, if they ceased to practice circumcision. They did not in fact cease to be the church, though they neglected that rite for the forty years they wandered in the wilderness, until there was not a circumcised man among them, save Caleb and Joshua. Yet far more is said of the duty and necessity of circumcision in the Old Testament than is said of

baptism in the New. It is the doctrine of our church that baptism recognizes, but does not constitute membership in the church. Plain and important, therefore, as is the duty of administering and observing these ordinances, they are not to be exalted into a higher place than that assigned them in the word of God. Though the due celebration of the sacraments may very properly be enumerated, in one sense, among the signs of the church, we do not feel authorized or permitted by the authority of Scripture, to make such celebration essential to salvation or to the existence of the church. If any of our brethren should differ from us as to this point, it would not follow that they must reject the definition above given. For as the sacraments are a means and a mode of divine worship, the due celebration of them may be considered as included in that clause of the definition, which declares that a church is a society for the worship of God.

We revert therefore to the question, Is the definition given above correct? Is a church an organized society professing the true religion, united for the worship of God and the exercise of discipline, and subject to the same form of government and to common tribunal? It certainly has in its favor the common *usus loquendi*. When we speak of the church of England, of Scotland, the Free church, the Secession church, the Protestant Episcopal church; or when we speak of a single congregation as a church, as the church at Easton, or the first, second, or third Presbyterian church in Philadelphia; or if we take the term in the New England sense, as distinguished from parish or congregation, still all these cases fall under the definition. By the word church, in all such cases, we mean an organized society professing the true religion, united for the worship of God and the exercise of discipline, under the same form of government and under some common tribunal. That common tribunal in a Congregational church, is the brotherhood; in a Presbyterian church, the session; in the Presbyterian church in the United States, our General Assembly; in the Episcopal church, the general convention; in the Church of England, the reigning sovereign; in the Evangelical church of Prussia, the king. In all these cases it is subjection to some independent tribunal that gives unity to a church, in the light in which it is here contemplated.

2. This definition is substantially the one given in our standards. "A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians with their offspring, voluntarily associated together for divine worship and godly living agreeably to the Holy Scriptures; and submitting to a certain form of government [sic] [3]. "Professing Christians" is here used as equivalent to "those professing the true religion," the form of expression adopted in the Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism. It is obvious that the definition suits all the cases mentioned above, applying equally well to a single congregation, and to a whole denomination united in one body.

3. This definition suits the use of the term as it occurs in many passages of Scripture. When we read of the church of Corinth, of Antioch, of Rome, the word

is universally admitted to designate a number of persons professing the true religion, united for religious worship and discipline, under some common tribunal.

4. This definition is one to which the principles laid down on this subject in Scripture necessarily lead. The Scriptures teach that the faith in Christ makes a man a Christian; the profession of that faith makes him a professing Christian. The true, or invisible church consists of true believers; the visible church, of a society of such professors, united for church purposes and separated from other societies by subjection to some one tribunal. These seem to be plain scriptural principles. If any thing else or more than faith in Christ is absolutely necessary to union with him, and therefore to salvation [sic]; then something more than faith is necessary to make a man a Christian, and something more than the profession of that faith to make him a professing Christian, and consequently some other sign of a visible church must be necessary than the profession of the true religion. But we do not see how consistently with the evangelical system of doctrine, and especially with the great doctrine that salvation is by faith, we can avoid the conclusion that all true believers are in the true church, and all professing believers are in the visible church. 5. Did time permit, or were it necessary, it could easily be proved that in all ages of the church, this idea of the church has been the prevailing one. We have already quoted the testimony of Sherlock against the Romanists in proof of this point, and it would be easy to fill volumes with quotations from ancient and modern writers to the same effect. "Church," says Hooker in his Eccles. Polity, vol. ii, 17, "is a word which art hath devised thereby to sever and distinguish that society of men which professeth the true religion from the rest, which profess it not, whereupon, because, the only object which separateth ours from other religions, is Jesus Christ, in whom none but the church doth believe, and whom none but the church doth worship; we find that accordingly the apostles do everywhere distinguish hereby the church from infidels and Jews, accounting them which call upon the name of the Lord Jesus to be his church." And again, B. 3, 1, "The visible church of Jesus Christ is one by outward profession of those things which supernaturally appertain to the essence of Christianity, and are necessarily required in every particular Christian man." Barrow, in his Discourse on the Unity of the Church says, "It is evident that the church is one by consent in faith and opinion concerning all principal matters of opinion." Bishop Taylor, in his Dissuasive against Popery, says, "The church (visible) is a company of men and women professing the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ." This is but saying what Tertullian, Augustin, Jerome, Hilary, Chrysostom and the whole line of God's people have said from the beginning.

6. Finally, we appeal in support of the essential element of the definition of a church given above, to the constant testimony of the Spirit. The Scriptures teach that the Spirit operates through the truth; that we have no right to expect his influence (as far as adults are concerned) where the truth is not known, and that where it is known, he never fails to give it more or less effect; that wherever the Spirit is, there is the church, since it is by receiving the spirit, men become members of the true church; and wherever the true or invisible church is, there is

the church visible, because profession of faith; and, therefore, where these true believers are united in the profession of that truth by which they are saved, with a society or community--then such society is within the limits of the visible church, *i.e.*, is a constituent portion of that body which embraces all those who profess the true religion. All we contend for is that the church is the body of Christ, that those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells are members of that body; and consequently that whenever we have evidence of the presence of the Spirit, there we have evidence of the presence of the church. And if these evidences occur in a society professing certain doctrines by which men are thus born unto God, it is God's own testimony that such society is still a part of the visible church. It strikes us as one of the greatest absurdities of Ritualism, whether among Romanists or Anglicans, that it sets up a definition of the church, not at all commensurate with its actual and obvious extent. What more glaring absurdity can be uttered than that the Episcopal church in this country is here the only church, when nine tenths of the true religion of the country exists without its pale. It may be man's church, but God's church is much wider. Wherever, therefore, there is a society professing truth, by which men are actually born unto God, that society is within the definition of the church given in our standards, and if as a society, it is united under one tribunal for church purposes, it is itself a church.

The next step in the argument is, of course, the consideration of the question, whether the church of Rome comes within the definition, the correctness of which we have endeavored to establish? It was very common with the reformers and their successors to distinguish between the papacy, and the body of people professing Christianity under its dominion. When, by the church of Rome they meant the papacy, they denounced it as the mystical Babylon, and synagogue of Satan; when they meant by it the people, considered as a community professing the essential doctrines of the gospel, they admitted it to be a church. This distinction is natural and just, though it imposes the necessity of affirming and denying the same proposition. If by the church of Rome, you mean one thing, it is not a church; if you mean another, it is a church. People will not trouble themselves, however, with such distinctions, though they often unconsciously make them, and are forced to act upon them. Thus by the word England, we sometimes mean the country, sometimes the government, and sometimes the people. If we mean by it the government, we may say (in reference to some periods of its history), that it is unjust, cruel, persecuting, rapacious, opposed to Christ and his kingdom: when these things could not be said with truth of the people [4].

Though we regard the above distinction as sound, and though we can see no more real contradiction in saying Rome is a church, and is not a church, than in saying a man is mortal and yet immortal, spiritual yet carnal, a child of God yet sold under sin; yet as the distinction is not necessary for the sake either of truth or perspicuity, we do not intend to avail ourselves of it. All that we have to beg is, that brethren would not quote against us the sweeping declarations and denunciations of our Protestant fore-fathers against popery as the man of sin,

antichrist, the mystical Babylon, and synagogue of Satan, as proof of our departure from the Protestant faith. In all those denunciations we could consistently join; just as our fathers, as Professor Thornwell acknowledges, while uttering those denunciations, still admitted Rome, in one sense, to be a church. Our present object is to enquire whether the church of Rome, taking the term as Bishop Sanderson says, *Conjunctim pro toto aggregato*, just as we take the term, church of England, falls within the definition of a church given above.

That it is an organized society, is of course plain; that it is united for the purpose of worship and discipline is no less so. That is, it is the professed ostensible object of the society, to teach and promote the Christian religion, to convert men to the faith, to edify believers, to celebrate the worship of God, and to exercise the power of the keys, *i.e.*, the peculiar prerogatives of a church in matters of doctrine and discipline. This is the ostensible professed object of the society. That its rulers have left its true end out of view and perverted it into an engine of government and self-aggrandizement is true, and very wicked; but the same thing is true of almost all established churches. It has been palpably true of the church of England, and scarcely less obviously true of the church of Prussia, as well as the Greek church in Russia. When a church is perverted by its rulers into an engine of state, it does not cease to be a church, because it is by the church as such, *i.e.*, as a society designed for the worship of God and the edification of his people, such rulers endeavor to secure their own secular ends.

The only point really open to debate is, whether the Romish church as a society professes the true religion. In reference to this point we would remark, 1st. That by true religion in this connection, has ever been understood, and from the nature of the case must be understood, the essential doctrines of the gospel. Men may enlarge or contract their list of such doctrines; but it involves a contradiction to say, that those who hold the essentials of the gospel, do not hold the gospel. This would be saying that the essence of a thing is not the thing itself, but something else. By the essential doctrines of the gospel we mean, and Protestants have been accustomed to mean, those doctrines which, in the language of Hooker, "are necessarily required in every particular Christian man." The question, therefore, as correctly stated by Professor Thornwell, really is, Whether Rome as a society still teaches enough to save the soul? 2. Our second preliminary remark is, that in determining what are the essential doctrines of the gospel, we cannot consent to bow to any other authority than the word of God. We cannot with Romanists and Anglicans, on the one hand, consent to make the judgment of the church the criterion of decision on this subject; nor on the other, can we submit to the judgment of individuals or sects, some of which would close not the church only, but heaven itself, against all Presbyterians, others against all Calvinists, others against all Armenians, others against all who sing hymns. 3d. A third remark is, that we must distinguish between what is essential to the gospel, and what is essential for a particular individual to believe. The former is fixed, the other is a variable quantity. The gospel in its essential principles is now what it always was and always must be. But what is essential for a man to believe

depends upon that man's opportunities of knowledge. A poor Hottentot may get to Heaven though he knows nothing about, or should unintelligently reject many doctrines which it would argue an unsanctified heart in a man nurtured in the bosom of a pure church, even to question. 4. We must interpret language according to the *usus loquendi* of those who use it, and not according to our own usage. If a man defines justification so as to include sanctification, and says that justification is by works as well as faith, we must understand him accordingly. We may say a man is sanctified by love, hope, and other Christian graces and works; meaning that all these tend to promote his conformity to God; when we could not say, that he is justified, in our sense of the term, by these things.

It is then impossible to give any list of essential doctrines of the gospel, if so doing were to imply that all doctrines not included in such list might be safely rejected by men, no matter what their opportunities for knowledge might be. By essential doctrines we mean, as already stated, those which no man can be saved without believing. We shall not undertake the delicate task of giving a list of such doctrines, but content ourselves with remarking that the Scriptures adopt a twofold mode of statement on the subject. First, they give certain doctrines which, they declare, if any man believes he shall be saved. And secondly, they state certain doctrines which, if a man rejects, he shall be lost. These two modes of statement must be consistent, *i.e.*, they cannot lead logically to contradictory conclusions, even though the Bible arranges under the one head some doctrines which it does not place in the other. One reason why more particulars are found under the latter head than the former, no doubt is, that the rejection of a doctrine implies a knowledge of it. And the rejection of a doctrine when known may be fatal, when the knowledge of it, as a distinct proposition, may not be essential to salvation. These essential doctrines therefore may be learned both from the affirmative and negative statements of the Bible. For example, it is said, whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved; whosoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God is born of God; whosoever believes and confesses that Christ is Lord, does it by the Holy Ghost; on the other hand, it is fatal to deny God, for he that cometh unto God must believe that he is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him. He who denies the Son, the same hath not the Father; he who denies sin, or that he is a sinner, the truth is not in him; he who rejects the sacrifice of Christ, has only a fearful looking for of judgment; he who seeks justification from the law has fallen from grace, and Christ shall profit him nothing; he who denies the resurrection of Christ, makes our preaching and our faith vain; he who denies holiness, and the obligation of holiness, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel; so he who says that the resurrection is past already, has made shipwreck of the faith. The denial of these doctrines is said to forfeit salvation; but it does not follow that they must all be clearly known and intelligently received in order to salvation. It is a historical fact, as far as such a fact can be historically known, that men have been saved who knew nothing of the gospel but that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Scriptures do not warrant us in fixing the minimum of divine truth by which the Spirit may save the soul. We do know, however, that if any man believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he is born of

God; that no true worshipper of Christ ever perishes. Paul sends his Christian salutations to all in every place, theirs and ours, who shall call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, their Lord and ours.

That Romanists as a society profess the true religion, meaning thereby the essential doctrines of the gospel, those doctrines which if truly believed will save the soul, is, as we think, plain. 1. Because they believe the Scriptures to be the word of God. 2. They direct that the Scriptures should be understood and received as they were understood by the Christian Fathers. 3. They receive the three general creeds of the church, the Apostle's, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, or as these are summed up in the creed of Pius V. 4. They believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. In one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And the third day rose again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And they believe in one catholic apostolic church. They acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

If this creed were submitted to any intelligent Christian without his knowing whence it came, could he hesitate to say that it was the creed of a Christian church? Could he deny that these are the very terms in which for ages the general faith of Christendom has been expressed? Could he, without renouncing the Bible, say that the sincere belief of these doctrines would not secure eternal life? Can any man take it upon himself in the sight of God, to assert there is not truth enough in the above summary to save the soul? If not, then a society professing that creed professes the true religion in the sense stated above. 5. We argue from the acknowledged fact that God has always had, still has, and is to have a people in that church until its final destruction; just as he had in the midst of corrupt and apostate Israel. We admit that Rome has grievously apostatized from the faith, the order and the worship of the church; that she has introduced a multitude of false doctrines, a corrupt and superstitious and even idolatrous worship, and a most oppressive and cruel government; but since as a society she still retains the profession of saving doctrines, and as in point of fact, by those doctrines men are born unto God and nurtured for heaven, we dare not deny that she is still a part of the visible church. We consider such a denial a direct contradiction of the Bible, and of the facts of God's providence. It was within the limits of the church the great anti-christian power was to arise; it was in the church the man of sin was to exalt himself; and it was over the church he was to exercise his baneful and cruel power.

The most common and plausible objections to the admission that the church of Rome is still a part of the visible church are the following. First, it is said that she does not profess the true religion, because though she retains the forms or propositions in which the truth is stated, she vitiates them by her explanation. To which we answer, 1. That in her general creeds, adopted and professed by the people, no explanations are given. The doctrines are asserted in the general terms, just as they were presented and professed before the Romish apostasy. 2. That the explanations, as given by the Council of Trent, are as stated by Theophilus, designedly two-sided and ambiguous; so that while one class of Romanists take them in a sense consistent with their saving efficacy, others take them in a sense which destroys their value. It is notorious that the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England are taken in a Calvinistic sense by one class of her theologians; in a semi-Pelagian sense by another class; and in a Romish sense by a third. 3. While we admit the truth of the objection as a fact, viz., that the dominant class of theologians do explain away most of the saving doctrines of her ancient creeds, yet we deny that this destroys the argument from the profession of those creeds, in proof that as a society she retains saving truth. Because it is the creeds and not the explanations, that constitute the profession of the people.

Secondly, it is objected that Rome Professes fundamental errors. To this we answer, 1. That we acknowledge that the teaching of many of her most authoritative authors is fatally erroneous. 2. That the decisions of the Council of Trent, as understood by one class of Romish theologians, are not less at variance with the truth; but not as they are in fact explained by another class of her doctors. 3. That these decisions and explanations are not incorporated into the creed professed by the people. 4. That the profession of fundamental error by a society retains with such error the essential truths of religion. The Jewish church at the time of Christ, by her officers, in the synagogues and in the sanhedrim [sic], and by all her great parties professed fundamental error justification by the law, for example; and yet retained its being as a church, in the bosom of which the elect of God still lived.

Thirdly, Rome is idolatrous, and therefore in no sense a church. To this we answer, 1. That the practice of the great body of the church of Rome is beyond doubt idolatrous. 2. That the avowed principles of the majority of her teachers are also justly liable to the same charge. 3. That the principles of another class of her doctors, who say they worship neither the images themselves, nor through them, but simply in the presence of them, are not idolatrous in the ordinary meaning of the term. 4. That it is not necessary that every man should be, in the fatal sense of that word, an idolater in order to remain in that church; otherwise there could be not true children of God within its pale. But the contrary is, as a fact, on all hands conceded. 5. We know that the Jewish church, though often overrun with idolatry, never ceased to exist.

Fourthly, it is objected that the people of God are commanded to come out of the church of Rome, which would not be the case were she still a part of the visible church. To this we answer, that the people of God are commanded to come out of every church which either professes error, or which imposes any terms of communion which hurt an enlightened conscience. The non-conformists in the time of Charles II, were bound to leave the church of England, and yet did not thereby assert that it was no longer a church.

Fifthly, it is said we give up too much to the papists if we admit Romanists to be in the church. To this we answer, Every false position is a weak position. The cause of truth. The cause of truth suffers in no way more than from identifying it with error, which is always done when its friends advocate it on false principles. When one says, we favor intemperance, unless we say that the use of intoxicating liquors is sinful; another, that we favor slavery, unless we say slaveholding is a sin; and a third, that we favor popery unless we say the church of Rome is no church, they all, as it seems to us, make the same mistake, and greatly injure the cause in which they are engaged. They give the adversary an advantage over them, and they fail to enlist the strength of their own side. Men who are anxious to promote temperance, cannot join societies which avow principles which they believe to be untrue; and men who believe popery to be the greatest modern enemy of the gospel, cannot co-operate in measures of opposition to that growing evil, which are founded on the denial of what appear to be important scriptural principles. It is a great mistake to suppose popery is aided by admitting what truth it does include. What gives it its power, what constitutes its peculiarly dangerous character, is that it is not pure infidelity; it is not the entire rejection of the gospel, but truth surrounded with enticing and destructive error. Poison by itself is not so seductive, and therefore not so dangerous, as when mixed with food. We do not believe that those of our brethren from whom we are so unfortunate as to differ on this subject, have a deeper impression than we have either of the destructive character of the errors of popery, or of the danger to which religion and liberty are exposed from its progress. We believe it to be by far the most dangerous forms of delusion and error that has ever arisen in the Christian world, and all the more dangerous from its having arisen and established itself in the church, or temple of God.

Endnotes

1. See Preservative against Popery, vol. 1, tit. iii., ch. i., p. 36.
2. See treatise on the church, page 50, Goode's edition.
3. Form of Government, ch. 2, sec. 4.
4. "The church of Rome," says Bishop Sanderson, "may be considered, 1. *Materialiter*, as it is a church professing the faith of Christ, as we also do in the common points of agreement. 2. *Formaliter*, and in regard to what we call Popery, viz., the point of difference, whether concerning the doctrine or worship, wherein we charge her with having added to the substance of the faith her own inventions. 3. *Conjunctim pro toto aggregato*, taking both together. As in an unsound body, we may consider the body by itself; the disease by itself; and the

body and the disease both together, as they make a diseased body." Considered in the first sense, he says, it is a church; considered in the second sense or "*formally* , in regard of those points which are properly of popery, it has become a false and corrupt church; and is indeed an anti-Christian synagogue, and not a true Christian church taking truth in the second sense." He had previously said: " the word *truth* applied to any subject is taken either absolute or respective. *Absolutely* a thing is true, when it hath *veritatem entis et essentia* , with all those essential things which are requisite to the being and existence of it. *Respectively* , when over and above these essentials, it hath also such accidental conditions and qualities, as should make it perfect and commendably good. A thing may be true in the first sense, and yet not true in the second, but false. As a man may be a true man (*animal rationale*) and yet a false knave." Treatise on the Church, pp. 214 and 219.