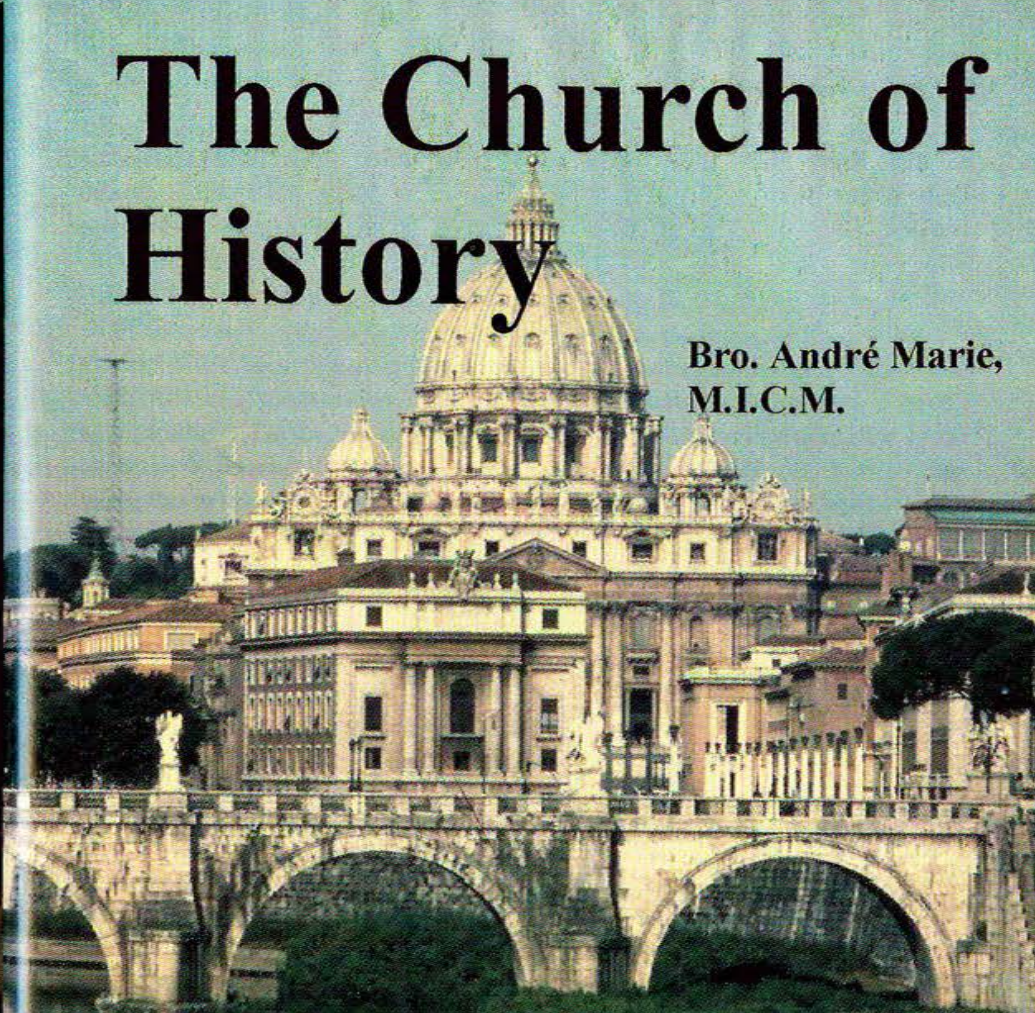


The Church of History

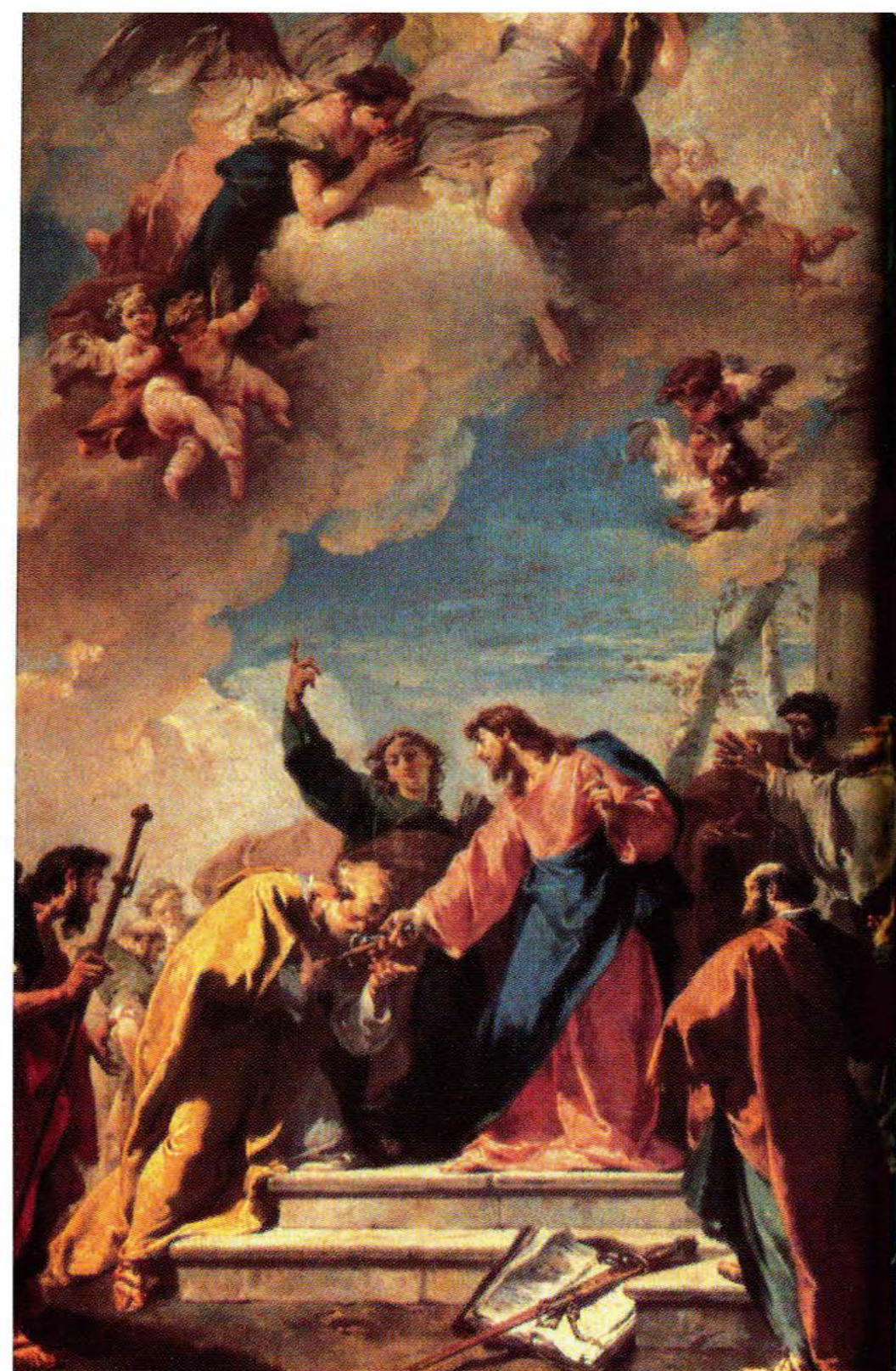
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Of all the "churches" calling themselves "Christian," can any one of them irrefutably claim to be the Church founded by Jesus Christ? Does any conform to the clear, precise terms by which this Church of Christ is described in Holy Scripture: "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15); or the "One Body" of which St. Paul repeatedly speaks (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 1 Cor. 12:12-20; etc.); or the "Kingdom of Heaven" of the synoptic Gospels, and the "Kingdom of God" of Saint John's? Does any one of them insist that those who fail to hear its decrees are to be treated as the "heathen and publican" (Matt. 18:17)?

Opposite: The Presentation of the Keys to Peter

Above: Saint Peter's Basilica



Yes, there is such a One True Church that meets all these descriptive requirements. The question is, which one is it?

Before we answer that question, we must address an objection that there is a "One True Church." Many taking the name "Christian" would never claim the sect to which they adhere is the true Church. Rather, they

fall into the flagrant error of saying that we are all, somehow, the Church that was founded by Christ. Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Calvinists, Fundamentalists, Presbyteri-

ans, Lutherans, and, yes, even some Catholics, are all, so they say, part of the universal Church founded by Christ. This, of course, is blasphemy! It is blasphemy for the simple reason that the Holy Ghost is the One Who sustains the Church and informs its members into one body, and this Holy Ghost is also known as the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17), in Whom there can be no error.

Now if all Protestants who claim to be members of the true Church were gathered together, there would be among them Calvinists who believe that Baptism is a Sacrament, and Bap-

tists who do not; Lutherans who call Mary the Mother of God, and Evangelicals who do not; Episcopalians who believe that man has free will, and Presbyterians who do not; Pentecostals who say true believers have to speak in tongues, and Methodists who do not. One would even find, and not infrequently, "Born-Again Believers" who believe Jesus is God, contrary to other "Born-Again Believers" who do not.

To say that the Spirit of Truth would animate a "church" in which there would be so much contradictory doc-

trine, contradictory leadership, and contradictory worship, as such a church as this would have, is to accuse the Holy Ghost of being a deceiver or schizophrenic. To claim that all these different "Christians" are included in the One True Church is not only absurd: it is blasphemous.

Returning to our question above, we find that there is but one single, united group of Christians who form a Church that meets the qualifications set down in Holy Scripture. It is the Catholic Church. Now it becomes our task to prove that this Catholic Church, which has the Roman Pon-



Saint Ignatius of Antioch

tiff as its visible head, is the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

We can do so from Holy Scripture, from patristics, and from the various miracles that have been worked by Catholic Saints (which proves the divinity of the religion). We will combine the first two into one and call it, "the historical argument." The third, because of its wide range of examples, we must leave for another article.

Jesus Founded a Church

We begin with Scripture. The Bible proves that Jesus Himself, the God-Man, established an institution which He called a "Church": "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). In addition to this reference, there are one hundred and nine other times that the New Testament uses the word, "church." But this one reference is enough to prove that Jesus did indeed intend to establish a Church .

A fundamental mark of the Church founded by Jesus is its oneness. Our Lord Himself referred to His Church as "one fold," and in His agony in Gethsemane He prayed to His Father, "that they may be one, as we also are one." (Other scriptural texts proving the unity of the Church are Acts 2:42 and 20:27-31; Romans 12:4,5,16; 15:5,6; and 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13 and 12:13-29; 1 Peter 3:8; and Jude 17-19; — to name just a few.)

Knowing there is only one true Church of Christ, we proceed to our next point: This Church is an historical reality.

Jesus gave His Apostles a mission: "And he said to them: Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall he condemned." (Mark 16:15-16) In his account of this mandate, Saint Matthew adds these words of Our Lord (they are the very last words of St. Matthew's Gospel): "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

We know from the Gospels and from the Acts of the Apostles that these men did indeed go out to convert the world. And we also know, both from the Acts and from some of the Epistles, that they were joined by new followers, who accompanied and assisted them in their mission. We know from these books that the Apostles ordained men into the offices of deacon, priest, and bishop to continue this mission. But where the Bible leaves off, where it simply ends as an historical account, the story of Christ's Church has merely begun. Anyone who believes in the Bible as the inspired word of God must believe that the Church of God continued, and that it existed as the divine institution Jesus Himself founded. For He Himself, the uncreated Word of the Father, promised it His abiding presence. When He said to the Twelve, "Behold