

(3) THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

20. Richard Field

[From *Of the Church*, Book II, Chapter ii. Ed. *E.H.S.*, Cambridge, 1847. Vol. I, p. 65.
Cp. note on No. 72.]

THIS entire profession of the truth revealed in Christ, though it distinguish right believers from heretics, yet it is not proper to the happy number and blessed company of Catholic Christians, because schismatics may and sometimes do hold an entire profession of the truth of God revealed in Christ. It remaineth, therefore, that we seek out those things that are so peculiarly found in the companies of right believing and Catholic Christians, that they may serve as notes of difference to distinguish them from all, both Pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics. These are of two sorts; for either they are such as only at some times and not perpetually, or such as do perpetually and ever, sever the true Church from all conventicles of erring and seduced miscreants. Of the former sort was multitude, largeness of extent, and the name of "Catholic," esteemed a Note of the Church in the time of the Fathers. The Notes of the latter sort, that are inseparable, perpetual, and absolutely proper and peculiar, which perpetually distinguish the true Catholic Church from all other societies of men and professions of religions in the world, are three: First, the entire profession of those supernatural verities, which God hath revealed in Christ His Son; Secondly, the use of such holy ceremonies and Sacraments as He hath instituted and appointed to serve as provocations to godliness, preservations from sin, memorials of the benefits of Christ, warrants for the greater security of our belief, and marks of distinction to separate His Own from strangers; Thirdly, an union or connexion of men in this profession and use of these Sacraments under lawful pastors and guides, appointed, authorized, and sanctified, to direct and lead them in the happy ways of eternal salvation. That these are Notes of the Church it will easily appear by consideration of all those conditions that are required in the nature of Notes. They are inseparable, they are proper, and they are essential, and such things as give being to the Church, and therefore are in nature more clear and evident, and such as that from them the perfect knowledge of the Church may and must be derived.

21. Francis White

[From *A Reply to Jesuit Fisher's Answer*, pp. 54, 102. Cp. note on No. 228.]

The qualities of unity, holiness, verity, Apostolical Succession, and other the like, are not always found in the true Church equally or in the same degree and measure of perfection, but according to a latitude and inequality of intention and remission, and more or less; so that although the sounder part of the Church hath always the substance of truth, sanctity, and unity, yet this verity of doctrine, unity of charity, sanctity of manners, is greater, larger and more sincere and perfect in some persons and ages of the Church than in others. These qualities were in their greatest perfection when the Apostles themselves lived; they were in great measure in the ages immediately abutting upon the Apostles. But the holy Fathers complain of the decrease and decay of them in after times; and Papists deplore the extreme diminution of them in their days. . . .

Although the true Church is always holy for doctrine, yet it is not perfectly and in the highest degree ever so. And it is most inconsequent to argue: Christ which is the Truth is ever with the Church, *Ergo* the Church cannot err or teach any falsehood; for Christ is always with

the faithful (*Eph.* iii, 17), yet just and faithful people may err. Because Christ was with the Apostles by miraculous inspiration, therefore they could not err or deliver any falsehood, great or small. But He is present with the sounder part of the Church militant since the Apostles by ordinary grace and assistance, which freeth the same from damnable and malicious error, but not from all error. And this assistance of grace is greater or less, according to the good pleasure of Christ, and the disposition of His people, which are compassed about with ignorance and infirmity, and at some times better or worse qualified than at other.

22. Jeremy Taylor

[From *A Dissuasive from Popery, Part II*, Book I, § I. *Works*, ed. R. Heber. Vol. X, pp. 377–381 (ed. C.P. Eden, Vol. VI, pp. 375–378). Cp. note on No. 50.]

Bellarmino reckons fifteen Notes of the Church. It is a mighty hue and cry after a thing that he pretends is visible to all the world. 1. The very name “Catholic” is his first Note. He might as well have said the word “Church” is a note of the Church; for he cannot be ignorant but that all Christians who esteem themselves members of the Church think and call themselves members of the Catholic Church; and the Greeks give the same title to their Churches. Nay, all conventions of heretics anciently did so; and, therefore, I shall quit Bellarmine of this note by the words of Lactantius, which himself also (a little forgetting himself) quotes *Sed tamen singuli quique haereticorum coetus, se potissimum Christianos, et suam esse catholicam ecclesiam putant*. 2. “Antiquity,” indeed, is a Note of the Church, and Salmeron proves it to be so from the example of Adam and Eve, most learnedly. But the certainty that God had a Church in Paradise is as good an argument for the Church of England and Ireland, as for Rome; for we derive from them as certainly as do the Italians, and have as much of Adam’s religion as they have. But a Church might have been very ancient, and yet become no Church; and without separating from a greater Church. The Church of the Jews is the great example; and the Church of Rome, unless she takes better heed, may be another. St. Paul hath plainly threatened it to the Church of Rome. 3. “Duration” is made a note. Now this respects the time past or the time to come. If the time past, then the Church of Britain was Christian before Rome was;¹ and, blessed be God, is so at this day. If Duration means the time to come—for so Bellarmine says, *Ecclesia dicitur catholica, non solum quia semper fuit, sed etiam quia semper erit*—so we have a rare note for us who are alive to discern the Church of Rome to be the Catholic Church, and we may possibly come to know it by this sign, many ages after we are dead, because she will last always. But this sign is not yet come to pass; and when it shall come to pass, it will prove our Church to be the Catholic Church, as well as that of Rome, and the Greek Church as well as both of us; for these Churches, at least some of them, have begun sooner, and for aught they or we know, they all may so continue longer. 4. “Amplitude” was no Note of the Church when the world was Arian, and is as little now, because that great part of Europe is papal. 5. “Succession of Bishops” is an excellent conservatory of Christian doctrine; but it is as notorious in the Greek Church as in the Roman and therefore cannot signify which is the true Church, unless they be both true, and then the Church of England can claim by this tenure, as having, since her being Christian, a succession of Bishops never interrupted but, as all others have been, in persecution. 6. “Consent in doctrine with the Ancient Church” may be a good sign or a bad, as it happens; but the Church of Rome hath not, and never can prove, the pure and prime Antiquity to be of her side. 7. “Union of members among themselves and with their Head,” is very good, if the members be united in truth (for else

1. [Having been founded, as many Seventeenth-Century Divines believed, at an earlier date than that at which St. Peter arrived in Rome.]

it may be a conspiracy), and if by Head be meant Jesus Christ; and indeed this is the only true sign of the Church. But if by head be meant the Roman Pope, it may be *ecclesia malignantium*, and Antichrist may sit in the chair. But the uncertainty of this Note, as it relates to this question, I have already manifested; and what excellent concord there is in the Church of Rome, we are taught by the question of supremacy of Councils or Popes; and now also by the strict and loving concord between the Jansenists and Molinists, and the abettors of the Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin Mother with their antagonists. 8. "Sanctity of Doctrine" is an excellent note of the Church. But that is the question among all the pretenders, and is not any advantage to the Church of Rome, unless it be a holy thing to worship images, to trample upon kings, to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven at the last minute, by the charm of external ministries; to domineer over consciences, to impose useless and intolerable burdens, to damn all the world that are not their slaves, to shut up the fountains of salvation from the people; to be easier in dispensing with the laws of God than the laws of the Church; to give leave to princes to break their oaths, as Pope Clement VII did to Francis I of France to cozen the Emperor, and as Pope Julius II did to Ferdinand of Aragon, sending him an absolution for his treachery against the King of France, not to keep faith with heretics; to find out tricks to entrap them that trusted to their letters of safe conduct; to declare that Popes cannot be bound by their promises—for Pope Paul IV in a Conclave, A.D. 1555, complained of them that said he could make but four Cardinals, because (forsooth) he had sworn so in the Conclave, saying this was to bind the Pope, whose authority is absolute; that it is an article of faith that the Pope cannot be bound, much less can he bind himself; that to say otherwise was a manifest heresy; and against them that should obstinately persevere in saying so, he threatened the Inquisition. These, indeed, are holy doctrines, taught and practised respectively by their Holinesses at Rome, and, indeed, are the Notes of their Church—if by the doctrine of the head, to whom they are bound to adhere, we may guess at the doctrine of their body. 9. "The prevalency of their doctrine" is produced for a good note. And yet this is a greater note of Mahometanism than of Christianity, and was once of Arianism; and yet the argument is not now so good at Rome, as it was before Luther's time. 10. That "the chiefs of the Pope's Religion lived more holy lives than others" gives some light that their Church is the true one. But I had thought that their Popes had been the chiefs of their religion, till now; and if so, then this was a good note, while they did live well—but that was before Popery. Since that time, we will guess at their Church by the holiness of the lives of those that rule and teach all; and then if we have none to follow amongst us, yet we know whom we are to fly amongst them. 11. "Miracles" were in the beginning of Christianity a note of true believers; Christ told us so. And He also taught us that Antichrist should be revealed in lying signs and wonders, and commanded us by that token to take heed of them. And the Church of Rome would take it ill, if we should call them, as St. Austin did the Donatists, *mirabiliarios*, "miracle-mongers"; concerning which, he that pleases to read that excellent tract of St. Austin, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, cap. 14, will be sufficiently satisfied in this particular, and in the main ground and foundation of the Protestant Religion. In the meantime, it may suffice that Bellarmine says, "miracles are a sign of the true Church," and Salmeron says that "they are no certain signs of the true Church, but may be done by the false." 12. "The Spirit of Prophecy" is also a pretty sure note of the true Church, and yet, in the dispute between Israel and Judah, Samaria and Jerusalem, it was of no force, but was really in both. And at the day of judgement Christ shall reject some who will allege that they prophesied in His Name. I deny not but there have been some prophets in the Church of Rome: Johannes de Rupe Scissa, Anselmus Marsicanus, Robert Grossthead (Bishop of Lincoln), St. Hildegardis, Abbot Joachim, whose prophecies and pictures prophetical were published by Theophrastus

Paracelsus and John Adrasder, and by Paschalinus Regiselmus at Venice, 1589. But (as Ahab said concerning Micaiah) these do not prophesy good concerning Rome, but evil; and that Rome should be reformed *in ore gladii cruentandi* was one of the prophecies; and, *universa sanctorum ecclesia abscondetur*, “that the whole Church of the Saints shall be hidden,” viz. in the Days of Antichrist; and that in the days of darkness the elect of God shall have that faith, or wisdom, to themselves, which they have, and shall not dare to preach it publicly, was another prophecy, and carries its meaning upon the forehead, and many more I could tell. But whether such prophecies as these be good signs that the Church of Rome is the true Church, I desire to be informed by the Roman doctors before I trouble myself any further to consider the particulars. 13. Towards the latter end of this catalogue of wonderful signs, the “Confession of Adversaries” is brought in for a note; and no question they intended it so! But did ever any Protestant, remaining so, confess the Church of Rome to be the true Catholic Church? Let the man be named, and a sufficient testimony brought, that he was *mentis compos*, and I will grant to the Church of Rome this to be the best note they have. 14. But since “the enemies of the Church have all had tragical ends,” it is no question but this signifies the Church of Rome to be the only Church. Indeed, if all the Protestants had died unnatural deaths, and all the Papists, nay, if all the Popes had died quietly in their beds, we had reason to deplore our sad calamity and inquired after the cause. But we could never have told by this: for, by all that is before him, a man cannot tell whether he deserves love or hatred. And all the world finds that, as dies the Papist, so dies the Protestant; and the like event happens to them all, excepting only some Popes have been remarked by their own histories for funest and direful deaths. 15. And lately, “Temporal Prosperity” is brought for a Note of the true Church. And for this there is great reason; because the Cross is the highway to Heaven, and Christ promised to His disciples for their lot in this world great and lasting persecutions, and the Church felt His Blessing for three hundred years together. But this had been a better argument in the mouth of a Turkish mufti than a Roman Cardinal.

23. John Hales

[From *Miscellanies*, § i (“How to know the Church”). *The Works of the Ever Memorable Mr. John Hales of Eaton*, Glasgow, 1765, Vol. I, p. 104.]

Marks and notes to know the Church there are none, except we will make true profession—which is the form and essence of the Church—to be a mark. And as there are none, so it is not necessary there should be. For to what purpose should they serve? That I might go seek and find out some company to mark. This is no way necessary; for glorious things are in the Scriptures spoken of the Church. Not that I should run up and down the world to find the persons of the professors; but that I should make myself of it. This I do by taking upon me the profession of Christianity and submitting myself to the rules of belief and practice delivered in the Gospel—though besides myself I know no other professor in the world.