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Μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται
Matt. 5:9

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THE TRUE CHURCH AND THE NOTES OF THE CHURCH

"How do we know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Christ?" Thus reads question 153 in the Revised Baltimore Catechism. Upon our ability to answer this question effectively and accurately depend the spiritual welfare of our own people and the progress of our missionary effort. As Catholics we know that the scientifically assured and demonstrated answer to that question exists in the teaching of our Church. As teachers, however (and every priest is necessarily and pre-eminently a teacher), it must be our business to know how to give that answer. Moreover, we must be able to give it in such a way that those to whom our teaching is addressed will be able to profit from it, and may be able to see the God-given evidence that ours is the true Church of Christ.

The Revised Baltimore Catechism answers its own question with an appeal to the four marks or notes of the Church. It states that "We know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Christ because it alone has the marks of the true Church." In answering the two subsequent questions it defines the marks of the Church as "certain clear signs by which all men can recognize it as the true Church founded by Jesus Christ," and informs us that "The chief marks of the Church are four: It is one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic." After explaining why each of these qualities can be predicated of the Catholic Church, the Catechism terminates this section of Christian Doctrine with the answer to question 160: "We know that no other church but the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ because no other church has these four marks."

Thus the Revised Baltimore Catechism expresses itself as fully confident that the proof from the four marks or notes of the Church can show "all men" that the Catholic Church is the one true Church instituted by our Lord. It considers the *via notarum* as an effective demonstration, even apart from the *via historica*, which shows the identity of the Catholic Church with the organized religious society to which our Lord's immediate disciples belonged, and apart from the *via empirica*, which deals with the existent Catholic Church as a manifest miracle of the social order, and thus as a

"great and perpetual motive of credibility and an unshakeable evidence of its own divine messengership."¹

A great number of distinguished and highly competent modern theologians have treated the *via notarum* as a fully and independently effective argument for the Catholic Church's position as our Lord's own society. In this group we find such authors as Hurter,² Mazzella,³ Herrmann,⁴ Egger,⁵ Billot,⁶ D'Herbigny,⁷ Pesch,⁸ Michelitsch,⁹ Felder,¹⁰ Bainvel,¹¹ Van Noort,¹² Zubizarreta,¹³ Bartmann,¹⁴ Berry,¹⁵ Brunsmann,¹⁶ Tepe,¹⁷ MacGuinness,¹⁸ Paris,¹⁹

¹ Vatican Council, Sess. III, chap. 3 (DB 1794).

² Cf. *Theologiae dogmaticae compendium* (Innsbruck, 1878), I, 262 ff.

³ Cf. *De religione et Ecclesia praelectiones scholastico-dogmaticae* (Prato, 1905), pp. 639 ff.

⁴ Cf. *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae* (Lyons and Paris: E. Vitte, 1937), I, 427 ff.

⁵ Cf. *Enchiridion theologiae dogmaticae generalis* (Brixen, 1932), pp. 526 ff.

⁶ Cf. *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi sive continuatio theologiae de Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1921), pp. 135 ff.

⁷ Cf. *Theologica de Ecclesia* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928), II, 29 ff.

⁸ Cf. *Praelectiones dogmaticae* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1924), I, 285 ff.

⁹ Cf. *Elementa apologeticae sive theologiae fundamentalis* (Graz and Vienna, 1925), pp. 285 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. *Apologetica sive theologia fundamentalis* (Paderborn, 1923), II, 154 ff.

¹¹ Cf. *De Ecclesia Christi* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1925), pp. 49 f.

¹² Cf. *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi* (Amsterdam, 1913), pp. 130 ff.

¹³ Cf. *Theologia dogmatico-scholastica ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatis* (Bilbao, 1937), I, 338 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. *Précis de théologie dogmatique*, traduit par l'Abbé Marcel Gautier (Mulhouse, France, 1936), II, 204 ff.

¹⁵ Cf. *The Church of Christ. An Apologetic and Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis and London: B. Herder Book Co., 1927), pp. 146 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. *A Handbook of Fundamental Theology*, freely adapted and edited by Arthur Preuss (St. Louis and London: B. Herder Book Co., 1931), III, 409 f.

¹⁷ Cf. *Institutiones theologicae in usum scholarum* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1894), pp. 317 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. *Commentarii theologici* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1930), I, 263 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatis tractatus de Ecclesia Christi ad usum studentium theologiae fundamentalis* (Turin: Marietti, 1929), pp. 74 ff.

and Schultes.²⁰ There is, of course, no such thing as any one uniform method of treating the notes of the Church to be found in the writings of these modern theologians. These men handle their material in different ways and they manage to achieve strikingly different degrees of effectiveness. Yet, amidst this diversity of treatment, they all manifest their confidence in the *via notarum* as a correct and efficacious apologetical process.

Still other competent theologians, however, have placed no such reliance on the proof from the notes of the Church. Speaking of this demonstration, Tanquerey-Bord says brusquely: "*Hodie vero Protestantibus minime convincit.*"²¹ In a similar vein, Martin Jugie, the greatest modern Catholic authority on the doctrines of the dissident Orientals, insists that the *via notarum* is of little use in explaining the Roman Church's prerogatives to the members of the dissident assemblies.²² Dieckmann²³ and Lercher²⁴ give the demonstration from the notes of the Church but show themselves quite diffident about its efficacy. Cotter does not employ it at all.²⁵ Schoupe,²⁶ Dorsch,²⁷ Straub,²⁸ and Hervé²⁹ use the notes of the Church together with the argument from the Petrine primacy, the

²⁰ Cf. *De Ecclesia catholica praelectiones apologeticae* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1931), pp. 160 ff. The same author showed himself quite critical of the *via notarum* in an article in *Divus Thomas*, I (1914), pp. 57 ff.

²¹ *Synopsis theologiae dogmaticae* (Paris, Tournai, and Rome: Desclée, 1937), I, 516.

²² *Theologia dogmatica christianorum orientalium ab ecclesia catholica Dissidentium* (Paris: Letouzey and Ané, 1931), IV, 591.

²³ Cf. *De Ecclesia tractatus historico-dogmatici* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1925), I, 511.

²⁴ *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1934), I, 449 f.

²⁵ Cf. *Theologia fundamentalis* (Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College, 1940), p. 391.

²⁶ *Elementa theologiae dogmaticae* (Lyons and Paris, 1861), I, 186 ff.

²⁷ Cf. *Institutiones theologiae fundamentalis* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1928), II, 637 ff.

²⁸ Cf. *De ecclesia Christi* (Innsbruck, 1894), pp. 743 ff.

²⁹ Cf. *Manuale theologiae dogmaticae* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Bookshop, 1943), I, 374 ff. Hervé also employs the hierarchical nature of the Church as a quasi note.

strongest element in the *via historica*. Yelle and Fournier use the three methods very effectively.³⁰

Strangely enough, the sharpest attack on the validity of the proof from the notes of the Church comes from Dr. Gustave Thils, the theologian who has done the most towards explaining the history and the various forms of this demonstration. Dr. Thils holds that, even granting the efficacy of the proof from the notes of the Church, such a proof is neither simple nor easy, and certainly not adapted to all the faithful.³¹ Moreover, he shows a serious lack of confidence in the force of the demonstration itself.

The learned professor from Malines reduces the proof from the notes of the Church to syllogistic form. The major of this syllogism is the assertion that our Lord endowed His Church with certain characteristics which should permit us to recognize it amidst all the Christian groups. The minor tells us that these characteristics are found in the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Thils holds that, during the course of recent theological history, ecclesiologists have presented the minor premise in three different ways. Sometimes they have made an *absolute* assertion, affirming without any restriction that these notes belong to the Church of Rome. At other times they have given the minor premise in *comparative* form, holding that the four notes exist in the Roman Church more perfectly than they do in non-Roman communions. Dr. Thils holds that our theologians present the minor premise in the proof from the notes of the Church in a *negative* manner when they content themselves with showing that the four qualities employed by the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople do not exist in religious societies other than the Catholic Church.³²

Dr. Thils passes a very severe judgment on the *via notarum*. He claims that its major premise has never been rigorously demonstrated, and that it fails to justify completely its declarations on the existence, the number, and the nature of the notes themselves. He believes that the minor premise, in whatever form it

³⁰ Cf. *Apologetica* (Montreal: Grand Séminaire, 1945), pp. 191 ff.

³¹ Cf. *Les notes de l'Église dans l'Apologétique Catholique depuis la Réforme* (Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, 1937), p. 342; cf. also the article by the same author "*La 'via notarum' et l'Apologétique contemporaine*" (*Angelicum*, XVI, 1[Jan. 1939], pp. 24 ff.).

³² Cf. *Les notes de l'Église*, p. 81.

may be found, has serious and easily ascertainable shortcomings. As he sees it, the demonstration from the notes of the Church, taken as a unit, is a sadly ineffective instrument for bringing people to realize the status of the Catholic Church as the true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is obviously important for us to know whether or not Dr. Thils has adequately and accurately evaluated the *via notarum*. In order to have this knowledge, we must understand something about the way in which and the purpose for which the proof from the notes of the Church was originally conceived. With this historical information once gained, we should have little difficulty in seeing in what way and to what end the demonstration from the four notes of the Church is manifestly and fully effective.

Catholic theologians began to use the *via notarum*, in its existent form, during the course of the sixteenth century. Such is the constant teaching of Dr. Thils, and such is the evidence from the history of sacred theology. The precise point of this beginning in the sixteenth century, however, is unfortunately not too well set forth in many explanations of the history of the notes.

In the first place, the men of the sixteenth century were by no means the first to appeal to qualities visible in the true Church of Jesus Christ as evidence justifying their attachment to that Church. As a matter of fact, some of the earliest and most effective of the Counter-Reformation ecclesiologists incorporated into their own works passages taken bodily from the writings of the Fathers, indicating visible characteristics of the Catholic Church which manifested that Church as the society within which every man who seeks to live as a follower of Christ should dwell. Passages of this kind were to be found in the writings of Saints Irenaeus, Augustine, Jerome, Optatus, and Vincent of Lerins.

St. Irenaeus had taught that the true faith, the veritable message of our Lord, was to be found in the apostolic Churches, and especially in the apostolic Roman Church, with which, because of its "*potior principalitas*," every Church which preserved the apostolic tradition was to be united.³³ Listing the factors which held him as a member of the Catholic Church and kept him from association in the conventicles of heretics, St. Augustine had spoken of a "most sincere wisdom" existent within the true Church, an "agree-

³³ Cf. *Adversus haereses*, 3, 3 (MPG, VII, 848 f.).

ment of peoples and of nations," an "authority, begun by miracles, nourished by hope, increased by charity, confirmed by age," a "succession of priests from the very see of Peter the Apostle . . . to the present episcopate," and finally "the Catholic name itself."³⁴ The "wisdom" found within the Church, in other words the flowering of the divine life of grace within the Catholic society, was presented as something which should influence Catholics to remain within the Church. St. Augustine seems to admit that it has no probative value in manifesting the truth of the Church to non-Catholics, since these do not believe that it exists in the Church. The other four factors, however, by their very nature, are such that they can be seen and appreciated even by those outside the fold.

St. Jerome had used the name and the origin of the Church as signs of its truth.

We ought to remain in that Church which was founded by the apostles and which continues to this day. If you ever hear of any that are called Christians taking their name not from the Lord Jesus Christ but from some other, as for instance Marcionites, Valentinians, men of the mountains or of the plain, you may be sure that you have there not the Church of Christ but the synagogue of Antichrist. For the fact that they took their origin after the foundation of the Church is proof that they are those whose coming the Apostle foretold.³⁵

St. Vincent of Lerins had taught that a man would hold the orthodox faith within the Catholic Church when he held to entirety, antiquity, and agreement.³⁶ St. Optatus of Milevis had appealed to the catholicity of the Church in showing "which is the one Church called by Christ His Dove and His Bride." Furthermore he makes use of five endowments (*notes*) of the Church in arguing against the Donatists. These five endowments, which the Donatists themselves admitted as adornments of the Church, were the *Cathedra*, *Angelus*, *Spiritus*, *Fons Signatus*, and the *Sigillum*. The *Cathedra* is the See of Peter, and the true Church is the one in communion with the legitimate successor of the Prince of the Apostles.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, 4 (CSEL, XXV, 196; MPL, XLII, 175).

³⁵ *Dialogus contra Luciferianos* (MPL, XXIII, 181 f.).

³⁶ Cf. *Commonitorium 2* (MPL, L, 640).

³⁷ Cf. *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*, 2 (CSEL, XXVI, 32 ff., MPL, XI, 941 ff.).

Furthermore, when we say that the scholastic argument from the notes of the Church originated during the sixteenth century, we by no means imply that the theologians of the sixteenth century were the first to teach that the four qualities enumerated by the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople are to be found in the Catholic society and in no other. This doctrine had been a commonplace in Catholic ecclesiology since the thirteenth century. St. Thomas Aquinas had listed four *conditiones* of the Church, unity, holiness, catholicity, and a firmness due to its divine foundation and to its apostolicity.³⁸ He insisted that these *conditiones* belonged to the Catholic Church alone. The fourteenth century ecclesiologist James of Viterbo had indicated no less than ten factors contributing to the "glory" of the true Church.³⁹ These ten qualities, he said, could be reduced to the four *conditiones* set forth in the Creed of Constantinople. The fifteenth century Cardinal John de Turrecremata had designated these same four qualities, not only as *conditiones* but as *proprietas*, as pertaining to the Catholic Church and to no other religious society.⁴⁰ Thomas Netter of Walden had appealed to these four qualities in his arguments against the Wyclifites, but had relied mainly on demonstrations from the Church's unity, catholicity, and apostolicity.⁴¹

Despite the fact that the Catholic ecclesiologists of the sixteenth century were not the first to appeal to visible qualities inherent in the Catholic Church in defending her status as the true Church of Jesus Christ, and despite the fact that they were not the first to teach that the four qualities enumerated in the Creed of Constantinople are actually properties of the Catholic Church, they were the originators of the *via notarum*. The demonstration from the notes of the Church is something far more radical and specialized than a mere appeal to the Church's visible qualities. It is a triumphant refutation of one specific attack on the Church, an attack which began with the Protestant Reformation.

What distinguished the Protestant groups from the various

³⁸ Cf. *Expositio super symbolum apostolorum* (Mandonnet's edition of the *Opuscula omnia* [Paris: Lethielleux, 1927]) IV, 378 ff.

³⁹ Cf. *De regimine Christiano* (Arquillière's critical edition [Paris: Beauchesne, 1926]) pp. 100 ff.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Summa de Ecclesia* (Venice, 1560), chapters 6-19, pp. 7^v ff.

⁴¹ Cf. *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae* (Venice, 1571), I, 190 ff.

heretical societies which had preceded them, and what fashioned them into the most formidable adversaries that have ever been ranged against the Church of God, was one ingenious thesis in the field of ecclesiology. Earlier heretical societies had gone their own individual ways and held their own individual tenets, separating themselves, theoretically at least, as thoroughly from other erroneous assemblies as from the true Church. It remained for the Lutherans, and for Calvin, and for their followers, to concoct and to adopt a scheme which would give plausibility and consistency to the spectacle of doctrinal variety itself. That scheme was the hypothesis of a twofold church, the one visible and the other invisible. The Protestant theory of the notes of the church was an essential part of this scheme. The Catholic demonstration from the notes of the Church, the *via notarum*, provided the evidence which showed the error of this basic Protestant contention.

Both the Lutherans and the Calvinists insisted that the true Church of Christ was basically an invisible society. By the term "the true Church of Jesus Christ" both these men and their Catholic opponents understood the group which was the recipient of our Lord's promises, the assembly which He and His disciples called the *Ecclesia*. The true Church was the body of men against which the gates of hell would not prevail. It was the Kingdom of God, within which our Lord was to remain forever. It was the Church of Christ, and the men who did not belong to it were to constitute a loosely organized church of Satan, the "world," gathered under "the prince of this world," to fight against our Lord and His followers.

It was the contention of the Lutherans that this true Church consisted of men and women in the state of grace.⁴² The Calvinists held that only the predestined belonged to it.⁴³ Both parties, in

⁴² Cf. *The Confession of Augsburg*, "They [The Lutherans] teach that the one Holy Church will remain forever. Now this Church is the congregation of the saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered." Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 295.

⁴³ Cf. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, "The Catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect . . . The visible Church which is also Catholic or universal under the Gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children. (Bettenson, *op. cit.*, p. 348).

other words, taught that in order to be a Christian, in the sense in which this term is used in the Acts of the Apostles, in order to be a true disciple or follower of Christ and to be in His company, it was not *primarily* requisite to live in any organized religious society at all.

There was nothing particularly new about these contentions. They had been the stock in trade of various heretics from the time of Montanus down to the days of Wyclif and Huss. What made the Reformation heresiarchs' attack on the true Church more dangerous than previous onslaughts had been was that none of them attempted to identify his own organization with this imaginary invisible Church. The Reformers were anxious to put up a concerted fight against the Catholic Church, and they found the instrument for this campaign in their own theory on the notes of the Church.

That theory, as elaborated by the Lutherans and adopted by the Calvinists, was embodied in the assertion that the true Church existed wherever the Gospel was preached sincerely and the sacraments were properly administered.⁴⁴ The just and the predestined were depicted as being free to enter into any visible religious society wherein these two characteristics could be found. Such societies were presented as being fit assemblies for Christians, organizations within which the followers of Christ could unite to work for their common interests. The sincere preaching of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments were thus the Protestant notes of the Church.

The sincere preaching of the Gospel, according to Reformation theory, demanded accuracy only in the statement of essential or primary doctrines of Christianity, and allowed error and disagreement on accidentals. The determination was made by a sort of "greatest common factor" method. The teachings on which Protestant religious groups agreed were, *ipso facto*, elevated to the status of primary Christian doctrines. Matters on which they differed automatically became designated as accidentals.

The Protestant notes of the Church thus became the foundation of a kind of religious "tolerance." No individual Protestant assembly could claim to constitute the Church of God in its own

⁴⁴ Cf. Calvin's *Institutio Christianae religionis*, Lib. IV, cap. 1, n. 9 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1874), II, 207.

right. Each one claimed for itself and recognized in others only the pretension to be an apt and fitting dwelling for men and women who were Christians by virtue of the life of grace or by predestination. Thus the Protestant notes of the Church do not claim the prerogatives of the visible Catholic Church for any heretical religious organization. Rather they are part of a system which claims these gifts for an unorganized body of men and women, for those in the state of grace or for the predestined.

In opposing this error through the use of the real *via notarum* the Catholic theologians of the sixteenth century took cognizance of those religious truths which their Protestant opponents accepted. The Reformers recognized the early Saints, the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church as true disciples of Christ. They claimed to follow the teaching of the early Church. Most important of all, they accepted the Bible as God's word. With this in mind the Catholic controversialists worked to draw from the Scriptures, and from ancient patristic and conciliar writings all that they could find to show that being a Christian in the proper sense of the term, being a true disciple or follower of Christ, being in the company of Christ, meant belonging to the visible society which our Lord had organized around Himself, the society within which He still lives and rules and which we know as the Roman Catholic Church.

John Driedo stated the central issue of the sixteenth century religious controversy clearly and accurately. Echoing the words of St. Augustine he says that "there is an ancient controversy between the heretics and the true Christians about where the true Church of Christ is and with whom it dwells."⁴⁵ He notes that there are two different Churches opposing one another, each one claiming that it wishes to remain in the faith of our Saviour, to abide by the evangelical and apostolic teachings and to possess the Christian religion. The issue is between two Churches. If the claim of one of these groups is justified, that of the other is not. If one of these really is the Church of Christ, and actually possesses the qualifications it claims to have, then the other is the body, or at least belongs to the body which is set against the Church of Christ, and which fights in some way under the direction of the prince of this world.

⁴⁵ Cf. Driedo's *De ecclesiasticis scripturis et dogmatibus*, Lib. IV, cap. 2 (Louvain, 1533), p. 503. Driedo uses an adaptation of the words of St. Augustine's *De unitate Ecclesiae*, cap. 2.

Driedo sets out to prove that "the true Church of Christ is with those who remain in that Church which was founded by the apostles, which began to grow out of Jerusalem, spreading to all nations, and which endures to this day."⁴⁶ He advances ten *sententiae* to demonstrate this proposition. The ten *sententiae* center around the evidence that the true Church of Christ is an organized body, containing both good and bad men in this world, that it is apostolic, and necessarily connected with the See of Peter, that it is united in one sacrament of faith, and that its status as the group within which our Lord dwells can be demonstrated through an appeal to the scriptures. Driedo's proof, as stated and explained under the heading of his ten *sententiae*, is perfectly cogent. It is capable of showing a man who acknowledges the existence of a group which has the right to the name of Christian that this group is nothing more or less than the visible Catholic Church. Driedo organized his demonstration well, but made no attempt to hinge his teachings on any definite number of characteristics existent within the Catholic Church.

Ruard Tapper, on the other hand, appeals explicitly to the classical passages from St. Augustine and St. Vincent of Lerins in demonstrating that "the Church in which we have been born again to Christ, in which we have received the sacraments, and in which we have been instructed from our earliest years is that true Catholic Church outside of which there is no salvation."⁴⁷ Like Driedo, Tapper teaches that this claim can be verified through an examination of the scriptures. For Peter Soto, unity is the great sign of the true Church. Soto insisted that the true Church of the Christians is indubitably the one which existed long ago "in the apostles and disciples, to the number of about a hundred, who were gathered in Jerusalem after the ascension, and who there received the Holy Ghost." The ones who remain in that unity constitute the body of the Christians. The others, those who have

⁴⁶ Cf. Driedo, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

⁴⁷ Cf. Tapper's *Oratio secunda, De Ecclesiae unitate, et quod vera Christi Ecclesia est apud nos Catholicos*, in the *Opera omnia* (Cologne, 1582), pp. 332 ff. Tapper calls the "notes" taken from Vincent of Lerins "signa certissima."

left it, are joined with the antichrist described in the First Epistle of St. John.⁴⁸

John Hessels appeals to the authority of St. Irenaeus, and uses the Catholicity of the Church, and its apostolicity, as signs showing that the visible Catholic Church is the Church of the Christians.⁴⁹ In his *Demonstratio methodica*, the great Thomas Stapleton uses universality, perpetuity, and conspicuous clarity as notes of the true Church.⁵⁰ In the later book, the *Relectio scholastica*, he offers a somewhat different listing. Here the notes are antiquity, succession, universality and unity.⁵¹

Christopher Holiwood taught that the Catholic Church could be shown to be the true Church of Jesus Christ by the fact of its status as the historically demonstrable continuation of the apostolic society.⁵² In a later edition of his book he indicated five signs or marks which rendered the exclusive claim of the Church evident. These five marks were faith, morals, extension in place, extension in time, and glorious works.⁵³ Nicholas Sander had listed six notes, the Church's depth and sublimity, its splendor and clarity, its extension, its duration, its unity, and its constancy.⁵⁴

Suarez named ten properties of the Church by which a man could demonstrate its status as the true Church of Jesus Christ, even apart from those other arguments which certify the correctness of its faith. These ten notes were the Church's catholicity, its duration, the agreement of peoples and nations, its unity, its holiness, its apostolicity, the gift of prophecy and of miracles, the

⁴⁸ Cf. *Assertio Catholicae fidei circa articulos confessionis nomine illustrissimi Ducis Wirtenbergensis oblatae per legatos eius Concilio Tridentino* (Cologne, 1555), *sectio de Ecclesia*. The sections and the pages of this edition are not numbered.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Brevis et Catholica symboli apostolici explicatio* (Louvain, 1562), pp. 30v ff.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Principiorum fidei doctrinalium demonstratio methodica* (Paris, 1579), pp. 104 ff.

⁵¹ Cf. *Principiorum fidei doctrinalium relectio scholastica et compendiaria* (Antwerp, 1596), pp. 70 ff.

⁵² Cf. *De investiganda vera ac visibili Christi Ecclesia tractatus*, (Antwerp, 1619), p. 25. Holiwood used the Latinized form of his name, Christophorus a Sacrobosco, as a signature for his book.

⁵³ Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 75 ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. *De visibili monarchia Ecclesiae* (Louvain, 1571), p. 793.

ordered government of the Church, its legitimate use of the sacraments, and its legitimate use of Scripture.⁵⁵ Gregory of Valentia⁵⁶ and Adam Tanner⁵⁷ considered as notes of the true Church the four properties attributed to the Church in the Creed of Constantinople and two others, the order existent in the Church, and its visibility. St. Robert Bellarmine, reminding his reader that the note of the Church leads to a conclusion "evidently credible" rather than "evidently true" for those who do not accept the Scriptures as God's word, employs no less than fifteen of these marks.⁵⁸ These are the Catholic name, the Church's antiquity, its uninterrupted duration, the number and variety of its adherents, the succession of its bishops from the apostles, its agreement with the faith of the apostles, the union of its members, the holiness of its teaching, the efficacy of its teaching, the holy lives of its great teachers, its miracles, its prophecies, the admissions of its enemies, the dreadful fate of those who oppose it, and finally the temporal felicity of its protectors. St. Robert, however, taught that these demonstrations might be arranged around the four marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Thus he lent the pressure of his influence towards the tendency to limit the number of notes to these four.

Earlier in the sixteenth century both Michael Vehe⁵⁹ and Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius⁶⁰ had designated these four properties as notes of the Church. This manner of listing the notes soon triumphed over the more complicated methods. John Wiggers took pains to show that the various elements in St. Augustine's celebrated argument for the Church could all be explained in terms of the four properties set forth at Constantinople,⁶¹ and Francis Sylvius argued

⁵⁵ Cf. *Opus de triplici virtute theologica, fide, spe, et charitate* (Lyons, 1621), p. 177.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Commentarii theologici* (Ingolstadt, 1603), III, col. 184 ff.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Theologia scholastica* (Ingolstadt, 1627), III, col. 156.

⁵⁸ Cf. *De controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticas* (Ingolstadt, 1586), I, col. 1338 ff.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Assertio sacrorum quorundam axiomatum, quae a nonnullis nostri seculi pseudo prophetis in periculosam rapiuntur controversiam* (Leipzig, 1535), Tract. I, cap. 2. The pages of this edition are not numbered.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Confessio Catholicae fidei Christiana*, in the *Opera omnia* (Cologne, 1584), pp. 29 ff.

⁶¹ Cf. *Commentaria de virtutibus theologis, fide, spe, et charitate* (Louvain, 1689), pp. 120 ff.

that all arrangements of the notes could be reduced to this one.⁶² Later in the seventeenth century the brothers Adrian and Peter van Walenburch used another set of four notes, unity, miracles, the diffusion of the Church and the perpetual succession of teachers within it,⁶³ but after their time the demonstration from the notes of the Church was, for all practical purposes, restricted to the arrangement sponsored by Vehe and Hosius.

The *via notarum* as these men employed it was a perfectly effective demonstration. It was addressed to men who professed themselves willing to follow the teaching of Scripture and of the Fathers, and who wanted to be associated with our Lord in the same way that the primitive Christians were joined to Him. Throughout all of its various individual arrangements, the demonstration from the notes of the true Church gave these men ample evidence that the Church of the promises, the company of the Christians, was, on the authority of Scripture and of the Fathers, essentially an organized and visible society, the visible society which they knew as the Catholic Church. Men like St. Robert and Francis Sylvius did not waste their time in using this comparatively complex process to prove something self-evident, the fact that as individual societies the various Protestant religious assemblies had not been established by our Lord during the course of His public life in this world. This fact was taken in as one element of their demonstration. They were engaged in polemic, not against one individual religious group nor against a mere union of societies. They were trying, in the interests of divine truth, to overcome an erroneous system, the system in which the Protestant teaching on the notes of the Church formed the key position. In showing that the Fathers of Constantinople had declared the visible Church over which they ruled as the Church of the faith, in presenting the formulae of St. Augustine and of the other patristic writers, the Counter-Reformation theologians were offering ample proof that, to be in the company of Christ, or to be a Christian, a disciple in the strict sense of the term, a man had to belong to the visible Church.

⁶² Cf. *De praecipuis fidei nostrae orthodoxae controversiis cum nostris haereticis*, in the *Opera omnia* (Antwerp, 1698), pp. 256 ff.

⁶³ Cf. *Professio fidei Catholicae*, in Migne's *Theologiae cursus completus* I, col. 1004 ff. This *Professio* is sometimes ascribed to Francis Veronius, S.J.

The weakness which Dr. Thils and other modern theologians have remarked in the modern use of the *via notarum* arises, not from any defect in the process itself, but rather from a faulty use of this process. In certain modern works there is a tendency to depict the Catholic Church and dissident religious organizations as claiming the same dignity, and to treat the *via notarum* as a kind of magic instrument for deciding the contest in favor of the Catholic Church. Thus the notes of the Church are considered as standards awarding the prerogatives of our Lord's true Church to the Catholic Church rather than, let us say, to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Actually, of course, there is no such contest. The Catholic Church's prerogatives as the true Church of Christ are not claimed in the name of any non-Catholic religious society, or even for the sum-total of these societies. They are claimed for an invisible church of the just or of the predestined. All that the modern Protestant bodies claim, and all that any such visible organization ever claimed, is the status of a society organized for the furtherance of the common interests of persons who seek their salvation as members of this invisible church. The Catholic *via notarum* shows that the Church of salvation is actually the visible society, the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, in recent years there has also been a tendency on the part of some authors to rely too much on a mere enumeration of the notes and an indication that they are found within the Church. After all, the essential work of the *via notarum* is to indicate that the visible Catholic Church is the true Church of Jesus Christ. The process is devoid of purpose and of meaning when the person to whom it is addressed is not aware of what the expression "true Church of Jesus Christ" really means. The classical masterpieces of ecclesiology all insisted upon the "names" of the Church, the various designations given to the Church by our Lord and by the Fathers. When they set out to prove that the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ, they were demonstrating that it is the Kingdom of God, the City of God, the House and Temple of God, and our Lord's Mystical Body. They were showing that the Catholic Church is the Church of the faithful and that, in order to have the designation of disciple of Christ or of Christian, in the sense in which these terms appear in Scripture, a man must belong to the Catholic Church.

In the religious and secular literature of our own time, a tremendous amount of the force and meaning contained in the notion of the Church or the *Ecclesia* has been lost. We have become so prone to apply the name "church" to every religious organization that we forget that it was and is the pre-eminent title of the company within which our Lord dwells. We are so accustomed to hearing expressions like "the union of the Churches" that we are apt to forget that this manner of speech would have sounded like blasphemy to the men who first elaborated the argument from the notes of the Church. For them, and for their opponents in religious debate, there was manifestly only one Church of Christ, and one church of Satan. We can expect little good from the *via notarum* when it is advanced by the type of Catholic writer who will use the inherently contradictory expression, "orthodox Christians, both Protestant and Catholic."

It is encouraging to find a distinguished non-Catholic scholar like H. Burn-Murdoch protesting against the attenuated meaning attached to the word "church" in modern times.⁶⁴ Only when men come to realize the content and the implications of this word can they be in a position to profit from the *via notarum*.⁶⁵ Unless they have an idea of what the notion of the true Church of Jesus Christ really is, they will not appreciate what this process of proof has to show them. Once they come to learn that meaning, however, they will find in the proof from the notes of the Church one of the most fruitful portions of Catholic theology.

JOSEPH CLIFFORD FENTON

*The Catholic University of America,
Washington, D. C.*

⁶⁴ Cf. *Church, Continuity and Unity* (Cambridge, England: At the University Press, 1945), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Dr. Thils' diffidence towards the *via notarum* may, perhaps, be ascribed to his belief that modern theologians see only a contest between the Catholic Church and three rival religious organizations where their counter-Reformation predecessors described one great conflict between the Catholic Church and the *ecclesia sathanae* (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 5).