



THE  
POPES

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*Infallible  
Teachers*

BY

REV. JOHN B. HARNEY, C.S.P.



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# The Popes: Infallible Teachers

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# The Popes: Infallible Teachers

**A** LITTLE while before He went out to the Garden of Olives to begin His Passion, our Lord prayed for His Apostles: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name Whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we also are. . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me; that they all may be one as Thou, Father, in me and I in Thee; that they may also be one in us. . . . And the glory which Thou hast given me, I have given to them that they may be one, as we also are one: I in them and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast also loved me. . . ." (John xvii. 11, 20, 21, 23).

How great, how wonderful, how perfect the unity which Jesus Christ desired for His Apostles, and for all those who would be led by their labors to believe in Him.

## The Unity Which Christ Desires

That unity was not to be merely one of good fellowship, of kind thoughts, of friendly feelings, of warm and true love. All these things, to be sure, are necessary for the perfect realization of His prayer. But they alone are not enough. At best, they are but a faint and remote preparation for the unity which He desires among His followers.

He is the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world (John i. 9). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John xiv. 6). He was born, and He came into the world to give testimony to the truth (John xviii. 37). Acceptance of His testimony, of the truths which He has made known, is therefore necessary for union with Him and with those who truly cleave to Him. Every jot and tittle of His teaching must be accepted and held fast. Though difficulties may arise and

remain unsolved, because the truths revealed are hard to understand, doubts may not be deliberately entertained; and downright disbelief must be disowned. "He that believeth in the Son, hath life everlasting, but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36).

### Possible—Through Him

This then is the unity which our Lord wishes His disciples to have, with the Father and Himself, and with all men who will be brought to believe in Him. They are to be *one body* and one Spirit, to have one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. iv. 4, 5). Of themselves alone men could never attain such unity. He has made it possible. "To every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ. . . . And He gave some Apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all meet into the unity of *faith*, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ: that henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive. But doing the truth in charity we may in all things grow up in Him Who is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. iv. 7-15).

In two previous pamphlets—*The Divine Commission of the Church* and *Peter: Prince of the Apostles*, we have looked closely and carefully into the means which Jesus Christ provided for our fulfillment of His demands. We have seen that He sent the Apostles to preach His Gospel to all nations, and that He gave them tremendous authority, obliging all men to whom they preached to receive them, to hear their words, and

to believe their teaching under pain of terrible penalties. "He that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 16). We have seen also that He was not arbitrary nor unreasonable in making such demands. For He solemnly promised to be with His Apostles all days even to the consummation of the world (Matt. xxviii. 20), and to send the Holy Spirit of Truth to abide with them forever and to bring to their minds all things that He had commanded and taught (John xiv. 26).

### **There Will Be Many Enemies**

Those promises are more than a guarantee that the Apostles would preach His gospel unerringly to the end of their lives. They are also a definite assurance that the work entrusted to them would be faithfully and infallibly carried on by their successors to the end of the world. No generation of men was to be left without divine assistance—to be "tossed around by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. iv. 14). Our Lord knew that the Apostles would have made no more than a beginning of their work when there would arise "false Christs and false prophets, showing signs and wonders to seduce (if it were possible) even the elect" (Mark xiii. 22). For a little while the influence and authority of the Apostles might be enough to counteract those false teachers. But after their dispersion, and still more after their death there would be need of a vigilant and supreme authority to keep a close watch on all who claimed a right to speak for Christ, lest His sincere followers should be deceived and led astray.

### **Peter Will Rout Them Perpetually**

Our Lord was, of course, well aware of this need. He did not ignore, nor did He treat it as unimportant. He met it squarely and effectively by placing Peter over His whole Church, and by making him its supreme teacher.

With all this most non-Catholic Christians will probably agree quite readily. It is hardly anything more than a summary reference to manifold words of our Blessed Lord. In those counsels, commands, promises, warnings, and threats, He speaks for His Father to His Apostles and to all those men to whom they preached His gospel. For this reason, only those who have already cast Him aside, consciously or unconsciously, who no longer believe the Sacred Scriptures, whose hearts are seared with unbelief, will question or deny the fact that He gave great and far-reaching authority to each and every Apostle, and a greater, wider authority to Peter.

### **The Popes Carry On**

But when we try to analyze that authority and to point out what it involves, there is an immediate and vehement protest as if we were asserting in Peter's behalf something but little short of blasphemy. Were we to say that the prerogatives and authority which Christ conferred on him were purely personal, and that they perished with him when he was crucified outside the walls of Rome in 67 A. D. there might not be much objection to that statement. But that is not what we say. We are far, very far, from granting the truth of that opinion. Our belief is its exact contrary. Just as we hold that the power, authority, and promises of Divine assistance which Christ gave to all the Apostles did not cease when they died, but were transmitted to their lawful successors even as they were transmitted to Matthias only a day or two after the Lord's ascension into heaven, so we hold in precisely the same way and for precisely the same reasons that the transcendent power and authority which He gave to Peter in making him the Foundation of the Church, the Holder of the keys of heaven, the Confirmer of the brethren, and the supreme Shepherd of the flock, have been transmitted



to all his lawful successors, the Bishops of Rome. Those powers were not conferred on the Apostles or on Peter for their personal exaltation, but for the glory of God and for the eternal welfare of those whom they would bring to the knowledge and love of His only-begotten Son. They were meant to be and they are abiding, irrevocable endowments of the Church of Christ.

### **The Popes Are Infallible**

In our study of this subject we will not deal with the legislative, judicial, or administrative powers of the Pope, but will confine ourselves rigorously to the one point of his authority as the supreme earthly teacher of all Christ's followers. Acting in that capacity no Pope has ever blundered. No Pope ever could blunder, for Jesus Christ in commissioning Peter to feed His lambs and His sheep, made him and his successors in the Papacy infallible.

That word infallible need not detain us. It means simply freedom from the liability—the possibility of falling into error. The *doctrine*, however, calls insistently for clear and careful exposition. Anything less exact will be only a caricature of our belief, and probably a very unjust misrepresentation. The *doctrine*, moreover, must be studied and judged in its entirety, as a single, distinct belief, no matter how much its component parts may be split apart for the sake of accurate analysis and appraisal. Though examined piecemeal it must be judged as a whole. One cannot estimate the strength and security of a house by merely looking at the disjointed stones, bricks, and timbers of which it has been built.

### **Papal Infallibility Is Limited**

Our belief is that the Pope, every Pope, without a single exception, from Peter to Pius XII, has been blessed and pro-

tected by Almighty God with the gift of infallibility in the exercise of his Supreme Teaching Authority. To know when this authority is involved, we must pay close attention to the following conditions:

- 1—It must be perfectly clear and certain that the Pope is defining, i.e., is handing down a final, authoritative, and irrevocable decision
- 2—Concerning a matter of either faith or morals;
- 3—And that he means to make his decision binding on all Christians.

By noting carefully and by keeping faithfully in mind these three essential requisites of an infallible Papal teaching, we will usually be able to avoid easily many grave blunders of which various critics of our Faith have been guilty. It will be impractical, if not impossible, to mention all of them. However, it will be well to specify a few which have been widely circulated and are still widely entertained.

### **Some Misunderstandings**

(A) We do not believe that the Pope is infallible, or has any special Divine assistance in dealing with other branches of human knowledge, such as astronomy, geology, and the physical sciences. He may blunder in them as badly as any other studious, intelligent man.

(B) We do not believe that the Pope is infallible in discussing other questions which may have a slight bearing on religious truths, or even a direct and intimate relation with them, except under the conditions and circumstances which have been already specified. In discussing those problems privately, he must rely entirely and exclusively on his purely natural powers of study and of reasoning. The gift of infallibility does not

come into play in his private reflections or opinions, but only in his *official* and *definitive* teaching.

(C) We do not believe that the Pope can make known *new* truths or proclaim *new* revelations. He cannot do either of these things. He is simply the chief custodian of Divine truth and Divine revelation. His task is not to discover new truths, but to guard and to expound the old—not to create or to change, but to preserve. The whole Gospel of Jesus Christ and the whole body of Divine revelation had been made known before the death of John, the Beloved Disciple. Both had begun with the prophets; both had been amplified, developed, and completed by Jesus Christ; both had been delivered to mankind through the Apostles and Evangelists. Whoever might preach a new or a different gospel, even though he were an angel from heaven would be accursed (Gal. i. 8). And rightly, for he would be an enemy of Christ. Long before John, the last of the Apostles died, Peter and the rest had gone to their eternal reward. For Peter's successors in the Papacy, therefore, the heirs of his Supreme Authority and infallibility, there remained only the glorious task of guarding the true Gospel and revelation. They have guarded it well; they have expounded it faithfully. And they will guard it till doomsday.

(D) We do not believe that the infallibility of the Pope is due in any way, shape, or degree to himself or to any other man. It is not the product of his abilities, his studious researches, or of his keen vision. Neither is it dependent on his character. A scholarly Pope is no more infallible than one whose talents are mediocre. A saintly Pope is no more infallible than one whose behavior is stained with deadly sin.

This assertion seems to scandalize many people. To some it is a sufficient reason to reject all the Papal claims. Yet very unreasonably. There is not a Christian on earth who does not

know that our Lord conferred on the traitor Judas power to cast out devils, to heal the sick, and to work miracles. Yet Judas was himself a devil. Our Lord so testified (John vi. 72). There is no Christian who does not know that Caiphas, the High Priest of that year (the year of Christ's death) had from God the gift and power of prophecy; (John xi. 51) yet Caiphas was a murderer.

### **Infallibility a Divine Gift**

The principle on which these convictions rest—a principle universally held by thoughtful men—is that when God gives to some men special powers and authority for the welfare of other men who come within their jurisdiction, He does not make their exercise of those powers dependent on their moral rectitude. Emperors, kings, presidents, and premiers, who legally possess civil power do not derive it from their observance of the moral law, nor do they lose it automatically through transgression. Were it otherwise, men could never have more than tremulous confidence in any of their rulers or guides. No man can know with absolute certainty what is in the heart of any other man. For this reason priests, bishops, and Popes retain to the end of their lives the spiritual powers with which they have been validly vested. Their *personal* unworthiness does not neutralize nor destroy their *official* power or prerogatives. An unworthy Pope, therefore, is still infallible.

This infallibility is not a new, magical faculty suddenly and mysteriously added to his earlier endowments. It is neither a faculty nor a power. It does not increase his ability. It does not enable him to *do* what was before beyond his reach, but only to do his work more perfectly than would otherwise be possible. It is simply a Divine protection, promised to him in Peter, by which he is kept from error in officially setting forth the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is given to him and it is there-

fore, his—his prerogative. But it is given for us and it is, therefore, also ours—our safeguard.

### **Papal Infallibility Not a New Doctrine**

This Catholic teaching has been condemned by many men as something new, unknown to primitive Christianity, and therefore false. With an air of triumph, as if their opinion were thereby proved to the hilt, they point out that it was not *formally* declared an integral part of Catholic belief until July 18, 1870—more than eighteen hundred years after the death of Peter. This fact actually proves nothing about either the antiquity or the truth of the Catholic doctrine of Papal Infallibility. That is *not* a *new* doctrine. To its full extent, in each and every one of its assertions, it is as old as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an integral and necessary part of that Gospel. It was taught and held and acted on from the very beginning of Christianity. In point of fact, it was better understood, more fully realized, and more universally accepted as the truth in the earliest years, than a dozen or more other truths which are now commonplaces of Christian belief. For many centuries agreement with the teaching and doctrinal decisions of the Bishop of Rome was the touchstone of orthodoxy everywhere in the Christian world. Indeed, it was not until the rise of Protestantism, that the teaching authority of the Popes was either widely or seriously denied by men who considered themselves Christians. Well and truthfully therefore, did the Vatican Council in defining the doctrine of Papal Infallibility declare that it was simply “adhering faithfully to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith.”

### **Explicit Declaration of Original Belief**

What then did the Vatican Council do, if it did not add anything *new* to the previous doctrines of the Catholic Church?

Laying aside consideration of the great number of other doctrinal matters which it discussed, renewing, ratifying, and making more emphatic previous Papal pronouncements, especially those contained in the famous "Syllabus" of Pope Pius IX, and confining our attention to the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, we answer: It formulated that doctrine a trifle more precisely than ever before, set it forth in words less open to misunderstanding and evasion, clearer and more explicit, and it also made that doctrine more binding on all Catholics. Previously they might quibble about its meaning and its sanctions; thereafter they were all bound to profess their acceptance of it, and their sincere belief in it *explicitly* under penalty of exclusion from the Church as heretics.

Much of what has been written in preceding pages has been said simply to clear away the clouds of misunderstanding and misrepresentation with which some enemies of the truth have befogged this doctrine. Before we enter into a study of its proofs, it will be well therefore to restate it succinctly. And since in these days it is not merely a question of what prerogatives Peter had and exercised a little over nineteen hundred years ago, but also of their lawful, valid, and effective transmission to Pope Pius XII, we will not bother with distinctions between Peter and Pius. In the point of authority and infallibility they are identical. What is true of one in this regard is true also of the other. Here then is a brief but adequate summary of our belief:

- 1—The Pope is infallible. He cannot make a mistake in defining a doctrine of faith or morals, when that definition is to be held by all believers in Jesus Christ.
- 2—His protection from the possibility of making erroneous definitions in those matters springs *directly*

and *exclusively* from the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter.

3—The *definitions* of Roman Pontiffs are *irreformable* and *irrevocable*. They do not depend on the consent or approval of the Church.

4—Papal infallibility is *not* a *new* doctrine but only the clear statement of a truth held from the very beginning of the Christian faith.

This doctrine does not rest on the wishes, the claims, the assurances of any man or group of men. Its sole source is Jesus Christ, of Whose *words, promises, and commissions* it is but the clear comprehension, and the faithful echo.

### Simon Will Become Peter

The words to which we must first pay close, careful, and prayerful attention were spoken on two separate occasions. The first was when Jesus met Simon, a fisherman of Bethsaida in Galilee. Straightway our Lord promised him a new name. "Jesus looking upon him said: 'Thou art Simon the son of Jona: Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter'" (John i. 42). The second was approximately two years later, only a short while before the death of Jesus. He and the disciples were then near Caesarea Philippi in North Galilee. After asking them: "Whom do men say that the son of man is?" and listening to their replies, He asked them another more searching and more vital question: "But Whom do you say that I am?" This question Peter alone answered, saying: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father Who is in heaven. 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. And I will give

to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 15-19).

### **The New Name Significant**

In considering these incidents we note that there was a long interval between them—one of at least two years. Yet they were very closely connected in the mind of Christ. The first was a *promise* and a *prophecy*: "Thou shalt be called Cephas"; the second their *fulfillment*: "Thou art Peter." Plainly they were not trifles of no real importance or significance. The Evangelist did not record mere pleasantries. Nor did our Lord make a promise and a prophecy just to whet the curiosity of bystanders. There was a deep meaning and serious purpose in what He said. He had chosen this poor fisherman to play a leading, vital, and decisive part in the execution of His divine determination to set up on earth a spiritual kingdom, whose members were first to be tested and purified by many trials, and then, after their worth had been proved, were to be welcomed into His heavenly kingdom where God lives and reigns in majesty and glory.

### **The Church Impregnable**

That earthly kingdom which Christ meant to establish was to be worthy of Him, an evidence of His wisdom, of His skill, of His power, and of His fidelity. It was to stand forever. It would, however, have many enemies—the rebellious angels, with Lucifer at their head who had been hurled out of heaven with the speed of lightning into the depths of hell, and reprobate men, who would be too proud to serve God and would, therefore, walk in ways of their own choosing, fancying themselves to be wise and strong. All these, fallen angels and willful men, would fight against the earthly kingdom of God, the Church of



Christ, with all their strength and fancied wisdom, with all their cleverness and treachery. They would fight against it, but they would fail, utterly, miserably. Jesus Christ had said: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Her victory would be hers indeed, but it would also be His, for she would win only with Him, by Him, and through Him. Yet He would not win that fight by Himself alone. Even as an Archangel, Michael, had led the faithful angels against Lucifer and his fellow rebels, so another man, the lowly fisherman Peter, would lead the human friends of Christ against His human foes—proud, disobedient, self-sufficient men. He did not himself choose that leadership; it was given to him by Jesus Christ. He could not of himself alone discharge its tremendous responsibilities, for he was by nature weak, inconstant, uneducated; a nonentity in the eyes of the learned, talented, brilliant leaders of his nation with whom he would often clash. Christ, Who placed those responsibilities on him, would give him the strength, the fidelity, the knowledge of which he would always stand in need.

### **Peter the Rock Foundation**

All those gifts our Lord had implicitly promised to bestow on him, though Peter, still known as Simon, did not realize nor even suspect His intention, when He said that this disciple would be called Cephas, that is Peter, the Rock. But when Jesus finally gave him that name he must have understood, at least in part, just what the Master had in mind. For He had immediately made plain the meaning of the new name. "Thou art Peter" (thou art a Rock) "and on this rock I will build my Church."

### **That Truth Never Doubted**

We digress here for a moment to remark that for centuries Christian people never had the slightest doubt about the mean-

ing of that name, or about the reason why it had been given. They all realized, even those who soon fell into varied heresies, that Simon, the fisherman of Bethsaida, had been called a rock, because he was the foundation on which Christ had determined to build His indestructible Church. It was not until fifteen hundred years of the Christian era had passed that heretics, seeking new arguments to justify their pride, thought to weaken and dethrone their nemesis, the Bishop of Rome, the universally recognized successor of Peter, by denying that Peter had ever had divinely bestowed authority over the whole Church. As if Jesus had merely made a pun, playing a trick of speech on the simple-minded fisherman and gratifying his vanity, but holding him up to ridicule all the while as a simpleton, they told the world that Christ, the Master Architect and Builder, had never had the intention of erecting His Church on so unsound and unreliable a foundation as poor, weak Peter, no matter what He had seemed to say, no matter what had been said, or thought, or believed by generations of learned, devout, and holy men. These good men had simply misunderstood Christ. The Rock on which He intended to build was Himself, or at most, faith in His divine nature. He had merely complimented Peter on being the first of His disciples to learn that truth and to proclaim it clearly.

### **Misinterpretations**

This interpretation of our Lord's words: "Thou art Peter" had only a brief vogue. It was rejected almost at once as both false and insulting to Christ by most educated and thoughtful Protestant students of the Scriptures. They held that He certainly knew how to say what was in His mind, and that He had distinctly and unequivocally said that Peter was to be the foundation of His Church.

He did not call Peter the founder of the Church. Not he,

but Christ alone was its Founder, its Architect. He drew up its plan, determining every detail from foundation to topmost stone. He was also its *Builder*, deciding what materials should be used by Him in its construction. Neither did our Lord say that Peter would *lay the foundations* of His Church. Some men pretend to think that this is what He meant. They add that Peter actually laid those foundations by being the first who preached the Gospel to the Jews on Pentecost, and the first who received Gentiles into the Church. Though it is true that he was the first who did these things, it cannot be said correctly that he thereby laid the foundations of the Church, or that those converts were her foundations. There is no truth in either assertion; both are futile and childishly foolish attempts to dodge the plain words of Christ: "*Thou art Peter*" a Rock "*and on this Rock*" (which thou art) "*I will build my Church.*" Our Lord Himself laid the foundation. *The foundation was Peter.*

Our Lord's words were obviously figurative. Everyone knows that He was not speaking of a rock, or a church, or gates, or keys, or of binding and loosing in the bare, bald, material sense of those words. Everybody knows that He attached a spiritual meaning to every one of them, and everybody may easily know also exactly what He meant by each one.

### **The Church—One and Permanent**

His Church was to be a spiritual edifice, made up of men and women and little children who would believe in Him, love Him, and obey Him. She was to have two outstanding characteristics, both essential to her peace and life. The first was *unity*. She was to be a kingdom—the Kingdom of God on earth. Naturally, she could have only one Supreme Ruler. "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to deso-

lation and house upon house shall fall" (Luke xi. 17). The second was *permanence*. She was to stand forever. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Jesus, however, did not intend to spend much time in His kingdom on earth. He would be lying dead on Calvary, only a few months at most, more probably only a few weeks, after He had spoken so confidently about His Church. True, He would rise with his wounds all healed on the third day, and He would live in full sight of His friends for another forty days. He would speak to them. He would dine with them. But after those forty days they would see Him no more on earth, until He shall come centuries later to judge the living and the dead.

Meanwhile, what would happen to His Church? To His Apostles? To His sheep? What plans had He made for their welfare and security?

### **Through Peter and the Popes**

The answer is one word, one name, *Peter*. Jesus Christ was leaving His earthly kingdom and all His followers, but He was not deserting them. He would be with them always, to the end of all human, earthly things. Not visibly as of old, but still powerfully and reliably. Peter—Foundation of the Church; Holder of the keys; Confirmer of the brethren; Shepherd of the flock; had been made His Vicar. And though he had once been cowardly, he would be thenceforth brave; though he was naturally weak, by the strength of His Master's blessing, he would be mighty.

*Unity* and *permanence*, both desired and guaranteed by our Blessed Lord as distinctive features of His Church have been effected through Peter and his successors. Through his successors! In the very nature of things—since he was to die some forty years after his Master, while the Church which was

built on him was to be immortal—there had to be at all times some one man to whom Peter's prerogatives would be transmitted without fail and without diminution. That transmission of his authority and power had to be made, and made lawfully; otherwise it could not be valid.

Imposters, pretenders, usurpers, if any should seize it temporarily, would have to be kept out, or driven out of power. There would be false claimants. "There will rise up false Christs and false prophets, and they shall show signs and wonders to seduce (if it were possible) even the elect" (Mark xiii. 22). That menace had to be met. It was. History has not recorded for us how Peter's successors were chosen in the early days. Very probably Peter appointed the first. A few later Pontiffs may have followed the same procedure. But in a short while the Clergy of Rome made the choice. Thereafter, no matter who was chosen or whence he came, the Church of Rome cast the decisive vote. And the new successor of Peter became at once Bishop of Rome. Rome! Always Rome!

### **Christ Is Their Safeguard**

This is not a groundless guess. It is a logical, a necessary, an imperative inference from the words of Christ. He made Peter the *foundation* of His Church. He solemnly affirmed her *indestructibility*. Not only His honor, His truthfulness, His fidelity, but even His very Godhead demanded the maintenance of that foundation. If it could be dislodged or made ineffective, if it could be pulverized by the might of enemies, if it could be neutralized in some subtle way by the trickery and deceits of foes, then the Church of Christ would fall swiftly, crushingly, irreparably. Her enemies would have triumphed over her Founder and Builder. They would have conquered

Jesus Christ. And all the denizens of hell would gloat forever over the discomfited and dethroned Son of God.

The maintenance of her unity and her preservation against all attacks were not the sole tasks which our Lord entrusted to Peter when He made him the *foundation* of His Church. One might indeed draw from that fact the inference that everything necessary for her welfare was thus implicitly provided. But it is plain that the Apostles did not understand that truth clearly. What they failed to realize, others also might easily miss. Consequently, the Master went on to explain Peter's prerogatives and duties more clearly. "And *I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven.*"

### Peter Has the Keys

One to whom the keys are *given* plainly is not himself the owner, nor the natural ruler of that house or kingdom. Despite his high authority he is nothing more than a servant, a trustee, a steward, an administrator, a general manager. All the other servants are under his jurisdiction. But he is not himself exempt from authority. He cannot follow His own inclinations, his whims, his impulses, his prejudices, his private interests. He knows and he must do his master's will. For him, as for all the lesser servants and dependents, there will come a day of reckoning in which he will have to give an accounting of his stewardship.

This was manifestly and precisely the role which Jesus Christ assigned to Peter in His kingdom on earth. It is the role which Peter's successors in the bishopric of Rome have filled and will continue to fill until doomsday. That is why the Popes so often speak of themselves as the "Servant of the servants of God."

## Supreme Authority

It is an office of great authority and of great responsibility. The holder of the keys has the right to open and to shut the doors, to admit and to exclude those who seek entrance. It is his right, but he may not exercise it arbitrarily; he must admit the worthy; he must keep out the undeserving. In every case he must be just.

His power of binding means that he has authority to make some rules or regulations obligatory; his power of loosening means that he has authority to relax some of them, or to declare that they no longer impose obligations. It is a wider power than that of pardoning or of refusing to pardon sins—a power which was conferred on all the Apostles as on him, and in exactly the same words. It has a more extensive reach and scope than their authority, for his is also a legislative power. He is the *holder* of the *keys*.

## Peter Confirms the Brethren

So much for the powers which our Lord promised to Peter in return for his ringing proclamation of his Master's divinity at Caesarea Philippi. To most of us they clearly indicate his supremacy among the Apostles. Our Lord wished, however, to put that point beyond all question, to settle it forever. Therefore, He gave Peter another commission, more directly and intimately concerned with their personal needs. The Last Supper was its occasion. Even then the Apostles were asking, as many times before, which of them was to be first in His kingdom. He had frequently answered that question indirectly. Now He answered it directly and so plainly that they never asked it again. Turning to Peter He said: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you" (all of you, for He spoke of them in the plural) "that he may sift you as wheat. But I

have prayed for *thee*, that *thy* faith fail not. And *thou*, being once converted, *confirm thy* brethren" (Luke xxii. 31). Satan hated all the Apostles. He wished to scatter and to rout them all. Jesus prays particularly for *one*. His prayer is granted by the Heavenly Father. Straightway He commissions that *one*—Peter—to confirm them all, to strengthen them, to make sure of their everlasting fidelity. "Confirm thy brethren." Now Satan knows the man by whom he will be perpetually baffled.

### **Peter Chief Shepherd**

The last act of our Lord's life on earth was the laying of another commission on Peter. It was not something really new and different, but only the full rounding out and development of the authority implied in his responsibility for the welfare of the Church. Possibly to bring that home to him vividly for the last time, and also to make clear to all other men what is required in a faithful steward of His Church, our Lord thrice questioned Peter about his love for his Master: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" (John xxi. 15.) To those inquiries the disciple replied with an affirmation of his love, making his final affirmation a plaintive appeal to the Lord's omniscience: "Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee." Twice Jesus responded with the commission: "Feed my lambs." The third time He said: "Feed my sheep." Thus He entrusted His whole flock to Peter. He was made the shepherd of all. None were left out of his care, beyond his jurisdiction.

A shepherd has many obligations toward his sheep. He must provide them with shelter; he must lead them to wholesome pastures; he must see to it that they do not go astray and become lost; he must look for them when they wander and bring them back to safety; he must guard them against thieves



and marauding wild dogs or wolves. In a word, he must keep them healthy, sound, and safe.

### **His Primary Duty**

All these obligations were laid on Peter when our Lord gave him full charge of His lambs and His sheep, though the command that he feed them might seem to some to mean nothing more than that he provide them with sufficient food. This was indeed, his chief obligation, for food is the sustainer of life. To sustain life it must be wholesome, not poisonous. Peter's chief duty, therefore, plainly stressed by our Lord, was to see to it that all His lambs and His sheep, called every one to eternal life, would be nourished with truth, the truth which God has revealed, the truth which concerns the things of God, the truth which teaches men how they may please God. And since many false teachers who seek to pervert the Gospel of Christ have gone out into the world, it is pre-eminently Peter's duty to warn the whole flock against the errors of these false teachers—their vain conceits and fancies, their blindness, their ignorance, their perversity. Above and beyond all other ambassadors of God, Peter must "preach the word: be instant in season and out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine" (2 Tim. iv. 2).

This was no light, easy task that our Lord assigned to Peter in commissioning him to feed His lambs and His sheep. Yet he could undertake it with a happy and a confident heart. He Who gave him the task had prayed especially for him that his faith might never fail. The Heavenly Father had heard and granted the prayer which His only-begotten Son had spoken on His way to Gethsemane and Calvary. Peter would have forever the light, the wisdom, and the strength to fulfill his appointed task gloriously.

## Peter and Church Inseparable

What has been written thus far is merely a short study of the relations which Christ created between Peter and His Church. It tells us how, and when, and why He established them. It calls attention to their closeness, their intimacy, their inseparability. It points out some conclusions to which they lead inevitably—conclusions which are not trifling, but serious; not mere probabilities, but certainties; not theoretical, but practical; not weak, unimportant, and negligible, but strong, vital, and imperative. What it sets before us vividly and unmistakably is that our Lord united Peter and His Church so intimately that they are inseparable. St. Ambrose stated that truth in one short, memorable phrase: "Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia," where Peter is, there is the Church.

The Church is the Lord's handiwork. He is its Founder, its Architect, its Builder. He drew up its plan; not in a sketchy way, but with extremely close attention to its essential features. It is true that He left, or seemed to leave, some minor details to be developed by the Apostles, but it is also very plain that He had laid down the general principles and determined the policy which they grasped and faithfully followed. His Church in its growth and activities has been marvelously consistent. Evidently nothing was left to blind chance.

His Church has had many enemies, ferret-like in the keenness of their search for mistakes, flaws, imperfections, oversights, or anything else that might invalidate its claim to human consideration and confidence. Their furious search has been in vain. Our Lord had forestalled and beaten them by appointing Peter as His Vicar, and by making him infallible in his teaching. Through him He has provided for the satisfaction of every man's needs and for the sound solution of every man's moral problems.

## **The Test**

A little more than nineteen hundred years have passed since our Lord outlined for the Apostles the work which He was entrusting to them and the arrangements which He had made for its execution. Surely so long a stretch of years has afforded ample time for a thorough testing of His plans. We look, therefore, at our world of today to see whether they have been successfully carried out, or should be written off as a bad investment and another failure.

The work to which they were to devote themselves with their whole heart, and soul, and strength, and mind was the preaching of His Gospel; the finished product which was to result from their labors was to be His Church. Note those two objectives carefully, and keep them clearly in mind. It is with them that we are vitally concerned. Has His Gospel been preached from the day of Pentecost to this hour? Is it still being preached? In its purity? In its fullness? Is His Church still standing? On its first foundation? With its original features and characteristics?

### **Fraudulent Gospels and Churches**

We all know well that many different gospels have been preached in the name of Christ. Not merely one or two hundred, but more probably ten thousand. At this moment there are upwards of a hundred Protestant sects in this country alone. That fact does not astonish anybody though it shows a sad and shameful disregard for the wish and the prayer of Him Whom they all call Master. He warned men repeatedly against false christs and false prophets (Matt. xxiv. 24). And St. Paul writing to Timothy said: "there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and

will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, and will be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. iv. 3-4). Apostasy from the true Gospel of Christ began in the days of the Apostles and has run through the world ever since like an incurable plague.

We all know well also that there have been many different churches that were not of Christ's building or design, though they had an air of godliness, and indeed preached much of His Gospel with fervid zeal, but ignored, or distorted, or vehemently denied many of His teachings, and are, therefore, reprobate. Many of them have perished though they once counted their followers by the millions, and at times seemed about to overwhelm the one, true Church. Many more have sprung into being since the day of Martin Luther. Some are insignificant, numbering only a few thousands of adherents. Many are numerically strong, though their strength is not in fidelity to the principles and teachings of their founders which they have long abandoned, but in mere stubborn, unreasoning opposition to the Church from which their founders broke away. It is not with any of them, whether strong or weak, that we are at the moment concerned. The simple fact, undeniable and undenied, that they had neither name nor existence until at least fifteen hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ, is clear proof that none of them is the Church that He built.

### Vital Questions

We come, therefore, of necessity to the two questions which must be answered by all those who wish to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to belong to the Church which He built.

*Is His Gospel still preached?*

*Is His Church still standing?*

Were we compelled by evidence or by truth to answer either of those questions in the negative, we would be the most

wretched and miserable of men (1 Cor. xv. 19). For if His Gospel is not preached in its purity and soundness, but only in some shreds and tatters all intermingled with vain fancies and falsehoods, or if His Church is now only a wreck, storm tossed and shattered, we have no one to whom we may go for true knowledge and for sure salvation. How happy, however, is our actual lot! His words have not passed away (Luke xxi. 33). His Gospel is preached *now*, as always, faithfully, unerringly, *infallibly*, by him whom Christ made the supreme earthly shepherd of His flock—Peter, who teaches and has always taught in and through his lawful successors, the Bishops of Rome, and will teach through them to the end of the world. His Church still stands. She is still “the pillar and ground of the Truth” (1 Tim. iii. 15). And she stands, as always, on the foundation which He laid when He said to Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. xvi. 18).

In considering the special commissions which our Lord gave to Peter, one quickly realizes that they were particularly concerned with the safeguarding, and the right, sound preaching of the truths contained in His Gospel. Of course, this does not mean that he had no other work to do for Christ and His flock, nor that the other Apostles could sit back, as it were, and leave it to Peter alone to defend the Gospel from attack and to protect it from mutilation or perversion. But it does mean that Peter had a heavier obligation than any other Apostle with regard to the maintenance and the preaching of the Gospel in its pristine purity. And it means also that he was for that very reason given a greater assurance of divine help and protection in the fulfillment of that duty. God deals fairly and justly with every man on whom He lays burdens and responsibilities.

## Vividly Answered

That our Lord put graver obligations on Peter than on any other Apostle, and that those obligations were chiefly bound up with the preservation of His Gospel is plainly indicated by what He said in making him the foundation of His indestructible Church, in entrusting to him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, in empowering and appointing him to confirm his brethren, even his brother Apostles, and in commissioning him to feed His whole flock.

That Peter himself and the other Apostles thus understood those words of the Lord stands out quite sharply in the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It was Peter who played the leading and decisive part in the election of Matthias to the Apostleship; in the first preaching of the Gospel to the Jews; in the reception of Gentiles into the Church; and in the definitive settlement of the long drawn out dissension over the infliction of circumcision on Gentile converts.

And finally, the conviction that the Lord had laid on Peter supreme responsibility for the preservation of His Gospel in its original purity, and had given him both the authority and the divine assistance without which that sacred duty could not be fulfilled, is overwhelmingly attested by the history of all the centuries from the death of Christ to this hour. Especially by the earliest. Then the Christian religion was a new thing in the world, which had long been buried in worse than primeval darkness. There had been light, and the light had shone in the darkness, but "the darkness did not comprehend it." Then came the "true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John i. 5-9).

It is not astonishing that many men were dazzled by the glory which suddenly shone upon them, and that in trying to comprehend and to explain it they fell into error. Whether we

understand it or not, this is what happened. It had been foreseen by the Creator. Jesus Christ, Himself, the true Light, on coming into the world, had taken pains to make sure that the light which He threw into the darkness should remain a blessing to mankind and should not be changed, by their folly, into a curse. That is the reason why He gave the Apostles not only gifts and graces, but also authority. That is the reason why He gave to their chief the protection which made him infallible in his teaching. That is the reason why the power and authority and special gifts which He bestowed on the Apostles and on Peter have been faithfully transmitted to their lawful successors.

### **Testimony of Saints, Scholars, Heretics**

Because the singular authority and prerogatives of Peter were recognized in the beginning—as is evidenced by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv.)—the grave doubts and dissensions which troubled the early Christians were referred to his See for authoritative and final decision. This we know with certainty though we have only one bit of non-Scriptural evidence on the point until the middle of the second century. This is the letter of Pope St. Clement I to the Church of Corinth shortly before his death in 99 A. D. In it he rebuked the people for a schism among them and enjoined on them obedience to the divinely established hierarchy. Though St. John was still living at Ephesus, it was Clement of Rome who wrote the letter.

About a half century later the evidences of Papal authority and of its decisive character became quite numerous. Doubts, difficulties, and dissensions about matters of faith and of discipline were regularly referred to the Bishop of Rome, not for advice, but for definitive settlement. Naturally, this did not

happen in the first stages of a conflict, for almost all of them began at points fairly far from Rome, and not easy to reach in those days of slow, uncertain travel. But when those disputes and dissensions got out of hand, local Church authorities from Egypt, Africa, Gaul, the Orient, and elsewhere submitted those dissensions to the reigning Pope, and abided by his decisions. Even heretics, condemned at home, sometimes appealed to him.

### **Why Papal Decisions Were Accepted**

This did not happen because he was thought to be more capable or scholarly than those who were the storm centers of the raging controversy or heresy. Many of them were undoubtedly far more talented, acute, and subtle thinkers than most of the Popes who were obliged by their high office to sit in judgment on their controversies, to weigh their arguments, and to decide the questions that were at stake. Those issues were submitted to the Pope by even the most learned of the litigants simply because it was universally known and admitted that he had not only supreme authority, but had also the divine assistance promised to him in Peter, and therefore, could not err in his decisions. They did not use the word infallibility but they knew the fact.

From the very beginning Peter, as a rule, had the assistance and co-operation of his fellow Apostles and of other prominent members of the Church in his official activities. Thus he consulted them and gave them a voice in the election of Matthias to the Apostleship. Thus, also, they freely discussed the problem of circumcision before he decisively ended the debate. At other times, he decided grave matters on his own initiative as when he received Cornelius and his companions into the Church; and also when he inflicted stern punish-



ment on Ananias and Saphira. Evidently, he was free to act in either way and was equally authoritative.

### **Popes Have Not Been Arbitrary**

The Popes have generally consulted their fellow bishops in all serious matters. Pope St. Victor I who died in 198 A. D. summoned a synod of bishops who lived near Rome to discuss the "Easter Controversy." At that time, and for that reason, he also urged the holding of similar synods, or local councils in Gaul, Palestine, and Asia Minor. That controversy, hot, angry, and prolonged, was as to whether the Lord's Resurrection should be celebrated on Sunday, as was the custom in Rome, or on whatever day of the week the 14th Nisan might fall in the Jewish calendar.

Soon the custom of holding provincial councils became a feature of church life in all the sub-divisions of the Roman Empire. Then came what we now know as Ecumenical or General Councils. The first seven were held in the East; were convoked by the Emperors; and were composed predominantly, in most instances, almost exclusively of Oriental bishops. They all obtained recognition, however, by virtue of the Pope's approval and ratification. In some few instances he rejected a few decrees. What he ratified became and was everywhere accepted as authoritative; what he rejected became null and void, and was everywhere abandoned as worthless. The outstanding fact about all these councils is that the Pope's acceptance and approval of their decisions, decrees, and legislative enactments were in every instance requisite conditions of their validity. Surely this shows that his supreme authority, and whenever there was question of a doctrinal decision concerning either faith or morals, his infallibility, were tenets of Catholic faith everywhere in the Christian world.

## Papal Authority and Infallibility Still the Way to Life

The clear recognition and sincere acceptance of these two truths is absolutely necessary for the welfare of humanity, as necessary now as when our Lord sent the Apostles, with Peter at their head, to preach His Gospel to the world. Those truths are integral, essential, strongly emphasized elements of that Gospel. And belief in that Gospel is an imperative condition of eternal life. "He that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 16).

Many men have rejected those truths and have denounced them. They have drawn millions after them into that disbelief. With this result—that they are as "children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. iv. 14). A confusion like that of Babel, but more grievous and deadly, prevails in all the Protestant world. When its leaders speak, there is no harmony, but discord; no unity, but dissension. Thus it has been with them since those dark days of four hundred years ago when multitudes of men broke out of the Church of the living God, and fashioned churches of their own, "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13).

Yet there is hope for their offspring. The Church of Jesus Christ is still standing, strong, sturdy, stable. The gates of hell have not prevailed against her, nor will they. The shepherd whom Christ appointed and commanded to feed His lambs and His sheep is still at his post and is calling them. If they will but listen to his voice and come home they will have the knowledge, the peace, the security which are the birthright of those who dwell in that Church which will never fall because it is built on that rock once known as Simon, but now and forever as Peter.

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