

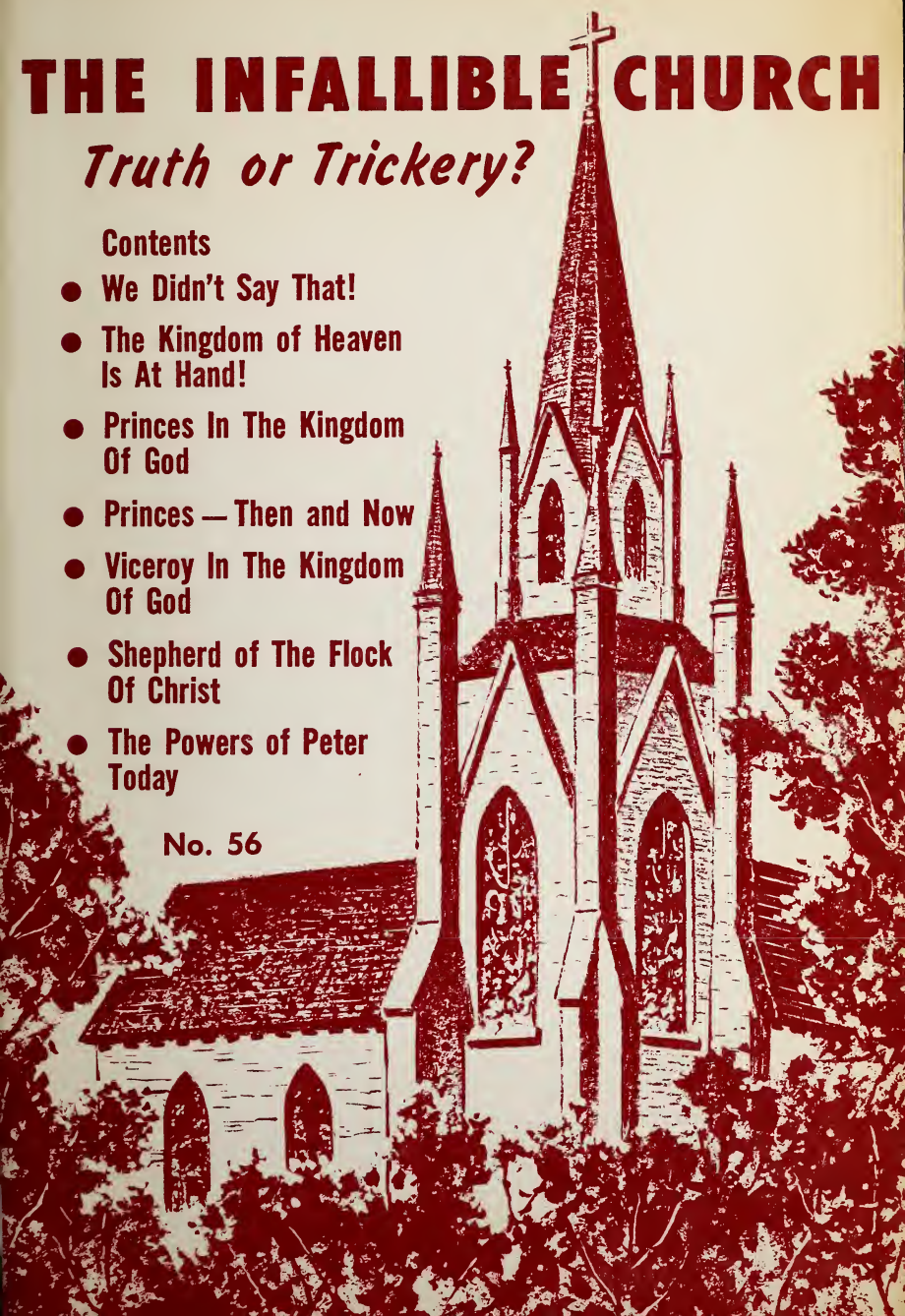
THE INFALLIBLE CHURCH

Truth or Trickery?

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No. 56



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Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are some times mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

**SUPREME COUNCIL
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WE DIDN'T SAY THAT!

On every side the Catholic is confronted with the questions: "Why do you say that the Catholic Church is the only true Church?" or "Why do you claim that a man who was born and reared an Italian peasant is infallible, and cannot make a mistake in teaching as head of the Church?"



And to this, we have to answer: "We didn't say that. God did." Maybe this sounds like a quarrel over words. But actually, it is not. God is not running for office. Hence it doesn't make the slightest difference how many people vote for Him as head of the Church. And it doesn't make any difference how many people claim a man cannot make a mistake. As a man with purely human powers, he most certainly can make a mistake. The only one who can guarantee that He will keep a man from making certain mistakes is God Himself. If He could not do that much, He most surely would not be God as we know Him.

The question, then — the vital question — is whether God did say these things. It is the contention of the Catholic Church that He did. If He did, surely this is a fact that

concerns the life of every human being who has the chance to consider it. If He did, it is a fact that no human being could safely ignore. And it is the contention of the Catholic Church that the Son of God did say that He was founding one only Church of which He is the head, and through it He

says that He will continue to teach, rule, and grant holiness to mankind. It is the contention of the Catholic Church that the Son of God gave a guarantee that this Church would never waver from the truths of salvation. It is the contention of the Catholic Church that the Son of God provided for a visible head of that Church; this mere man would be guided by the Holy Spirit so as to continue to proclaim to the world the doctrines of Christ Himself. Regardless of what is the conclusion of a sincere inquiry, these claims are so tremendous that they deserve serious thought and study.

There must be a basis for such claims as these before a reasonable man could be asked to accept them. And there is. It is the most widely known book in the world, the Holy Bible, and in particular the four Gospels. Aside from the fact that

they are the inspired word of God, the four Gospels are reliable historical documents. They report accurately the things that were done and said in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They were written by men who had first-hand knowledge of the things of which they wrote. These men wrote honestly, reporting not only the wonders of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and His sayings, but also their own failings and their lack of understanding at times of what He said. They were written in a time when men, hostile men, were able to challenge the truth of their accounts — a thing which they never did.

From these accounts, we know that Jesus of Nazareth laid claim to having been sent by God to teach men the way to eternal life. He went even further and laid claim to being Himself the equal of the Father, and therefore truly God. He Himself admitted that it was reasonable for men to ask proof of these claims

(see John 15:22-25). He gave proof of them in His miracles, works that can be performed by the power of God alone; these miracles He performed to seal with the truth of God the truths which He taught about Himself. He spoke prophecies of the future from knowledge that could come from God alone and these also He spoke to seal the truths which He taught men. He rose again from the dead in an act without parallel in all history. He had called others back to life; but He rose from the dead Himself. And once again, it was to seal the truth of His teaching with the authority of divine truth.

We are then on very solid ground in asking all men to open the pages of the Gospel and to pursue the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth about the future of the work which He came on earth to accomplish. Let every man investigate the claim of the Catholics: "We didn't say it. God did."

Since it would take too long to set out here the successions of all the churches, we shall turn to that great, ancient, and universally known church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles Peter and Paul, and we shall show that the tradition it has received of the apostles and the faith that it preaches to men has come down to our time through the regular succession of its bishops . . . For it is with this Roman Church by reason of the pre-eminent authority of its foundation that every other church, that is to say all the faithful everywhere, ought to agree, inasmuch as in this church the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously.

St. Ireneus of Lyons, 2nd century.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!



Like the roll of thunder, the voice of John the Baptist was heard throughout ancient Palestine: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" And the crowds flocked to see and hear him. The voice of prophecy, silent for centuries, was now heard again. The message was the message of hope of people of the Old Testament—the Kingdom of God, long awaited, was now at last to come among them. This Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven—an expression meaning the same thing) is the reign of God among men; it is the actual rule of God over men that would be brought about through the Messiah, long awaited and expected by the Jews.

The mission of John was that of herald of the King, announcing the coming of the King and calling all to prepare to receive Him. But John's mission was soon completed with his imprisonment by Herod. Then it was that the King, Jesus of Nazareth, began His public preaching on the same theme as John's: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:17). It was the Kingdom of God, the reign of God among men, that formed the

core of His teaching throughout His whole life. There are different points from which the Reign of God is viewed in the preaching of Jesus. But always it is the Reign of God, the actual ruling power of God over man, His creature, destined to enjoy the vision of God for all eternity. And these are the points from which Jesus views the Reign of God over men.

The Kingdom In Heaven

The final phase of the Kingdom of God will come at the end of the world when Jesus will return in glory. "Then the king will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34). "And night shall be no more, and they shall have no need of light of lamp, or light of sun, for the Lord God will shed light upon them; and they shall reign forever and ever" (Apocalypse or Revelation 22:5).

The Kingdom On Earth

The final Kingdom of God in which He will reign forever over the

blessed in Heaven is the final stage of the Kingdom. But it is reached through gradual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus announced at the beginning of His public life, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." The Pharisees asked Him in the course of His preaching: "When is the Kingdom of God coming?" He answered that the Kingdom of God would not come with all the external splendor and triumph that they expected. In fact, He told them, "the Kingdom of God is within you," that is, in their very midst, certainly not meaning in the hearts of these men who were doing their best to turn men from the way of God (Luke 17:20-21). Turning then to His disciples, He reminded them that He would go away, and that they would have much to suffer before He returned to usher in the final stage of the Kingdom of God.

What Kind of a Kingdom?

The people of the time of our Lord—yes, even some of the disciples before the coming of the Holy Spirit—expected that the Kingdom of God would be established by force and with the total destruction of the enemies of God on earth. Patiently, our Lord set about to correct the excess in the idea of a material Kingdom of God on earth. Certainly, in all that He did, Jesus had as His objective to bring about the Kingdom or the Reign of God in the hearts of men. It was His purpose to establish the Kingdom of God in the spiritual rebirth of mankind, but, as we shall see, with certain very definite

external and social means. One has only to open the Gospels at random to find Jesus directing men toward the practice of justice, charity, obedience to the will of God, and so on. Read, for instance, Matthew 6:31-33:

"Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?' (for after all these things the Gentiles seek); for your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Again, in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."

The distorted ideas of the times made Jesus stress over and over again the internal and spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God. But we would fall into the contrary error if we lost sight of His teaching on the external and social nature of this Kingdom; for it is through this external and social reign of God over men that the internal and spiritual will be brought about.

Teaching of Parables

The parables were homely little stories, drawn from the common experience of the people of Jesus' day, and spoken to convey spiritual truths gradually and gently to those

who were of good will.

Thus, in the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), Jesus explains that the good and the evil will exist in the Kingdom of God in this world until the time of the Last Judgment, when "the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all scandals, and those who work iniquity, and cast them into the furnace of fire... Then will the just shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

In the Parable of Net (Matthew 13:47-50) He repeats that the good and the bad will be in the Kingdom of Heaven until the Last Judgment, just as a net contains good and bad fish that have to be separated when the catch is landed.

Again, read the Parable of the Vine-dressers in Matthew 21:33-44. Here Jesus tells us that the vineyard represents the *Kingdom of God*. It has been put under the guidance of men who have proven themselves unworthy of the trust they have received; therefore, it will be taken from them and given to others. "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they knew that He was speaking of them" (Matthew 21:45).

What Follows From This?

There will be, then, in the Kingdom of God men who are good — men over whom God reigns internally through His grace and their use of that grace; and there will be men who are evil — men over whom

God does not reign internally, for they have rejected Him and they will be rejected by Him. But they are in the Kingdom of God, like the fish enclosed in the net and separated from other fish not enclosed in the net. There is, then, a Kingdom of God which is distinct from the internal and spiritual reign of God over the hearts of men. It is the external Kingdom in which God reigns externally over men, even though they are evil men. The external Kingdom has for its purpose to produce the internal reign of God in men; but it is a distinct idea or point of view in examining the Kingdom of God as founded by Christ.

The Parable of the Vine-dressers is even more expressive. In the Old Testament, the term "vineyard" was a common figure for the Israelite nation (see Isaiah 5:1-7). As a nation, it was a distinct body of men, separate from all other nations. It was banded together into a nation under authorities set up by God. The purpose of this was that, by their common effort, the Israelites would show forth to the other nations of the earth the holiness of God; that they also in their national life would offer due worship to God and attain holiness themselves (see Exodus 19:6). This is what we call a *society*: a permanent union of many men working together for a common end under the direction of authorities.

The Parable of the Vine-dressers, then, does not indicate that the external Kingdom of God is to be abolished. On the contrary, it is to be continued as a group of men

working together for the common end of the glory of God and their own salvation, but under different authorities.

The people at the time of Jesus had many mistaken notions about the Kingdom of the Messias. They thought He would restore the Kingdom of Israel as a universal kingdom like David's. They thought His reign would be entirely glorious, and left little room, if any, for the idea of a Suffering Messias. They thought He would come only once, establishing His reign once and for all. These and other mistaken notions our Lord corrected chiefly through the parables. He did not need to lay stress on the external nature of the Kingdom; the trouble was that the expectations of the people laid too much stress on the external Kingdom. But if it were not to be external, but merely internal and spiritual, then that was a basic mistake that would have had to be corrected with emphasis. But Jesus did not deny the external phase of the Kingdom of God. Rather, while stressing constantly that the end of all was the reign of God in the souls of men, He pointed out to all the people that there would be an external phase until the end of time. The purpose of it, obviously, will be to produce

the internal reign of justice and holiness in the hearts of men, and thus to prepare them to enter the final and perfect phase of the eternal reign of God over mankind in the blessedness of heaven.

The Kingdom of God, then, is the reign or rule of God over men. It is religious, not political; it is opposed to the reign of sin, not to the reign of Caesar. It has its final phase in heaven, but its initial phase on earth. It is internal in the hearts of men on earth, but likewise on earth it is external in the society which Jesus calls "my Church." Always, it is religious.

This is not the whole teaching of Jesus on the nature of the Kingdom of God. It was to be completed in His intimate instructions to His chosen disciples. In these, He clearly described who were to be the new vine-dressers of the vineyard of the Lord. He told them what their authority was to be. And He instructed them on the manner in which they personally were to conduct themselves in the use of this authority which is His by right. But in all this, He was simply filling in the sketch of the nature of the Kingdom of God which He had been preaching to the people throughout His public life.

"Christianity is more than a doctrine. It is Christ Himself, living in those whom He has united to Himself in one Mystical Body. It is the mystery by which the incarnation of the Word of God continues and extends itself throughout the history of the world, reaching into the souls and lives of all men, until the final completion of God's plan. Christianity is the re-establishment of all things in Christ."

Thomas Merton, *The Living Bread*

PRINCES IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD



It was a momentous step that Jesus took toward the beginning of His public life. He had been going through Galilee preaching "The Kingdom of God is at hand." He had gathered followers, but had also caused bitter opposition on the part of the leaders of the people. Now He was about to set forth in the Sermon on the Mount the moral plan and the general spirit of the Kingdom of God. But first He took care to choose the core of men around whom He would form this Kingdom. As before all the great steps in this work, He first devoted Himself to intense prayer to the Father.

"Now it came to pass in those days, that he went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when day broke, he summoned his disciples; and from these, he chose twelve (whom he also named apostles): Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew..." (Luke 6: 12-16).

St. Mark describes the incident in these words: "And going up a mountain, he called to him men of his own choosing, and they came

to him. And he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them forth to preach. To them he gave power to cure sicknesses and to cast out devils. There were Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter; and James, the son of Zebedee..." (Mark 3:13-19).

This group of the Twelve stands out throughout the life of Jesus as a group set apart to be the co-workers of the Son of God in the founding of the Kingdom. Their very title of "apostles" indicates "men sent forth" as legates of the Son of God for the work of preaching the Kingdom as Jesus was doing and of confirming their words with signs, as He also was doing. St. Matthew names them also, and gives a long instruction that Christ spoke on the manner of conducting themselves in the discharge of their high office (see Matthew 10). In St. John, too, they are clearly singled out in the words of Christ: "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil! Now he was speaking of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon; for he it was, though one of the Twelve, who was to betray

him" (John 6:71-72).

Our Lord then set the Twelve off from the rest of His followers as a special group. At times, they are referred to under the name, "disciples," like the other followers of Christ. But a careful reading of the Scripture will show us when this name, "disciples," applies only to the Twelve. Not only were they constant and devoted pupils of the Master in all His public preaching; they received separate and prolonged instructions by themselves on the Kingdom which Jesus was to found. These are found especially in the last year of the public life of Jesus. By that time, the people as a whole had refused to receive Him as their spiritual Messiah. He then turned His principal attention to the formation of the Apostles.

Training of the Twelve

He spoke to them of His divine mission and of His coming passion and death (Matthew 16:12-23). He allowed three of them to see Him in the glory that was His by right as Son of God (Matthew 17:1-8). He gave them a long instruction on their manner of acting as leaders in His Kingdom (Matthew 18:1-35 and Mark 9:32-41). They alone were with Him at the Last Supper and in the Garden before His arrest. To them as a group He manifested Himself several times after the Resurrection.

The instruction in Matthew 18:1-35 and Mark 9:32-41 is a most important step in the formation of the Apostolic group as the core of the Kingdom of God on earth. In it there are two themes that are

found again and again when Our Lord speaks to the Twelve. On the one hand, there is the clear statement of their power in the Kingdom. On the other hand, there is the detailed description of the way in which they must conduct themselves in the use of their power. They are to learn the spirit of the Master when He washed their feet at the Last Supper (John 13:13-14).

"The Little Ones"

In the instruction to the Twelve in Matthew 18, then, our Lord first points out the need of humility in the Kingdom of God, in place of a spirit of ambition (Matthew 18:1-5). He continues with instructions on the care of the "little ones"—the faithful followers of Christ—so as not to allow even one of them to perish (Matthew 18:6-14). But finally He shows what must be done with someone who is an occasion of scandal and spiritual harm to his fellows: first, private correction; then, public correction; then, denunciation to the Church (to the people of Christ's time, the Church was a religious society founded by God under the external direction of His delegates—the same idea as the external phase of the Kingdom of God); finally, in the case of persistent refusal to amend, there is to be excommunication—that is, the cutting off of the individual from all privileges and association in this religious body.

As the basis of the drastic action of excommunication from the Kingdom of God, there has to be power that comes from God. And this is what Jesus promises to the

Twelve at this time: "Amen I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven (Matthew 18:18).

It is not hard to understand what Jesus means in this statement. He is speaking not of the spirit in which the Apostles should exercise their authority in the Kingdom of God; He has spoken of that in the earlier part of the instruction. Rather, He is speaking of the authority or power itself.

Notice that He is speaking to the group of Apostles as a whole; He addresses them as "you" in the plural, not "thou" in the singular. Hence the power that is given is given to the group as a whole.

Binding and Loosing

The power that He promises is that of "binding" and "loosing." This means to impose an obligation or to remove that obligation (compare Matthew 23:4). We have the same expression when we say that a person is "bound in conscience." This means that he has the obligation in conscience toward something.

Further, the power promised is not limited. It includes *whatever* the Apostles bind or loose. This, of course, is in relation to the Kingdom of God and the salvation of souls. It surely does not give the Apostles power to make traffic laws.

And finally, it is a power that is God's own power. For, whatever they bind on earth is bound in heaven. It therefore affects the conscience of man, his guilt or inno-

cence in the sight of God, both in this world and in the next. God here guarantees that the Apostolic body cannot, when acting as the authorities in the Kingdom of God and when imposing or removing obligations in that Kingdom—we repeat, it cannot misdirect souls. If it could, we would have the ridiculous situation in which God could bind a man to something evil or release him from the duty of living in virtue.

Investiture of Princes

The promise of Apostolic power in the Kingdom was made only a few months before the death of Christ for the salvation of mankind. It was through this saving death of Christ that the perfect Kingdom, succeeding the imperfect Kingdom of the Old Testament, was brought into being.

Thus, after Jesus' Resurrection, He manifested Himself to the eleven disciples in Galilee—for Judas, the twelfth, had gone to his own place. "And Jesus drew near and spoke to them saying, 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Saint Mark gives us these words of Christ to the Apostles: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be

saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Power in External Kingdom

Jesus had always possessed all power in heaven and on earth. It was His by right of creation—for He brought all things into being. It was His by right of preservation—for He keeps creation in existence. "All things have been created through and unto him, and he is before all creatures, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). But now there is a new title by which Jesus as God-man possesses all power; it is the title of Redemption, by which He has bought the human race back from its bondage to sin. It is in view of this title that Jesus gives to the Eleven their commission to carry to all nations and every creature the fruits of His Redemption of man upon the cross. It is in view of the salvation of men that power is given to the Apostles over all men of all times, even to the consummation of the world. It is the power of teaching and ruling men, and of producing their internal holiness through the external authority given to the Church. And this activity of the Church can never fail of producing its results. For to them, the teachers and rulers in the Kingdom of God, Jesus promises: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." With His constant presence, the work can never disappear; it can never go astray.

The power to teach the doctrine of Christ with complete authority

cannot be mistaken in the words of Christ: "Make disciples of all nations," and "preach the gospel to every creature." No one may knowingly exempt himself from submitting of this power, for these Apostles teach with the authority of Christ Himself. When teaching thus with His authority, the body of Apostles and their successors are *infallible*. This, let us point out, does not mean *sinlessness*. This is not the end of this commission of Christ. Its end and purpose is to bring to all men of all times the truths which Christ has taught for the salvation of mankind. These are things that must be believed—things pertaining to faith—and things that must be done—things pertaining to morals. For, in this activity, Christ promises His constant presence with them even to the end of time. Thus, the teaching of the Church is guaranteed to be free from error in those things which pertain to the Kingdom of God on earth. If the Church were to fall into error on matters pertaining to man's salvation and holiness, the error would have to be attributed to Jesus, the Son of God. And that is evidently impossible.

The power to rule with authority, to command in the name of Christ, is likewise clearly stated. This is the power of binding and loosing, which our Lord promised to the Apostolic group beforehand. They are to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." The command is the command of Christ; but it reaches man through the direction of the leaders of His Church. The Apostles have the ob-

ligation to direct men to fulfill the commandments of Christ; men, therefore, must have the duty to obey these directions. To give some men the duty to direct others, and then to turn and tell the others they do not need to obey would be a self-contradiction.

Perpetual Power

Some will grant that what we have said is true, but true only of the Eleven to whom this commission was given. It was a power, they say, that was never to be passed on to others. To the Eleven it was given; with them, it would die. The Kingdom of God, as Christ founded it, was to last, at best, only some seventy years until the death of the last Apostle.

This by no means squares with the clear words of Christ. He had shown in His lifetime that He was not only God's legate, but truly God Himself. Thus He knew with the knowledge of God the future events of the world. He knew that these Eleven would not live to the end of the world. He knew equally well that they could not possibly bring to "all nations" and "every creature" the doctrine of salvation through the merits of Christ. But this is the command that He gave them: "Go into the *whole world* and preach the gospel to every creature"; "Go, therefore, and make disciples of *all nations*" (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). Further, He told them that He would be with them "all days even to the consummation of the world." This could mean only that it was His intention that these powers be passed on to other men as their

successors, down to the end of time. Any other conclusion is impossible; any other conclusion runs up against the fact that the Apostles did share their power of teaching and ruling in their own lifetime.

The Kingdom of God On Earth

We have seen the teaching of Christ to the multitudes in which He pointed out that the Reign of God on earth would be internal and spiritual in the hearts of men. But we have also seen that He clearly taught that there would be an external Reign of God, and that it would be for the purpose of bringing about true holiness among all men. It was to be a society, that is, the permanent union of many men working together for the glory of God and their own salvation, under the direction of authorities. The selection of the Apostles, the promise to them that they would receive the power of binding and loosing all things, the command to bring the truths and the means of salvation to all men even to the end of time—these things make the intention of Christ very definite and unmistakable. The power and authority in the Kingdom is His, always His. He and He alone is King. But He wills to confer upon mere man a tremendous dignity—and that is to share with Him that power and authority, while at the same time constantly reminding him that it must be exercised with the spirit of sacrifice, humility, and the love of God that was the characteristic of Jesus' own exercise of His power over men.

PRINCES - THEN and NOW

From the public preaching of Christ and from His instructions to the Twelve, we turn to the other books of the New Testament to see if they reflect the kind of Kingdom of God which the Gospels describe. The Book of Acts is a little history of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the years following the Ascension of our Lord into heaven. The Epistles are letters written by the Apostles. They are not written as the basic instruction of some individual church, but usually as the solution to some problems that have arisen from the oral teaching of the Apostle. The basic instruction in the faith was given by the Apostles in person and by word of mouth. "Therefore we too give thanks to God without ceasing," says St. Paul, "because when you heard and received from us the word of God, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but, as it truly is, the word of God who works in you who have believed" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). And again, "you have learned from us how you ought to walk to please God...For you know what precepts I have given to you by the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2). "The



rest I shall set in order when I come" (1 Corinthians 11:34). This is in no sense to argue against the sacred character of these books inspired by the Holy Spirit. But we would play false to the Holy Spirit were we to expect to find in them a detailed argument on all the basic elements of Christianity.

Yet, though these books did not set out to argue in favor of the Church as we have seen it in the Gospels, they do give us valuable information on the working Church.

A remarkable example of the external Reign of God through His authorities is found in the conversion of St. Paul by our Lord Himself. "He heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?' And he said, 'Who art thou, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom thou art persecuting. Arise and go into the city, and it will be told thee what thou must do'" (Acts 9:4-6). Even Paul, the Apostle, converted by Jesus Himself, was required to submit to the external Reign of God.

Again, the centurion Cornelius was a man who by his prayers

and good deeds brought an angel from heaven to him — but only to tell him to send for the Apostle Peter. Through a man, he would learn the will of God and would be thus admitted into the Kingdom of God (Acts 10:1-33).

Princes Ruling In The Kingdom

There is no doubt about the position of the Apostles in reference to the faithful who were brought into the Church through their preaching.

To the centurion Cornelius, Peter explained: "But God raised him (Jesus) on the third day and caused him to be plainly seen, not by all the people, but by witnesses designated beforehand by God, that is, by us, who ate and drank with him after he had risen from the dead. And he charged us to preach to the people and to testify that he it is who has been appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10: 40-42). We cannot say that Christ could not have made Himself manifest to all the people; He most certainly could have, had He chosen to do so. But He had established authorities in the Kingdom of God; it would be only through them, that the people would be taught the facts that are the basic foundation of the faith.

The whole life of the Kingdom was centered around the Apostles. "And they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of

the bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; many wonders also and signs were done by means of the apostles in Jerusalem, and great fear came upon all" (Acts 2:42-43).

They were the unquestioned rulers of the Church in spiritual and also in temporal matters. "And with great power the apostles gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord; and great grace was in them all . . . For those who owned land and houses would sell them and bring the price of what they sold and lay it at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each, according as any one had need" (Acts 4:33-35).

A Continuing Power?

Jesus had spoken about the future of the Kingdom in terms that demand that the power of teaching, ruling, and bringing men to holiness would continue to the end of time. There was no doubt in the minds of the Apostles about the intentions of our Lord. As they went about founding churches in the cities of the Roman Empire, they set up men as true authorities in these churches. These men would exercise true divine authority, not only in the absence of the Apostles but after their death. The prophets of old could not share their divine mission with others; the Apostles could and did. This is, in itself, indication of the intention of Jesus. No one can share a power from God, unless God

Himself wishes that to be done.

Speaking to the presbyters (priests) of the church of Ephesus, Paul indicates that they have a real ruling power over the flock, the Kingdom of God. He further indicates that this power will continue after him. "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as bishops, to rule the Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will get in among you, and will not spare the flock. And from among your own selves men will rise speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples after them" (Acts 20: 28-30).

To his faithful disciple, Timothy, Paul wrote his last letter from his prison cell in Rome where he was awaiting execution. In it, he appeals to the teaching power of the Church. "The things thou hast heard from me through many witnesses, commend to trustworthy men who shall be competent in turn to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). In this one statement, there is already a threefold succession: Paul to Timothy to Timothy's successors as teachers in the Church.

To Titus in Crete, Paul wrote: "For this reason I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set right anything that is defective and shouldst appoint presbyters in every city... A bishop must be blameless... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to confute opponents" (Titus 1:5-9).

Peter also had set up authorities in the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia. He wrote to remind them that they share in the Apostolic power, and as such will be held accountable to God for the way they use it. "Now I exhort the presbyters among you — I, your fellow-presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ, the partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed in time to come — tend the flock of God which is among you, governing not by constraint but willingly... And when the Prince of shepherds appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4). The power of Christ, the Prince and Chief of shepherds, must then continue in the rulers of the Church until the return of Christ in glory. "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world!"

Then And Now

This is not all there is to say about the Church as Christ founded it. For instance, we have not spoken of the place of Peter; but this simply because of the fact that we cannot speak of everything at once.

But this much we have seen: Christ proposed to found an external Kingdom of God—that is men permanently united and working together for the common end of their own salvation and holiness under the direction of authorities. We have identified at least the Apostolic authority of teaching, ruling, and producing the holiness of Christ in men; we have seen that Christ intended it to continue

through all the ages, and that the Apostles took steps to see to that.

The most casual look at the Catholic Church will show the existence of this Apostolic authority of teaching and ruling men, and of producing in men the holiness of Christ. The Catholic Church back through the ages has been thus constituted. One of the most common objections to the identity of the Catholic Church with the Kingdom of God as founded by Christ is the change in externals, such as the solemnity of worship and ritual, the magnificence of churches and vestments, and so on. To begin with, these have nothing to do with the question of Apostolic authority. And secondly, they are based on the presumption that in Apostolic times, all was shabby and without adornment, and that this is the only thing which Jesus approved of. Yet He and His disciples frequented the Temple in Jerusalem, and took part in the public worship there. Few Catholic churches could rival in magnificence the splendor of the Temple of Jerusalem. Most Catholic ceremonies are simple as compared to the elaborate worship of the Temple of Jerusalem. But our Lord had not a word of disapproval of the splendor of Jewish worship offered to His Father. On the contrary, He protected its sacredness in driving out the buyers and sellers, for "he said to them, 'It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer.'"

The Power of Bishops

In speaking of the power of bishops in the Catholic Church,

there is need to distinguish between their power in their own territories (called "dioceses"), and their power as united in a body under their leader, the Pope.

In his own diocese, each bishop has the complete power of ruling his diocese both in spiritual and temporal affairs independently of his subjects, whether priests or laymen. He has power to make laws, to pass judgment on those who have broken the laws of God and the Church, and to impose penalties, when this is required. His power is, of course, subject to the power of the Pope, for reasons which will be explained. But he is truly the successor to the power of the Apostles. When he commands, makes laws, or judges, he does so with power given him by God. Hence to obey him is to obey God.

It is true that he is not infallible, and thus he can make a mistake in his government and teaching. If his laws or commands are manifestly contrary to God's will, no subject is obliged to obey them. For in these cases, he has clearly not acted according to the Apostolic office and grace which is his.

The General Council

The most solemn exercise of the office of teaching and ruling among the bishops is the General (or Ecumenical) Council. A General Council is the assembly of the bishops of the whole Church under their leader, the Pope, for the purpose of determining matters pertaining to faith and morals, and to settle questions of discipline. For such a Council, it is not necessary that

every bishop in the world be present. It is required only that there be a number that is truly representative of the whole Church. When such a Council judges and teaches on matters pertaining to faith and morals in union with the Pope, the whole Council enjoys that privilege of infallibility which our Lord promised to the Apostles when He said: "Whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

New Doctrines?

A matter that needs some explanation is the defining of dogmas which must be believed by every Catholic. The idea of some is that these are "novelties and new doctrines" that have no place in the teaching of Christ. It is said that they are not the teaching of Christ.

The Church has the commission from Christ to preserve without blemish the revelation given to it either by Christ Himself or through the Holy Spirit in Apostolic times. The Church has the duty not simply of preserving this where no one can get at it; the Church must spread this doctrine, it must defend it, it must explain it in accordance with the growing needs of mankind. But, above all, it must not add to it. The Church is Christ's Church; in it, He continues as the teacher of mankind. When the Church makes an infallible definition of dogma, it solemnly pronounces that this particular point is and has always been in the body of truths which came from God.

This does not mean that each

and every one of these truths must be found in the Scriptures in so many words. To take some simple examples, it is nowhere stated in the Scriptures that our Lord ever had a meal before the one in the house of Peter in Capharnaum. Must we conclude that this is the first time He ever ate? It is nowhere stated that He had a nose or eyebrows or eyelids. But is it not necessary that a perfect man have these things? And thus, many of the definitions of the Church concern matters that are necessarily implicit in Scripture, without being put into so many words.

The Catholic Church has the deepest reverence for the Sacred Scriptures. They are the most sacred possession of the Church, aside only from Christ Himself present in the Holy Eucharist. But we cannot mistake that the work of Christ on earth was to found the Reign of God on earth in the Kingdom of God, His Church. It was to this Church that He entrusted the body of truths that men must accept. And these truths have been preserved in the life of the Church—in its prayers, in its practices, in the things it avoids as contrary to the teachings of Christ, and in the things it requires as absolutely necessary. This is what is known as Divine Tradition. And this too is the object of the solemn definition of the Church, to whom Christ has committed the preservation, the explanation, and the defense of the truths of salvation. In Christ's external Kingdom of God on earth, this not a difficult thing to understand.

VICEROY IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD



As the aged Apostle John looked back on his life with the Master, he could not forget those first days when he and a few others had begun to follow Christ. There was a rather mysterious incident that took place, an incident that found its explanation only in the years to follow. Andrew, one of the first of the disciples, had brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus. "But Jesus, looking upon him, said, 'Thou art Simon, the son of John; thou shalt be called Cephas (which interpreted is Peter)'" (John 1:42).

"Cephas" is an Aramaic word meaning rock in its natural position, bed-rock. To John and the other Apostles, the equivalent of this in Greek was the word "petros" or "Peter." In later years, Simon is sometimes called by the Aramaic form of his name, Cephas, sometimes by the Greek form, Peter. The more exact Greek word would have been the word, "petra," a feminine noun. But it would have been strange to call Simon by a female name. There is no doubt about the meaning of Cephas, nor any doubt that the Apostles used the Greek

word "petros" as its translation and equivalent.

Among people of ancient times in the Near East, the name of a thing or person was of great importance. It was to be the expression of the character or nature of that thing or person. Thus, the name of God does not simply mean the word "God."

It means the character of God as He has revealed Himself to us. Hence, in Israelite history, God sometimes changed the names of men to whom He entrusted great tasks or duties. This was to indicate the internal change that He had worked in them to fit them for those duties. The name of Abram was changed by God to that of "Abraham" (Genesis 17:5). The name of Jacob was changed by God to "Israel" (Genesis 32:28).

In New Testament times, the name of John was given to the Baptist by an angel, to express the character and function of the Baptist; so, too, the name of Jesus was revealed by the angel Gabriel, as expressing His character and function in the work of Redemption (Luke 1:13 and 31). Now we hear our Lord tell Simon at their first

meeting that his name will be changed to Cephas, meaning rock. He says no more at this time. But one who knows the meaning of "name" to the Israelites must ask himself: what is this change to be worked in Simon which is expressed by the term "rock"?

What's In A Name?

Four times in the New Testament the list of the Twelve is given: Matthew 10:2, Mark 3:16, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13. The order of the names differs in each list, with one exception: the name of Simon Peter is at the head of every list. In all three lists in the Gospels, it is noted that Simon's name was changed to Peter; no mention is made that our Lord changed the name of any of the others.

Throughout the Gospels, Simon Cephas is the foremost of the Apostles, the spokesman for them all. There might be many reasons assigned for this. But the more striking fact is that Jesus continually singles out Simon Cephas rather than the beloved disciple, John. Jesus lived at the house of Peter in Capernaum (Luke 4:38). He taught the people from the boat of Simon Peter, rather than from those of others who were there (Luke 5:3). To Simon Peter He granted the power to walk on the storm-tossed waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:28-32). He worked a miracle to pay the Temple tax for Himself and Simon Cephas (Matthew 17:23-26). He offered a special prayer for Peter that his faith would not fail in spite of the most violent attacks of Satan (Luke 22:31-32). After His Resurrection, He

appeared to Simon Peter before He did to the group of Apostles (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). To Simon Cephas He foretold the death that awaited him (John 21:18).

We ask again, what does all this mean? Or is it meaningless chance? Jesus is the Son of God. He is supremely wise. He did nothing uselessly or foolishly, nor was He the object of whim and caprice. We draw no particular conclusion from all this. But we do seek a satisfactory reason for His manner of acting in relation to Simon Cephas.

The Answer To A Puzzle

The summer before His Passion, Jesus Himself gave the answer that puts meaning into the facts about Simon Peter that call for some explanation. The time had come for the Apostles to make profession of faith in His Person and mission. "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" Simon Peter answered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." To this magnificent statement of Simon Cephas, Christ replies in kind by describing in turn the person and mission of Peter. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee, 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 thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-19).

A Scene of Fury and Struggle

This description of the Church of Christ, His Kingdom on earth, seems on the surface to be peaceful and serene. Actually, it is a scene of furious turmoil and struggle that will go on between the reign of evil and the Reign of God on earth until the end of time. All the power of the reign of evil ("the gates of hell") will be mustered and will fling itself against the Church of Christ like a mighty torrent in flood flinging itself against a house to throw it down and destroy it. Never will the struggle cease until the end of time, for never can there be peace between the reign of the evil one and the Reign of God. But of the outcome, there is no doubt; the power of evil can never overthrow the Church of God on earth. For Christ is acting like the wise man "building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon rock. And when a flood came, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it was founded on rock" (Luke 6:48).

On What Rock?

This is the response of Jesus for the profession of faith in the Person and mission of Jesus. This is the change of Simon's name to Cephas, meaning "rock," long ago predicted by Jesus Himself (John 1:42). This is the explanation of why the word "rock" (Cephas) expresses the change worked by God in Simon—for, we repeat, the change of a name by God is indicative of a change in the character

or mission of a person. There is no need, no, there is no place for disputing the Greek distinction between *petrā* and *petros*. *Cephas*, in the Aramaic language, means bed-rock. Cephas was the name promised to Simon by Jesus. *Petros* or Peter is the New Testament equivalent of that Aramaic word. What Christ, then, says to Simon in describing his mission is: "Thou art Cephas, and on this cephas I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

In the last four hundred years, every other conceivable explanation of the rock on which Christ built His Church has been explored. But always, something is lacking; these explanations fail to explain why Jesus changed the name of Simon; they fail to explain where is the blessing pronounced upon Simon, and usually succeed in making this so-called blessing sound like ridicule or mockery; they fail to justify any other meaning to the expression, "*this* rock," without having recourse to gestures that contradict the text—such as Jesus pointing to Himself when He says it—or to meanings that do not exist in New Testament language—such as "the rock" meaning the faith of Peter.

Why A Rock?

In His preaching to the people, in His special instructions to the Apostles, Jesus pointed out clearly that He would establish on earth an external Kingdom of God, a permanent union of men, working together for the end of the glory of God and their own internal holiness and salvation under the direc-

tion of authorities. Without authority a society ceases to exist. There is anarchy. Men work for their own selfish ends. There is no common end, no common good.

Authority gives stability and firmness to a society. Only through authority are men bound together into a society; only through authority can they attain their common end. Authority in a society is like the bed-rock on which a house is built: "and when a flood came, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it was founded on rock."

Because founded on Cephas, the rock, the Church of Christ will withstand the raging torrents of the power of hell, the gates of hell; never will it crumble. To Simon Peter, therefore, is promised that which gives firmness and stability to a society—authority, the power of ruling with the authority of God. There will be, then, in the Kingdom of God a supreme ruling power which will be the source of its successful resistance to the constant attack of the kingdom of evil.

"Rock" and "Corner Stone"

But what of the statement in 1 Peter 2:6-7, which refers to Jesus as "a chief corner stone" and says further that "a stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner." Paul, likewise in Ephesians 2:20 refers to "Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner stone."

Both these references call to mind the parable of the vine-dressers in Matthew 21:33 ff. The figure in the parable is in turn taken from

Psalm 117 (118), and is based on the figure of men selecting stones for the construction of a building. Actually, the stone that mere men reject as unfit for the building is the one which, in God's intention, is the very corner stone of the building, the stone which by its nature and place gives strength and cohesion to the building. This certainly is the position of Christ in the Church.

The figure of the "rock" and of the "stone" are simply two different figures. The Apostles are showing the nature of the Church to the early converts. They use the figure of the living Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Jesus is speaking of the function of Simon Peter in the Church which He is building, His Kingdom, for which He places the bed-rock.

To try to combine these two figures into one would be like trying to combine the "word-picture" of Christ as the Lamb of God (John 1:36) with that of Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). To mix up pictures in this way is to defeat the purpose of Scripture.

Steward of The Lord

The keys of a household are the symbol of authority over that household. They may be held by the master and owner of the household; or entrusted by him to one who holds his place in his absence. The power of the keys is the power in a household to admit or to exclude others. It is the power to dispense to the other members of the household the goods of the master.

In the visible Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, Jesus has entrusted

the power of the keys to Simon Peter. He does not cease to be King in His Kingdom. But in His absence, He entrusts the administration of the household to Simon Peter: "To thee I will give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." He will thus have all power in the Kingdom, subject always to Him who is the Master. All other members of the Kingdom are thus subject to the Steward of the Lord.

Our Lord leaves no room for misunderstanding. In His blessing of Simon Cephas, He adds still a third figure to emphasize the completeness of the authority of Peter in the Kingdom, and to show how God will guide him in the exercise of this authority.

Binding and Loosing

God cannot say that what is wrong is right, or that what is right is wrong. We have seen that the power of binding and loosing is the power of imposing obligations or of removing obligations. To Simon Cephas is given individually the power to impose or remove all obligations in the Kingdom. And in his exercise of that power, he will be guided by God in such way that God will bind in heaven what he binds on earth; God will loose in heaven what he looses on earth.

This magnificent blessing of Simon Peter is in no way lessened by Jesus' later statement to the whole body of Apostles: "Amen I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). This, we have

seen, is a promise to the body of the Apostles as a group, not to each individual one of the group. It does not contradict the promise of supreme power to Simon Peter. It leaves him still, by the action of God Himself, as the head of the Apostolic body. It leaves to him the power to do personally all that the body could do as a body.

What Happens After Simon Cephas?

Our Lord knew very well that Peter would not live as long as the struggle between the Reign of God and the reign of evil would last. This is obvious. But He had made Simon Cephas the rock of stability of His Kingdom. What would happen when Simon dies? Would the Kingdom as Christ founded it change? Or would it yield in defeat to the "gates of hell"? Rather, is not this the obvious intention of the Master: so long as the Church on earth would exist, it would find its stability in the office of supreme leader which was first entrusted to Peter?

Christ Has No Successor

Simon Cephas does not replace Christ as the head of the Church. Peter will have his successors as the visible delegate or viceroy of Christ in the Kingdom. Christ has no successor in anyone. He speaks of the Church as MY Church. All power in the Kingdom is His own by right. What power is exercised is determined by Him alone. It is His power, entrusted to man for a time till He will come again in power with His angels to establish the perfect and final Kingdom.

SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK OF CHRIST



In the months that followed upon these promises of Jesus to Simon Peter and the Apostolic body occurred the tragic events which were the climax of the life of Jesus on earth—His betrayal, His Passion, His terrible death upon the Cross. These came as no surprise to Jesus; it was for this that He had come into the world. He knew beforehand what would happen, and He foretold it to His Apostles with ever increasing clarity (Luke 9:42; 9:44-45; 18-31-33).

And when He promised Simon Peter and the Apostles their place in the Kingdom of God on earth, He knew what would be their conduct at the time of these events. There was no need for Him to change His first plans. On the very night of His betrayal, when all were most firmly with Him in their own minds, He told them:

"You will all be scandalized this night; for it is written: 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27).

"Behold the hour is coming, and has already come for you to be scattered, each one to his own house, and to leave me alone. But I am not

alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32).

To Simon Peter, Jesus foretold the terrible trial that all would experience. But He also provided that they would come through it without final harm:

"Simon, Simon," Jesus said, "behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you (that is, the Twelve) as wheat. But I have prayed for thee (that is, for Simon in particular) that thy faith may not fail; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32).

Simon was that night to deny that he knew this Jesus. And yet it is the prayer of Christ, the Son of God, that his faith will never fail, but will be the source of strength of all in the Apostolic group.

After the Resurrection Jesus spoke again to Simon Peter, giving him commission to undertake the office which had been promised to him months before. The scene is the Sea of Galilee. The outstanding figure of the whole scene is Simon Peter. But it is the words of Christ to Simon that interest us, in view of the background that has

been laid for them in the Gospels.

"Feed My Lambs"

"Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, dost thou love me more than these do?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'"

A second time Jesus questioned Peter, and then a third; after the second question, He repeated, "Feed my lambs," and after the third, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

The figure of the shepherd in the Old Testament indicates God's rule over His people (Isaias 40:10-11). It likewise indicates the rule of the Old Testament king over the people of God; the king in the Israelite nation, rules with God's power as the shepherd over his flock (Psalm 77 (78): 70-72).

Our Lord takes this figure into His own preaching in the Gospels. In John 10:1-18, He describes His position as the Good Shepherd who rules over His flock, His followers. As their shepherd, He calls them and they obey; He directs them, and they follow His direction.

Jesus is soon to leave the flock here on earth, and return to His Father in heaven. The flock will need some visible shepherd to whom they can look for guidance. Thus, to Simon is given the office of chief shepherd of the flock on earth. It is a power that comes from Christ. Hence it is the power to teach and to rule the followers of Christ, His flock, in such a way as to bring about their internal holiness and eternal salvation. To Peter alone this is spoken. It is three times re-

peated. It is spoken in the presence of seven other Apostles, who are excluded from this special commission. It is true that to them was given the commission to teach, to rule, and to sanctify. To no one of them, save Peter, was the whole flock entrusted.

The Shepherd and His Flock

The basic teaching of the Church was by word of mouth, through those whom Christ had sent to teach—either the Apostles or those who were given a share in their power. The Scriptures were never written to take the place of this living teaching power. By this, we do not make light of the sacred character of these books. We respect their sacred nature by reading and using them according to the purpose for which they were written.

The book of Acts, we repeat, is a little history of the great and important steps in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is not a book of basic instruction. But it does accurately depict the results of the basic instruction of the faithful. The dominant figure in chapters 13 to the end, with the exception of chapter 15, is Paul. It relates how the Church spread from one to another of the great areas of the ancient world. In chapters 1 to 12 and in chapter 15, the history concerns the great steps in the determination of the policy of the Church. The dominant figure in this section is Peter. No single important policy is attributed to any other Apostle. Every one is attributed to him, except the beginning of the order of Deacons (Acts 6), and this

is attributed to the whole body of the Apostles, of which Peter is head.

It is Simon Peter who organizes the selection of a successor to Judas, and lays down the conditions for this selection (Acts 1). In the first public defense of Christianity, it is Peter who speaks with authority for the Twelve (Acts 2). Peter cures the lame beggar, preaches in the Temple, and defends the faith in Jesus as Messiah before the Sanhedrin (Acts 3, 4). Peter pronounces sentence on Ananias and Sapphira for their sin of tempting God (Acts 5). The very shadow of Peter falling on the sick cures them (Acts 5:15). "Peter and the apostles" defend the faith a second time before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:21 ff). Peter pronounces sentence on Simon the Magician (Acts 8). Peter visits all the newly founded churches (Acts 9). Peter receives from God a revelation to admit the Gentiles into the Church without submission to the Jewish law (Acts 10). Peter is miraculously delivered from prison by an angel (Acts 12).

The Council of Jerusalem

Peter's place in the Council of Jerusalem is most important to note. The policy of admitting the Gentiles had found its justification in the action of Peter (Acts 10). Yet some looked upon this as an exception, not to be repeated. But when Peter arose and laid down the rule that this was not an exception, but the rule to be followed always, "the whole meeting quieted

down and listened while Barnabas and Paul told of the great signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles through them" (Acts 15:7-12). James in his speech merely offers suggestions to make this decision acceptable to the converts from Judaism (Acts 15:13-21).

Vicar of Christ on Earth

To Simon Peter, then is given supreme and absolute authority over a clearly defined group of men (the Church, the Kingdom of God, the sheep of Christ). The purpose of this authority is to bring about, through God's power, that internal holiness which was the very reason why Christ came on earth among us.

There are many today who echo the words of some of the disciples: "This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?" And they "turned back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:61-67). To them, it seems an intolerable slavery of the spirit to be subject in religious matters to a mere man, like themselves. If this were subjection to a mere man, we would heartily agree. But it is not a slavery of the spirit to subject oneself to God; it is the only freedom the spirit has. If God has vested man with His authority, then by learning from them, we learn from Him; by obeying them, we obey Him. Thus we can work together toward the eternal goal of salvation with all the confidence of knowing the will of God. This is not slavery—this is freedom, security, the peace of Christ!

The Powers of Peter Today

The conclusion that we must draw from the description of the office of Simon Peter is that he and his successors as Vicars of Christ are infallible. Simon Peter was the rock on which Christ built His Church. His office was to be the source of firmness in this Church while the powers of hell are constantly beating against it to throw it down. But hell will never prevail over the power of God in the Church as Christ has established it. This must mean that Christ through His divine power cannot allow the supreme teacher in that Church to teach what is false. If he did so, the Church as Christ founded it would have changed. It would have failed to preserve His teaching for all men. The power of hell would have prevailed, and would have caused the Church which Christ built on the rock to crumble. These are impossible suppositions, in view of the divine nature of Jesus. He must, then, preserve the supreme teacher from error in leading the flock, the flock which Jesus had entrusted to Simon Peter and his successors in His absence.

Furthermore, our Lord in His



prayer for Simon Peter (Luke 22:31-32) prayed that he would be the source of firmness in faith for his brethren. This is the prayer of the Son of God for something that affects the very basis of the Kingdom of God on earth. Such a prayer cannot be unanswered.

The Pope, as the Bishop of Rome, is the direct successor of Simon Peter, the first bishop of Rome. Thus he succeeds to the office which Peter held—that of visible head of the Church, the representative of Christ to whom the Church belongs by right. Thus also, he enjoys the privilege that was granted Simon Peter as visible head of the Church—the privilege of infallibility as supreme teacher in the Church.

Infallibility, then, has nothing to do with the personal conduct of the Pope; it does not mean that he cannot sin. It has to do with his office as teacher—but not teacher of anything and everything. Christ gave to His Church the command to "make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). It is the duty of the Church to preserve all this teaching of Christ, to spread it, to explain it, to defend it against all attacks. The office of Pope as supreme teacher concerns this body of doctrine. It does not concern the secrets of the atomic bomb, the size of the population of China, or the state of the weather tomorrow. But when he teaches as supreme pastor regarding the truths of revelation, he cannot err—not because of any natural talent of his, but because Christ through the Holy Spirit will keep him from error. The Vatican Council of the Catholic Church defines and describes this privilege in these words: "When he (the Pope) speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in fulfilling his office as supreme shepherd and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he enjoys that same infallibility with which our Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine pertaining to faith and morals."

In breaking down this statement into its elements, we see the manner in which the Pope exercises his infallible teaching power.

The person: the Pope when he speaks as 'supreme shepherd and teacher of all Christians.

The matter: doctrines pertaining to faith and morals.

The expression: a final statement which demands absolute consent and submission on the part of all the Church, because of the mani-

fest intention of the Pope to bind the whole Church to accept the truth defined as of faith.

Under these circumstances, then, the Pope personally exercises that privilege which Christ gave to the Church—to teach, define, and defend His doctrine in such a way that there can be no error. As explained before in regard to the General Councils, these are not "novelties and new doctrines." Neither the Pope, nor the General Council can add to the body of doctrine which Christ entrusted to His Church either by His own action or through the revelations of the Holy Spirit. The definitions of the Pope make clear for all to see what has been in this revelation from the beginning. As explained in regard to the General Council, many of these things are to be found in the Sacred Scriptures—not always in so many words, but in such a way that they are truly contained in the statements of the Scriptures. Others are to be found in the Divine Tradition. Christ instituted an external Kingdom of God in which, through other men, He would continue to teach, rule, and sanctify men to the end of time. It is to this Church then, that He entrusted the truths that are to be believed and the commandments that are to be obeyed in order to attain eternal salvation. These truths, as preserved in the life of the Church—in its prayers, in its practices, in the things it avoids as contrary to divine truth and in those that it requires as necessary—make up what is known as Divine Tradition.

Since the Church has the right

and duty to defend and to explain this teaching of the Master, it can—either through the infallible teaching of the General Councils or of the Pope—pronounce on those truths that are necessary to defend and to explain the divine revelation given to it.

As is quite evident from this, the Pope does not usually make solemn definitions even on matters pertaining to faith and morals. The infallible statement is a most solemn statement, and thus rather rarely made, when there is need to proclaim or defend divine truths in such a way no one can be mistaken about the teaching of Christ through His Church.

The Pope Without Infallibility

As the supreme teacher of the Church, the Pope makes many other pronouncements in various ways for the direction of the Church. In these statements or teachings, the Pope acts with the authority of Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ to His Church. These statements are usually applications of the divinely revealed truths of the faith to current difficulties and problems. Their purpose is not merely to prevent the faithful from falling into heresy by the denial of divinely revealed truth; they are designed to guide the faithful to a more perfect knowledge of divine truth and the more complete practice of this truth in all aspects of current life. Thus through these teachings the love of Christ grows more and more in the hearts

of the faithful and the union of the faithful in Christ is made more and more perfect. Needless to say, the faithful are not free to disregard these teachings coming from the supreme teacher in the Church for the purpose of their advance in truth and holiness.

The Supreme Shepherd

To recall in brief what we have explained in the preceding two chapters, our Lord gave to Simon Cephas supreme ruling power in the external Kingdom of God which He founded. He was to be the rock which would give stability to the Church—the rock which is the symbol of authority, on which every society is based. To him in a special way were given the keys of the Kingdom—symbols of power over the household of Christ in His visible absence. To him, in a special manner, was given the power of binding and loosing all things. He in a most special way was made the shepherd of the flock of Christ, with authority to lead them to their eternal goal in heaven.

As successor to Simon Peter, the Pope also has supreme power in the Church—not just in teaching what pertains to faith and morals, but in ruling and guiding all to the practice of these truths. His power, then, extends to all parts of the world. It includes all bishops, the clergy, and the faithful individually. Men of all classes and races, of the highest as well as the simplest of talents and education accept these facts for one reason only: not because physical fear or force is brought against them, not because

they are a source of wealth and power, but for the simple reason that Christ has so commanded, and they listen to His voice: "He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me; and he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

Truth or Trickery?

There are many who have been taught and who sincerely believe that Christ did not intend to found one single Church. They believe that He started something like a "Christian" movement in which everyone would move in his own way. Thus they believe that the Catholic Church is the most tremendous hoax ever worked against mankind—a deception that has tricked billions of people over many centuries of time. And yet, the facts of history as described in the New Testament show that Christ founded a single Church, a Church of which He is both founder and head, a Church governed in His absence by a representative called the Vicar of Christ and by a distinct body of men who share in this teaching and governing power. There is only one Church in the world that meets those requirements—the Catholic Church. No one dare ignore this claim. It is too great to be dismissed without consideration.

There are many, also, who sincerely believe that the leaders of the Catholic Church—especially the Pope—have stolen the place of the Son of God as head of the Church.

They believe that it is the diabolic (this is the only word that fits) work of the Catholic Church to put the worship of something merely human in the place of the worship of God.

But the teachings of the Catholic Church are a matter of public record through the centuries down to the present day. These teachings propose and defend the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity of Persons in one God as the center of worship and the ideal of perfection. They bind the members of the Catholic Church to a necessary minimum of the practice of virtue, and they lead these members to the practice of the heroic virtue that is found in the lives of the Saints. These teachings explain the union of men in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit who produces in the souls of men that image of Christ.

There are, of course, the lives of bad Catholics; they are bad, not because they are Catholics, but in spite of it. These lives are to many a stumbling block to accepting the Catholic Church as the one true Church of Christ. But men were warned from the beginning that this would be so; we have spoken before of the Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43) and of the Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50).

If the claims of the Catholic Church are beyond the expectations of human beings, the Catholic can only answer: "We didn't say that. God did."

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