

Choose a topic from Vol 5:

[Awareness of God](#)
Awareness of God[The Faith of Israel](#)
The Faith of Israel[The Importance of Man](#)
The Importance of Man[Origin of the Gospels](#)
Origin of the Gospels[The Divine Redeemer](#)
The Divine Redeemer[The Catholic Church](#)
The Catholic Church[The Papacy](#)
The Papacy[The Biblical Tradition](#)
The Biblical Tradition[The Blessed Virgin Mary](#)
The Blessed Virgin Mary[Liturgy and Sacraments](#)
Liturgy and Sacraments[Moral Problems](#)
Moral Problems[Final Realities](#)
Final Realities[The Ecumenical Movement](#)
The Problem of Disunity
Reactions Among Non-Catholics
Bewildered Catholics
Combined Unity Services
Mutual Bible Study
Prospects of Reunion

The Papacy

241. As regards Papal Supremacy, the Anglican Bishop John Moorman says that, exegetically and historically, "Far too much has been made of the words of our Lord to St. Peter: 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church.' (Matt., 16:18)."

Bishop Moorman, who was an observer of the Second Vatican Council and whose courtesy and scholarship won the respect of everybody there, was expressing his opinion, not of the text itself, but of later historical developments in the Church and of the conclusions of Catholic theologians concerning its implications. As an Anglican, he does not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Pope's supreme authority over the whole Church. But he would say that far too little is made of the text by those who try to escape the fact that Christ intended Peter himself to be the rock on which the Church was to be built.

242. Did the early Fathers believe Christ meant Peter personally when He spoke of the "rock"?

Biblical scholars have long since agreed that they did. Tertullian ♦ he is early enough, 160-220 A.D. ♦ wrote in his "De Praescriptione", c.22: "Was anything hidden from Peter who was named as the rock on which the Church was to be built, and who possessed the keys of the kingdom of heaven together with the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth?" It is true that the early Fathers, presupposing that Peter was the rock, speak at times of the Church as built on the rock of the faith professed by Peter which deserved the office given him; or as built on the rock of Christ who bestowed the primacy on Peter and on whom Peter himself was necessarily dependent; or as built on the rock of all the apostles, of whom Peter was the chief. But to take such references to different aspects of the subject, isolating them from the general patristic agreement concerning the fact itself which gave rise to them does violence to the teachings of the early Fathers.

243. Do modern Protestant biblical scholars themselves admit that Christ was referring, not to Himself, but to Peter?

Undoubtedly. Professor G. B. Stevens, in his book "The Theology of the New Testament" (1906), wrote: "It is quite certain and is now generally admitted that the words 'this rock' refer, not to Christ, nor to Peter's confession of faith, but to Peter himself." In 1910, the Presbyterian biblical scholar Charles A. Briggs wrote in his book "Church Unity," p. 203: "All attempts to explain 'the rock' in any other way than as referring to Peter have ignominiously failed." In 1928, the Anglican "New Commentary on Holy Scripture," p. 168, said: "The rock on which the Church is to rise is Peter himself, not our Lord." In 1936, the Oxford Clarendon Bible Commentary said, p. 201: "There can be no doubt that the words 'I will build my church' were understood by Matthew to refer to Peter himself personally." In 1953, the Swiss Calvinist biblical scholar, Oscar Cullmann, in his book "Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr," points out, pp. 18-20, that the Aramaic word 'Kepha' used by our Lord, sometimes translated into Greek as 'Petros', sometimes transliterated as 'Cephas', was not a proper name but a descriptive title; and that the right meaning is: 'You are the Rock and on this Rock I will build my Church.'" On p. 207, Cullmann declares to be unsatisfactory "all Protestant interpretations that seek in one way or another to explain away the reference to Peter . . . the Roman Catholic exegesis must be regarded as correct." In 1956, the Anglican Dr. John Lowe, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, said in his book "Saint Peter," p. 55: "The statement 'Thou art Peter (Kepha) and upon this rock (Kepha) I will build my Church' must certainly be taken to refer to Peter personally." In 1961, the "New English Bible", to exclude all possibility of mistake, translated Matt., 16:18 as "Thou art Peter the Rock, and on this Rock I will build my Church." In 1962, Peake's new and revised Protestant "Commentary on the Bible", p. 788, admits that "the different attempts to interpret the 'Rock' as something else than Peter in person are in most cases . . . expressions of Protestant bias." This was followed by Presbyterian William Neil's admission in his 1962 "One Volume Bible Commentary", p. 343, that our Lord commissions "Peter to be the foundation stone of his Church. Simon becomes Peter, head of the new family of God and with supreme authority over it."

Search for

in Vol 1 ▾

MORE FROM VOLUME 5

"QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH" - Book Title

- About the Author
- Author's Introduction
- Dr Rumble, MSC

244. Granted such an admission, how can they avoid acceptance of Papal Supremacy?

Following Professor Oscar Cullmann, Dr. John Lowe writes in his book, p. 56: "Reluctance to admit this" (that Peter was the 'Rock') "has been due, consciously or unconsciously, to the fear that such an admission is to concede the claims of Rome." Declaring this is a wrong approach, he says the argument should now be, not a denial of St. Peter's unique position, but a denial that the office given to St. Peter was transferable to any successors. "No one," he writes, "could take over Peter's function as the Rock man." In this, he adopts with Cullmann what Cardinal Journet, in his book "The Primacy of Peter," p. 50, describes as Dr. Cullmann's "false dilemma", namely, that Peter's office must either perish with him, or survive him in its entirety. There is an alternative position, that held by Catholics. Catholics hold that St. Peter was endowed with an extraordinary non-communicable gift (as an immediate apostle and witness of the life and resurrection of Jesus) relating to the foundation of the Church, but also with an ordinary communicable gift transmissible to successors and necessary for the preservation of the Church. No Pope claims to be the "Rock" on which the Church is built. The claim is simply that St. Peter's supreme "episcopal" authority is still exercised in the Church through the succession of bishops elected to the primatial See of Rome.

245. At the Council in Jerusalem (Acts, 15:6-29), did not James, as Bishop of Jerusalem, the chief See, preside, and not St. Peter?

Bishop of Jerusalem, the chief See, preside, and not St. Peter? The Council took place on the eve of the dispersion of the apostles on their mission to "all the world." St. James seems to have been designated as the future Bishop of Jerusalem, but there is no indication that Jerusalem itself had been designated as the "chief See". At the Council, St. Peter manifested his superior authority by speaking first, giving his decision and declaring that, by means of a vision, the course to be adopted had been indicated to him by God. His verdict did not need the approval of the assembly, and it left no room for discussion. "All held their peace" once Peter had spoken (Acts, 15:11). The Anglican scholar, Dr. Trevor G. Jalland, in his book "The Church and the Papacy," says of the subsequent speech of St. James: "It is the summing up of a chairman, not the verdict of an arbiter. If anything, the narrative suggests that it was the evidence of Peter which turned the scales of decision." The same Dr. Jalland says of St. Paul's visit to Jerusalem (Galatians, 1:18) that Paul "admits that he did encounter James . . . but makes it clear that this meeting was purely accidental. Why was it so important to introduce himself to St. Peter? Can we exclude the possibility that St. Paul had some problem of a pastoral or administrative nature, regarding which he had reason to think that St. Peter's opinion would not only be valuable, but decisive?" At most it can be said, as regards the Council itself, that St. James acted as local host, not as supreme ruler of the whole Church.

246. If Peter was given the supremacy, why did Paul rebuke him to the face, as in Galatians, 2:11-15?

Precisely because St. Peter was supreme head of the Church. Take the case. The apostles all knew and taught that Jewish laws did not still oblige Christians. Now at Antioch St. Peter had been sharing meals with Gentile converts, but stopped doing so when some Jewish converts arrived in the city. Eating with Gentiles meant defilement according to Jewish laws and St. Peter did not want to shock the Jewish converts who might not yet have grown out of their old ideas. St. Paul rebuked him for this, saying that his conduct would "compel" the Gentiles to acknowledge Jewish laws as still binding. That makes sense only if St. Peter's attitude was decisive and would be imitated by others precisely because of his authority and influence as head of the Church. It is very significant that earlier in this same epistle to the Galatians, 1:18, St. Paul describes how he had gone to Jerusalem especially to consult St. Peter on other matters, indicating that in the present case he felt the affair to be so serious that he even had to reproach Cephas, the very head of the Church, for the imprudence of his conduct at Antioch.

247. Was not the authority of "binding" and "loosing", i.e., of legislating, given equally to all the apostles, just as to Peter (Matt., 18:18)?

Although it was extended to all collectively, Christ nevertheless gave more to St. Peter than to the others. To St. Peter, whose name He had changed from Simon to "Rock", He had said in the singular: "Thou art Peter (Rock), and upon this rock I will build My Church . . . and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He did not say those additional words to the other apostles. Again, to St. Peter alone, in Jn., 21:15-17, He committed the whole flock, saying: "Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep;" also, in Lk., 22:32: "I have prayed for thee (again in the

singular) that thy faith fail not; and do thou . . . confirm my brethren." The Anglican Dr. John Lowe, in his book "Saint Peter," pp. 60-62, writes of St. Peter: "To try to level him down as merely one among others all on the same footing is not really fair to the evidence . . . no one can take from him his special distinction as the leading disciple of Jesus, the first witness of the resurrection, the first head of the Church, the rock in a special sense on which it was built. On this point the Roman Catholic exegetes have had right on their side, as is increasingly recognised. Where they go wrong, and I say it with all respect to their learning and acuteness, is in the assumption that the commission given Peter includes successors." The real assumption, however, for which no sound reasons exist, is that the supreme spiritual authority conferred upon St. Peter was not meant to be transmitted to successors. Are we to hold that the Church had a visible head on earth only so long as St. Peter was alive, but that it had to continue in a decapitated state all days from St. Peter's death until the end of the world?

248. No mention is made in the New Testament of Peter's authority being passed on to any successor holding a particular office.

For the historical fact of continued succession in the office Christ had conferred on St. Peter we naturally have to look to early Church history. The New Testament records Christ's promise that His Church as He instituted it would last all days till the end of time. This promise implied the constitutional permanence of the office of head of the Church which He had bestowed upon Peter. For subsequent events we can scarcely find a better authority than that of St. Irenaeus, who was taught by St. Polycarp who, in turn, had been a disciple of St. John the Apostle. St. Irenaeus wrote his great work "Adversus Haereses" during the time of Pope Eleutherius, who held office 177A.D. to 189 A.D. and whom Irenaeus described as the "twelfth from the Apostles." In Bk. 3, sect. 2, St. Irenaeus expressly says: "The blessed Apostles, after founding and building up of the Church (in Rome), handed over to Linus the office of Bishop. Paul mentions this Linus in his epistles to Timothy (2 Tim., 4:21)." Irenaeus then lists the successive Bishops of Rome as Linus, Anacletus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telesphorus, Hyginus, Pius, Anicetus, Soter and Eleutherius, adding: "It is in this order and in this line of succession that the tradition has come down in the Church from the time of the Apostles, and the preaching of the truth has come down to our own day." Eusebius, in his "History of the Church", Book 5, c. 58, says that Pope Victor, the successor of Eleutherius, "was the thirteenth Bishop of Rome after Peter."

249. Granted a succession of bishops in Rome, why, during the first 250 years, was there no sign of recognition that the Bishop of Rome was greater than the bishops of any of the other great Sees?

It cannot rightly be said that there are no such signs, although the doctrine of Papal Supremacy was not then formulated as clearly as in later times. Cardinal Newman dealt fully with this matter in chapter 4, sect. 3 of his classic work "The Development of Christian Doctrine." He wrote the book while he was still an Anglican, before his reception into the Catholic Church in 1845. Newman was deeply versed in the writings of the early Christian Fathers. Naturally, he held that one cannot rightly expect to find literally and explicitly in the germinal stages of Christian doctrine all the detailed features developed through centuries of later thought and experience. He points out that, theoretically, an adequate formulation of Christian doctrines was not possible until the minds of Christian thinkers had worked out all that they implied; while, in practice, during the first three centuries of persecution until the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and his Edict of Tolerance in 313 A.D., the Church could neither build public edifices nor consolidate itself as an organised ecclesiastical institution. From his studies, however, he concludes that there is "nothing in the early history of the Church to contradict" Papal Supremacy "as part of Christianity." The great Petrine texts (Matt., 16:18-19; Lk., 22:32; Jn., 21:15-17) he declared to be not only precepts, but prophecies and promises to be clarified, in a way not necessary while the apostles were still living, by subsequent events - events which brought out the logical consequences of the original teaching of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As for the earliest of the Fathers, Newman insisted that their writings contained indications of the later developed doctrine of Papal Supremacy. He declared that the doctrine's substance, principle and essential features are found "in writers of many times and countries, illustrative of each other," instances of which he duly quotes. And he concludes that the guidance of the Church by the Infinite Wisdom of the Holy Spirit justified interpreting earlier indications by the way they in fact developed and became the defined teaching of the Church in later ages. Having completed his study of the case, Newman felt that he had no option except to become a Catholic.

250. Other good and scholarly men have read Newman's book, yet have not felt impelled to take the step he did.

Many factors could account for that. The Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Soloviev published a book in 1889 entitled "Russia and the Universal Church." In it he arrived at the same conclusion as Cardinal Newman and pleaded with the authorities of the Eastern Orthodox Churches to acknowledge the doctrine of Papal Supremacy. In 1896 he himself was received into the Catholic Church, but seemed to regard himself as still retaining his membership of the Russian Orthodox Church. From this point of view his own position remains ambiguous; but the Russian Orthodox Synod condemned his book outright. Soloviev sadly commented that against sentiments and loyalties of the heart appeals to the head by arguments drawn from Scripture and the early Church history are bound at least from a merely human point of view to remain ineffective. He declared it naive to think that, however necessary biblical, historical or theological arguments may be, these will succeed in removing deeply ingrained religious attachments which inevitably colour one's whole approach to the problem. Our agreement with Soloviev on the influence of such psychological factors does not dispense us, however, from examining the evidence in the interests of objective truth, regardless of the incapability or unwillingness of others to see things as they really are.

251. Did the early Fathers regard union with Rome as necessary?

Their principles certainly required that. The Anglican Professor S. L. Greenslade says in his book "Schism in the Early Church" (1953), p. 18, that as regards the Fathers we must always remember that "it was held on biblical grounds not simply that the Church ought to be one, but that it is one, and cannot but be one. This unity was predicated of the visible Church, and the visible Church was thought of organically as one structure, one communion . . . bodies separated from that communion were outside the Church." Separation from that communion, of course, meant separation from communion with the Pope as Bishop of Rome. Realising this, Professor Greenslade, as an Anglican, has to declare the early Fathers as mistaken as modern Roman theologians, and says that we should abandon a theology of unity for a theology of disunity!

252. Does Scripture anywhere say that Peter was ever in Rome?

In the New Testament there is one sufficiently clear indication of his presence there. He concludes his first Epistle (5:13) with the words: "The church that is at Babylon salutes you." He was writing about 64 A.D., during the reign of the Emperor Nero. Christians generally at that time used the word "Babylon" as a cryptic name for Rome. There was certainly no other place to which this figurative meaning of the ancient Babylon was applied by them. It would be of no importance, however, if there were not even this reference in the New Testament. At most one could conclude from the absence of it that the New Testament writers did not deal with the matter. Historical documents and archaeological research afford more than enough evidence that St. Peter died as a martyr in Rome during Nero's persecution of the Church.

253. In every case in the Book of Revelation the term "Babylon" represents evil. If the "Babylon" in St. Peter's epistle meant Rome, can Protestants be blamed for holding that Papal Rome is described as "the mother of harlots and of the earth's abominations" (Rev., 17:5)?

It must be remembered that St. John wrote the Book of Revelation towards the end of the reign of the pagan Emperor Domitian, who died in 96 A.D. Domitian persecuted Christians, inflicting on them atrocious cruelties. St. John described "Babylon" as being "drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs" who were dying for their Christian faith, even as St. Peter and St. Paul had suffered martyrdom in Rome some thirty years earlier under Nero. In the Protestant "Torch Bible Commentary" on "Revelation" (1949), the authors Preston and Hanson say: "Anti-Christ was not Christian Rome but the pagan Rome, persecuting the Church . . . Rome as an Empire did fall 350 years later, and by an extraordinary irony, Rome as a city became the new holy city of the Church." The interpretation of "Babylon" as "Papal Rome" has no biblical foundation and has practically died away altogether even in quarters whose representatives in bygone years made much of it. No reputable biblical scholar can be quoted in favour of such an interpretation.

254. Will the problem ever be fully cleared up about St. Peter having been in Rome at any time?

It has been cleared up beyond all reasonable doubt by universally accepted scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. It will never be cleared up beyond unreasonable doubts, for these can be manufactured about almost anything one does not want to accept. A thorough examination of the literary and archaeological evidence for St. Peter's going to Rome will be found in the Lutheran Dr. Oscar Cullmann's book: "Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr," 1962. Dr. Cullmann

concludes, on p. 157: "We must say that he (Peter) came to Rome and there died a martyr under Nero." Dr. Cullmann says that St. Peter's presence in Rome was first questioned in the Middle Ages by the Waldensians (followers of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who broke away from the Catholic Church) about 1170 A.D. Until then no one in Christendom, East or West, thought of denying the fact. After the 16th century Reformation the Waldensian denial was revived, but through controversial motives, not as a result of objective and scientific study. Dr. Cullmann rejects Papal Supremacy, but says this must be argued on other grounds, not by denying the evidence that St. Peter went to Rome and died as a martyr there.

255. Did not Pope Pius XII definitely state that the actual grave of St. Peter had been found deep below the present St. Peter's Basilica in Rome?

Archaeological research has confirmed conclusions based on early Christian documentary references to St. Peter's presence in Rome. Excavations under St. Peter's Basilica, which have been going on since 1939, have uncovered a memorial monument to St. Peter mentioned by a Roman writer named Gaius, who lived at the time of Pope Zephyrinus (202-217 A.D.), a monument the building of which archaeologists date from about 150 A.D. A grave connected with this monument was empty, although other graves in the vicinity contained human remains, the area having evidently been a burial ground. In his Christmas broadcast, on December 23, 1950, Pope Pius XII made the statement you quote, admitting that fragments of human bones found near the grave could not be identified as part of the mortal remains of the Apostle. In discussions that followed, archaeologists were divided in their views, some experts, Catholic as well as non-Catholic, expressing doubts about the Pope's opinion regarding the grave itself. Further progress, however, has since been made. Pope Pius XII died in 1958. Early in this year (1965), Professor M. Guarducci, who holds the University Chair of Greek Antiquities and Ancient Inscriptions, published a book describing the discovery of the remains of a human skeleton preserved in a cavity made in a nearby wall about six feet above the empty grave connected with the Gaius monument and beyond the reach of any water-seepage through the damp earth. Greek inscriptions around the cavity have been deciphered as declaring that it contains the remains "of Peter", and that the actual grave is nearby. Earth found within the cavity is the same as that found in the Memorial grave. These further findings by Professor Guarducci and other co-operating scientists, and which were not available when Pius XII publicly declared his opinion, can certainly be regarded as confirming the correctness of his verdict.

256. Granted that Peter died in Rome, was he ever "Bishop of Rome" - a very different thing?

Rome"  a very different thing? The answer to that must be yes and no, for he was an Apostle, his apostleship being of much wider significance than, although including the powers of a Bishop. The prerogatives of the Apostles, proper to them precisely as Apostles, were not transferable. But they were able to transfer lesser episcopal powers to the Bishops they provided for the government of the Church in succession to themselves. So St. Paul, by the imposition of his own hands, consecrated both Timothy and Titus as well as others with episcopal jurisdiction in various localities. Thus Acts, 20:28, tells us that on his last visit to Ephesus, he bade farewell to a conference of neighbouring bishops, saying to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock wherein the Holy Spirit has placed you as guardians to rule the Church of God." As far as Rome is concerned, it is enough to show that the Bishops of Rome derived their episcopal authority from St. Peter. In this sense. Dr. T. G. Jalland, an Anglican scholar of high repute, says in his book "The Church and the Papacy" (1944), p. 542, that the available evidence shows that Roman Bishops to have been held to be, and to have been in fact, heirs to the authority of St. Peter.

257. On what grounds do those who reject Papal Supremacy deny that St. Peter was the first Pope?

They give various reasons. The Baptist J. R. Mantey, in his booklet "Was Peter a Pope?", begins by saying that if Papal Supremacy can be substantiated scripturally and historically, then the numerous Protestant denominations that reject it are at once disqualified. Efforts are made accordingly to interpret scripture and history in a way which excludes any papal succession to a supreme authority conferred by Christ upon St. Peter. Some have said that Christ had no idea of establishing an organised Church of any kind, but just wanted to gather followers who would be held together by their common belief in Him. Others say no, for He did call the twelve apostles to be the foundation of a new and organised religious society, but that Peter was not made head of the apostles, all of whom were equal. Others, again, say no to that, holding that St. Peter was chief of the apostles, but that any primacy conferred upon him died with him and could not be inherited by any successors. For good measure, others say that in any case Peter was never in

Rome; or, if he was, he was never Bishop of Rome; or if he was that, later Bishops of Rome cannot claim to derive their Papal Supremacy from him. So, on various grounds, Protestants say that St. Peter was not the first Pope; and they argue that if Papal Supremacy did become an accepted fact both in theory and practice throughout Christendom, this was mainly due to the city of Rome's political and geographical importance as the chief seat of government, especially after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

258. Whom do they declare to have been the first Pope, if St. Peter was not?

Here again there are various opinions. All who have studied the subject admit that there was a continuous series of Bishops of Rome beginning with Linus from the time of St. Peter wherever Peter may have lived and died. But they differ as to which of these Bishops first claimed to be Pope, with supreme authority over the whole Church derived from St. Peter. Some say it was Pope Sylvester, 314-335, who had been elected during the first year after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. Others say that is too early, and among their other conjectures we find Pope Julius I, 337-352; Pope Damasus, 366-384; Pope Innocent I, 402-417; Pope Leo the Great, 440-461; Pope Gregory the Great, 590-604; Pope Nicholas I, 858-867; and even as late as Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085. Various historical reasons are suggested, of course, for each of these choices.

259. What, in general, is the answer to such contentions?

Simply that they are based on a misunderstanding of history, not entirely without excuse. The grounds for excuse lie in the fact that where one encounters a development of doctrine, what later becomes clear is necessarily obscure in earlier stages even though as really contained in its sources as a fully developed oak tree in an acorn. Realising this, the Anglican scholar Dr. T. G. Jalland admits Cardinal Newman's explanation that the doctrine of Papal Supremacy was present in principle in the earliest ages of the Church, but that it needed both reflection and circumstances to make its full implications generally realised. Dr. Jalland himself holds that Leo the Great (440-461) was the first Pope in whom Papal Supremacy as derived from St. Peter became fully explicit, but agrees that implicitly the doctrine was always there, and that the statement of St. Irenaeus, 185 A.D., in "Adversus Haereses", Book I, c. 27, namely, that Hyginus in Rome "occupied the ninth place in episcopal succession from the Apostles" (which would include St. Peter as first in the list of Popes) must be accepted. It would take too long to discuss the historical factors which led to the evolutionary development from implicit principles to explicit recognition of Papal Supremacy transmitted from St. Peter as an integral part of the Christian religion; but Dr. Jalland makes it clear that there is no historical evidence of an unjust usurpation of authority on the part of the Popes which had not been attached to their office by Christ Himself through St. Peter, whatever abuses of that authority may have occurred during the lives of individual and exceptional Popes of later ages. The essential doctrine stands which St. Thomas More knew to have been defined by the Council of Florence in 1439, and which he expressed in his own way before going to his death in 1535 rather than deny it, by saying: "I perceived that the Papacy upholdeth all." In St. Peter, not in any later Popes, Papal Supremacy had its real, if implicit, beginning.

260. I asked a Roman Catholic friend in vain to prove that Papal Supremacy is actually derived from St. Peter.

You were asking too much. It is one thing to be a Catholic; quite another to be a trained historian. For the average Catholic, the matter is quite simple. The Gospels tell us that Christ made St. Peter head of His Church and promised that His Church would last all days till the end of the world. For Catholics, that means that the supreme leadership entrusted to St. Peter has been transmitted to his successors through the ages; and as only the Bishops of Rome have ever claimed this supreme leadership in regard to the whole Church, Catholics take it for granted that the Popes are indeed the successors of St. Peter. They leave historical and archaeological research to those who have the time and capacity for it. From this point of view, it is enough to say that there is as great a certainty as about any other well-accredited facts of history relating to the first ages of the Church which those who reject papal claims find no difficulty in accepting.

261. How were Popes validly elected?

According to St. Irenaeus, the first after the Apostles, Linus, was appointed by the Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul themselves. From then until the conversion of Constantine in 312 A.D., Popes were elected by a majority choice of the clergy of Rome. For some 400 years after the conversion of Constantine, the clergy and laity of Rome could alone validly elect a Pope, but various Christian Emperors had the

right to nominate the candidate and confirm the election. All agreed, however, that the papal power was attached to the office of the bishopric of Rome and was conferred upon the Pope by Christ Himself as Head of the Church, not by those who either nominated or elected him. In 768 A.D., a Roman Synod restricted rights of election to the clergy of Rome only. The Third Lateran Council in 1179 limited the right of electing a Pope to the Cardinals only. The Cardinals may elect anyone they wish provided he be a baptised member of the Catholic Church, a valid election requiring a two-thirds majority of votes. This custom has continued till today, apart from a Decree by Pope Pius XII in 1945 that the majority of votes required must be two thirds plus one, to exclude any candidate who happens to be a Cardinal from obtaining the two thirds majority by having voted for himself. No Cardinal may bring into the Conclave or Assembly for the election of a Pope any messages of support for or opposition to any particular candidate from secular governments.

262. I have found no Pope John XX in any papal lists.

That is for the very good reason that there never was a Pope John XX. The Pope who should have taken that title was acclaimed through an error of calculation as Pope John XXI. Pope John XIX died in 1033. The next Pope to take the name John was elected over 200 years later, in 1276 and was mistakenly proclaimed as John XXI instead of John XX. This means that the title "John XX" is missing from historical lists, but not of course that any Pope is missing.

263. On the other hand, I have found reference to a 15th century Pope John XXIII.

That "Pope", 1410-1415, was not a lawfully elected one. The lawful Pope at the time was Pope Gregory XII, 1406-1415. The trouble went back to 1378, when Pope Urban VI was elected. Some of the Cardinals, finding him too strict, repudiated their votes for him and thought they were entitled to elect someone else as Pope. Their action gave rise to a line of rival and unlawful Popes, of whom John XXIII was one. At the Council of Constance in 1415 all rival claims were renounced, and in 1417 Pope Martin V was elected and recognised by all.

264. Pope John XXIII. That "Pope", 1410-1415, was not a lawfully elected one. The lawful Pope at the time was Pope Gregory XII, 1406-1415. The trouble went back to 1378, when Pope Urban VI was elected. Some of the Cardinals, finding him too strict, repudiated their votes for him and thought they were entitled to elect someone else as Pope. Their action gave rise to a line of rival and unlawful Popes, of whom John XXIII was one. At the Council of Constance in 1415 all rival claims were renounced, and in 1417 Pope Martin V was elected and recognised by all.

According to the official Vatican Year Book, known as the "Annuario Pontificio," our present Pope Paul VI is the 262nd Pope, the list commencing with St. Peter.

265. What territorial rights with political authority did the Popes inherit from St. Peter?

None at all. He had none to transmit to them. The supremacy they inherit from St. Peter has a purely ecclesiastical significance, although the Church as a visible institution existing in this world cannot escape relationships with other visible societies, such as states and countries, in the midst of which her members live. Inevitably temporal interests proper to the Church developed to which the Popes had to give their attention. But the conditions that prevailed in past centuries were due simply and solely to historical circumstances which have long since given way to the entirely different circumstances of our own times.

266. Is it true that the Emperor Constantine, when he transferred the seat of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople, kept the Eastern half for himself, but gave political authority to Pope Sylvester over the whole Western half?

There is no truth in that story which owes its origin to a document known as the "Donation of Constantine" and which has been proved to be a forgery dating from the 8th century A.D., four centuries after the death of Constantine in 337 A.D. The temporal power of the Popes developed quite independently of that spurious document. As Toynbee points out in his monumental "Study of History", the Roman Empire fell and Europe survived only because the Popes gave leadership where no other was available. When the barbarian invasions of Huns and Vandals swept down from the north in the fifth century A.D., the then Emperors at Constantinople were unable to defend their Western territories. It was left to Pope

Leo the Great (440-461) to confront Attila, the leader of the Huns, and halt his campaign. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), with no help from the Emperor, had perforce to exercise full imperial powers in the West, saving it from chaos and barbarism. It was 150 years after Pope Gregory's time that Pepin, king of the Franks, came to the defence of Pope Stephen III against invading Lombards and, having defeated them, gave Central Italy to the Pope as "States of the Church." This bestowal, in 756 A.D., is known as the "Donation of Pepin" and there is no doubt about the documentary evidence for it. It was years later than an imaginative but unknown author, to give the impression of venerable antiquity to papal claims to temporal authority, concocted the forged document called the "Donation of Constantine," dating it 317 A.D. This spurious document was proved false by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa in his book "De Concordantia Catholica", published in 1433. The Papal States in Central Italy, dating from Pepin's gift in 756 A.D., continued in existence until the unification of Italy in 1870. But they formed only one aspect of the whole set-up that prevailed from the fifth century onwards throughout Europe during Feudal Ages and the gradually changing social and political conditions that followed after them. The Anglican Bishop J. W. Hunkin, of Truro, rightly says in his Penguin book: "The Gospel for Tomorrow" (1941) that it is false to charge the Popes with having wrongly acquired temporal authority, for they had had it conceded to them by Western Christendom itself.

267. While the recognition of Papal Supremacy was in many ways good for the Church and for Europe during the Middle Ages, with the passing of those had not its usefulness come to an end?

We need to distinguish here between the temporal and purely religious aspects of Papal Supremacy. The temporal order that prevailed in the Middle Ages is a thing of the past. With United Italy's confiscation of the Papal States in 1870, Pope Pius IX became simply ♦ as he put it ♦ a "prisoner" in the Vatican. He was a voluntary prisoner, for Italy would have been only too ready to grant him all the rights and privileges available to all Italian citizens. But, although an Italian by birth and with as much love for Italy as any other Italian, Pius IX, as Pope, was spiritual head of the Catholic Church with millions of members belonging to many different nations. He was bound, in virtue of his office, to rise above all national levels, giving Catholics everywhere the assurance that he was not a subject and puppet of any particular government, but independent of all pressures changing political regimes could bring to bear upon him. Succeeding Popes, Leo XIII, Pius X, and Benedict XV, adopted the same attitude, renouncing Italian citizenship and remaining within the precincts of the Vatican, insisting that their position as subject to no worldly ties and loyalties but quite independent of them must be recognised not only by Italy, but internationally also. The problem was solved in 1929 by the Lateran Treaty between Italy and Pope Pius XI, under which Italy agreed that Vatican City State had its own sovereignty and that the area within its boundaries was no longer Italian territory, subject to Italian laws. Vatican City State was not intended as a continuation of the confiscated Papal States. Pope Pius XI renounced all claims to those, Italy in turn acknowledging a newly-established sphere of temporal rule restricted to an agreed 109 acres independent of any outside political control and as a guarantee visible to all nations of the Pope's freedom from the dominating influence of any earthly powers. All this, however, leaves unaffected the question of Papal Supremacy in the spiritual order over the world-wide Church as successor of St. Peter. That remains; and on the whole, modern Popes are relieved to find themselves free from the temporal cares that burdened their predecessors, and able to devote all their attention to the purely ecclesiastical responsibilities. What we have to ask ourselves is whether the religious doctrine of Papal Supremacy over the whole Church is or is not an essential part of Christianity as taught by Christ and proclaimed by the Apostles.

268. Did not the English Church, considering the usefulness of Papal Supremacy to the Church as a whole at an end, decide in the 16th century to return to an idea of the Church closer to that of the New Testament?

That suggestion runs into historical difficulties which merely need stating. Firstly, the English Church was not consulted on the matter. The absolute Tudor monarch, Henry VIII, made the decision, telling the clergy what they had to do and compelling a subservient parliament in 1534 to pass an Act of Supremacy declaring himself to be the only supreme head of the Church in England. Secondly, Henry in this matter was concerned only with the realisation of his own selfish interests about which the less said the better. Thirdly, he was strongly opposed to, and wrote against the continental reformers who abandoned Catholic doctrines in the name of returning to primitive New Testament Christianity. Apart from emancipating himself from papal authority, he wanted the Catholic religion to remain as it was; so we have the strange spectacle of his penalising Catholics for denying his own supremacy over the Church in England and Protestants for denying the Sacrifice of the Mass! England had to wait for the death of Henry and the following reigns of Edward VI and later of Elizabeth I before the introduction of

the Protestant ideas of the continental reformers became possible. Henry's 1534 Act basically demanded only the substitution of the Royal Supremacy over the Church in England for the hitherto acknowledged Papal Supremacy, as held throughout the rest of Christendom. There had been, of course, conflicts from time to time on administrative levels between Rome and various civil principalities, including England. But of these the Anglican Archbishop Cyril Garbett, of York, writes frankly in his book "Church and State in England" (1940), p. 40: "The true nature of these controversies is often misunderstood." (They) "sometimes have been misinterpreted as the attempt of an indignant Church and patriotic nation to escape from thralldom to Rome. However much we might wish this had been so, the actual facts give no support to a theory so congenial to later-day Protestantism. Both Church and State accepted the spiritual supremacy of the Pope."

269. Did not the Popes base their claim to supremacy on documents forged in the ninth century and known today as the "False Decretals"?

No falsity of any ninth century documents can avail against claims made centuries earlier. The notorious "False Decretals" were fabrications, pretended papal letters and conciliar decrees which were inserted about 845 A.D. in a French compilation of genuine canon laws. Their purpose was to defend diocesan bishops against metropolitan archbishops in France by stressing their right of appeal to the higher papal authority which all acknowledged already and which was more than sufficiently established by the genuine documents in the collection of Church laws. The Anglican scholar, Dr. T. G. Jalland, in his book "The Church and the Papacy", p. 377, says that these genuine documents were "indubitably authentic"; that the interpolated "False Decretals" contributed nothing to the doctrine itself of Papal Supremacy; that the Papal Chancery itself showed a remarkable hesitation in regard to them; and that those who through prejudice cite them to discredit papal claims have seriously misunderstood them.

270. If, as the Second Vatican Council declared, members of the Church constitute the "People of God", have not the people themselves a decisive voice in all that concerns them rather than a "Papal Supremacy" which exists to serve God's people?

We cannot think in terms of a political democracy where the Church is concerned. Israel of old was chosen by God to be "His People." The only choice left to Israel was whether the people would be obedient to His will. All through the Old Testament the prophets reminded them that God had chosen them from among all the nations, not for their own purposes, but for His. As the prophet Amos reminded them, God had brought them out of the land of Egypt and could say to them: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos, 3:2). Christ, in turn, could say to His disciples, as called to be the "New Israel" or "People of God": "You have not chosen me. I have chosen you." Jn., 15:16. To Christians generally St. Peter wrote that they were a "chosen generation . . . who in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God." I Pet., 2:10. But Christ Himself chose St. Peter and the other Apostles, Peter being the first in importance amongst them, to exercise authority in the Church in His name. St. Peter was to be the chief shepherd of the whole flock (Jn., 21:15-17). The authority was divinely-given from above, not conferred democratically from below by the members of the flock themselves.

271. Is it not supreme papal authority that non-Catholics find it hardest to accept?

It certainly ranks for them among the major problems; and it is here that, in the interests of reunion, dialogue and understanding will be most necessary. On February 18, 1965, Cardinal Bea, President of the Catholic Secretariat for Christian Unity, visited and addressed the Ecumenical Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Geneva. Quite frankly, although with a courtesy and charity which all appreciated, he told the Assembly that between Catholics and other Christians "there is complete divergence on the structure of the Church." "For us Catholics," he said, "Christ entrusted His religion wholly to the College of the Apostles, of which Peter was the head. Unity cannot be achieved except in union with the Catholic Bishops as historical successors of the Apostles, with the Bishop of Rome as Supreme Pontiff."

272. Granted Papal Supremacy, the Pope would be an absolute monarch whom no one would dare to rebuke as Paul rebuked Peter.

History does not support that. St. Bernard, St. Thomas of Canterbury, even St. Catherine of Siena, a nun, while fully acknowledging papal supremacy, sent strong protests to the Popes of their times against papal decisions; and, far from being

expelled from the Church, they were later canonised by the Church as Saints. Fraternal correction even of a superior, with all due respect, can be a definite duty in defence of what one believes to be right. One, of course, may not be right; but full allowance is made for the conscientious convictions of those who are manifestly sincere and who go about things in the right way, respectfully yet none the less firmly protesting against what they think to be wrong, even though they themselves may be wrong in thinking as they do.

273. Popes, as supreme and above criticism, could do whatever they liked.

The Popes are as obliged as all others in the Church to obey the precepts of the Gospels and to conform their will to the will of Christ in fulfilling the duties of their office. Also there are precedents to be observed. Although purely ecclesiastical laws can be changed, until they are abrogated, they may not be ignored. We have all heard the anecdote of Pope John XXIII's rather exasperated exclamation: "I'm in a bag here," when, after his election, he found himself told by the Curial Cardinals that some things he wanted to do just could not be done. The Second Vatican Council went quite far towards remedying that by declaring that the authority of the Bishops throughout the world as successors of the Apostles by divine institution counted much more than that of the Curial Cardinals whose office was not of divine institution; and that the Bishops, acting collectively with the Pope, shared responsibility in the government of the Church. An American Presbyterian observer at the Council, the Rev. Robert McAfee Brown, remarked in his account of the Council's "Constitution on the Church" that "the principle of 'collegiality' or of corporate authority of all Catholic Bishops, so heavily supported by the Council Fathers, lays to rest many of the grotesque stereotypes of 'one-man-rule' and unilateral papal monarchialism." He was right as regards the exclusion of exaggerated estimates of Papal Supremacy which he knew to be prevalent among many non-Catholics. Nevertheless, the Council declared that the "collegiality" of the universal episcopate must always include the Pope as head of the college or collectivity; that as head the Pope retains primatial authority over the whole Church; and also the right as occasion demands to exercise that authority on his own initiative. Normally, however, on major issues, it can be taken for granted that papal decisions will have been preceded by consultations with the world episcopal conferences, or their delegated representatives in special Synods. Another non-Catholic observer at the Vatican Council, the Anglican Bishop John Moorman, said after its conclusion that in any case, if final Christian unity is to be achieved "there will have to be a central head of the Church, and that head will clearly have to be the Bishop of Rome."

274. Although a non-Catholic, I feel that when Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, the world lost a wonderful man.

Your tribute reflects the universal esteem in which he was held. He was certainly a man of deep faith, humility, piety and an all-embracing charity. In his will, he stressed that he had come from a poor peasant family and said that he had vowed poverty when quite young and had observed it, that no relatives had ever benefited materially from his having become a priest and that he had nothing to leave them except his blessing. When told that death was near, he accepted the fact uncomplainingly despite his being unable to complete the work of the Vatican Council in which he was so interested, saying to his doctor: "So I have a tumor. Well, the Will of God be done. My bags are packed and I am ready, more than ready to go." Then he asked for the last Sacraments, saying: "Let us do things as good Christians." Pope John XXIII set us all an example both of how to live and how to die.

275. This prompts my comment that you have admitted there have been bad Popes in the past, with special reference to Alexander VI.

Alexander VI, the "Borgia Pope", held office over 400 years ago, during what is known as the Renaissance period of history, from 1499 till 1503. I declared his personal life in many ways disgraceful and quite incongruous with his office, however successful an administrator he may have been, as undoubtedly he was. But I pointed out, firstly, that Popes, like all other men, have to work out their own salvation. To be elected as a Pope is not to get a through ticket to heaven, but only to have one's responsibilities before God immeasurably increased. Christ Himself said: "Unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required." Lk., 12:48. If Alexander VI led an evil life personally, one can only hope that he repented before he died; otherwise he will have lost his soul. Meantime, the Catholic Church not only does not bid us imitate anyone's vices, no matter who he is. She forbids us to do so. Secondly, all the Popes throughout the centuries have professed the same religion and held the same office; yet out of the 262 Popes over eighty of them have been canonised as saints because of their having died as martyrs for the faith or because of their outstanding virtue and holiness. Thirdly, the proportion of Popes who have been really unworthy of their office works out at

about one in forty, whereas the proportion of failures among the apostles chosen by Christ Himself was one in twelve. Fourthly, unworthy Popes in past ages are no argument against the truth of the Catholic Church but, if anything, prove the Holy Spirit's protection of her, not only despite external adversities, but despite even such a disaster within as an unworthy man succeeding to the office of St. Peter as head of the Church on earth.

276. Have non-Catholic historians supported your estimate of only a few bad-living Popes?

Ordinary historians are not sufficiently interested in that topic to discuss it. Those specifically interested in religious history and who do not allow prejudices to sway their judgment can quote only about five or six out of the 262 Popes as examples of personal depravity in one form or another. A balanced judgment on this matter is that of the Anglican Dr. T. G. Jalland in his book "The Church and the Papacy." On p. 543 he writes: "In spite of the occasional failure of individual Popes to uphold a morality consistent with the demands of their high office, it is a strange form of historical blindness which is unable to perceive in the long and remarkable history (of the Papacy) a supernatural grandeur which no mere secular institution has ever attained in equal measure . . . The Papacy defies a categorization which is purely of this world."

277. May a Pope be deposed; and if so, by whom?

No lawfully elected Pope can be deposed. A lawful Pope can cease to be Pope only by death; or by his own resignation, as in the cases of Pope Celestine V in 1294 and Gregory XII in 1415; or by losing the faith and thereby separating himself from the Church. There is no known case of this last condition having occurred, and most theologians say it would not be possible owing to our Lord's prayer for St. Peter, which would apply to his successors for the good of the Church: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and do thou . . . confirm thy brethren" (Lk., 22:32).

278. Is it a rule that all Popes must be Italian?

There is no law in the Catholic Church to that effect. The instructions in Canon Law for the Cardinals called together for the election of a Pope are that they must put aside all personal motives and vote for the one whom, in the sight of God, they sincerely believe best fitted for the office. Throughout history there have been in fact many non- Italian Popes.

279. If not, can statistics be given for the nationality of the various Popes from the beginning?

The changes of history make that very difficult, if not impossible. For example, we tend to think today of anybody born within the geographical limits of the Italian Peninsula as an Italian. But thousands of years ago people so born would no more have thought of themselves as Italians than the early Britons before the Anglo-Saxon invasions would have thought of themselves as English. In dealing with the Popes we have to span a period of almost 2,000 years. It should not be surprising, of course, that since whoever is elected as Bishop of Rome is Pope, out of 262 Popes, 115 have been Roman-born. But for the first 300 years before Constantine no citizen of Rome would have considered himself an Italian. Even through the centuries since the time of Constantine what we call Italy has gone through all kinds of changes of independent cities and states. Italy attained to national and political unity only in 1870. Before then, there were Popes from, say, Lombardy, who would not have regarded themselves as being of the same nationality or even race as a Neapolitan, Sicilian or Sardinian Pope. From this point of view the problem of the nationality of the Popes is a very complex one. The case is clearer with those born outside the geographical limits of the Italian Peninsula. St. Peter himself was, as we know, a Galilean Jew. In a descending numerical order not chronological since his time there have been seventeen French Popes, fifteen Greek, six Syrian, four German, three African, three Spanish, two Dalmatians, one English, one Portuguese, one Slavonic and one Dutch Pope.

280. In post-Reformation times, certainly, only Italians have been elected.

Using the term Italian to cover the whole post-Reformation period even before the unification of Italy in 1870, that is true. All things else being equal, it would of course be natural that, since Rome is an Italian diocese and each Pope is elected as Bishop of Rome the people there should be given an Italian-speaking Bishop, just as in English-speaking countries an English-speaking Bishop would be preferable. But independently of the fact that the Pope is the Bishop of the diocese of Rome, there are various reasons why the Cardinals should have thought it wiser to elect an Italian as Pope in post-Reformation times. Even Protestants

could take a more detached and less prejudiced attitude towards a Pope not chosen from among the Catholic Bishops of their own religiously divided countries ♦ one perhaps with whom they had been in immediate contact and in a possibly heated polemical atmosphere. The present and growing ecumenical spirit of greater understanding and tolerance is, after all, but of yesterday. However, it is quite possible that, in the near future, a non-Italian will again be elected as Pope. In any case, once a Pope is elected as head of the visible Church on earth and Vicar of Christ, he must have an equal care for Catholics of all nations and not regard himself as holding office for the special benefit of any particular nation. From that point of view it would not matter to what country or nation he belonged prior to his election.

281. Besides accepting Papal Supremacy in governing the Church, Catholics have to accept Papal Infallibility in defining what constitutes the Christian religion.

The First Vatican Council, in 1870, proclaimed as a dogma or required article of faith that, under due conditions, the Pope himself exercises "that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith and morals." It is the infallibility of the Catholic Church, therefore, which on such occasions expresses itself through him. (On the infallibility of the Church as such, see also Qs. 177-188 above).

282. What bothers me is the claim of the Church itself to infallibility.

In general, it is certain from many New Testament passages that Christ constituted His Church as an infallible teaching-authority to which He guaranteed perpetuity all days till the end of the world and the protection of the Holy Spirit against the teaching of error in religious and moral matters. He could not have sent His Church to preach the gospel to every creature, saying: "He who believes shall be saved; he who believes not shall be condemned", if the Church could oblige men to believe error, leading them astray. St. Paul, therefore, declared the Church of the Living God to be "the pillar and the mainstay of truth." Through all phases of later developments, in all essentials the unchangeable faith of the Church remains secure and intact.

283. Have the successors of the Apostles always been recognised as infallible?

The New Testament makes it clear, although many professing Christians pay insufficient attention to the fact, that Christ called and appointed the Apostles as leaders and official rulers of His Church, and spokesmen in her name. So, at the Council of Jerusalem, they declared: "It has seemed good to The Holy Spirit and to us." Acts, 15:28. Since infallibility as an essential characteristic of the true Church had to continue with her till the end of time, it could not but be operative in the Bishops as successors of the Apostles and as the organs of the infallibility proper to the Church herself. Historically, this infallibility of the Catholic Church expressing herself through the official teachings of her Bishops at least taken collectively was ever recognised. Thus the 2nd century St. Irenaeus wrote: "Those who inherit succession from the Apostles in the episcopate participate in the grace of truth according to the will of God the Father."

284. I firmly believe in the Catholic religion, but not in the Church's teachings on a number of things, nor that it is being a good Catholic to follow everything blindly.

Much in that declaration needs sorting out. Firstly, one who firmly believes in the Catholic religion believes that the Catholic Church was founded, commissioned and guaranteed by Christ our Lord to preserve and proclaim to mankind the true religion which He had taught the Apostles. Secondly, having come to the use of reason, we are expected to use it by checking the grounds for our faith in Christ according to His life, character and work; and also for our faith in the Catholic Church as that one historical religious society which has come down to us continuously from the time of the Apostles, which is truly Catholic or for all men regardless of racial or national differences, and which so aims at the salvation and sanctification of her members that those of her members who have fully lived up to her teachings and directives have in fact become Saints. Thirdly, granted such reasonable justification for having faith in the Catholic religion, we accept on faith whatever the Catholic Church officially teaches as essential to it; and we willingly fulfil those duties which the Church with the authority Christ gave her imposes upon us. Fourthly, the infallibility of the Church can be considered directly or indirectly. Directly, it pertains to the essentials of divinely-revealed truths, whether in solemnly proclaiming this or that doctrine as a necessary part of our faith or in condemning a doctrine as opposed to it. Indirectly, infallibility at least

preserves the Church from officially approving of beliefs and practices calculated to undermine the faith. Directly and positively infallible teachings we accept, not blindly, but in a spirit of faith in Christ with due humility and obedience on our part. But it is necessary to note that, besides the area of essential beliefs and practices, there is a large area - much larger than most people imagine - of opinions more or less probable in biblical and theological matters, and of pious practices permitted but not imposed, in which Catholics are free to follow what they feel to be their own reasonable preferences. As you do not say on what things you disagree with the Church's teachings, I am not able to discuss the nature and gravity of the teachings involved, nor how your dispositions fit in with the firm belief you profess in the Catholic religion.

285. One can see how infallibility can attach to doctrines we must believe; but not to legislation or precepts as to what we must do.

The Apostles were given divine authority within the Church to teach, to rule, and to sanctify her members. They therefore could legislate in regard to doctrine, or in regard to merely external discipline, or in regard to the religious and moral lives of the faithful. Owing to the gift of infallibility promised to the Church as such, the assistance and protection of the Holy Spirit extends to all three forms of legislation, whether enacted by the Bishops assembled collectively in a General Council, or by the Pope alone as successor of St. Peter and head of the Church on earth. Whether, technically, the infallibility of the Church finds expression in a particular decision is another matter. That would have to be decided from the circumstances and the terms in which the decision was formulated.

286. Why have dogmas been defined by the Church after the elapse of long periods of time instead of much earlier?

Because reasons for defining them have not arisen earlier. It would be surprising if the age-long pondering over the revealed teachings of the Christian religion did not give rise to a deeper understanding of them and a new insight into their significance. But side by side with this advance differences of opinion have also risen, or perhaps denials of basic doctrines which new theories have overlooked; or this changing world in later stages may confront the Church with a general outlook unknown in previous times. These and other possible factors as they occur may call for an uncompromising and infallible declaration by the Church of exactly what their Christian faith requires Catholics to believe.

287. It seems that even the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not defined by the Church until about the 4th century A.D.

All Christians knew of that doctrine in general from the formula for baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" as contained in Matt., 28:19. But in explaining the meaning of the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the relationships between them, different early writers fell into different errors. Some taught practically that these were three distinct Gods; others that only the Father was God, the Son and the Holy Spirit being only creatures and inferior to Him. I cannot go through all the variations here; but the confusion that arose became so widespread that in 325 A.D. the Council of Nicea defined the doctrine of the Trinity as we know it and as embodied in the Nicene Creed; that is, of three equal and divine Persons possessing one and the same divine Nature. It is difficult to see any problem in the fact that definitions of doctrine were given as the need arose for them.

288. I accept the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God; but not that of the Catholic Church which consists of human beings. No human beings can ever speak with the untainted accents of the Holy Spirit.

The various books of the Bible were written by human beings. If they were not rendered infallible by God, what they wrote could not be quoted as the infallible Word of God. Yet if God did render them infallible for the purpose of recording His Word, on whatever other grounds one rejects the infallibility claimed by the Catholic Church, it cannot be on the ground that no human beings can be rendered infallible by the Holy Spirit.

289. Human beings can speak of God only with the realisation of their own frailty and proneness to sin.

That concerns another matter altogether. Infallibility does not mean impeccability. It means that even a human being prone to doing the wrong thing can at least be so safeguarded by God that he will say the right thing. Scripture tells us that "the holy men of God" (i.e., the prophets of old) "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Pet., 1:21. Yet take the case of one of them. Isaiah,

when called to be a prophet of God, was supremely conscious of his unworthiness. "Then said I," he wrote, "woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Is., 6:5. One cannot disprove an infallibility conferred by God by references to the weaknesses of the human instruments He chooses for the purpose of manifesting His will.

290. No human beings can claim such infallibility that their words constitute an irreformable Word of the Lord.

You leave out of consideration the possibility that God might render a human being infallible for His own purposes within the limits of those purposes. St. Paul had no doubts about God's having done this where the apostolic preaching was concerned. He wrote to the Galatians (1:8): "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach to you a gospel besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema;" that is, condemned and rejected. The apostles were human beings and the words they had spoken constituted the irreformable Word of the Lord. Again, Jude 3 certainly regarded what the evangelists had written and what the apostles had preached as accredited spokesmen for the Church as being the irreformable Word of the Lord. "Contend earnestly," he wrote, "for the faith once delivered to the saints." The infallibility of the Catholic Church means simply that the Holy Spirit by His supernatural power renders her unable to teach officially as being an essential part of the Christian faith anything which in fact conflicts with the gospel as taught by Christ and by the apostles themselves.

291. Any infallible teaching-authority seems to mean throwing one's intellect overboard and just saying yes in the right places. I want proofs of what I am asked to believe.

The problem belongs to a deeper level than that on which you are working. It concerns the nature of revealed truth, the act of faith by which it is accepted, and the authority by which it is mediated to us. Revealed truth concerns mysteries of religion believed solely because God has revealed them. Our faith, Scripture tells us, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Heb., 11:1. The last word cannot rest with the results of biblical, historical and theological research, or our faith would be in biblical scholars, historians and theologians ♦ and that is not Christian faith. Christ stressed the fact that faith is a supernatural gift of God when He said, "No man can come to me unless the Father who has sent me draw him." Jn., 6:44; and St. Paul tells us that God has "chosen the foolish of this world to confound the wise." I Cor., 1:27. Human intelligence is to be respected, of course. Scholarship is a good thing in its own sphere; but it cannot produce Christian faith. Catholic scholars may ask whether and how particular doctrines are contained in what God has revealed and manifested in Scripture, in traditional clarifications of it, and in official declarations of the Church concerning it. But the actual faith of these scholars, as long as they remain Catholics, is not faith in their own ability to prove things to their satisfaction, which would mean faith in themselves! Just as a simple unlettered Papuan in some remote native village becomes a convert, experiencing a faith awakened within him by the grace of God as he listens to the preaching of a Catholic missionary, so the most learned theologians accept all the truths of faith taught authoritatively by the Catholic Church. That is faith in Christ speaking through the Church He founded upon the apostles and to whom He said: "He that hears you, hears me." Lk., 10:16. For Catholics, therefore, however learned and intelligent they may be, that a dogma is an essential part of divinely-revealed truth is sufficiently demonstrated when it is clear that the Catholic Church has infallibly defined it as such.

292. If one must have the will to believe in the Catholic religion, taking it all on faith, does not that reduce faith to a form of wishful thinking?

Christ commanded His apostles, and through them His Church, to preach the gospel. That supposes a body of truths put before us which is not the fruit of our own wishful-thinking. Again, Mk., 16:20 tells us that the apostles "preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the message by signs that attended it." This supposes that we have not only been confronted with the truth of the gospel, but that Christ Himself offers us the grace enabling us to believe if we have the will to do so, and more than sufficient evidences to render our choice a reasonable one and no mere act of blind credulity. Certainly reason alone can verify the historical facts concerning Christ and His religion, realising that no merely natural explanation can account for them. The one remaining problem and responsibility for each man is whether or not he is prepared to accept the divine authority of Christ and of His Church, adopting their teachings or refusing to do so. The teachings are to be accepted, of course, as a set of religious convictions upon which one intends to base his life in practice to the best of his ability; for, as St. Paul says: "The just man lives by faith." Gal., 3:11.

293. if one cannot believe without the grace of God and God does not give that grace, then one cannot be responsible for not having the faith.

Of God's providence we are not the judges. But we cannot assume that He does not offer a person sufficient grace to enable him to accept the faith when it has been seriously brought to his attention. Commissioning His apostles to preach the gospel to every creature, Christ said: "He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned." Mk., 16:16. The attaching of salvation to belief and condemnation to unbelief supposes that to every man who has had the gospel sufficiently put before him and is of goodwill, God is prepared to grant the grace of faith. Christ Himself said: "The light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light." Jn., 3:19. The conditions on man's part are sincerity, humble repentance of sin, courage in facing difficulties of a practical nature, and prayer ♦ conditions not all are willing to fulfil.

294. I was intrigued when I read that, after the Second Vatican Council, the oath against Modernism was abolished. What was the meaning of such oath-taking?

The idea itself is surely not an unfamiliar one to us. Witnesses in our law courts give their evidence under oath, calling God to witness that what they say is true. Also, in our naturalisation ceremonies, the State requires an oath of allegiance from new citizens. To confirm a statement by oath before God is an act of religion, proclaiming one's belief in Him and consciousness of responsibility to Him. Naturally, not trivial, but only serious matters justify declarations on oath. That it is lawful to do so when necessary is evident from Scripture. St. Paul himself did not hesitate to "call God to witness" (2 Cor., 1:23) to the truth of his words. And the Catholic Church, in the very serious matter of preserving the divinely-revealed truth entrusted to her, rightly required of those called to exercise any office in her name a sworn declaration that any errors she had condemned as being opposed to that divinely-revealed truth they also whole-heartedly condemned and rejected. An understanding of why the making of such a declaration was imposed requires a knowledge of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

295. What was the Modernism then condemned?

Modernism was a movement which arose about 1900 A.D. among some Catholic biblical scholars, philosophers and theologians. These, while still professing to be Catholics, tried to explain the Catholic religion as the product, not of a divine revelation, but of a merely natural evolution of man's inner and subjective religious experience. Such a principle was of its very nature calculated to undermine any permanent and objective value of Sacred Scripture, of the authority of the Church, of the Mass and the Sacraments and of all else in the Catholic religion. Some Modernists did not deny that, useful as these may have been found in the past, evolving religious experience would go on evolving and would eventually change the Catholic religion out of all recognition. In 1907, Pope Pius X, realising that these new tendencies were destructive of all Christianity as a supernaturally-revealed religion, condemned Modernism as a "synthesis of all heresies", and in 1910 decreed that all who received ordination to minister in the name of the Catholic Church or undertook major ecclesiastical appointments must, besides making a profession of their Catholic Faith, add a sworn declaration that they sincerely rejected the Modernism he had condemned. The 1918 Code of Canon Law omitted reference to the Oath against Modernism as being concerned with only a temporary episode in the Church's history, prescribing simply a solemn Profession of Faith before ordination as a priest and again before further assuming any major ecclesiastical responsibilities. But the particular law outside the 1918 Code of Canon Law still remained in force, requiring the Oath against Modernism, until 1967 when the new Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith abrogated it and decreed that the solemn Profession of Faith as required by the Code of Canon Law would of itself be henceforth sufficient.

296. Does not Catholicism teach, not only that the Church as such is infallible, but also that Divine Truth is revealed to the Pope as an individual?

Here we turn from the doctrine of Papal Supremacy in the Church to that of Papal Infallibility. Rightly you refer to the infallibility of the Church, for it is the infallibility of the Church which becomes operative on certain occasions in official decisions of the Pope himself as head of the Church and intended to be binding upon all members of the Church. Papal Infallibility, however, does not mean that any special revelations are granted to the Pope. God has revealed Himself and His purposes in word and deed as recorded in the Old and New Testaments, that is, through the history and the prophets of Israel as well as through Christ and His Apostles. We see God at work, for example, in the call of Abraham, in the liberation of Israel from Egypt to be His Chosen People, in the long series of Israel's

prophets, and in the greatest act of all for which these prepared the way, His own breaking through into human history in the Person of His Eternal Son. That Divine Son, under the name of Jesus Christ, lived and died for the salvation of mankind, and rose again from the dead, having founded a new community or new "People of God" on earth, known as His Church. To His Church, in the persons of the Apostles, Christ who accomplished the work of our salvation entrusted the duty of teaching all nations whatsoever He had taught (Matt., 28:30). The Pope, as successor of St. Peter and Christ's chief representative in the Church, is infallible only in the sense that the Holy Spirit safeguards him against officially teaching as an essential part of the Christian religion anything not in accordance with the Truth as contained in Holy Scripture and in the divinely-safeguarded traditional teachings derived from Christ and the Apostles.

297. Revelations to the Pope instead of to all human beings individually are opposed to belief in a merciful God.

The infallibility of the Pope means, not that he receives revelations, but that he, for the sake of the whole Church, is divinely preserved from officially teaching as part of the Faith what is in fact opposed to the Truth God has revealed. And such protection of the Pope against leading the whole Church astray is in itself a great mercy. As for the way in which God's mercy provides for the salvation of mankind, whether by His actions in history or by revealing a knowledge of His designs, it is not for us to tell Him what He should or should not do. It is for us to accept what He has chosen to do and adjust ourselves to that. As regards His mercy, the great redemptive act of Christ on Calvary affects all mankind, providing all, both before and after it, with graces or helps at least sufficient for salvation right through history, even for those who through no fault of their own have not known of it. As a result, no one can be lost except by his own deliberate rejection of God, whose mercy is available to all who seek it. Knowledge of ways and means provided by God and an insight into His purposes is another matter. The whole human race does not exist simultaneously. Generations progressively follow generations; and God's plan has been progressively manifested. With the coming of Christ as the Redeemer, the mission of preserving and propagating a knowledge of the Truth was entrusted to the Apostles and the Church Christ founded upon them. Faith in the authoritative teachings of His Church is the means appointed by Christ for our knowledge of the Truth; and one who knows yet rejects this will be responsible to God for having been without the Truth and for not having lived in accordance with it.

298. In 1870, Pope Pius IX brought in the doctrine of his own infallibility.

The doctrine was part of the teaching of Christ and of the Apostles. To make the implicit truth explicit and clear, the doctrine was defined as a dogma or article of the Catholic Faith by the First Vatican Council in 1870. Pope Pius IX himself did not decide the issue. For centuries there had been discussions among theologians as to whether the Catholic Church, which all admitted to be infallible as a Church, gave final and definitive expression of her teaching in a General Council together with the Pope, or whether the Pope alone apart from a General Council could also speak infallibly in the name of the whole Church. Over fifty years before Vatican Council I Joseph de Maistre, a French diplomat, author and prominent Catholic layman, energetically maintained in 1817 that the final, infallible court of appeal must be the Pope, with or without a Council. The question was a very vital one. In 1848, two years after his own election, Pius IX wrote to the then 603 Catholic bishops in the world asking whether they thought Papal Infallibility ought itself to be defined as an Article of Faith. Of the 603 bishops, 546 said yes. Twenty-two years later, when the First Vatican Council met, Pope Pius IX left the discussion entirely to the assembled bishops, not attending the Council's discussions but presiding only at the public Sessions. On April 29, 1870, he had a document read to the assembled bishops declaring that he had no intention of bringing any pressure to bear on the decisions of the Council, and that he would proclaim the "Constitution of the Church" with or without any clause defining Papal Infallibility according to the majority vote of the assembled bishops for or against it. More than a two-thirds majority voted for it and Pope Pius IX accordingly promulgated the Definition as formulated by the Council. The suggestion that he acted by himself independently of the Council in this matter is without foundation.

299. The voting of the bishops at the Council was not unanimous.

It did not have to be. Over a century before the First Vatican Council Pope Benedict XIV, who was elected in 1740, not defining anything but speaking simply as a theologian, said that even in a General Council the Pope is not bound to decide in conformity with the majority. Quoting Christ's words to St. Peter: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and do thou confirm thy brethren" (Lk., 22:32), Benedict added: "Not this one nor that one, but whether a minority or a majority." In fact, at Vatican Council I, more than a two-thirds majority voted for

Definition.

300. Evidence shows that, of the 601 bishops present, 451 said yes, but 150 said no.

That is a misreading of the evidence. At the Council's preliminary debate there were 150 speakers who addressed the assembly, some putting the case for the Definition, others putting the case against it. There were two sets of votes to be made, one in a preliminary closed Session on July 13, the other in a Public Session on July 18, when the Pope himself would preside at an open ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica. At the July 13 meeting there were 601 bishops present. After long discussion, the voting was 451 for the Definition; 62 for it, provided some amendments were made; and 88 against it, a few because they thought the proposed declaration wrong, most because they thought it inopportune to define the doctrine as a dogma of the Faith however true it might be. When some of the suggested alterations were made in the wording of the proposed Definition, twenty of the minority agreed, making 471 votes for it, with 130 votes against it. Already there had been a two-thirds majority, and this increased it. Many of the bishops regarding the matter as settled returned to their dioceses without waiting for the Public Session. Of the bishops who remained in Rome, 435 were present at the Public Session on July 18, 66 absenting themselves from it. In the Public Session 433 voted for the Definition, only two expressing dissent; and these two announced their complete acceptance the moment Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Definition of Papal Infallibility as approved by the Council majority. The 66 absentees sent a joint letter to the Pope saying that they had not wanted to attend and publicly declare their minority vote against the decision lest they should give any impression of lacking respect for the Holy Father personally or give cause for possible disedification among the faithful. All the absentees eventually declared their full acceptance of the defined doctrine, either in public statements to that effect or in personal letters to the Holy See.

301. If Popes are indeed infallible, the Holy Spirit should have inspired all to vote yes.

That is not a reasonable expectation. Cardinal Newman wrote in his book "The Development of Christian Doctrine," published in 1845, that if God has given an infallible revelation of Truth, as Christians believe, reason demands a Church divinely-safeguarded in its official and essential teachings against erroneous doctrines. He spoke, not of a new revelation, nor of any positive inspiration, but only of a providential protection against the Church committing herself officially to erroneous teachings. In 1864, after he had become a Catholic, he published his "Apologia pro Vita Sua," in which he said that the Church is a vast assembly of human beings whose thoughts about the implications of their religion involve intense and varied operations of reasoning, the action and reaction of human ideas refining and moulding one another until eventually they are brought into such unity as faith requires by the superhuman power of the Holy Spirit. Newman wrote in such terms six years before the 1870 Vatican Council met, the proceedings of which illustrated what he had anticipated, namely, both the role of human reason and the final outcome through the assistance of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church in her ultimate and official definition of Papal Infallibility. When the text of the Definition then given was published in England on July 23, although he himself had not thought it opportune to define the doctrine, Father Newman (he was not made a Cardinal until 1879) wrote next day, July 24, in a letter that in the terms in which it had been defined: "I personally have no difficulty in admitting it."

302. Granted Papal Infallibility, why does not the Pope exercise this faculty whenever decisions have to be made?

The Catholic doctrine does not imply that the Pope is endowed with any special faculty to be exercised at will and whenever he likes. The Catholic Church is held to be infallible in the sense that she can never cease to be true to the teachings of Christ and of the Apostles. She cannot fall into error in her official "Articles of Faith", declared to be binding on all the faithful. This is in virtue of Christ's promise to be with her "all days even till the end of the world" (Matt., 28:20) and that of the perpetual assistance of the Holy Spirit (Jn., 14:16). The ordinary means of preserving the faith of the whole Church is by the influence of the Holy Spirit within the souls of all members of it, including the bishops who have care of the flocks entrusted to them. Guidance by papal definitions is not an ordinary, but an exceptional and extraordinary means. As to the nature of the Pope's infallibility, that belongs to him only in virtue of his office. If, granted Papal Supremacy, he could officially define as part of the Christian Faith an erroneous doctrine the whole Church would be led into error — a catastrophe excluded by the promised protection of the Holy Spirit. Only if and when he defines a doctrine in virtue of his office as supreme head of the Church is his preservation from error infallibly

guaranteed by the Holy Spirit for the sake of the Church. This does not mean that the Pope is a kind of inspired oracle or endowed with some sort of miraculous clairvoyance enabling him to provide infallible decisions automatically on any and every problem that happens to arise. It is one thing for the Pope not to be able to define what is wrong; quite another to be able to hand out infallible definitions whenever he pleases. Never has the Church taught that Papal Infallibility is to be understood in that sense, and no Catholic has to believe it in that sense.

303. You are practically saying that the Pope is not personally infallible.

The Pope himself does not claim that he is. As a matter of fact, he is personally far more often fallible than infallible. I do not mean that he is far more often mistaken than he is right. I mean that he is far more often able to be mistaken, even though in fact he is not mistaken, than he is absolutely and completely unable to be mistaken. I must confess that I do not like the expression "personal infallibility of the Pope," taking those words at their face value. The Pope is not infallible as a man. He is not infallible as a priest. He is not infallible as a theologian. He is not infallible as a bishop. The Pope is kept infallible, not by any personal characteristics but by the Holy Spirit, and that only on the rare occasions when making official decisions in virtue of his position as supreme head of the Church on earth, intending those decisions to bind the whole Church as matters of faith. The decisions could concern doctrines, moral principles, the canonisation of Saints, or other items so intimately connected with the Christian Faith as to be practically part of it. I think you will agree that all this sounds, not like personal infallibility, but rather like a very impersonal infallibility in virtue of the office itself which he happens to hold.

304. Why all the sifting of evidence and consulting of other bishops, historians, canonists and theologians, who should be listening to his decisions?

The Pope exercises his ordinary authority as supreme head of the Church by means of many decisions for which infallibility is not claimed, but to which nevertheless all Catholics owe reverent obedience. Even in these decisions the Pope is bound in conscience not to act impulsively, but only after due reflection and prayer. Much more is this required where it is a question of a solemn definition involving the very faith of all Catholics throughout the world. Here he will consult experts on Scripture, theology, philosophy, history, science, sociology, on any subject directly or indirectly connected with the matter under consideration. No one, Catholic or non-Catholic, if the Pope does make an infallible definition, will be able to say that it was an ill-informed one. Even so, all this inquiry is outside the notion itself of infallibility. That resides in the protection of the Holy Spirit rendering him unable in fact, as Pope, to teach false doctrine to the Universal Church as its supreme head on earth. In an extreme case, were the Pope on the verge of solemnly defining a doctrine opposed to the Christian Faith, and there were no other way of preventing it, he would drop dead before doing so. However drastic the measures necessary, God would see to the protection of His Church in all essential Christian teachings.

305. There must be thousands of tortured minds among Roman Catholics, not believing in the Pope's infallibility but compelled to do so.

To think in such a way is to let imagination run riot. A Catholic with the basic gift of faith really means the declaration in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." If, before Papal Infallibility was defined by the 1870 Vatican Council, a Catholic had thought differently, he would have realised that this was only his personal and fallible opinion; and that, in promulgating the definition, the Church and not he must undoubtedly be right. The Catholic knows that in accepting such defined doctrines he is yielding to the authority appointed by Christ, the only compulsion being the basic convictions of his own conscience. Cardinal Newman wrote in his "Apologia", in regard to the 1854 definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that he had not heard of one Catholic having difficulties in accepting it whose faith on quite other grounds was not already defective.

306. I have read that the early Christian Fathers knew nothing of Papal Infallibility.

Substantially the doctrine clarified by the 1870 definition was quite well known to them. In 1889, nineteen years after the Vatican Council's proclamation of the dogma, the great Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Soloviev published his book "Russia and the Universal Church." In it, pleading for the reunion of the Orthodox Churches with Rome, he wrote, on p. 34: "As a member of the Orthodox Church, I recognise as supreme judge in matters of religion him who has been recognised as such by St. Irenaeus, St. Dionysius the Great, St. Athanasius the Great, St. John

Chrysostom, St. Cyril, St. Flavian, the Blessed Theodoret, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Theodore of the Studium, St. Ignatius, etc. ♦ namely, the Apostle Peter who lives on in his successors." On p. 143 he writes that at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) "the reading of the Pope's dogmatic letter was hailed by the Orthodox Bishops with cries of 'Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo'." The reference was to Pope Leo the Great. Soloviev adds that "to reject the supremacy and doctrinal authority of the Roman See as usurped and false involves not merely a charge of usurpation and heresy against a man of the character of St. Leo the Great; it means accusing the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of heresy, and with it the whole Orthodox Church of the fifth century." Few scholars have made themselves as familiar with the early Church Fathers as was Soloviev.

307. If the Catholic Church as such is infallible, why single out the Bishop of Rome as infallible rather than the other Catholic Bishops?

The Church, St. Paul tells us, was built "upon the foundation of the apostles." (Eph., 2:20); and all twelve were equally apostles, sent by Christ to preach the gospel in His name and with the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, our Lord gave more to St. Peter than to the other apostles, making him the shepherd of the whole flock (Jn., 21:15-17. See also Q.247 above). Each of the apostles was, of course, infallible as an exponent of the religion of Christ. But there is a difference between apostolic and episcopal power. The latter was included in, but less extensive than the former; and it was the episcopal power that the apostles conferred upon the bishops they appointed to rule the particular churches they established. These bishops were not infallible individually; but the continuing infallibility of the Church as such finds its expression through the bishops taken collectively and as united with the Pope as head of the Church. In 1870, the First Vatican Council defined that, besides the collective infallibility of all the bishops including the Pope as successor of St. Peter, the Pope individually and in his own right as head of the Church is infallible when, in virtue of his office, he defines a doctrine of Christian faith or morals for the benefit of the whole Church. The infallibility of the Church can, therefore, find its expression either through all the bishops taken collectively with the Pope, or, under special circumstances and conditions, through the Pope alone. This doctrine was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council in its 1964 Decree on "The Constitution of the Church", n.25.

308. How much of Roman Catholic teaching is guaranteed as true by specifically papal definitions of themselves infallible?

It would be a mistake to think that only those Catholic teachings are guaranteed as true for which strictly papal definitions can be produced. The Catholic Church as such is infallible in the safeguarding and teaching of all essential Christian doctrines. These, regarded as Articles of Faith are to be found in the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, in many definitions by various Councils, and in such teachings as the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have unanimously held to be an integral part of the Christian Faith. Particular doctrines infallibly guaranteed by individual papal definitions are relatively few, about fifteen or sixteen at most, ranging from a declaration concerning the Divinity of Christ by Pope Leo I in 449 A.D. to the most recent of them, namely, the definition of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950 A.D. Normally, Catholics make the allinclusive act of faith: "I believe in the Catholic Church and in all that she believes and teaches," without worrying as to how this or that particular doctrine has been declared to be part of the Catholic Faith. One can have implicit faith in the Catholic religion without having an explicit knowledge of every specific aspect of it.

309. Have Catholics to believe that the Pope is always infallible when speaking as head of the Church on matters of faith and morals?

Catholic doctrine does not require that. When the Pope addresses an Encyclical Letter to the faithful everywhere on matters of faith or morals he is undoubtedly speaking as head of the Church, yet not necessarily infallibly. Pope Pius XII, in his Encyclical "Humani Generis" (1950), said that such documents are indeed authoritative, demanding respectful attention and obedience, but that in them the Popes do not necessarily exercise their teaching authority to the full nor claim to be speaking infallibly. Catholics have to believe that the Pope is infallible only when he makes it clear that he is exercising the fulness of his teaching-authority, defining some truth to be accepted by all Catholics throughout the world as part of or essentially connected with the divine revelation given to mankind by Christ and the Apostles.

310. Surely the Pope is not infallible when expressing merely his personal opinion on religious matters.

If the Pope does express merely a personal opinion, speaking as a private theologian, then his views are neither infallible nor do they impose upon us acceptance of them in a spirit of religious obedience. But if the Pope, in virtue of his office, gives an authoritative decision on some religious matter, even though he does not intend it as an infallible declaration, we are obliged to regard his decision as binding. So the Second Vatican Council, in its "Constitution on the Church", n.25, said expressly that "loyal submission" of the will and intellect must be given in a special way to the authentic teaching-authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra*, so that his supreme teaching authority is acknowledged with respect and sincere assent is given to decisions made by him, in accordance with his manifest mind and intention." It is not absolutely impossible for the Pope to be mistaken in such non-infallible decisions, but owing to the general guidance and protection of the Church by the Holy Spirit, it is not at all likely or probable that the Pope's decision would be erroneous. The ordinary day-to-day guidance of the Church would be practically impossible if we had no obligation to accept any but technically infallible papal definitions of doctrine. In such a case, the Pope would be called upon to make an endless number of infallible decrees in order to have any real teaching authority at all - which it would be quite unreasonable to expect.

[311. Did not Cardinal Newman say: "If I had to bring religion into an after-dinner speech, I would drink to the Pope, if you wish - but I would drink to conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards?"](#)

He used those words in his "Open Letter to the Duke of Norfolk," dated Dec. 27, 1874. He was replying to Gladstone's charge that, after the definition of Papal Infallibility in 1870, Catholics were reduced to mental and moral slavery under a foreign power, and could not be trusted as loyal subjects of the realm. Newman realised, of course, that Gladstone was making an unwarranted transition from the sphere of strictly religious matters to that of our civic duties and the obligation of allegiance to our country in its lawful requirements of us; and he stressed the Catholic doctrine of the supremacy of Conscience. Even where religion is concerned it can be said that a Catholic's conscientious conviction of the truth of the Catholic religion both precedes his acceptance of the Pope's authority as supreme head of the Church on earth and also dictates submission to it. But in order to show Gladstone that Catholics are not mental and moral slaves Cardinal Newman explained the limits of the Pope's authority and the areas in which the individual conscience still retains its independence. All the more significant is what he has to say about the duties of the Catholic conscience in regard to authoritative but non-infallible papal decisions in matters of faith and morals.

[312. When has a Catholic the right in conscience to dissent from an authoritative but non-infallible ruling of the Pope on matters of belief or moral conduct?](#)

Cardinal Newman lays down pretty stringent conditions for that. First of all, he says, make sure that what you call your conscience is your conscience, and not the "miserable counterfeit" which so often assumes the name ♦ merely attachment to one's own opinions and selfwill. That, he says, would be but the right of conscience to dispense with conscience. If true, conscience must be a genuine sense of duty to God and to the divine voice speaking within us. Many speak of the right of conscience, not as involving the rights of God and of duty to Him, but as the right of thinking, speaking and acting according to their own ideas with no thought of God at all. Secondly, the initial dispositions of a Catholic must be the desire rather than otherwise to think and speak as the Pope does, to want to take one's stand with him. One must guard against being predisposed to dispute what the Pope says, or his right to say it, and the desire to exempt oneself from the duty of obedience. Thirdly, granted proper dispositions, conscience is not to be taken as reflecting the Will of God until after serious thought, earnest prayer, consultation, and all other available means of arriving at what one honestly believes to be a right judgment ♦ that is, should difficulties present themselves. Fourthly, it must ever be kept in mind that obedience to the Pope is "in possession;" that is, the burden of proof rests on the conscience of the one who is inclined not to obey. As Cardinal Newman puts it: Unless one can say before God "I must not, I dare not obey", it would be sinful to reject and to disobey the Pope's decision. Newman adds that if these rules were observed, conflicts between individual consciences and the Pope's authority would be rare indeed; which means that in most cases of insubordination and protest such rules have not been observed.

[313. Another Pope, especially one of a different nationality, might think differently from our recent Popes.](#)

Once a Pope is elected, no matter of what nationality, as successor of St. Peter and head of the Catholic Church on earth he has to act in the name of Christ and

according to the mind and will of Christ. He has to put aside all lesser considerations, intent above all else on the preservation and propagation of the Christian Faith, and the good of the whole Church everywhere. Many Popes, once elected, conscious of their office and its responsibilities, have falsified all human predictions and expectations of what they would be likely to do. A classic example of this is the case of Pope Pius II. Born in 1405 as Aeneas Sylvio de Piccolomini, he led a very loose life but was intellectually highly-gifted and as a lay-theologian opposed Pope Eugenius IV and published a book against Papal Supremacy. In 1445, however, converted from his dissolute ways, he became a priest and later a bishop, finally being elected as Pope in 1458. When his earlier writings were quoted against him, he issued a condemnation of such writings, insisting that no credit should be given to them, and concluding: "Reject Aeneas; accept Pius." Pope John XXIII, when opening the Second Vatican Council in 1962, called for a renewal within the Church; but he stressed that the Council must provide for "a formation of consciences in perfect harmony with authentic doctrine" which, he said, "still shines forth in the acts of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council." An English, French, Belgian, German, American, Indian or African Pope would have exactly the same sense of duty in regard to what Pope John XXIII called that of "guarding the sacred inheritance of Christian doctrine." Catholics, convinced of the divine institution and protection of the Catholic Church, are equally convinced that the Holy Spirit would certainly see to that.

NEXT TOPIC »