

"Transubstantiation," they merely brought about a development of expression, the doctrine remaining the same. Again, the fathers were exceedingly strong in asserting Mary's absolute freedom from sin, or from any touch of the devil's power. Yet it was only by a gradual process that the term "Immaculate Conception" was coined; an expression meaning substantially the same thing. Besides, the tradition of Mary's Immaculate Conception was current at Rome, and in other places, before it became clear in all parts of the Church. Hence arose theological disputes, which lasted till the belief had come to be accepted almost universally by clergy and people; and a final definition by Pius IX in 1854, confirmed the doctrine as part of the traditional faith. Lastly, the Church is accused of inventing the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870. Yet this doctrine is found clearly taught by the scholastic divines centuries back, and an examination of history will show that it was clearly supposed by the Church from very early times. A section of the Gallican clergy resisted it for a time, but this opposition soon died down sufficiently to allow a practical unanimity to be arrived at, and the definition of 1870 closed the discussion once for all. All these are regarded as examples of legitimate development, in the sense of an advance in clearness of expression or unanimity, but not an invention of new doctrines, beyond those revealed and traditionally handed down from the first.

This being the case, converts need entertain no fear of the pope capriciously springing new and unheard of doctrines upon them for subsequent belief. There exists in history no case of a final definition made without accurate previous knowledge of the state of belief in the Church at large. And when we consider the numberless snares into which a pope left without divine assistance might have fallen, by making definitions based on the imperfect state of knowledge in his own times, at the risk of being proved wrong afterwards; we can say that history affords a strong support for our doctrine, that a special providence has watched over the pope from the very beginning, and will not fail us in the end.

How the Church Regards the Use of the Bible

The deposit of faith preserved by the Catholic Church includes: (1) Doctrines clearly taught in the New Testament; (2) Doctrines obscurely taught in the Bible, and requiring the authority of the Church to decide their true interpretation; (3) Doctrines not mentioned in the Bible at all — e.g., the abrogation of the Jewish Sabbath, with the obligation of observing Sunday instead; the practice of eating meat with blood, which was forbidden for a time by the apostles (Acts 15:20); the inspiration of each and every part of the New Testament. It is not that there is any antagonism between the Church and the Bible, as Protestants imagine, but that the two stand on a different footing. The Church derived its doctrine from the apostles before the New Testament was written and has followed the law of oral transmission ever since. The fact that the New Testament was afterwards written does not interfere with this principle, but only provides us with an inspired and historic witness to the claims of the Church, and, in many points, to the accuracy of her teaching, without,

however, supplying a substitute for her authority.

It is, however, sometimes alleged that the Church confesses a fear of the Bible by discouraging its use. This charge is entirely untrue. The Church never did discourage the use of the Bible, but only its abuse. Probably St. Peter would have recommended those who misunderstood St. Paul's Epistles to leave such difficult writings alone, until they could use them with better discretion. No book has ever been so badly abused as the Bible. There is no heresy, which has not claimed Scripture in its own support against the doctrine of the Church. The Arians and Socinians both relied strongly on Holy Scripture when it becomes a fashion to use the Scripture in this way for the support of private views, the Bible, instead of being a help to faith, is converted into a source of confusion. Again, modern scholarship has proved the enormous textual difficulties which abound in the Scripture, and which require all the tools of science and Oriental languages to master. Simple Protestants think the Bible is easy to understand, because they can find some meaning or other in every verse. It is quite a different matter to find the true original meaning. The most extraordinary ideas can be drawn out of an English translation, which reference to the original Hebrew or Greek will show not to be in the text at all.

No wonder then if the Church considers the Bible anything but an easy book. The infinite capacity of the human mind to go wrong is sufficient reason for caution; but, in spite of this, Catholics have always been free to read the Bible, and encouraged to do so, provided they use the original text or an authorized translation. No one can accuse the Douay Version of being a garbled version, though not without the defects incidental to all translations. Nor does the obligation of accepting the Church's interpretation, in those few dogmatic texts about which she has declared her mind, hamper the mind. For nowhere does such an interpretation do violence to the text, and in each case it will be found reasonable and likely, to say the least; and given that the Church is what Catholics believe she is, it is a distinct advantage to have an authoritative decision, where otherwise all would be left to uncertain speculation. But these decisions are comparatively few and far between; and the freedom of discussion which exists in our theological and scriptural schools would surprise Protestants if they came to realize it.

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Pamphlet 029

The Authority of the Catholic Church

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This pamphlet has been written with a view of enabling non-Catholics to obtain concise and correct information regarding Catholic teaching. Those interested in its contents will have no difficulty in obtaining references to larger works by which to continue their inquiries.

What Submission to authority means

The idea of authority in matters of religion has been much ridiculed in modern times, as if it were injurious to liberty of conscience. It will be well to remove this prejudice before going any further. Submission to the authority of another, in matters of thought, may be justly objected to, especially when half the advantage lies in the intellectual exercise of thinking such matters out for oneself.

But when it is a case of ascertaining facts which some one else knows, and which we cannot find out for ourselves; then we must, whether we like it or not, take them on the authority of another, if we wish to acquit them at all. The only important condition is to make sure that our authority is reliable. No one believing in the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ would refuse submission to His authority in matters of revelation; for everything He teaches must be true, no matter what our previous ideas on the subject may have been; and submission to His authority means acquisition of the truth. The same holds good as regards the apostles, when once we have ascertained that they are reliable witnesses to the teaching of Christ. Every Protestant accepting the statements of the Bible as correct submits to the authority of those who wrote the books of the Bible. Finally, once being convinced that the living voice of the Catholic Church is authorized and guaranteed by Christ, the only rational course is to accept that authority as a means of ascertaining Christ's teaching; and instead of resenting it, we ought to be thankful for the gift.

Some further apprehension may, however, be felt about the Church extending her authority beyond the limits of revealed dogma, and fettering the mind in fields where Christ has left it free. This is not really the case. The Church naturally expects the prevailing Catholic lines of thought and feeling, outside the strict limits of faith, to be treated with respect, especially in public writing and speaking; and her general policy is to be cautious and slow in taking up novel views, such as tend to shock and alarm the simple minded, until such views have been firmly established by evidence. But as for freedom of private thought and opinion and taste, in all matters outside the strict limits of faith, Catholics (even though some of the more simple may not realize it) enjoy the fullest liberty. The great richness of Catholic theological speculation, compared with that of Protestants, is a proof, which will appeal to those who have studied in both schools.

How the Teaching of the Church is to be ascertained

In communicating His teaching to mankind, Christ has made use of the most natural means at His command. Even the apostles did not grasp their Master's full doctrine at once, or without thinking over what they had learned and asking further questions. Thus also an inquirer coming to the Catholic Church would naturally begin by studying a universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; which represents the doctrine taught in the schools and churches of the entire world. His further questions would be answered by reading or by instruction from a priest. Continued study will carry him deeper into each subject, but will not require a departure from this Catechism. It is not essential that he should be a master of theology before entering the Church. A sound knowledge of the substantial doctrines is sufficient. The important thing is to be thoroughly imbued with the principle of belief in the authority of the Church; and to be ready to accept, in general, whatever the Church teaches as belonging to the deposit of faith.

So far in practice; but speaking more scientifically, it will be necessary to go further afield, to explain the constitution of the teaching body of the Catholic Church. If we trace back to its source the authority of the Catechism and of the priest who explains it, we shall come ultimately to the Bishop of Rome, who is responsible for the teaching of the faith. The Catechism represents substantially the unanimous teaching of the bishops all over the world. Catholic bishops are no ornamental heads of churches, but the responsible guardians of the deposit of faith. They are the successors of the apostles, endowed with their authority and power to teach and govern the Church. Taken singly, they do not inherit the personal endowments of the apostles; they have neither the gift of inspiration nor of miracles, nor of personal infallibility, nor of universal jurisdiction. They receive neither new revelations, nor repetitions of old ones; and yet they are infallible in this sense, that they cannot collectively be guilty of false teaching, and so lead the whole Church astray. It is possible for individual bishops to desert their duty and fall in heresy, as some have done in times past. But such are quickly cut off from the Church, and lose their position in the teaching body. For a bishop can retain his office only by remaining in communion with his fellow bishops and with the pope; separated from this communion, he ceases to be a member of the teaching Church. It is in this collective body of bishops in communion with each other and with the pope, that the teaching Church properly consists. Hence it is to this collective body that the promises of Christ apply. Consequently it is believed that any doctrine unanimously taught by this collective body, as part of the deposit of faith, must be infallibly correct; since otherwise the whole Church, clergy and laity (whose belief is simply a reflection of the teaching of the bishops), would be committed to a false doctrine, and so the gates of hell would have prevailed against the Church. It will be seen that everything works in the most natural manner possible; and the only effect of Christ's promise is, that it guarantees the unanimous teaching and belief of the Church.

How Does the Pope Stand in Relation to the Teaching Body?

The pope, besides holding the position of bishop over the local Church of Rome, enjoys the twofold prerogative of supreme ruler and of supreme teacher of the whole Church. These prerogatives are believed to have been bestowed on St. Peter by Christ (Mt. 16:13-19; Lk. 22:31-33; Jn. 21:15-17) and to have been inherited by his successors in the see of Rome. As supreme ruler, the pope has power to make disciplinary laws binding on the whole Church. As supreme teacher, he possesses authority to settle disputed points of faith and morals. It is with the last named prerogative that we are now chiefly concerned. Under favorable circumstances, when the teaching of the bishops is unanimous and the belief of the people undisturbed, no ulterior guarantee is needed beyond this fact. But when a heresy arises, and the unanimity of the bishops is disputed; or when the traditional doctrine has been imperfectly transmitted in some part of the Church, and a dispute arises on this or any other account, an authoritative declaration may be needed to close the question in a manner which admits of no evasion. It is then that the decision of the supreme teacher is called for. Now Catholics believe that in these decisions, and in these alone, the pope is infallible. For it is of the nature of these decisions to bind the whole Church, and commit it irrevocably to teaching and to believing as part of Christ's revelation the doctrine proclaimed by them. Hence, unless the pope were absolutely reliable in such decisions, the faith of the Church might be corrupted by an error, and so the gates of hell would have prevailed against it.

From this it will be clear what papal infallibility means. The pope is not inspired; he receives no private revelations; he does not carry in his mind the whole of Christ's teaching as a miraculous treasure on which to draw at will. He has learned the faith as we learn it, from his Catechism and from his theology. If he wishes to know the two sides of a dispute he must study it, as we must. Even when preparing to make a definition in his office of supreme teacher, he can count on no new revelation or inspiration of a personal kind. But when he comes finally to the act of definition — when, acting in his highest official capacity of teacher of the Universal Church, he defines a point of faith or morals with the intent of binding the whole Church, then we believe, by virtue of Christ's promise, that the decision will be infallibly right.

A Mistake about Infallibility

Protestants find a great difficulty in believing that infallibility means no more than this. Some, incorrectly believe, for instance, that if the pope is infallible at all he must be infallible in all his acts. This is simply refusing to accept the Catholic's account of his own belief. But it is a groundless objection. The President of the United States of America does not always act as President. No one would attribute any authority to his views on hunting, or yachting, or on the theater. Even when he presides over an official function, he is not always using presidential prerogatives. No one would attach the full authority of his office to the remarks he makes to a group

of Presbyterians, Jews, or Catholics. Even when speaking to Congress, or making his official speech on the State of the Union, he does not intend to throw the full weight of his authority into his utterances. It is only when signing an Bill, Act, or a treaty with some foreign nation that the full and highest exercise of his presidential office comes into play. Then and then alone does he act as head of a nation, committing the power to the deed, and binding the whole nation. As it is with the President of the United States, so it is with the pope. In his private acts as a Christian, in his official acts as a bishop, in his official acts in the government of the Church, he might make a mistake or fail in caution, and no great harm would be done. But if he made an error in committing the whole Church to a point of faith or morals, the damage would be irreparable; the teaching of Christ's revelation would be adulterated, and the Church would cease to be the guaranteed delegate of Christ. Hence in these acts only is it necessary for the pope to be infallible, according to Christ's promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church.

Does the Church Add New Doctrines to the Faith?

But this doctrine of the pope's power is open to another objection; for it seems as if, by means of it, new doctrines were periodically added to the Church's teaching. Certainly more doctrines are taught as of faith today than were taught as of faith a thousand years ago; and therefore, presumably, more than were taught as of faith by the apostles.

This question leads to the idea of development of doctrine. Catholics believe that the Church never develops into a doctrine of faith anything that was not originally part of the Deposit of Faith, which is the sum total of Christ's revelation. But a development can take place in clearness and definiteness of expression. St. Peter would have told us that our Lord was God and Man, but he would hardly have been able to express his doctrine in the terms of the Nicene or Athanasian creed, because that kind of language was not in use in St. Peter's time. This is an example of development from a less scientific to a more scientific form of expression. Take another example. None of the apostles, except St. John, lived long enough to see the whole of the New Testament written. Probably St. John informed the Church of his own time that certain writings, and no others, were inspired. But this knowledge was not so spread throughout the Church as to make it universally known. It took some centuries for this tradition to become unanimous and universal in Christendom. Then only could the canon or list of the New Testament books become a recognized dogma of faith. This is an example of development from local knowledge to universal knowledge, by the complete spread of the original tradition to all parts of the Church.

Protestants have accepted the results of these two examples of development. But the same principle applies to other cases which Protestants do not usually admit. The fathers were quite clear in teaching that the consecrated bread and wine were not common bread and wine, but became, by God's mysterious power, the real Body and Blood of Christ. When the scholastic divines invented the philosophical word