

FOR YOUR PROTESTANT FRIEND

The Catholic Point of View

by T.V. Fleming, S.J.

“Good evening, Peggy! We seem to meet pretty often on the way home from the office these times. What about coming to the dance next week?”

“Thanks for the invitation, Bill, but somehow I don’t feel keen on going.”

“So you’ve turned me down again. I suppose it’s on account of our difference of religion—because you’re a Catholic and I’m a Protestant.”

“To be candid, Bill, that is the reason. As marriage between us is out of the question, I think it is better we should not have any dates.”

WHY NOT MIXED MARRIAGES?

“Why should marriage be ‘out of the question’? Haven’t plenty of mixed marriages proved happy and successful?”

“Some have, but the odds are heavily against it—twelve to one according to a certain Catholic Bishop who has had much experience of how they work out.”

“Why shouldn’t our marriage be the happy one?”

“It might—but the risk is too great. It wouldn’t be fair to you, Bill, to let you marry me. My conscience would make too many demands on you, and you would feel it unfair to have to give in to me all along the line. To begin with, the wedding would have to be in a Catholic Church. Then all the children would have to be brought up Catholics. They would join me in their night prayers, in going to Mass on Sundays, in the abstinence or other penance on Fridays, and so on. You would feel a kind of stranger in the family, and in the long run it might get you down.”

“In other words, you want me to become a Catholic to marry you?”

“Certainly not! To become a Catholic without being convinced that Catholicism is the true religion would be mere hypocrisy. If you were to become a Catholic for that reason I should lose all respect for you.”

IS ONE RELIGION AS GOOD AS ANOTHER?

“There’s ‘the rub.’ I am not convinced of the need to change my religion. We are each serving God in our own way, like two travellers going by different roads to the same destination. The Protestant religion appeals more to me, since I have been born a Protestant. If you were born a Protestant, you would feel just the same.”

“Sorry, Bill, to have to disagree with you. God requires that we serve Him in the way that He wills—not in any other way, no matter how much it may appeal to us. So, even if I had been born a Protestant, with my present knowledge of the claims of the Catholic Church, I should feel bound in conscience to become a Catholic.”

“Perhaps, you don’t know our Church sufficiently well to appreciate it?”

“Of course, I don’t know your religion as well as you do, but there are many Protestant ministers who have known their religion very thoroughly, and yet have become Catholics—several hundreds since the time of the conversion of Cardinal Newman.”

“To balance all that, Catholic priests have become Protestants.”

“It is true that some priests have left the Church—mainly because they refused to live up to the high moral standard required for the Catholic priesthood. (I’m talking about the demand for celibacy.) Among these men you certainly will not find such sincere seekers after truth as you will find in the long line of eminent converts to the Catholic Church—for instance, Cardinals Newman and Manning, Monsignor Ronald Knox (who has re-translated the Bible into English), and many others who formerly were prominent Protestant clergymen. You should read Monsignor John O’Brien’s work, ‘The

Road to Damascus,' which gives short biographies of well-known recent converts.”

BAD POPES

“All the same, Peggy, haven't there been many bad Catholics—even bad Popes?”

“There are at present over 450 million Catholics in the world in 1957. [There are over 1100 million in 2005] In such a big number it is inevitable that there should be some failures, as the Church is composed of human beings, not of angels. Our Lord Himself has said: ‘It must needs be that scandals come, but woe to him through whom scandal comes’.” (See Matthew 18:7)

“But what about those bad Popes?”

“Well, even among Christ's chosen Apostles one turned traitor. Peter, their leader, perjured himself by swearing that he knew not his Master. All the others forsook Christ and fled at the first approach of danger. These failures, however, were fully atoned for by loyalty at other times. So, too, Catholic failures are more than counter-balanced by hundreds of millions of good Catholics. Besides, of the more than 260 Popes relatively few have been bad, whereas a lot of them have been saints.”

INFALLIBLE OR IMPECCABLE?

“How could there have been bad Popes at all, if the Popes are supposed to be infallible?”

“I am afraid, Bill, you are mixing up infallibility and impeccability. These are two very different ideas. To be impeccable means that one can't sin. To be infallible means that one can't make a mistake in what one knows (or teaches). The Pope, being human, is able to sin like the rest of men. But, when he speaks as the representative of Our Lord, officially teaching the whole Church, he cannot teach what is false. There have been Popes who led bad lives, but they did not lose their infallibility (when teaching) on that account. They were infallible, but not impeccable. A school-master may be a bad man at home, yet a good teacher in class. Likewise, certain Popes taught truth officially, even though they did evil at other times.

“That's all very well, Peggy, in the case of an ordinary teacher, but how can the Pope be truly the representative of Christ if he leads a bad life?”

“Let's take an example. When the Governor-General of Australia signs Parliamentary bills officially we accept them as binding in law, that is, having the Queen's authority behind them. Even if the Governor-General led a bad life (which he doesn't), his official signature would still be authoritative. Similarly, even if the Pope were a bad man (which has rarely happened, and never in recent times) this would not deprive him of his authority to speak infallibly in the name of Christ.”

WHY NOT IMPECCABLE?

“If Christ made the Pope infallible, why did He not make him impeccable also?”

“Because infallibility is necessary for the survival of the Church, whereas impeccability is not. If the Pope were officially to teach false doctrine, the Church would no longer be the true Church which Christ founded. In this case “the gates of hell” would have prevailed against it, which would falsify Christ's promise. So, for the sake of the Church, the Pope is preserved from error, even though personally he may be undeserving of his high office. Impeccability, on the other hand, is not necessary for the handing on of truth, as Christ Himself made clear when He said: ‘On the chair of Moses sit the scribes and Pharisees. All things therefore whatsoever they say to you, do all you; but according to their works do all you not’.” (See Matthew 23:2-3)

IS INFALLIBILITY DANGEROUS?

“Even still, Peggy, I find it difficult to accept this idea of an infallible Pope. It seems to give too much power to one man. Suppose the Pope were to run amuck and start teaching all kinds of infallible doctrines, what would you do?”

“There is no need to be afraid of that, Bill, the Pope seldom exercises his power of making infallible definitions. There

has been about a hundred years between the last two definite cases—the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the Assumption of Our Lady in 1950. Besides, he exercises his power very prudently—only after consulting the Catholic Bishops throughout the world.”

“Perhaps, however, some future Pope might abuse his power?”

“You don’t seem to understand, Bill, that the Pope’s infallibility is limited to very special cases. He can only make infallible pronouncements under very strict conditions, namely, when defining (or explaining) doctrines of faith and morals which have been revealed by God before the death of the last Apostle (or other doctrines logically connected with these). Further, he must make clear his intention of binding the whole Church to believe these doctrines.”

“In spite of all that, didn’t two Popes wrongly condemn Galileo on a religious question connected with the explanation of the Bible?”

“Yes, the two Popes erred on that occasion, but their condemnation of Galileo did not fulfil the conditions required for their verdict to be regarded as an infallible pronouncement. Of course we do not believe that the Pope is necessarily infallible in everything that he says. The quality of infallibility is had only when there are present the conditions I have already mentioned.”

NEW DOGMAS?

“But haven’t Popes infallibly taught new dogmas, which were completely unknown in the primitive Church ‘before the death of the last Apostle’, for example, the Immaculate Conception of Mary?”

“It is true that this doctrine is not mentioned explicitly in the Bible, but the Bible does tell us that Mary was ‘full of grace’, (Luke 1:28) or ‘highly favoured’. What were these favours which Mary received from God? Pope Pius IX infallibly answered this question by including among them Mary’s Immaculate Conception. So this doctrine is not completely new in the Church, because it has been implicitly in the Gospel from the very beginning. The same holds true of the dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady.”

“All the same, the introduction of all these infallible doctrines makes the Catholic Church today very different from the primitive Church, doesn’t it?”

“Great minds think alike, Bill. Cardinal Newman before his conversion had a similar idea. But after several years of study of early Christian writings, he came to the conclusion that the primitive Church bears the same relationship to the modern Catholic Church as a child does to a man. There has been growth and development in the Church without change of identity. Doctrines, which at first were known vaguely, are now known more clearly, together with various logical consequences flowing from them.”

PRIVATE REVELATIONS

“With Cardinal Newman I concede that point, and if your Church kept to what is in the Bible—at least, implicitly—I should not mind so much. But haven’t you also got to believe a lot of new revelations made at Lourdes, Fatima, and so on? How can intelligent people be so credulous?”

“The Pope could not define infallibly the truth of these private revelations. One reason is that they have happened after the death of the last Apostle. Hence a Catholic is not bound to believe them as of divine faith. However, if there is sufficient reason for accepting them, Catholics believe them with human faith. Actually, the Church examines these private revelations very carefully—often over periods of many years—before the faithful are allowed to believe in them. Most of them are rejected as due to illusion. But sometimes there is good reason to believe that they are true, especially when they are accompanied by miraculous cures of diseases.”

MIRACLES

“I don’t wish to disturb your simple faith, Peggy, but hasn’t science explained that miracles are due to auto-suggestion, such as is found among Indian fakirs and others?”

“No, science has explained nothing of the sort. Recently—in 1956—ten eminent doctors of the British Medical Association after two years’ special study were forced to admit that certain cures at Lourdes could not be explained by existing scientific knowledge. Indian fakirs do very extraordinary things by the power of mind over matter, but they cannot cure cancer instantaneously (as has been done at Lourdes)—if they could they would be in big demand everywhere.”

“How can you rule out the possibility that at some future date science may produce cures as wonderful as those at Lourdes?”

“Even if science were to produce a drug which could instantaneously cure cancer, this would not detract from events at Lourdes in which cancer is cured without any such drug. For Catholics the wonders at Lourdes and elsewhere fulfil the prophecy of Christ that ‘signs (or wonders) will follow them that believe.’ (See Mark 16:17) That is to say, the true Church of Christ, taken as a whole, will never lack the production of miracles—sufficiently conspicuous for the whole world to see or hear of them.”

THE ACID TEST FOR THE TRUE CHURCH

“I know that the Catholic Church claims to be the true Church, but there are other Churches also claiming to be true Churches. In all these Churches there are learned men who cannot agree which Church is right, how then can ordinary folk like ourselves solve the problem?”

“Our Lord foresaw this difficulty, so He gave an easy test by which all unbiased seekers after truth—whether learned or unlearned—could recognize His Church. The test, which He gave, is unity of religious belief.”

“But, Peggy, since all sincere Christians try to follow the teaching and example of Our Lord, aren’t we all one in spirit—both Catholics and Protestants?”

“Yes, there is at least some kind of vague unity between us, but this is not the perfect unity which Christ was thinking of when, at the Last Supper, He prayed to the Father that His followers might be ‘perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent Me.’ (See John 17:21) Our Lord intended His followers to have such striking religious unity among themselves that even ‘the world’—those outside His Church—could easily recognize it.”

“But, can’t Christianity as a whole be easily distinguished from other religions—Islam, Buddhism, etc.?”

“Let’s keep to the point, Bill. We are talking about the internal unity of the true religion. Anyone can see that the Christian Churches, taken as a whole, have not that perfect unity which Christ intended should be a sign of the true Church. On the contrary their disunion among themselves is so striking that it is the scandal of Christendom, and one of the biggest obstacles to the spread of the Christian faith, as many sincere Protestants admit. When we try to convert non-Christians, they tell us: ‘If you Christians cannot agree among yourselves, how can you expect us to agree with you?’ “

“All the same, are not Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others, one among themselves—just as Catholics are?”

“No, these Churches uphold the right of private judgement, and consequently have many differences of opinion. As there is no central teaching authority, there is no guarantee of unity of doctrine. For instance, in the Anglican Church Bishop Barnes denied the divinity of Christ, while others held it. Hence the Lambeth Conference was forced to admit that one can’t speak of the doctrine of the Church of England but only of doctrine in the Church of England.”

ARE CATHOLICS REALLY ONE?

“Are there no differences of opinion in the Catholic Church, too?”

“Yes, Bill, Catholics hold different opinions on matters which have not been taught authoritatively by the Church, but on essential religious doctrines they have perfect religious unity. Indeed, Catholic unity has been so evident that the enemies of our Church have never been able to attack it. Instead, they try to throw it at us a reproach, saying that we cannot think for ourselves. There is also our unity of government under the Pope, as shown by constant newspaper reports of pilgrimages to the Holy Father from all over the Christian world—even from distant Australia. So, again when our

enemies wish to be unkind to us, since they can't deny our unity, they call us 'papists'—thereby grudgingly admitting our striking unity of government.”

DOES OBLIGATION EXPLAIN CATHOLIC UNITY?

“Cannot Catholic unity be explained by the fact that Catholics are forced to believe the same thing, unlike Protestants who are allowed freedom of belief?”

“The very fact that the Catholic Church imposed an obligation to believe is another proof that it is the only true Church.”

“I'm afraid, Peggy, I don't follow your reasoning.”

“Let me explain this point fully, because it is important. Our Lord before His Ascension said to His disciples: ‘Preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes not shall be condemned.’ (See Mark 16:15-16) When Christ put this duty of preaching on His Apostles, He evidently put a corresponding duty on their listeners to accept the explanation of the gospel which they preached. We cannot imagine Our Saviour's meaning to have been: ‘You must preach the gospel to all, but people need not listen to you. They can believe anything that their private judgement suggests to them.’ That would have been unworthy of Christ. He also makes His meaning clear by adding: ‘He that believes not shall be condemned.’ He did not say: ‘Go and write a Bible, and let them make what they can out of it.’ No, He founded a teaching Church to which all must listen under penalty of eternal condemnation. He thus gave His Church authority to teach in His name, and to impose an obligation on all to believe this teaching. Since the Catholic Church alone claims this authority to teach in Christ's name, it alone can be the Church which Christ founded.”

WAS TEACHING AUTHORITY GIVEN ONLY TO THE APOSTLES?

“I agree, Peggy, that Christ gave His Apostles authority to teach in His name, just as He gave them power to work miracles in His name. But, since the Catholic clergy today have not inherited the miraculous powers of the Apostles, why should they have inherited the teaching authority of the Apostles?”

“The power of working miracles was a personal gift given to preachers of the gospel in early times. It is nowhere stated in the gospel that this gift was to last till the end of the world. Miracles were necessary at first to guarantee that the teaching of Christianity had God's approval, and was therefore true. But, nowadays, the striking unity of hundreds of millions of Catholics of all nations, races and classes, is in itself a continual psychological miracle which is sufficient to identify the true Church.”

“I agree that the gift of miracles was for Apostolic times, but so was the teaching authority of the Church—you have not disproved the latter.”

“I was just coming to that, Bill.”

“Sorry, Peggy! Keep going!”

“Before Our Lord ascended into heaven, He gave His last solemn instructions to His Apostles: ‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. . . Going, therefore, teach all nations . . . all things whatsoever I have commanded you. . . And, behold, I am with you all days even to the end of the world.’ (See John 20:21 and Matthew 28:19-20) On this occasion Christ clearly sent the Apostles with authority to teach in His name, and this authority was not a mere personal gift intended only for the lifetime of each, as is evident from the words: ‘Behold I am with you (that is, in your teaching) all days even to the end of the world.’ As the Apostles would not live till the end of the world, it is clear that Our Lord is here speaking to them not as individuals but as a Church, which would exist for all time. So, Christ gave His Church authority to teach infallibly until the end of the world. As I have already said, the Catholic Church alone claims this teaching authority, hence it alone must be the true Church to which all must belong. ‘He that believes not shall be condemned.’ “(See Mark 16:16)

ARE ALL PROTESTANTS DAMNED?

“Is that why your Church holds that all Protestants are damned?”

“Our Church holds nothing of the kind. We interpret Christ’s words as a general law obliging all to enter the Catholic Church. A general law, however, may admit of exceptions, and Our Lord made an exception against the general law of membership of His Church, when He said: ‘If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.’ (See John 14:23) This means that sincere love of God with a firm determination to keep His commandments will entitle ‘any one’ (Catholic or Protestant) to God’s friendship. Therefore, a Protestant who is sincerely convinced that his Church is the true Church can be saved; just as a man who drives away in another’s car—thinking it is his own—is saved from sin by his good faith. But, as soon as the latter recognizes that he is in the wrong car, he is bound to give it up; similarly, when a Protestant recognizes that he is in the wrong Church, he is bound to leave it.”

IS GOOD FAITH SUFFICIENT?

“All that’s necessary then is to love God and keep the commandments—one need not belong to any Church.”

“Not so fast, Bill. Sincere love of God includes a general desire to do whatever God wants. But God wants every one to enter the Catholic Church. Sincere love of God therefore includes the desire to become a Catholic. One may be unconscious of this obligation, through no fault of one’s own. So, if one is in good faith, one can be saved without being a member of the Catholic Church.”

“I suppose I’m in good faith, anyway.”

“Be careful, Bill. As Monsignor Knox has said: ‘To-be-in-good-faith is a defective verb. . . . It has no first person singular.’ So, you can’t say that you are in good faith, because this would be equivalent to saying: ‘I know my Church is wrong, but I belong to it believing (in good faith) that it is right.’”

“NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH”

“I’m afraid, Peggy, I find this whole explanation rather unsatisfactory. Catholics at one time say that those outside the Church can be saved by sincere love of Christ, and at other times they say the opposite: ‘Outside the Church no salvation.’ No matter how they try to wriggle out of it, these two statements seem to me to be contradictory.”

“I have already explained that a general law may admit of exceptions, and that these exceptions do not involve any contradiction. I have also shown that Protestants, who sincerely love Our Lord, have a desire to do all He wants. Therefore, they desire (at least, unconsciously) to enter the Catholic Church. On this account they are not completely cut off from the Church, as are those who are determined not to become Catholics under any circumstances. So, ‘Protestants in good faith’ are those who would readily become Catholics, if they knew that God wanted them to do so. This gives them ‘a link with the Church’, as Pius XII has said. In other words, they are ‘on the way’ to the Catholic Church. They already have, as it were, ‘one foot inside the door’, so that to them does not apply the statement: ‘(Completely) outside the Church no salvation.’”

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

“You seem to know all the answers, Peggy, but do you not find that your infallible Church takes away all freedom of thought in religious matters?”

“Not at all. The number of infallible doctrines is relatively small, and outside these there is a very wide range of matters for free discussion. Besides, since we believe that infallible doctrines are guaranteed true by God, we are quite logical in accepting them, because God cannot err. So, to complain that God’s revelation (through the Church) curtails one’s freedom of thought would be as foolish as to say that knowledge of the multiplication table destroys one’s liberty to believe otherwise.”

WHY NOT GO STRAIGHT TO THE BIBLE?

“Why bother about this business of infallibility? Why not go straight to the Bible which is written so simply that anyone can understand it? Isn't the inspired word of God better than any Pope or priest?”

“The Bible is not so easy to understand as you think. It is often difficult to know whether certain texts should be taken literally or metaphorically. One must also interpret each text so that it does not contradict other parts of the Bible. To do this, one must know all those other parts. Remember, Bill, St. Peter has warned us that certain things in the Bible are ‘hard to understand, which the unlearned have wrested to their destruction, as they have other Scriptures.’ (See 2 Peter 3:16). Christ foresaw this difficulty, so He gave the Church authority to teach the true meaning of the Bible.”

IS THE CHURCH TOTALITARIAN?

“Because the Catholic Church claims so much authority, a lot of people say that it is a totalitarian institution.”

“Such people don't know what they are talking about. A totalitarian government—such as now [1957] exists in Soviet Russia and Communist China, or North Korea, or North Vietnam,—is one in which all activities are subordinate to the State. In such a regime there can be no true freedom of religion, so in Soviet Russia and Communist China only puppet Churches are allowed. Totalitarianism also destroys freedom in politics, in trade unions and in private enterprise. The Catholic Church stands for all these freedoms, so that it is a calumny to say that she is totalitarian.”

THE BOGEY OF CONFESSION

“All the same, aren't Catholics priest-ridden, since they are forced to tell all their misdeeds in confession. That must be a pretty awful experience.”

“Catholics are not priest-ridden. In confession (or Penance, or Reconciliation, as it is sometimes called) they tell their sins to God whom the priest represents. The priest cannot use this knowledge in the slightest way. Catholics go to confession because Christ gave the Church the power of forgiving sins when He said to His Apostles: ‘Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven.’ (See John 20:23). Neither do Catholics feel that confession is ‘an awful experience.’ On the contrary, they find it a useful check-up on their service of God, and a big help towards leading a better life. This is shown by the fact that so many go so frequently to confession—many of them every week—even though they are obliged to go only once a year. Catholics fulfil their religious duties freely and willingly. You must not imagine, Bill, that the Church is always ‘shaking the big stick’ at us.”

WHY ARE PROTESTANTS WEDDINGS TABOO?

“Catholics may be free in some things, Peggy, but they aren't as free as Protestants are. For example, in this year of Our Lord 1957, we Protestants are quite free to go to the weddings of our Catholic friends, but Catholics are not free to return the courtesy by coming to our Protestant services. I don't wish to be unpleasant, but that kind of thing seems to me to be discourteous and bigoted.”

“We Catholics do not avoid Protestant weddings in order to be discourteous. On the contrary, we naturally find it painful to have to refuse invitations from our Protestant friends on these occasions. Protestants find it hard to understand our attitude in this matter, because their religious outlook is so different to ours. Many Protestants believe that one Church is as good as another, so they do not go against their conscience when coming to our services. With us Catholics it is totally different. We believe that Christ founded one Church—the Catholic Church—and that He has forbidden us to show any approval to other Churches which have broken away from His Church. ‘He that will not hear the Church,’ said Christ, ‘let him be to you as the heathen.’ (See Matthew 18:17) Conscience leaves us no choice in this matter—we must obey Christ rather than please our friends.”

THE SPIRIT OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

“I don't see, Peggy, how this attitude fits in with Christ's teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which He

urges us to be friendly with those who differ from us in religion.”

“I’m glad you brought up this point, Bill, because it will help to clear up a frequent source of misunderstanding. When Our Lord said one must love one’s neighbour as oneself, by ‘neighbour’ He meant people of all religions. So, one must wish well to all, and help them as far as one reasonably can. But this universal love must not contradict other teachings of Christ. It must not lead us to show approval of religious systems which we believe to be false. Briefly, we love Protestants, but we hate their errors as a revolt against Christ’s Church. On this point, we are uncompromising, but not ‘bigoted’—because bigotry is an ugly word which means the rejection of other people’s opinions without reason. We, on the contrary, have good reasons for rejecting Protestantism, as I have already explained.”

THE INQUISITION

“But, doesn’t the Catholic Church persecute those of other religions when it is able to do so—as in the case of the Spanish Inquisition?”

“To discuss the Inquisition intelligently one must have a sense of history. Those were cruel times, when Catholics were also tortured—by rack and thumbscrew—in the Tower of London, under the Protestant government of England. English civil law at that time was likewise very harsh judged by modern standards. For example, stealing a handkerchief was punishable by death. Similarly, the Spanish Inquisition was cruel in its methods because it was medieval—not because it was Catholic. Those days are now gone for ever. The Catholic Church does not force one to believe, because such belief would be mere hypocrisy. One’s choice of one’s religion is a matter between God and oneself.”

DOES THE CHURCH COME BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC AND GOD?

“That’s all very well in theory, but in practice don’t you find that your infallible Church—which insists on dictating to you what you must believe—comes between yourself and God?”

“Not in the slightest. On the contrary, it puts us in contact with God, because we hear His voice through the teaching Church just as you hear a friend speaking through a telephone. Christ intended it to be so, when He said to His disciples whom He was training to spread His Church: ‘He that hears you, hears Me’.” (See Luke 10:16)

THE ONE MEDIATOR

“I thought that you Catholics looked on the Mother of Christ as a kind of mediator between yourselves and Him.”

“When we speak of Mary as Mediator—or more correctly Mediatrix—we mean that Mary can pray for us to her Son, and because she is His mother her prayers are always heard. For instance, at her wish Jesus worked His first miracle at Cana, even before His appointed time had come. (See John Chapter 2) Besides, if we can pray for each other, why shouldn’t Mary be able to pray for us, too, and much more effectively? This doctrine is not against St. Paul’s teaching about ‘the One Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus’, (See 1 Timothy 2:5) because Christ is the one Mediator who alone redeemed the whole world—his mother included. Thus, Christ alone is Mediator in the full sense of the word, in a class all by Himself.”

THE MOTHER OF GOD

“How can you call Mary ‘the Mother of God’, since God existed before Mary was born?”

“This can be explained simply as follows. When a child is conceived, the mother helps to prepare the body, while God creates the soul. Even still she is rightly called the mother of the whole child. For example, if John is born of Julia, we say that Julia is ‘the mother of John’, that is, the mother of the person who is John. We do not call her ‘the mother of John’s body’. Somewhat similarly, because Mary helped to form the human nature of Christ, she is the mother of the Person Who is Christ, that is, Mother of God—since Christ is God.”

WHY STATUES?

“I agree that we should honour Mary as Mother of Christ, but why go to the extreme of praying to statues of her? Doesn't the Bible forbid us to make graven images?”

“The Bible forbids us ‘to make graven images . . . and to adore them’, (See Exodus 20:4&5) it does not forbid images for other purposes. On the contrary, God told Moses to make two images of angels on the sides of the Ark of the Covenant. (See Exodus 25:18) So, Catholics have statues of Mary to honour her and keep alive her memory. They do not pray to these statues, but before them. The statue itself is honoured merely in so far as it represents Mary, just as a soldier honours a flag which represents his country. Of course, any honour we show to Mary is a delicate compliment to her Son, for Whose sake alone we honour her.”

“BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS”

“The Protestant attitude to religion is much simpler: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’. (Acts 16:31) ‘No one comes to the Father but by Me.’ (John 14:6) Don't these texts prove that we can go to Christ without belonging to any Church?”

“No! To ‘believe in the Lord Jesus means to believe sincerely all His teaching. It is only by this means that we can come to the Father. His teaching includes the need of belonging to the Church which He founded: ‘You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church. . . He that will not hear the Church let him be to you as the heathen. . .’ (See Matthew 16:18 and 18:17) Elsewhere, also, Christ has clearly said that He wants those ‘other sheep outside the fold’ to belong to ‘the one fold and the one shepherd’. (See John 10:16) During His lifetime on earth, Christ Himself was the Good Shepherd. Before His Ascension He gave this office to St. Peter, when He said: ‘Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep’. (See John 21:15-17) Peter was thus made the representative of the Good Shepherd, that is, the first Vicar of Christ—in other words, the first Pope. The present Pope now holds the same position as Peter held, and the Catholic Church is ‘the one fold’ to which Christ wills all to belong—including yourself, Bill.”

HOW TO BECOME A CATHOLIC

“You know, I think you've solved all my difficulties against your Church, Peggy.”

“If you want any further information, you should go to a Catholic Presbytery and ask to see one of the priests. He would be very glad to help you in any way.”

“I think I should prefer to go to yourself. But, here we are at the end of our journey. You certainly have given me a lot to think about. Indeed, I'm already beginning to think that our marriage might not be out of the question after all. So, what about that dance next week?”

“Let's wait and see how that thinking of yours ends up. Goodbye, Bill!”

“Au revoir, Peggy!”
