

# UPON THIS ROCK

By John A. Phillips, S.J.

EVERYWHERE there is a growing realization that the present divisions among Christian Churches are something contrary to the mind of Christ our Lord, who wanted all men to form one Fold under one Shepherd (John x, 16). Conscious that the prevailing discord was anything but what Jesus planned, many non-Catholics are turning to the Catholic Church in their search for certainty and the full revelation that God gave to men through His Son (John i, 18; Hebrews i, 2-3). Their friends may reproach them for seeking to shelve responsibility. They may say that the clear, unhesitating authority of the Catholic Church is a kind of temptation, and that it is weakness to “submit to Rome” and meekly to do what you are told. Who is right?

Other non-Catholics, deterred by similar arguments and by centuries of prejudice and of misrepresentation of the Catholic Church, hang back, afraid either to investigate the claims of the Church or even to have any truck with “Rome.” Are their apprehensions justified?

If we are prepared to weigh things on their own merits, we must see that authority as such, even in religious matters, is not necessarily something to be afraid of. Human society could not exist at all without centres of authority to guide and direct it. Even the smallest human society, the family, needs a centre of authority, and trouble usually follows in one way or another if this is lacking.

As far as religion is concerned, the practical question is not whether there should be some ultimate authority which will decide questions of doctrine and morals, but whether, if it be claimed that such an authority exists, the claim is true. An authoritative guide, guaranteed by God, would be of immense help to us poor human beings trying to find our way through the darkness of this world by the dim light of reason. If God has spoken, if God has intervened in history and told men what He wants them to do, then we should *want* to hear His voice, we should be *anxious* to learn His will.

## Has God Intervened?

Has God intervened in this world to tell us what He wants us to do?

Catholics claim that God in His mercy has in fact provided us with an authoritative guide. They claim that the Catholic Church can impart to us a revelation which was given to her by the Son of God who took our human nature and lived among us ( John vi, 14). This claim deserves consideration. If it is true, it means much to us. If it is false, then we can disregard the Catholic Church and look elsewhere for a reliable guide.

Some men look to themselves. They say they do not want to do harm to anyone. Their aim is to live a good life, to help others, and to find God in the peace of their own hearts. Very good; but such people differ vastly among themselves as to what goodness means. In seeking God in their own way they may only be giving in to the inclinations of human nature and taking the easy road. *If God has* spoken to men, we may not turn a deaf ear and go on our own road. For a man has an obligation to believe and do what God wants him to believe and do. Once he is convinced that God has made a revelation — or even that there is real probability of His having done so — he has an obligation to try to find out whether there is anyone who can instruct him in that revelation.

Some people say that the Bible is a sufficient guide. They have in the Bible, they claim, all that is necessary. If they are simple and sincere, then the Holy Spirit will guide and help them, and so they can be sure, they think, of doing God’s will and reaching final happiness. Unfortunately, the religious chaos around us has been created by men who made precisely this claim. From the pages of the Bible men have gathered the most diverse religious ideas and practices. Confusion and contradiction are the fruit of this principle. The Holy Spirit produces peace, harmony, concord, and unity, not confusion.

If, then, we are not reliable guides to ourselves, and the Bible, interpreted by each one’s own efforts, has not in fact proved a sufficient guide to lead men surely to God, we must look to some group, society, or organization for help. Many religious bodies — Christian and non-Christian — claim to be able to give us reliable guidance. How are we to decide among them? If we are really to weigh the claims of each one, our task will take more than a lifetime.

However, if we should see that all religious bodies, except one, fail to establish their claim, our task will be reasonably easy.

Is it difficult to reduce the claimants to one? Well, God cannot contradict Himself or authorize the teaching of error. If, then, a man realizes that in the Catholic Church there is conscious, unhesitating authority and that everywhere else there is doubt, contradiction, and uncertainty, he may well concentrate his attention on the Catholic Church. No wonder her claims constitute a positive attraction for so many!

No one, of course, wants to be taken in by a sham. No one can be satisfied with promises that cannot be realized. How, then, are we to find out whether or not the Catholic Church — our only hope of sure guidance — hides a sham?

If, for the moment, it be granted that Jesus of Nazareth founded a Church by Divine authority, should it not be possible for the ordinary man to recognize that Church? Indeed should it not be possible for the man in the street to discern in the Church's very structure evidence of her divine origin?

### **The Catholic Church?**

The Catholic Church invites men to look and see for themselves that her structure proclaims her the work of a Divine Architect:

“On account of the Catholic Church's wonderful growth and diffusion, her outstanding holiness and unending fruitfulness in every form of good, on account of her world-wide unity and her unshakable stability, she is of herself a strong and permanent motive for belief and an irrefutable testimony to her divine commission.” (The Vatican Council, Sess. III, cap. 3.)

This appeal to the splendour of the Church is made, not arrogantly, in the name of those who belong to the Church, but humbly, in the name of God, who so conquers human frailty and unworthiness as to make His power and goodness shine through the feeble human material in which He works. The Church claims, then, that a man who weighs all this impartially and with a prayer for God's guidance—who makes it his business to see the Church for what she is—will come to say: “This is of God.”

However, a man's upbringing, his approach to history, the outlook he has formed, and the thousand and one prejudices that he has been acquiring from his earliest childhood — all this may obscure his vision, so that he cannot see the Church for what she is. Again, a man may admire the Church and long to be able to accept her authority, yet he may feel that her claims conflict with reason or with the facts of history. Such a man cannot honestly enter the Church, nor will the Church consciously accept him as a member. He has a duty to re-examine the evidence and the Church invites him to put her credentials to the test of reason and history.

Before presenting the evidence for the Church's claim to be the divinely appointed teacher of God's revelation to man, I must say something about the way in which this claim is proposed.

The Church's case for the truth of her claims is fundamental and complete. It is built up step by step — premise by premise — from the first data of consciousness to the certainty of the Church's authority, which is the guarantee of her dogmatic teaching. Her case vindicates the power of the mind to reach truth; it establishes, first, the existence of God, that He has made a revelation and made it through Jesus Christ, whom He sent into the world, that Jesus is Son of God in a special way — being one with Him in the Divine Nature — and, then, that Christ committed God's revelation to the Church and guaranteed that the Church should transmit it faithfully to all ages.

But I am not writing for agnostics, so I will here take the first premises of Christianity as granted. Accordingly, I will examine the evidence in the light of a fact that is readily accepted by non-Catholics generally, namely, that Jesus Christ is, at the very least, God's accredited envoy, who came upon earth to teach men the truth. Once this fact is admitted, it raises the urgent questions: What did He teach? Can we now attain to the knowledge of His truth? What, then, do the historical records of the beginnings of Christianity say?

### **The Way, the Truth, and the Life**

The inquirer will find himself confronted with three facts:—

1. *Christ taught one great truth — Himself.* “I am the Way,” He said, “and the Truth, and the Life” (John' xiv, 6). And again: “He that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John viii, 12). In teaching

this central truth He taught a great number of theological truths that are inseparably linked with it. “I and the Father,” He said, “are one Being” (John x, 30). And He promised: The Father “shall give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth” (John xiv, 16). “Apart from Me,” He asserted, “you can do nothing” (John xv, 5). And so on. Hence, His teaching was by no means confined to ethical maxims. He declared, too, that He was about to found a Kingdom and that membership of it was obligatory on men.

2. *He demanded assent to His teaching.* Acceptance of Christ — the following of Christ — included belief in all that He taught. True, He revealed His doctrine gradually, and one might follow Him with little knowledge of His teaching; but when He did propose a truth, He insisted on its acceptance. When, for example, He uttered a certain “hard saying”, some of those who had been following Him did not accept it. Christ did not compromise with them. “After this many of His disciples withdrew and went with Him no more. Jesus then said to the twelve: ‘Do you, too, wish to go away?’” (John, vi, 66-67). Thus He calmly challenged the belief of His closest friends: they could have no part with Him unless they were prepared to accept His teaching. He alone is the Way, and they must believe His Truth in order to possess His Life.

3. *He chose certain men — His ‘Apostles’ — and trained them as teachers of men.* To the crowds He spoke in parables, but to His Apostles, He said, it was “given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. xiii, 11). To them also His revelation was made gradually. The Holy Spirit whom He would send, would bring to their minds, He said, all things that He had taught them (John xiv, 26), and the same Spirit would guide them to the whole truth (John xvi, 13). Finally, He gave them a solemn commission: “Go, therefore, and teach all the nations — teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and, behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matt. xxviii, 19-20). Notice the terms of this commission. The mandate given to the Apostles extends to all nations and to all ages. They are to “teach” all the nations. To “teach” does not mean merely transmitting Our Lord’s words. It means — proposing His doctrine, explaining it, solving the learner’s difficulties, guiding him to full assent, and so making the doctrine part of his being. Christ will be with His Apostles in this work, and it is to go on till “the end of the world.” Assent to this teaching is, moreover, obligatory: “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved: and he that does not believe shall be condemned” (Mark xvi, 16). (Of course Our Lord did not mean to say that a man who, through no fault of his own did not accept the Christian revelation would be condemned for his unbelief.)

### **The Master’s Work Continues**

As the enquirer reads on in the New Testament, he will see how the Apostles carried out the task committed to them:—

1. *They taught the same great truth — Christ.* For the Apostles, to “preach Christ” did not mean merely to recount His life-work, but also to teach all the truths He taught. St. John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John xiii, 23) and the constant preacher of brotherly love, insisted uncompromisingly on the existence of a body of doctrine which could be distinguished from perversions: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring the teaching of Christ, do not have him inside your house. Do not even greet him. For anyone who greets him, shares in the evil he is doing” (2 John, 10). St. Paul wrote to Timothy: “Everything that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, hand on, in your turn, to reliable men who will be able to teach others” (2 Tim. ii, 2). Further, for St. Paul the truth was a “deposit” that must be “guarded” and kept free from “the profane babblings and subtleties of so-called ‘knowledge’, which some have followed and have gone astray in faith” (1 Tim. vi, 20).

2. *They demanded assent.* When Peter preached at Pentecost, “*They... that accepted* what he said were baptized... And they persevered in the teaching of the Apostles... (Acts ii, 41-42). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: “...when your ears received God’s message from us, you welcomed, not the word of men, but, as it truly is, the word of God” (1 Thess. ii, 13). And to the Galatians: “Now, even if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel different from the Gospel we have preached to you let a curse be on him” (Gal. i, 8).

Now, when the inquirer turns to the history of the Church, he will find that this confidence in the truth of her message, this same insistence on unqualified assent to her teaching, has characterized her in every age. The Fathers of the Church proposed the Apostolic doctrine with no less insistence than did the Apostles. From the first General Council — Nicaea 325 A.D. — every Ecumenical Council has insisted on the acceptance of its teaching as certainly

free from all error. Today, this consciousness of the power to teach with authority is to be found only in the Catholic Church. Everywhere else we find doubt, contradiction, and uncertainty. Then, either the Catholic Church is alone the Church of Christ, or it must be admitted that Christ's Church — which for centuries taught with an unwavering voice and rebuked unbelief as He rebuked it — has lost her voice, lost her power to discern truth from error, and now presents to men a confused jumble of conflicting doctrines. But such an admission gives the lie to Christ's promise to be with His Apostles "to the end of the world." How is a man to believe if he cannot know for certain what Christ taught?

What verdict, then, must the inquirer pass upon the Catholic Church? Can he admit her claims? This Church — a religious organization dating back to the time of Christ — says in no uncertain voice that she is the infallible guide appointed by Christ and that her Head on earth, the Pope, is infallible in the same way as the Church is infallible.

### **The See of Rome**

A common reply to this claim is to assert that Papal Infallibility has no foundation in Sacred Scripture. But, notice, once you have taken up that attitude, you have prejudged the later evidence for belief in the Papal prerogatives, and you have consequently set yourself the colossal task of explaining away that evidence. Having dismissed one testimony after another, you will come to a point in the early history of the Church when you will have to admit that both East and West recognized the Bishop of Rome as the *divinely appointed* spokesman of orthodoxy. This being so, we may well ask how an error in so important a question does not contradict Christ's promise to safeguard His Church from error. But if you do find in Scripture real justification for Papal Infallibility, then history shows that Christ has been faithful to His promise and that the testimonies to the Papal prerogatives — growing more and ever more explicit — are indications that Christ is with His Church, teaching her through the Holy Spirit and deepening her knowledge of the truth He committed to her.

The early Christians — for example, St. Irenaeus — did not, perhaps, discern the Papal prerogatives in their fullness, but they did know that Christ had made St. Peter the chief of the Apostles; they did recognize that the Church was infallible and that the See of Rome was the chief See of the infallible Church and the guardian of her tradition. The Vatican definition in 1870 was the most explicit as yet of the definitions of the sense in which that See is the chief See of the infallible Church, of the sense in which it is the custodian of the Church's tradition.

It would be impossible to set out the early testimonies to the Papal prerogatives in a pamphlet such as this, so I will confine myself to the Scriptural evidence. Does the New Testament support the Catholic position? Does it show that Christ intended to found such a Church as the Catholic Church and to give it a Head on earth with such powers as the Pope now exercises?

### **The Petrine Claims**

In their treatment of the New Testament evidence Protestants often allow themselves much liberty. They dismiss the passages in *St. Luke* (xxii, 32) and *St. John* (xxi, 15-17) on some such ground as that they do not seem to be very much to the point. Thus they are able to reduce the evidence to *St. Matthew* (xvi, 18). Then they turn round and accuse us of building a whole theology on a single text. Is this really the state of the question? No. The fact is, the New Testament contains abundant evidence for the Primacy of St. Peter.

The Kingdom of God which Our Lord preached was not to be merely the reign of God in the hearts of men, nor was it to be merely the triumph of Christ in His elect at the end of the world. It was to be also an external Kingdom, that is, an organized religious society composed of rulers and ruled, teachers and taught. Many of the parables (For example, Matt. xx, i seqq.; xxii, 1 seqq.; Luke xii, 32; John x, 1-16.) clearly suppose an external Kingdom, and the fact that not only good but also *wicked* (cf. Matt. xiii, 24; xiii, 47; xxii, 12.) men will be found in the Kingdom shows that the Kingdom must be external. That it was to be an organized society is clear from the fact that Christ chose a body of men whom He commissioned to go and "make disciples of all the nations, ...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. xxviii, 19 and 20). And He formally endowed them with authority: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John xx, 21). And again: "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in

Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed in Heaven” (Matt. xviii, 18) . This power of jurisdiction is intelligible only in an organized society.

Most Protestants are ready to admit that the text in *St. Matthew* gives, as they say, “a special position to Peter.” But the question is: What is the *nature* of that “special position”? St. Peter’s position in the Kingdom — the new religious society that Christ was founding — was that of its visible Head on earth. That is to say, Peter was to have supreme power from Christ to rule the Church and teach her. In considering the New Testament evidence for this, I can deal only with the main trends and such of the confirmatory evidence as is necessary to bring out the chief points.

### **Peter in the Gospels**

When Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, Our Lord, “gazing on him, said: ‘You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Kephas’ (which means Rock)” (John i, 42). (Our Lord spoke in Aramaic and in this language the word was Kepha. The Greek form of this Aramaic word was Kephas; but if the word were to be translated into Greek, then it could have two forms. If it was used simply for a rock it would be *petra* (feminine), but if it was to be used as a man’s name, then it would have to be the masculine form, *Petros*. Hence our word “Peter.”)

The scene here recorded is not an isolated incident but the beginning of a series of closely related incidents that stand out as a whole theme in the Gospel narrative. Christ, speaking with a gravity that becomes an important occasion, confers a new name upon Simon. He does this with the knowledge that the men who are present will one day recognize Him for what He is — God — and will recall how God had more than once in the story of their nation given a man a new name to signify a new function that he was to have in the divine scheme. Thus, Abram was given the name “Abraham” (Genesis xvii, 5). Christ knows, then, that His action must ultimately be regarded as one of high import. And since He could do nothing casually or thoughtlessly, He must have acted on a consistent plan of which He was fully conscious. From this first scene in which he receives the name “Rock”, Simon plays an outstanding *role* in the Gospel drama. Thus, in the matter of the Primacy there is no question of building a theology on a single text; for we cannot see the full force of the Petrine texts unless we take them as part of the Petrine theme. Indeed, it would be very unreasonable to ignore the interrelation of these texts; for the New Testament, the work of the one Holy Spirit acting through various human instruments, must be taken as a whole. Consequently, in tracing the course of Christ’s dealings with Simon we must not forget the giving of this significant name.

In fact, we cannot escape the problem: Christ knew what was in man; He did not have to learn Simon’s character, as we do, from the events that followed. At this first meeting (and before it) He knew Simon through and through. Now, there was nothing rock-like about the impetuous Simon. One moment it is: “You shall never wash my feet,” and the next: “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” ( John xiii, 8-9). As we follow Simon through the Gospels, searching for a solution of the problem of his ill-fitting name, another problem, inseparable from the first, arises: Why is he singled out from the rest? Simon, bearing, so far as his personal character is concerned, the incongruous name of “Rock”, is obviously leader and spokesman of the Twelve. In all the catalogues of the Apostles, Peter is placed first, though the other names are not always in the same order. In *Matthew* we read: “These are the names of the twelve Apostles: first, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, his brother . . .” (x, 2). *Mark* says: “So He appointed the Twelve: Simon, to whom He gave the, name Peter, and James . . .” (iii,17). *Luke* reads: “Simon (whom He called Peter) and Andrew . . .” (vi, 14). In the *Acts* we find: “Peter and John and James . . .” (i, 13). Even when only the favourite three are mentioned, Peter is always named first (Matt. xxvi, 31; Mark v, 37; xiv, 33).

### **Prominence of Peter**

The explanation of this special emphasis on Peter is obviously to be found in the fact that *he was singled out by Christ Himself*. For Jesus frequently associated Peter with Himself in a very significant way. When He walked across the waters of the Lake of Galilee towards the Apostles’ boat (Matt. xiv, 25), it is Peter that steps out of the boat at His bidding and walks towards Him over the waves. When Peter’s faith begins to fail, Our Lord restores it, and they walk together on the water. Our Lord will later assure Peter (luke xxii, 32) that a time will come when his faith will never fail again. When the collectors of the Temple-tax approach Peter and demand the tax, Jesus works a miracle and provides a coin that is just enough to pay the tax for Himself and Peter: “Give it to them, for both of us” (Matt. xvii,

27). Presumably the others paid the tax in the ordinary way. Thus, the association of Peter with Christ is not only close but exclusive. And can it be a mere coincidence that Christ chose to teach the people from Peter's boat? (Luke vj 3). Or is it just an accident that when He wished to enact an allegory of the apostolate Jesus commanded Peter, the leader of His chosen band, to launch out into the deep that under his direction the disciples might let down their nets for the miraculous draught of fish? (Luke v, 3-10; Matt. iv, 19).

Finally, notice how frequently Peter is mentioned in the Gospel narrative — far more frequently than any other Apostle — and then frankly take up the double problem we have before us: the giving of the name “Rock” to Simon and the unique emphasis laid on Simon in Christ's dealings with the Twelve. Can we find a solution to this twofold problem? We can. For Our Lord provides the solution Himself (Matt. xvi, 13-19).

About a year before He died, Our Lord asked the Apostles what men were saying about Him. They told Him. Then He asked them what they themselves thought. Simon answered: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Christ first remarked that Simon was a privileged man in knowing this truth, because it was not something that had come to him by any natural means: this truth had been revealed to him by the Father. Then Our Lord went on, addressing Simon alone:

**“And I, in My turn, tell you: You are ‘Rock’ and upon this Rock I will build My Church, And the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against her.**

**And I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, And whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound in Heaven,**

**And what you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed in Heaven.”**

The problem is solved: Simon is Rock, not for what he is, but for the position he is to hold. That is, he is singled out because upon him is to rest the Church that Christ will build upon earth. Christ is obviously conferring some great reward on Simon for Simon's wonderful confession of faith, and He speaks with solemnity and emphasis; but Our Lord's words can only be fully understood if we remember, as was explained above, that Our Lord would have used only one word for “Peter” and for “rock”, and, if we are to bring out Our Lord's exact meaning, the text should be translated as I have translated it above.

**“It fell not —”**

Our Lord's aim and purpose in building His Church on this rock-foundation is obvious — He wishes to ensure its permanence. This is clear from Our Lord's words on this occasion alone; but even if Our Lord had been a mere man, we should have been prone to see in these words a reference to His parable of the wise man who built his house upon the solid rock: “...and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not fall, because it was founded upon the rock” (Matt. i:vii, 25). However, when we recognize Our Lord for what He is, and when we allow for the necessary continuity of His thought, it is natural to see in His statement that He will build His Church upon a rock, the expression of an intention to found His Church in such a way that it will not fall. Hence, we must conclude that, in some way or other, Simon is to be the means which Christ will adopt to give stability and endurance to His Church. For the function performed by the bedrock is to sustain, unite, and give stability to the whole building. But the only way in which *one man* can perform this function in a society is by exercising *supreme authority* over that society; and, what is more, Christ in giving the keys to Peter shows, as we shall see, that Peter's function is to be one of supreme authority.

Christ, therefore, promised to Simon basic, and hence supreme, authority over the whole religious society which He was to establish — His Church. But — His Church was not to perish at the death of Peter. Therefore, the office of Peter as Supreme Head of the Church on earth was to be transmitted to Peter's successors, and thus the Church, because “it was founded upon the rock”, would never succumb to the powers of Hell, but would endure “always, even to the end of the world” (Matt. xxviii, 20). But if the rock-foundation is taken away, the Church will perish, because, then, either the Gates of Hell will prevail against her, or she will cease to be the Church of Christ. No one who really believes that Christ is God and could do what He said can conceive that the Church has suffered either of these evil ends. Therefore, we must conclude that the office of Peter, the Rock, exists and is exercised today by a successor of Peter.

## The Keys of the Kingdom

The same idea — supreme power of jurisdiction — is expressed by the words: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” It is evident from Isaiah that the Jews understood the giving of keys to mean the conferring of supreme authority: “And the key of the House of David will lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (xxii, 22). Christ Himself, by His own right, had supreme authority over all men: “This is what the Holy One, the True One says — He who has the Key of David. When He opens, no one can close again, and when He closes, no one can open any more” (Apocalypse iii, 7). Accordingly, by giving the keys of the Kingdom of God to Peter, Christ gave him delegated power over all things in the Kingdom. In order that there should be no doubt that He intended to give Peter supreme power and authority, Christ added: “Whatsoever you shall bind...”, etc.

Our Lord gave this same power of binding and loosing to all the Apostles (Matt. xviii, 18), that is, to the others *with* Peter, but not independently of Peter. But He gave this power to Peter alone, independently of the others. Therefore, it can be exercised by Peter alone or by the others together with Peter, and in that sense the other Apostles shared in it. Thus, at the present day, the Pope may exercise his supreme powers alone and independently, or the bishops may act together with him — for example, in a general council. But no other Apostle was called the Rock, (That is, the bed-rock (in Greek: *petra*) which sustains even the foundations. The Apostles together were the twelve foundation-stones (in Greek: *thernelioi*) of the Church (Apocalypse xxi, 14); but Peter was also the support of the whole building. In Scriptural figures of speech we must attend to the meaning of each, without confusing one with the other. Christ founded His Church upon the Apostles, and therefore upon Peter inasmuch as Peter was an Apostle. But Christ made Peter also the authoritative head over His whole Church, and thus Peter stood to the Church, regarded as a religious society, in that relation which the bed-rock bears to the foundations of a building and to the whole building itself. To no other Apostle were the keys of the Kingdom given. The conclusion is inescapable: Christ gave to Simon Peter supreme power of jurisdiction over His Church. But as this power was to be the stabilizing and unifying principle of the Kingdom, Christ must have intended Peter’s office to be perpetuated in successors.

### “I Have Prayed For Thee—”

Our Lord’s words recorded in St. Luke’s gospel (xxii, 32) are concerned rather with safeguarding Peter from error in doctrine than with his power of jurisdiction. Speaking first through Peter to all the Apostles, Our Lord said: “Simon, Simon, Satan has sought to have you (all), in order to sift you like wheat.” Then He addressed Peter *alone*. This fact — that He spoke to Peter alone — is not clear in most modern English translations, but it can be brought out by recourse to earlier English: “But I have prayed for *thee* that *thy* faith may not fail. And when once *thou* hast recovered, do *thou* strengthen *thy* brethren.” Here we see Our Lord opposing Himself to Satan, His prayer to what Satan sought, His object to Satan’s. That same night the Apostles were indeed “sifted”, and their human weakness was shown to the full. This was, as Christ foretold, especially true of Peter. Satan got what he wanted. We cannot suppose that Christ’s prayer was left unanswered. Once Peter had recovered himself, he, whom Christ had earlier named the Rock, was to support (This is the meaning of the Greek word used by St. Luke — establish, strengthen, support...) his brethren, and Christ’s prayer for Peter’s faith would be the guarantee of his being able to do so. Christ knew that Peter would show human weakness in the face of danger, yet He nevertheless declared that despite his disloyalty Peter would — once he had recovered — receive the position promised to him a year previously (Matt. xvi). (I speak of Simon’s “disloyalty” because his fall was not a failure in faith. What Simon denied was that he was associated with the Prisoner: “I do not know Him”— Luke xxii, 57).

It is important to notice the significant parallel between this passage in St. Luke’s gospel and that in which St. Matthew records the promise. In *Matthew*, Christ declares that Peter’s faith in His divinity is divinely inspired, and He promises the Primacy to Peter; in *Luke*, Christ declares that Peter’s faith will be divinely preserved, and He declares, in effect, that, notwithstanding the denial, the promise will hold good. In *Matthew*, Christ declares that He will make Peter the Rock that is to support His Church, so that the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against her; in *Luke*, Christ gives Peter the task of supporting the faith of his brethren against the attacks of Satan; for Satan’s attack was not to be confined to the night of the betrayal (Ephesians vi, 12).

But this passage not only brings out the Petrine office very clearly, it also emphasizes the important fact that Peter is weak and very human without the aid of Christ. When Peter was sinking into the waters of the Lake of Galilee, Christ had to support him. So, too, Peter could, unaided by Christ, sink into error and heresy. Nor is more claimed for the Pope than that *by Christ's own express will* and *by Christ's special help*, he will never propose for the Church's belief anything erroneous in faith or morals.

### **“Shepherd My Sheep”**

After the Resurrection Christ our Lord appeared to several of the Apostles beside the Lake of Galilee, and He questioned Peter three times on his love for Him, and in response to each assertion of love on Peter's part Christ charged him successively: “Feed My lambs. Shepherd My sheep. Feed My sheep” (John xxi, 15-18). The threefold repetition of the question has reference to Peter's threefold denial that he knew Christ, and thus Our Lord exacted from him a kind of reparation. But the command to feed and tend Christ's sheep and lambs cannot be taken as indicating a restoration to the apostolate — as some non-Catholic writers wish to take it — because Our Lord had already recognized Peter as an Apostle. (See John xii 19-28). Further, although all four Evangelists record Christ's prediction of Peter's denial and the denial itself, none of them suggests that Peter ever forfeited the apostolic Office. On the contrary, after the death of Judas the Apostles are termed — even before Peter is charged to feed Christ's sheep — the eleven, not the ten. The constant use of the name Rock for Simon in the Acts shows beyond all doubt that the Apostles and new-born Church understood that Peter had received the position that Christ had described in the scene of the promise. Or are we to believe that Simon was known to all as “Rock” precisely because he had forfeited his right to that name? Rather, Christ here fulfilled the promise that He made a year previously and renewed when, having foretold in the same breath Peter's disloyalty and subsequent repentance, He commanded him to assume in due time the position for which he had been destined.

Christ alone, by His own right, is Shepherd of His flock, and He stresses this fact in the very words He uses: “Feed My lambs, My sheep.” Hitherto He had never treated His Apostles as shepherds of His flock but rather as themselves belonging to it — “Fear not, little flock” (Luke xii, 32). Now, without prejudice to the powers He had given to them all, He deputed to Peter the office of Shepherd which had hitherto been His own and which He had already implicitly promised. The Apostles remained members of the flock. But Peter is given supreme authority over the flock — supreme authority, but delegated. Now, the flock cannot be left untended. Therefore, Peter and his successors *act only by Christ's power and authority*. Christ arranged things in that way, and we must accept His arrangement and obey His Vicar. It is not for us to determine what Christ should or *could have done*: we must accept what He *did do* and obey His will.

Some Protestant writers make much of the fact that St. Luke and St. Mark do not quote the promise: “Upon this Rock...”. But in *Luke* there is, as we have seen, a Petrine text that is equally significant, though less explicit. Mark, who wrote what he heard Peter preach, omits a number of things to Peter's credit and heightens those to his discredit. Peter's modesty would naturally cause him to refrain from emphasizing his own pre-eminence, especially as that pre-eminence was accepted by all. We must remember also that the mere omission of a truth does not imply any denial of it. Mark, in fact, omits a number of truths that are vital to the Gospel as a whole. Some basis for an argument might be found if all the vital truths of the Christian Revelation were found in each gospel, with the exception of this promise. Indeed, if the promise *had* appeared in *Mark*, the wayward critic would have been only too ready to attribute this to Peter's ambition. Evasions readily suggest themselves to the mind that is unwilling to accept a truth.

### **Peter in the Acts of the Apostles**

Some Protestant writers interpret the *Acts of the Apostles* in such a way as to make this book seem contrary to the claims that Catholics make for St. Peter. Now, I have already pointed out that the other Apostles could be said to share in Peter's power, that is, when all acted together as The Twelve. Nor was there any reason why St. Peter should assert his headship on every occasion. In point of fact, though, we find the Apostles unobtrusively according pre-eminence to Peter. Even St. Paul's rebuke to him implies, as we shall see, Peter's pre-eminence. Naturally, there was little call for the exercise of the primatial powers while the Apostles were establishing the Faith, nor, indeed, was their explicit

exercise unmistakable until the Church had reached an advanced degree of organization. The Primacy was undoubtedly established chiefly for the sake of the post-Apostolic Church, and the Church naturally had greater need of “support” after the death of the Apostles.

But that Peter *had* the Primacy and that his Primacy was recognized in Apostolic times there can be no doubt. It is Peter who takes the initiative in filling the place left vacant by Judas, and it is Peter who determines the qualifications required in the man who was to succeed Judas (i, 15-22). It is Peter who speaks on behalf of the Apostolic band to the multitude (ii, 14), and it is Peter who inaugurates the preaching of the Faith: “They that accepted what he said were baptized... (ii, 41). Peter is the spokesman of the others (iii, 12; iv, 8; v, 29), his mere shadow works miracles (v, 15) — though other Apostles are present in Jerusalem, it is “in order that *when Peter came by*, at least his shadow might fall upon some of them”, that the sick are brought to wait in the streets. Though other Apostles are present, it is Peter who judges Ananias and his wife (v, 1-10). Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was told to call Peter (x, 5), and to Peter it was revealed that the Gentiles were to be admitted into the Church without having to observe the Law of Moses (x, 9-16). Peter commanded that Cornelius and his household should be baptized (x, 48). The Jewish Christians found fault with Peter for this, but when he had explained the matter, “they held their peace” (xi, 18). It is clear, then, that in the early Christian community St. Peter had a place that was not shared by any other.

St. Luke’s way of describing the mission of Peter and John to Samaria in viii, 14, has been used against the natural conclusion that we should draw from the multitude of texts cited above. According to St. Luke, “the Apostles in Jerusalem... sent Peter and John” to the Samaritans. Obviously, St. John, as an Apostle, was not inferior to the other Apostles, and so he would not have been “sent” by the others as though he were their servant and an inferior. If this is true of St. John, it must also be true of St. Peter. Luke’s meaning, then, can only be that it was agreed that this important development in the spread of the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem called for the presence of two important Apostles.

Anyone who expects to hear that St. Peter wore a tiara or that he was surrounded with ceremonial, lacks a sense of historical perspective. The developments that came with the course of time may look like changes, but they are really manifestations of a greater understanding and of a deeper appreciation of realities. For the Church, being a *living* organism, experienced a steady growth in understanding and appreciation of what was involved in the New Covenant. Just as the Apostles, who at first spoke simply of “Jesus”, later referred to Him as “the Lord Jesus”, so there was a like growth in the Church’s reverence for the persons of His ministers. The spirit of reverence which prompted St. Paul to rebuke the Corinthians for their unseemly conduct in the reception of the Eucharist (1 Cor. xi, 17-34) has never ceased to work upon the Christian mind. It prompted the Church to enrich the sanctuary with all the beauty that human skill could devise. Later, the Church caused special garments to be set aside for Mass, and later still the spirit of reverence inspired the adoption of a special dress for the clergy. It was the same unerring spirit that caused the Church to show more and ever more reverence for the person of the Vicar of Christ. It was really esteem for Peter that made Rhoda leave him standing on the doorstep (Acts. xii, 13-17). It is esteem for Peter’s Successor that makes Noble Guardsmen take their place beside the Papal throne. Obviously, these two manifestations of esteem are separated by a vast process of evolution, but they are both centred on the Supreme Head of the Church on earth.

The synod at Jerusalem (Acts xv) has been used as an argument against the Primacy of St. Peter. Yet, when we read the passage in the *Acts* we find that it was Peter’s intervention that determined the *doctrinal* issue. Paul and Barnabas got a hearing only after Peter had intervened. St. James added nothing *doctrinal* to Peter’s decision. Rather, he merely suggested certain practical or disciplinary measures which would make fusion with the Gentiles easy for Christians of Jewish upbringing. The synod agreed, and it naturally expressed its determination in the plural: “It seemed good... to us...”.

### **St. Peter Rebuked by Paul**

Much is made of the incident at Antioch by opponents of the Primacy and Infallibility of St. Peter. Paul tells us (Galatians ii, 11-14) that Peter was accustomed to eat with the Gentile converts in that city, until some Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem. Then he ate only with Jewish Christians. St. Paul saw the possible consequences of such action, and he did not hesitate to point out to Peter that his action was inconsistent with his beliefs. Obviously, it was the way Peter was acting that was condemned by St. Paul. *Both agreed on doctrine*. Nor is this incident

prejudicial to the case for Peter's supreme jurisdiction over the Church. Not infrequently in the history of the Church we find the most loyal bishops giving advice to the Popes, and these bishops have been animated by the same motive as St. Paul — the desire that the visible Head of the Church should do as well as teach what is appropriate.

The Antioch incident, indeed, is rather a boomerang for those who use it against the Primacy of Peter. *It was precisely because of his supreme position in the Church that Peter's actions were so important.* Otherwise St. Paul could have used his own very great Apostolic authority to deal with the situation. He could not, and the only reason can be the superiority of Peter's position. Even St. Paul's great friend Barnabas followed Peter's example. The *only* remedy was to persuade St. Peter to resume his former relations with the Gentile converts. Peter was great-hearted enough to admit his mistake and humble enough to correct it.

These and various other arguments against the Primacy and Infallibility of St. Peter have been put forward since the Reformation and are still appearing in print or cropping up in discussions. They were not valid arguments when they were first invented, and constant repetition has not changed their nature. To some people they may afford comfort, but they are not proofs. The Scriptural confirmation of the Church's teaching remains unshaken. We see from the New Testament that Christ gave a special and significant name to Simon. He explained this name as involving an office of supreme authority in His Church, and He made it clear that this office, guaranteed by His divine power, was independent of Simon's natural qualifications for it. After the Resurrection Christ conferred this office upon Simon, and the *Acts* show Simon, surnamed Peter, acting as the Head of the Church. A man might well search the recesses of his heart and see what really prevents him from accepting the natural conclusion of this proof.

To many non-Catholics the Petrine claims are repellent simply because they do not understand those claims, especially the claims made for the successor of St. Peter. It is very important to note the purpose of Papal Infallibility, which is the preservation and transmission of revealed truth, without error or distortion. In other words, through this arrangement made by Christ our Lord we can know with certainty what He taught and what He meant. This is a blessing of immense value to every one of us.

The question whether this or that solemn utterance of the Pope, freely expressed, comes within the scope of the Vatican definition of Infallibility is for Catholics largely a question of technical interest. The Pope speaks infallibly at least when, as Supreme Pastor of the Church, he freely and authoritatively teaches the Church on matters of faith or morals. If, in a given instance, it is not clear that he has so spoken, there may be some doubt about the infallibility of the teaching — there can be no doubt about the Pope's authority to teach and our duty to heed him. (Cf. Luke x, 16.)

### **When God Speaks —**

The harmony of Catholic theology, founded on the Church's teaching throughout the ages, is itself an eloquent testimony to Christ's fidelity to His promise to be with His Church "always, even to the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii, 20). We accept the teachings of the Church and of its visible Head on the authority of God Himself. God, as supreme Lord and Master, has the right to demand the assent of the human mind, and consequently the submission of the whole man, to whatsoever He reveals to us. When we come to know where His Revelation is to be found unmixed with error, we are bound to accept that Revelation, even though it necessarily deprive us of the "liberty" of entertaining various opinions. (The same thing occurs in natural knowledge: once I know that two and two make four, I am no longer intellectually free to think that they make fifteen or fifty.) Truth alone perfects the mind. Error, ignorance, and agnostic "comprehensiveness" are a frustration of the very nature of the intellect and cannot be anything but imperfections, often very dangerous and injurious ones.

It may be well to add that a Papal definition cannot be more than a clarification of the doctrine already revealed to the Apostles. Thus while in their account of the Incarnation the Apostles never used the phrase "two natures", Leo I in defining the two natures, merely clarified the doctrine contained in such phrases as "the Word was made flesh." The Pope — to quote Karl Adam — "does not speak as a despot in his own right, as some absolute monarch, but as the head of the Church, in intimate vital relationship to the complete organism of the Church. So he cannot, like a Delphic Oracle, give dogmatic decisions purely at his own discretion and according to his own subjective notions. On the contrary, he is bound, as the Vatican Council emphatically declares, bound strongly in conscience, to proclaim and interpret that revelation which is contained in the written and unwritten mind of the Church, in the twin sources of our faith, sacred Scripture and Tradition." (The Spirit of Catholicism, chapter 3.)

To take another example, we find Pope Leo XIII pointing out to Catholic Biblical scholars that their labours can help to bring to maturity the judgement of the Church. (Providentissimus Deus, Nov. 18, 1893.) Through the Church's life of prayer, through discussions among her teachers, and through controversy itself, the judgement of the Church is matured, and it belongs to the Pope — with or without a General Council — to give the final statement of that judgement. It should be clearly understood that the Pope's function as a teacher is not dependent upon private revelations. Faithful to His promise, Christ has given the Holy Spirit to the Church to be her teacher for all time. The Church's commission being to teach all things whatsoever Christ commanded, the Holy Spirit does not give new revelations of doctrine: He works through the Church's pastors and scholars and the faithful themselves, using their human faculties as a means of giving to the Church a firmer perception of the truths contained in the Christian Revelation.

I may add that the Pope was always equally infallible. The Vatican definition of 1870 conferred no new power or authority on the Pope: it was a clarification of the doctrine implied, for example, in the charge to confirm the brethren and in such ancient phrases as: "the See to which heresy cannot have access." (St. Cyprian, Ep. 59, n, I4 (252 A.D.).) The Vatican definition stated that, in certain circumstances — when the Pope acts in a certain manner — a Papal definition is necessarily free from error. Infallibility is, then, in practice, freedom from error. That is, we can, even nineteen hundred years after Christ, possess certainty in doctrine. Anglicanism — to take a conspicuous example — by its conscious impotence to teach, has practically destroyed in the minds of many of its adherents the idea of absolute religious truth and the hope of attaining certainty in doctrine and belief. This was not Christ's plan. He wanted us to have certainty.

The Pope, then, exists for the sake of the Church and for the good of the Church. As far as jurisdiction is concerned, he has supreme authority over the Church on earth. Yet, we must always remember, it is precisely *through* this supreme jurisdiction that the Holy Father ensures the good of the Church. *This* was Christ Our Lord's plan.

### **What Does it Mean to Me?**

We have argued long enough. I am tired of it myself. No one is convinced by mere argument, yet claims must be proved, misunderstandings and misrepresentations corrected. Then we must pray...

It may be helpful to ask what, in practical daily life, does the Infallibility of the Pope and his supreme authority over the Church mean to me? Do these doctrines enter in any way into my personal daily life, or are they something to be defended just because I am a Catholic and this is the teaching of the Catholic Church?

Let us visit in imagination the Lake of Galilee twenty centuries ago. Peter's boat is standing off the shore. From it there comes a clear, strong voice speaking not only with conviction but with unhesitating authority. The Speaker claims to have a right to my most complete loyalty, to the surrender of anything, everything, for His sake, for the truths He is stating.

The crowd is silent.

No man ever spoke as this Man speaks.

He says that His words will never perish, though heaven and earth may pass away.

Can I hear these words today, and be sure that they are *His* words — all of them, saying just what He meant, offering all He had to give? Can I be sure that I am following the way of life He wanted me to follow, receiving all the helps He provided for His followers?

His voice no longer thrills our atmosphere, but it speaks still.

Yes; that same calm, clear voice is speaking still, with the same confident authority, though the accents may be those of an aging Italian peasant.

Listening to this guiding, reassuring, voice, I feel that I am not alone, groping in the twilight. I do not find myself with a Book in my hands and hear a thousand discordant voices telling me what it means.

No; I am confident that I hear again the authentic, directing voice of Christ, because He said that He would give His Spirit of truth to His Church. He said that He Himself would be always with that Church.

He could not be mistaken.

\*\*\*\*\*