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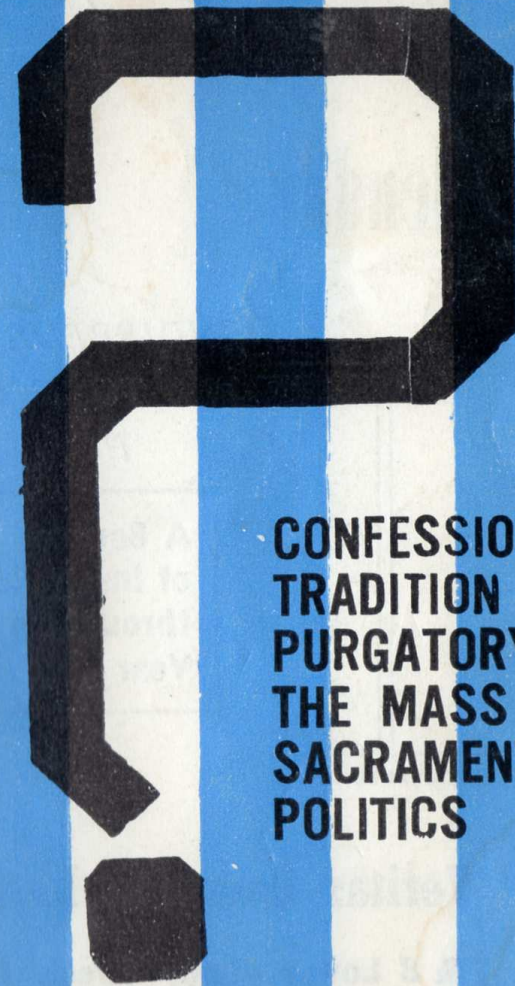
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CATHOLIC ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS



**CONFESSION
TRADITION
PURGATORY
THE MASS
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POLITICS**

Booklet III

**Put by some Protestants during the Clonard Missions
for All Denominations, 1949-'59**

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CATHOLIC ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

BOOKLET III



CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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FOREWORD

The original foreword over the names of Father S. O'Riordan and of myself tells how the questions and answers in these three booklets had their origin in a series of lectures for all denominations given by us in the Redemptorist Church at Clonard, Belfast during the Lent of 1949. That foreword was printed in each of those booklets. Henceforth it will be printed in Booklet I only. From it I quote the following paragraph :

“ Here then are our answers to all the N.U.P.'s questions. Taken together they amount to a statement of Catholic teaching on a number of important and topical subjects. As such they will, we trust, serve a twofold purpose. On the one hand they will give interested inquirers a true picture of what we Catholics believe, as distinct from what we are often credited with believing. On the other hand they will facilitate for Catholics themselves the observance of the Scriptural precept : If anyone asks you to give an account of the hope which you cherish, be ready at all times to answer for it, but courteously and with due reverence. (1, Peter, 3, 15-16 : Knox's translation).”

Courteously and with all due reverence. Reverence is first a state of mind and of feeling ; then it must show itself in word and deed. We must take for granted that those who question us about our religion are sincere ; we must also show that we believe them to be sincere.

The initials N.U.P. stand for National Union of Protestants. Their Irish headquarters is in Belfast. Their motto is “ *Set for the Defence of the Gospel* ”—*Phil.* 1, 17. Mr. Norman Porter, their Organising Secretary, later M.P., wrote to us in 1949 that they felt it their duty to meet what they considered to be a challenge to the Protestant faith. We tried to make him see that our mission was not intended as a challenge. His answer was to the effect that the mere statement of our Catholic position to Protestants

amounted, in his opinion, to a challenge. Some would call this bigotry, but let us try to see it from his point of view. Strong faith and zeal for the truth can easily be mistaken for bigotry, especially in these days of religious indifference. I could wish that all Christians took their religion as seriously as Mr. Porter, even though the consequences might not make the world a more pleasant place to live in. It is not one of the chief aims of Christianity to make this world more pleasant, as indifferent Christians like to believe. It is all the more welcome, then, when, without any compromise of Christian principle, some pleasant result is in fact achieved. This I believe to have happened. It was one result of our meetings with the N.U.P. in 1949.

The foreword to Booklet I mentions a private meeting in Clonard Monastery, at which Mr. Porter and three members of the N.U.P. put certain questions to us. It was agreed then that we should all meet again and that the President and other prominent members of the N.U.P. would be present. That meeting took place three months later in a Belfast hotel on 16th August, 1949. Next day a report appeared in all the four Belfast daily papers. I quote the following from the Unionist paper, *The Belfast News-Letter* :

PRIESTS' DISCUSSION WITH PROTESTANTS

In response to an invitation issued by the Very Rev. G. J. Reynolds, rector of Clonard Monastery, to discuss the answers to questions on Roman Catholic doctrine, posed by the National Union of Protestants during the recent mission in Clonard Roman Catholic Church for all denominations, clergymen and laymen of various Christian denominations, met in Belfast last night.

Among those taking part in the meeting were the Rev. Canon Henry O'Connor (president N.U.P.), the Rev. Douglas Stranex, the Rev. Ian R. K. Paisley, the Rev. E. H. Titcombe, the Rev. Frederick S. Leahy, Principal James Willoughby, Pastor Minnis Mills, Mr. Norman Porter (organising secretary N.U.P.), and Mr. David Porteous.

The Rev. J. J. W. Murphy, hon. C.F., and the Rev. Dr. S. O'Riordan, who had conducted the mission, explained various points of their Church's teaching.

An official agreed statement issued afterwards says: "There was general agreement that in the arguments each ought to recognise the absolute sincerity of the other, which kept the discussion on a high level. The meeting lasted over two hours and a number of points were clarified with satisfaction to all concerned. The meeting expressed the hope that exchange of information on doubtful points of doctrine and on matters of fact affecting religion would continue between the members of the various Churches".

At our meeting the draft of the agreed statement to be issued to the Press went many times around the table and was amended in many points before it was unanimously accepted by all present. It was rather unfortunate that Canon O'Connor, the President of the N.U.P. had to leave in order to fulfill another engagement, before the matter of the agreed statement came up for discussion. He said afterwards that if he had been present he would not have consented to it as he considered it misleading. He also said that the statement "was drawn up by the priests" and wrote a letter to that effect which was printed by the *News-Letter*. That point was dealt with by a letter from Fr. G. J. Reynolds, the rector of Clonard Monastery, which the *News-Letter* also printed:

Sir,—I read Canon O'Connor's letter in your paper. In it he stated that "the official statement which was furnished was drawn up by the priests." This is not correct. If the Canon consults his colleagues he will find that the statement was drawn up and agreed to by the members of the National Union of Protestants together with Fathers Murphy, O'Riordan and myself. It was then read aloud for the assembly and two members of the N.U.P. copied the statement and with their own hands delivered it to the Press. Yours etc.

G. J. Reynolds, C.S.S.R., Rector.
Clonard Monastery,
August 24, 1949.

Mr. Porter also wrote to the *News-Letter* pointing out with perfect fairness that the words in the agreed statement "clarified with satisfaction" did not mean, and were not understood by anyone present to mean, more than "a better understanding of each other's doctrinal position." In the letter and at a subsequent public meeting of the N.U.P. he paid tribute "to the spirit in which the priests discussed our doctrinal differences and it was only on the showing of such a spirit by all that we did agree." At the public meeting, as reported in the *Belfast Telegraph* 7th Sept., 1949, he said: "Although many points were clarified by both sides, the deputation did not accept any of Rome's interpretations of the Holy Scripture." This of course was quite true; our discussion had consisted almost entirely of questions from the N.U.P. as to how various selected texts of Scripture could be reconciled with certain Catholic points of doctrine. The most that we could hope was that our explanations would seem sufficiently reasonable to be sincere, even if they still appeared mistaken. In that limited aim we do seem

to have had success. Even Canon O'Connor, whose letter in the *News-Letter* had shown his annoyance at the terms of our agreed statement, said at the public meeting nearly three weeks later that the N.U.P. deputation had been "courteously and kindly received" and that the members of his Union had no ill-will to any Roman Catholic, but they were against that system of religion. (Report in *Belfast Telegraph*, 7th Sept., 1949).✓

All this may seem a small achievement. It is a small achievement. It is a very long way from the conversion of Belfast. But it is better than nothing and it is on the right lines. It does not aim primarily at making converts, but at producing understanding and goodwill in all, including those who in all human probability will never become Catholics. In Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland a change of religion still entails sacrifice which few average people will make. Grace can do much, but grace has to work on human nature as it is in the individual here and now. An increase of goodwill and the consequent re-examination of anti-Catholic popular prejudices will make those sacrifices less likely to be imposed on Catholic converts by their families and by the Protestant community. Thus, on a long-term view, we may expect more converts from a policy of building up goodwill and understanding than from any other. Meantime there will be converts made and lost as there always have been. There will be cases where good will may have to be sacrificed for conscience sake and the long-term plan must give way to the immediate claim of duty. The Protestant clergy generally understand this and have no hard feelings against a priest who is faced with such an issue and does his duty. They would do the same. But a large-scale raising of such issues would be a different matter, especially if it was the evident result of a campaign for conversions. They would feel bound to oppose that campaign in every possible way. With the means available, they could make it very difficult for any convert. The net result of the campaign for conversions would probably be a drop even in the normal intake in which marriage plays a large part.

The Clonard Mission still goes on, but there have not been any more meetings of Catholic and Protestant clergy like that of 1949. The exchange of information on religious interests, which the agreed statement hoped would continue, has not continued. But if information is not exchanged, it is at least imparted. These three booklets are one way in which that is done. A

fourth booklet has been added. There are other ways, such as the Clonard Correspondence Course. All depend upon goodwill, forbearance, and, above all, faith in our neighbour's sincerity.

J. J. W. Murphy, C.S.S.R.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NOTE

The answers given herein have been grouped under the headings used by the National Union of Protestants itself when submitting its questions. There are three groups, each published in a separate booklet. The present booklet (III) contains answers on Confession, Tradition, Purgatory, the Mass, the Sacraments and Politics. Booklet I contains answers on the Pope, Indulgences, Saints, Marriage, Gambling and Drinking, and Booklet II on the Church, Images, the Bible, the Virgin Mary and Sunday.

CONFESSION

N. U. P. Questions

- (1) *What Scripture can be fairly quoted as commanding or even implying secret confession of sin to a human priest?*
- (2) *Did not the early Church Fathers teach confession to God only?*

Our Answers

(1) The question is badly stated. A Catholic is bound to confess all his grave sins to a priest. *He is not bound by any Church law to refrain from telling others about what passes between himself and the priest in Confession.* On the other hand, the priest is never free to betray the confidence of those who confess their sins to him; he may not do so even in defence of his own life or honour. Thus while Confession is in the strictest possible sense "secret" from the point of view of the priest, it is merely "private" from the point of view of the penitent. The alternative to private confession is either no confession at all or public confession. The Church teaches that a Catholic who has sinned gravely is not free to adopt the principle of no confession at all;

* New Testament texts occurring in these answers are quoted according to accurate English versions of the original Greek. The Protestant Revised Version is, from this point of view, much superior to the popular Authorised Version. See the answer to the question: "Why has your Church banned, even burned, the Holy Scriptures in many parts of the world?" (Booklet II, "The Bible").

but he need not, and normally should not, confess his sins publicly. This brings us to the core of the subject, and to meet it the question should have been framed: What Scripture can be fairly quoted as commanding or even implying confession of sin to a human priest?"

Our reply is: this duty is nowhere explicitly and unequivocally enjoined in the New Testament, but the following passages deserve attention:

(a) "Many also of those who believed came, confessing and declaring their deeds. And not a few of those who practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all" (Acts 19, 18-19). Without interpreting this passage in favour of the Catholic doctrine of sacramental confession, as does the Lutheran commentator H. J. Holtzmann (*Apostelgeschichte*, in h.l.), we may note that the Ephesians are praised for confessing their sins to St. Paul on the occasion in question: "so mightily did the word of the Lord grow and prevail" (Acts 19, 20).

(b) "Confess therefore your sins to one another" (James 5, 16). The "sins" here referred to cannot be merely wrongs done to one's neighbour (as in Matt. 18, 15), since the verse is closely linked by a "therefore" with the verse immediately preceding in which the "sins" spoken of are clearly sins against God: "if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him." Thus St. James positively recommends *some* form of confession of sins by man to man within the Christian fellowship.

(c) "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20, 22-23). Again the sins of which Our Lord speaks cannot be merely faults committed by man against man.¹ Why should He breathe on the disciples (20, 22) and say to them in solemn words, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," if He were only giving them a power of brotherly forgiveness which every Christian can and should exercise? The constant meaning of the Scriptural phrase "to forgive sins" is to cleanse the sinner of his sins in the sight of God. "Thy sins are forgiven," said Christ

(1) This is the explanation of the text put forward by the Rev. Mr. Johnson in his reply to Fr. Murphy. He takes Matt. 16, 19; 18, 15-18 and John 20, 22-23 to mean that we should forgive one another "on a human plane" (*A Roman Catholic to a Minister*, p. 20). The N.U.P. Questions p. 8, offers a different interpretation: "The apostles never claimed the power of forgiving sins by absolution as the Roman priests do, but only by preaching the Gospel."

to the paralysed man, and the scribes objected, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2, 5, 7).

But on the other hand, who can lay down the law for God and prohibit Him from making mortal men the instruments of His own divine power of forgiveness, if He so chooses? Christ, we believe, acted thus with His apostles when He addressed them in words which mean what they say if they mean anything at all. And if the apostles were to forgive some sins and retain others, according as the sinner deserved or did not deserve forgiveness, were they not also empowered to exact from him a preliminary confession of his sins so that his spiritual worthiness or unworthiness might be known?

These and similar arguments from the New Testament are not put forward by Catholic theologians as though they proved the whole Catholic doctrine of sacramental Confession beyond yea or nay. Catholic teaching on this matter rests on the testimony of apostolic Tradition as well as on Scripture. Having glanced at the Scriptural evidence which favours the confession of sins, not to God alone, but also to man as the minister of God, let us now glance at what the Fathers of the Church have to say on the same subject.

(2) The early Church Fathers taught no such doctrine as confession to God only; on the contrary, they expressly teach the doctrine of confession to the ministers of the Church. Here are a few of the many passages which might be quoted in support of this assertion:

1. About 95 A.D. Clement of Rome wrote to the trouble-makers at Corinth: "You therefore who laid the foundation of the sedition, submit yourselves to the priests and receive chastisement unto penance, bending the knees of your heart" (*Ep. ad Cor.* 57).

2. About 110 A.D. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Philadelphians: "The Lord forgiveth all men when they repent, if repenting they return to the unity of God and the council of the bishop" (*Ep. ad Phil.* 8).

3. St. Irenaeus, writing about 180 A.D., relates that "certain heretics secretly corrupted the women who learned this doctrine from them. And many women who had been persuaded by them, and who afterwards returned to the Church, with their other crimes confessed this also" (*Adv. Haer.* 1, 6): Concerning a similar group of misguided women in his own neighbourhood

he writes: Their consciences were seared with crime. Some did penance publicly, but others, who were held back by shame and who in a way despaired of obtaining God's pardon, either fell from the faith entirely or remained in a state of indcision" (*ibid.* 1, 13).

It will be noted that in both these cases the repentant women had sinned secretly; yet they confessed their sins (not necessarily in public) and did public penance.

4. In his work *On Penance*, written about 200 A.D., Tertullian compares those who, "mindful of shame rather than of salvation," refuse to confess their sins, to sick people, "who shrink from disclosing some horrible disease to the doctors and perish through their bashfulness" (*De Poen.* 10). After going over to the Montanist heretics, Tertullian declared that God alone could forgive the sins of murder, idolatry and fornication (*De Pud.* 12), but these must still be confessed (*ibid.* 3-4); forgiveness for lighter sins could be obtained by confession to the bishop (*ibid.* 18). He had much to say about the works of satisfaction which the Church expected of the penitent in those days. The wretched man should "sleep on the ground . . . live on bread and water . . . join prayer and tears to fasting . . . prostrate himself before the priests," and so on (*De Poen.* 9).

5. The great Alexandrian scholar, Origen (185-254) tells his readers to "consider what the divine discipline teaches, namely that sins should not be concealed . . . Only here it will be fit to advise you to be careful in choosing a suitable person to whom you may confess. Try to find such a spiritual physician as knows . . . how to feel for others and sympathise with them in their sorrow . . . If he shall judge your disease to be such as should be laid open and cured before the whole assembly of the Church, for the possible edification of others and for your own ready healing, this should be done deliberately and discreetly and in obedience to the advice of such a skilled physician" (*Hom. 2 in Ps.* 37). Again: "If we reveal our sins not only to God but to those who can heal our wounds and sins, our sins will be blotted out by Him who says: "Behold, I will destroy thy iniquities as a cloud and as a thick cloud thy sins" (*Hom. 17 in Lev.*).

6. Origen's contemporary, St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (d. 258) gives just the same advice: "Let each confess his sin while he that has sinned is yet among the living, while his confession can be admitted, while the satisfaction and the remission

made through the priests are pleasing before the Lord" (*De Lapsis*, 29).

7. St. John Chrysostom, who was elected Patriarch of Constantinople in 398, heartily encouraged the sinners of the city to seek his spiritual aid: "Every time you sin, come to me and I will heal you" (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 6, 21). Christian priests, he wrote in his work on the priesthood, "have power not only to forgive sins when they regenerate us (by Baptism) but also to forgive sins committed after Baptism" (*De Sac.* 3).

8. St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (d. 397), also insists on the kinship between Baptism and Penance. He points out against the Novatianist heretics that it is illogical to admit that a priest can minister the grace of God to a soul in Baptism and to deny that he can do the same in Penance. Why do you baptise if it is unlawful for sins to be forgiven through a man? In Baptism assuredly there is forgiveness of all sins. What difference is there if priests claim that this power has been bestowed upon them through Penance or through Baptism? The mystery is the same in both cases" (*De Poen.* 8, 36).

9. We may conclude this list of extracts with a passage from the Greek ecclesiastical historian Sozomen (fifth century) which gives the reason why private confession was introduced. "From the beginning it naturally seemed to the priests an inconvenient thing that men should proclaim their crimes as in a theatre with all the members of the Church standing around. Therefore the bishop chose from among his priests one distinguished by his uprightness, reserve and discretion, to whom the duty of hearing the confessions of sinners was assigned" (*Hist. Eccl.* 7, 16). St. Leo, bishop of Rome (d. 461), also stresses the rightness of private confession. He censures a custom which was current in southern Italy, of reading out in church a complete list of the sins confessed. This is, he declares, contrary to the apostolic rule which demands no more than that a man should confess his sins to the priests alone by "secret confession" (*Litt. ad Ep. Camp.* 2). The "apostolic rule"; once again the Church appeals to the validity of apostolic Tradition. Was this appeal ill-founded in the records of the early centuries? ¹

(1) The N.U.P.'s answer to this question is as follows: "It was early in the 13th century when the doctrine of auricular confession of sin to a priest was introduced, and the majority of the church fathers were against such an obnoxious idea of confessing to a human priest who was a sinner himself." (Questions, p. 6).

TRADITION

N. U. P. Questions

- (1) *What does your Church mean by Tradition?*
- (2) *Can you prove that "Tradition" is divine or apostolic?*
- (3) *Did the Lord or His apostles ever appeal to Tradition?*

Our Answers

(1) The whole function of the teaching authority of the Church is to proclaim the truth of God to man. Does the Church get her knowledge of this truth out of her own head or "out of the blue," alleging as her authority a direct revelation made by God to the Pope or other ecclesiastical rulers of the day? Certainly not. The Church cannot teach anything on her own *isolated* authority. Her task is to hand on from generation to generation a true statement of the redeeming truth of Christ, nothing more and nothing less.

What then are the sources from which the Church draws her knowledge of Christ's teaching? There are two such sources, Scripture and Tradition. As the Council of Trent puts it, "every truth and ordinance pertaining to salvation is contained in written books and in unwritten traditions, those namely which were received by the apostles from the lips of Christ Himself, or received by them under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and which were passed down from hand to hand, so to speak, until they reached us" (Sess. 4). These "traditions," taken collectively as a body of revealed truth distinct from, though in harmony with Scripture, constitute "Tradition" in the strict sense of the term.

Traditions of this kind ("divine traditions") are either "dominical" or "apostolic." They are "dominical" if they owe their ultimate origin to the one teaching of Our Lord (*Dominus* in Latin), "apostolic" if they go back to the oral teaching of the apostles speaking "under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost."¹ The teaching authority of the Church exists

(1) The Apostles did not always speak under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In addition to acting, on occasion, as His spokesmen, they were also the legitimate pastors of the apostolic Church exercising a normal but not inspired pastoral ministry. Such directions as they may have given to their flock in the exercise of this ministry might be described, in a loose sense, as "apostolic traditions"; but they could not belong to the category of inspired apostolic traditions or, as the theologians say, "divine-apostolic traditions," which alone concern us here.

in order to preserve securely for mankind the entire body of revealed truth, whether as found in Scripture, in dominical traditions or in apostolic traditions. Drawing on these sources the Church proclaims the whole of Christ's saving truth to men with infallible certitude.

But, it may be asked, why bring Tradition into it at all? Are not all the truths which God has revealed to us for our salvation, to be found in the Bible alone? Ought not a Christian by definition to be a follower of Scriptural teaching, basing his whole faith on the written word of God?

No: A Christian ought by definition to be a follower of *Christ's teaching*; that is the primary point. It is only when we have taken our stand firmly on this ground that we can ask the question: Where is the teaching of Christ to be found? Now there is not a single scrap of evidence in the New Testament to support the theory that *all* the truths necessary for salvation are contained in Scripture *alone*; Christ never commanded His apostles to write a series of inspired books which should embody His entire teaching, but He did explicitly command them to proclaim His Gospel by the living voice to all mankind: "Go therefore, teach all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28, 19-20). Moreover, Scripture itself attests the Catholic view that divine revelation was transmitted to men by traditions not recorded in Scripture. "Hold fast the traditions," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "even as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11, 2). "Brethren," he writes again to the Thessalonians, "stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, *whether by word or epistle of ours*" (2 Thess. 2, 15). He tells them to withdraw "from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the traditions which they received of us" (2 Thess. 3, 6). Is it any wonder then that the early Church like the Roman Catholic Church of to-day, accepted dominical and apostolic (not merely human) traditions as a source of Christian life and truth parallel to, though never in contradiction with, Scripture? "To the words of God (the written Scriptures) we must," says St. Epiphanius (died 403), "add Tradition, for we cannot look for every truth to Scripture. The apostles have left us some truths in writing, others in the form of traditions" (*Haer.* 61, 6).

A word in conclusion about private revelations which God in His love for the individual soul, may have granted to the saints of later years. These do not form part of the body of revealed truth which it is the Church's task to transmit to "all nations." As the supreme spiritual guide of mankind she may, and sometimes does, decide whether or not they are worthy of credence; but even when she does pronounce in their favour, she never adopts them into the body of her official teaching. Still less does she commit herself to purely human traditions, even those of Christian origin, though she may avail herself of them for liturgical or other spiritual purposes. Thus, in spite of the fact that several Popes in the past, not speaking infallibly, accepted the current tradition that the Holy House of Loreto was the original home of the Virgin Mary at Nazareth, the historical truth of this tradition is widely rejected by modern Catholic writers, among others by Canon Ulysse Chevalier, a well-known French priest and scholar. His study of the subject, the value of which does not enter our present discussion, will yield arguments against the Catholic doctrine of Tradition as a source of revealed truth, and of papal infallibility as a divinely appointed instrument for the safeguarding of revealed truth, only to those who understand neither.

(2) The written word of God is contained in one collection of inspired books, the Bible, though it should be remembered that this collection assumed its final form only after more than three centuries had elapsed since the time of Christ. To this day there is no one collection of the evidences or documents which embody the unwritten word of God, dominical and apostolic Tradition, for the simple reason that such a collection would have to embrace not only the Creeds and Councils but also the ancient liturgies, the writings of the Fathers, the remains of primitive Christian art, in a word the entire heritage of Christian thought and teaching from the earliest times. Needless to say, not every tradition recorded in or illustrated by such evidences is of dominical or apostolic origin. How then are we to disentangle Tradition in the strict sense of the word from such a great mass of material?

In regard to many points of distinctively Catholic teaching the task is quite easy. They are so fully attested by a chain of testimonials reaching back to primitive Christian times that we can prove their origin in dominical or apostolic Tradition by the

legitimate methods of historical investigation. Thus, to take one example from the sphere of our sacramental teaching, the evidence which we have adduced from the Fathers in support of our claim that it is a Christian duty to confess one's sins to the ministers of the Church, is so telling that anybody who approached it with an open mind would, we think, give up for ever the idea that Confession is a Roman Catholic invention of later ages.

In regard to other doctrines, such evidence as has come down to us about them from early times, valuable as it may be, is not nearly so cogent. How then can we be sure that these particular doctrines go back ultimately to dominical or apostolic Tradition? It is here that the Church's teaching authority which is, we believe, the final infallible interpreter of both Scripture and Tradition, comes to our aid. If the Church defines that a certain doctrine belongs to the living and redeeming body of revealed truth, then we believe that it *is* true, even though our natural human reason cannot see conclusive evidence of it either in Scripture or in the Fathers. In such a case we have faith in Christ's consoling promise that His Church will never err and that He Himself will be with her "even to the end of the world."

(3) Our Lord wrote no inspired book for the guidance of His Church; all His teachings were given orally or, as the Roman Catholic would say by dominical Tradition. Some of the apostles, SS. Matthew, John, Paul, James, Peter and Jude did write inspired books, but most of their teaching was given orally or by apostolic Tradition, as was all the teaching of the seven other apostles. Opposed to Christ's dominical Tradition was the Pharisaic "tradition" which made void the word of God (Matt. 15, 6): opposed to St. Paul's apostolic Tradition (2 Thess. 2, 15), was the "tradition" of the false philosophers who led men astray (Col. 2, 8).

The Catholic doctrine of Tradition does not make void the word of God in favour of "the tradition of men" (Mark 7, 8: Col. 2, 8); on the contrary, it safeguards the whole word of God, written and unwritten alike, for the salvation of mankind. Moreover, Christian Tradition is one thing, Jewish tradition an entirely different thing. The N.U.P. confuses the two in its answer to the present question when it declares: "There is absolutely no evidence that the Lord or His apostles ever appealed to Tradition" (p. 4). Actually, besides using their own Tradition,

dominical or apostolic, as a means of communicating divine truth to men, they sometimes appealed even to Jewish tradition in support of their teaching. Thus St. Jude makes considerable use of two non-Scriptural Jewish writings, the Assumption of Moses, which is the source of the story of the dispute about the body of Moses between the Archangel Michael and the devil (v. 9), and the Book of Enoch (v. 14).

PURGATORY

N.U.P. Questions

- (1) *What is Purgatory and what Scripture have you for it?*
- (2) *Is Purgatory a place for bad members of your Church or for good and saintly members?*
- (3) *When was the doctrine of Purgatory officially accepted by your Church, and what was the position before its acceptance?*

Our Answers

(1) (The following explanation of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is taken, with minor adaptations, from a lecture delivered at Clonard Church, Belfast, during our mission of Advent, 1948).

Among those who believe in Christ's teaching and love Him, there are not many of whom one could say that they live wholeheartedly for Him. In lesser things they often fall short of the Christian ideal. Moreover, though they are sincerely sorry for any grave sins they may have committed, they have not done very much to make up for their unfaithfulness to God. Finally they die in this condition of soul. What becomes of them? They are not enemies of God, so the question of Hell does not arise for them. On the contrary, they are friends of God and receive the promised reward of Heaven.

But are they to receive it immediately? St. John in his Revelation says that nothing unclean can enter Heaven (Apoc. 21, 27), and such souls are not altogether clean. The Roman Catholic Church accordingly believes that before entering Heaven they must pass through a state of purification and suffering. This is Purgatory.

Thus Purgatory is not a kind of middle state between damnation and salvation. The souls in Purgatory are already saved, already sure of Heaven; only their entrance into it is delayed.

But if Christ paid a full ransom for all our sins, what is the need of purification in Purgatory? Let us get this point clear with the help of an example. Suppose that the public authorities of a city provide ample electric power for all. Will that automatically give us light in our houses after dark? No; we must draw on the power by switching on our lights. Similarly we Catholics believe that Christ paid a full and complete ransom; but must we not draw on His ransom by personal co-operation? The opposite doctrine, if applied logically, would mean that nobody need do anything at all to be saved. The man who hates God should be as sure of salvation as the man who has faith in God and loves Him. No Christian would go as far as that; but if you do admit the necessity of faith for salvation, then you are admitting the principle that we must co-operate personally with Christ, since faith is a personal act of man. Now once you admit co-operation you must surely admit degrees of this co-operation: the faith and love of some are greater than those of others. In other words, there are souls on earth that have entered into the redeeming life of Christ, but not fully, and that die in this state. Must they not be cleansed before they enter the all-pure Kingdom of Heaven?

This argument may fairly claim to have a basis in Scripture but explicit evidence of a state of purgation beyond the grave is not found in any of the inspired books, apart from the Second Book of Maccabees, which is not included in the Protestant Old Testament. We may for our present purpose waive the question whether this book is or is not Scripture; but if we accept it merely as historical evidence of authentic Jewish belief and practiced a century and a half before Christ's coming, we find that even then the Jews were convinced of the value of praying for the dead "that they might be delivered from their sins" (2 Macc. 12, 43-46). This practice endures among the Jewish people to the present day. Thus if you look at the list of dead in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the weekly newspaper of British Jews, you will find after many of the entries the words: "May his dear soul rest in everlasting peace." Prayers for the dead were common among the early Christians also and St. Cyril of Jerusalem publicly defended the practice. "I know that many

say," he writes, "What is a soul profited which departs from this world, either with sins or without sins, if it be commemorated in the [Eucharistic] Prayer? Now, surely, if when a king had banished certain subjects who had given him offence, their connections should weave a crown and offer it to him on behalf of those under his vengeance, would he not grant a respite to their punishments? In the same way we, when we offer to Him our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, though they are sinners, weave no crown but offer up Christ sacrificed for our sins, propitiating our merciful God both for them and for ourselves" (*Catech.* 5, 10).

Similar passages might be quoted without end from other Fathers of the Church. Do they bear witness to a tradition of revealed truth or to an erroneous "tradition of men?" To a tradition of revealed truth, says the Catholic Church, who lovingly recalls the memory of her dead every day in the Mass: "Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants and handmaids who are gone before us with the sign of faith and sleep the sleep of peace. To them, O Lord and to all that rest in Christ, we beseech Thee to grant a place of refreshment, light and peace, through the same Christ Our Lord.

(2) Purgatory is not a place for members of the Roman Catholic Church, but for all men, whether Catholics or not, who die:

(a) in the grace of God. If they died without His grace they go straight to Hell;

(b) without achieving complete spiritual purification during their life on earth. If they do attain it they go straight to Heaven.

(3) That doctrine of Purgatory was officially promulgated ("accepted" is an ambiguous word) by the Council of Lyons (1274) in which Eastern as well as Western Christians participated; again by the Council of Florence (1438); and finally by the Council of Trent in 1563. Up to the time of the Council of Lyons the doctrine was always accepted as an authentic "tradition" embodying a truth of divine revelation. The Council did no more than accurately formulate and define what had been part of Christian belief and practice from the beginning.¹

(1) The N.U.P.'s answer to the question is: "Purgatory was not proclaimed until 1439 A.D., consequently it would be rather difficult for the Redemptorist Fathers to answer the latter part of the question" (*Questions*, p. 5).

THE MASS

N.U.P. Questions

- (1) *Was not the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross sufficient and what is the meaning of Rom. 6, 9-10?*
- (2) *As the Mass is a bloodless sacrifice, can there be any remission of sin?*

Our Answers

In common with the great majority of Christians, the Catholic Church holds that the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was all-sufficient for the salvation of all men, but that all men are not by that very fact automatically saved. Something in the individual soul is necessary in order that the individual soul may be saved. What this necessary something is may be discussed and described differently by theologians of different denominations. The point we wish to make here is that the all-sufficient quality of Christ's redeeming sacrifice is not denied or doubted by Catholics who believe that the Mass is a divinely appointed means by which the redeeming power of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross reaches the individual soul. It is not the only means by which this is done, but we are not now concerned with others.

The Mass is not a separate sacrifice from that of the Cross. If there had been no sacrifice on the Cross, there would be no sacrifice of the Mass. St. Alphonsus Liguori, in the preface of his book, *The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ*, says: "Although we distinguish by different names the sacrifice of the Cross and the sacrifice of the Altar, yet it is in substance the same sacrifice. On the altar we have again the same Priest and the same Victim, namely Him who once offered Himself upon the Cross."

Catholics take the words of Christ at the Last Supper to mean what they say, namely, that the bread was then changed into His Body and the wine into His Blood. "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22, 19). "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many" (Mark 14, 24). But Catholics do not believe that Christ dies in the Mass, any more than they believe that He died when He said those words at the Supper. Consequently Romans (6,9-10) presents no difficulty. The separation of body and blood which took place on the Cross did not take place at the Supper and

does not take place at Mass. Only a "symbolic separation" can take place, that is a separation in appearance which signifies a separation in reality. The separation signified at the Supper by the separate changing of bread and wine into body and blood became a real separation when Christ shed the last drop of His blood next day on the Cross. The same real separation of body and blood on the Cross, nineteen centuries ago, is signified at Mass in the same way as it was signified at the Supper, that is by the separate changing of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood.

We believe that when Christ said "This do in remembrance of me," He gave the Apostles and their successors the power and commission to do what He was then doing with the bread and wine, and to do it with the same significance. Indeed it could not lose this significance without losing its reality. Therefore when it was done, after Christ's death, by the Apostles and their successors, it merely changed its time-relation to that death from *before* to *after*.

The Church has not defined the precise nature of the relationship. Catholic theologians discuss possible explanations of how the sacrifice of the Mass and that of the Cross are the same sacrifice. There is no unanimous conclusion. But every Catholic must believe that they *are* the same sacrifice, differing only in their time and manner of offering, though he does not understand *how* they are so, just as every Christian must believe that Christ is God and Man, though he does not understand how the infinite God can also be a finite creature. Every Catholic believes that the change of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood is at Mass essentially what it was at the Last Supper, Christ's offering of Himself for our salvation, which was consummated on the Cross. The same things are offered and the Offerer is the same, Christ Himself; but now He associates His Church in the offering of that sacrifice by using the words of the priest as His instrument to perform the miracle of changing the bread and wine into His body and blood.

The priest does this as visible representative of the Church, of which Christ is the divine invisible Head, and does it particularly on behalf of those members of the Church actually present at the celebration of Mass. He is therefore their agent and the sacrifice is theirs as well as his—his, theirs, and above all, Christ's.

Catholics recognise in the Mass a providential means by which the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is mysteriously brought out of the dim and distant past into the living present. That is why they love the Mass and have often thought it worthwhile to sacrifice all that the world holds dear in order to keep it with them. It enables them to join in Christ's offering of Himself on the Cross over nineteen centuries ago, and thereby effectively to bring their souls under the saving influence of His grace, of which they believe the sacrifice of the Cross to be the only source, as they believe the Mass to be its channel.

SACRAMENTS

N.U.P. Questions

- (1) *What Scriptural authority has your Church for proclaiming seven sacraments?*
- (2) *Is it true that your Church claims that grace and salvation are given through the sacraments; and if so, are you certain of validly receiving the sacraments?*

Our Answers

(1) Nearly all Protestants recognise Scriptural authority for the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist or Lord's Supper (cf. *Questions*, p.5). For Baptism then we need only refer to such texts as Matt. 28, 19 ("baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"), and for the Holy Eucharist to the New Testament accounts of its institution (Matt. 26, 26-28; Mark 14, 22-24; Luke 22, 19-20; I Cor. 11, 23-26).

In addition to Baptism and the Holy Eucharist the Catholic Church recognises five other sacraments: Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The existence of all seven sacraments were first officially proclaimed, not in "the 15th century" (*Questions*, p.5), but in 1274 at the Council of Lyons. This doctrine is not, however, peculiar to the Roman Catholic Church; it is also held by the Christian Churches of the East, though these have been separated from Rome, except for short intervals, since 1054. A synod held at Constantinople in 1638 expressed itself thus on the sacramental theology of Cyril Lukaris, an Eastern disciple of Calvin: "Let Cyril be con-

demned because he teaches and believes that there are not seven Mysteries of the Church, that is to say, Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation), Penance, the Eucharist, the Priesthood, Extreme Unction and Matrimony, according to the institution of Jesus Christ, the Tradition of the Apostles and the custom of the Church: and because he falsely asserts that Jesus Christ in the Gospel has given or instituted but two sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist."

The agreement of the Eastern and Western Churches in this matter has its roots in early Tradition. Moreover, the essential principles of the five sacraments denied by Calvin and Lukaris are all witnessed to by Scripture, even though admittedly the distinct existence of these sacraments is not expressly taught there. Thus, for example as regards Extreme Unction, see James 5, 14: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." Similarly, for Confirmation see Acts 8, 14-17; 19, 1-6; for Holy Orders 1 Tim, 4, 14; 2 Tim, 1, 6; for Matrimony, Matt. 19, 3-12; for Penance, John 20, 22-23, a text which is more fully discussed in connection with the N.U.P.'s questions on Confession.

(2) Grace and salvation are given through the sacraments as through their normal channels. Since God wills that all men should be saved (1 Tim. 2, 4), it is certain that God can, and does offer grace and salvation by other means than the sacraments to all who inculpably fail to receive the sacraments. If such persons use the available means, chiefly prayer, they will get the grace necessary for salvation and can be saved. If, by some defect or mistake, sacraments are not validly received, God can give the recipient the benefit of the sacraments, the same as if they had been validly received, Catholics, therefore have no reason to worry as to whether, by some obscure mischance, they may not validly receive the sacraments. But the mere possibility of invalidity does not mean that the sacraments can be safely neglected on that plea.

POLITICS

N.U.P. Questions

- (1) *Has your Church any declared policy towards politics ; and if so, what is that policy?*
- (2) *Can you state whether your Church is for or against the partitioning of Ireland?*

Our Answers

(1) The Catholic position is that purely political questions are outside the Church's scope. Only if political questions involve religious and moral issues is the Church entitled to intervene, and then only in so far as is necessary to safeguard the religious and moral issues which happen to be at stake : for example, in a case involving religious education, or the denial of it to Christian parents for their children.

(2) The partitioning of Ireland is a purely political question, and as such the Church has no views upon it. Individual Catholics, lay and clerical, are entitled to their views as citizens, but they are not entitled to invoke the Church's authority on one side or another. The Church is ready to discuss moral or religious issues, as they arise, with the Governments of the Republic of Ireland or of Northern Ireland, without prejudice to their constitutional positions.

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