

CONSIDERATIONS ON OUR CREDENDA

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The friars, nuns and tertiaries of the American Congregation of Franciscans are expected to take seriously the precepts of the seraphic father Francis. In his Rule he calls us to the observance of the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, to that fulness of Christlike living which the Gospel sets forth. Now it is to be noted that a fulness such as this demands fulness of faith. St. Francis therefore stipulates that no one is to be received into his spiritual family without giving evidence of steadfastness in profession of the Catholic Faith. By this phrase we understand him to mean the whole of the teaching of Christ, for the whole of the human race, for the whole of time, to make a whole being out of each of us. Franciscans are called to total Christianity in their living, not to an attenuated form of it. Surely a maturity of Catholic conviction is to be expected of those who seek affiliation with any Religious Community. Hence we invite those who would join us to renew their baptismal vow of faith in a form sufficiently amplified to secure them against the minimizing pressures of our present-day intellectual atmosphere of doubt and misgiving. In other words, that we may fulfill St. Francis' requirement of evidence of Catholic conviction in those who would join his spiritual family, we ask subscription to our Credenda, a summary of beliefs in which is set forth the what (or content) and the how (or authority) of the Catholic Faith.

In the early days of our foundation we discovered from experience that there were people who professed to be Catholic Christians but who delighted in causing controversy among the brethren, and consequent divisions as to what and how we should believe. Hence to promote unity in charity and to provide stability, it seems best to settle upon a maximum expression of Catholic belief as a protection against the narrowness of outlook and the littlenesses of prejudice which are such common afflictions of fallen man.

In this the twentieth century after Christ there is no commonly accepted standard of faith and morals. Before

the break-up of Western Christendom, there was such a standard. Whether people lived according to it or not, even the simplest of them felt back of them the sanctions of a great institution. Today many people go astray for the lack of such sanctions, and are misled by prevalent carping criticisms of the Church and the Bible. Sometimes these critics even presume to censure Christ Himself and to belittle His teaching.

The weightiest sanctions known to man are to be found in what is called Catholic Consent, by which is meant the formal and authoritative affirmations of all of Catholic Christendom, than which there is no greater institution known to man. In the pursuit of the meaning of revealed truth, thousands of minds have made an exhaustive investigation - saints in prayer and ecstasy, scholars in their critical studies, theologians in their defense of the Faith, pastors applying it at death-beds and in the confessional, and last but not least, millions of simple layfolk who have tested its worth in their daily lives. Catholic Consent is thus the registration of the final corporate judgements of the whole Christian commonwealth as it is divinely led by the Holy Spirit in pursuit of the real meaning of that truth which Jesus Christ revealed once for all to the Saints (Jude 3).

The Creeds are summaries of the religion of Catholic Consent, and constitute the Church's official credenda. Subscription to them would be sufficient were it not that the point at issue is not acceptance of the mere words of the Creeds but rather what our interpretation of these words is to be. The Creeds were produced in and by the Church's tradition, and it is precisely this tradition which has been lost or denied by a large part of our present generation.

When the American Congregation of Franciscans was founded a summary of belief was adopted from certain theological formularies already in existence, and has continued to serve its purpose of providing us with traditional Catholic affirmations, but our layfolk often find its theological technicalities difficult. For this reason the following

version, which paraphrases and re-arranges the original, has been prepared in an attempt to say the same things in a more popular fashion.

1. Two much-misunderstood Words.

It is popular usage to speak of Christians as being either Protestants or Catholics. According to this mode of speech those Christians whose ecclesiastical systems have been conditioned by the Reformation of the sixteenth century as carried out in Northern Europe are "Protestants" (and in this sense Anglicans are often so-called), and those conditioned by the Counter-Reformation of Southern Europe are "Catholics". But this manner of speaking implies that none but Christians of the Papal Obedience are Catholics, and ignores the realities of the English Reformation (for official Anglican formularies insist that the Anglican Communion is Catholic) and forgets the position of the Eastern Orthodox Christians (who are obviously Catholics though not Roman Catholics).

Christ's disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11, 26), and we are told that it was there also that the word Catholic first came into use to describe those who insisted on the acceptance by Christ's disciples of the whole of the Church's discipline and tradition instead of a minimized form of it. In the first instance, therefore, Catholics were those Christians who protested against the dilutions of their religion, and so might justly have been called Protestants.

Hence we should note that the word Protestant is a term of variable meaning, and should be on our guard against the popular usage of restricting the word Catholic to that portion of Christendom which constitutes the Papal Obedience, which same officially describes itself as Roman Catholic. By the same token, we should not fall into the error of thinking that the word Protestant necessarily denotes a non-Catholic as well as a non-Roman Catholic.

The term Protestant was first used in a religious sense as the name of a group in Germany composed both of Latin Catholics and of adherents of the "reformed reli-

gion" who had joined together to make a protest against a wicked political agreement entered into by their rulers to the effect that subjects must follow the religion of their princes. That is to say, those princes who held to "the old religion" found it inconvenient to have subjects who had embraced "the new religion" and vice versa, and hence the princes of both religions wished their subjects to be forced to accept the religion of their respective princes, no matter what any individual conscience might dictate. Thus it happened that these first "Protestants" were a mixed group, some being what we would now call Roman Catholics, the others followers of the recent "reforms".

Later, in England the term Protestant was applied to those who protested against belittlement of the true character of the Church of England. Some of these belittlers were on the Roman Catholic side of the controversy and some were on the side of those who faulted the Church of England for being too popish. So those who protested that the Church of England was truly Apostolic in practice and primitively Catholic in faith were referred to as of "the Protestant party".

Later still, the term Protestant was used to mean non-Roman and was adopted in this sense as part of the legal title of the American branch of the Anglican Communion. Hence "Protestant Episcopal" was then understood to indicate a national Church governed by a non-Roman episcopate, and should not now be taken to mean a non-Catholic Church. Rather, it implies that there are non-papal episcopals (i. e., the Catholics of the Anglican Communion) as well as papal episcopals (i. e., Roman Catholics).

This ecclesiastical use of a word which had not attained a definite status in theology illustrates the necessity for technical theological terms with a settled meaning, although of course these also are open to misinterpretation on the part of such as insist on their own private misunderstanding of them. The point is that the Church has her own language and her children should be willing to use it with the meaning that she has given it. This essay is an attempt

to help the Church's children to understand their Mother's tongue.

The traditional meaning of the term Catholic Religion may be stated thus: A certain experience of God throughout the ages which is described in the Old Testament Scriptures as having been initiated by God himself, and in the New Testament as having been authenticated and amplified by God incarnate our Lord Jesus Christ (i. e., this experience results from a revelation from God), which same, as we learn from history, has been maintained by the Church in her Councils and polemics, and summarized in her Creeds.

2. God has revealed Himself to Mankind.

Our religion begins in a notion which has tremendous consequences for us, namely: God desires to be known and loved, therefore He has revealed Himself; and therefore His self-revelation is for the purpose of making possible for man the spiritual experience which God wishes man to have. To deny that God can be known is to make religion impossible. But to accept the idea of God's self-revelation is to obligate oneself to seek Him according to the exact terms of this revelation. Hence the importance of studying the authority and content of the Church's teaching which claims to be the declaration of revealed truth.

Now in revelation there are two factors, the divine and the human, God the giver of revelation and man its receiver. Because of human limitations the receptivity was poor until the time when God became man, and then at last one perfect instrument of reception existed in our race. But in any event, God's self-revelation must be expressed in human terms, and their inadequacies must be allowed for. Hence, we understand human terms applied to God as analogies rather than as literal descriptions of Him. For example, to call God Father is to assert that His relationship to man is analogous to human parenthood; or, to speak of God's wrath is to indicate God's necessary opposition to that which is the negation of His holy nature. We are obliged to use anthropomorphisms in speaking of God, but we must be careful to interpret them in a sense

which is consonant with the truth that God is infinite wisdom, love and power.

In the Creeds we have some historic facts (e.g., suffered under Pontius Pilate) and much symbolic presentation of truth (e.g. sitteth on the right hand of the Father). The name which Catholic theology uses in place of the word creed is symbolum, i.e., symbol. The three Creeds accepted by Anglicans are known as the Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian Symbols. Since Catholic theology thus describes its language as symbolic, we need never think of Catholic dogma as coextensive with the truth it represents. It is rather a working drawing to help each one to build his house of faith for himself. Catholic dogmas are means of getting at the truth but the truth is bigger than the words which affirm it.

Interest in divine things is a prerequisite of learning about them. In ancient times the Semitic peoples of Palestine were preoccupied with religion. They had benefited from several ancient cultures, and had been moulded by life in the desert and various adversities until they had attained a moral standard as part of their religious observance. Their spiritual leaders, known as prophets (i.e., forthtellers, not necessarily foretellers), were men of special sensitivity to divine things and they taught their people that God had chosen them to be His very own in a covenant relationship whereby they could learn to serve Him in accordance with His will as He continuously revealed it to them. Thus they became not only the people to whom He was revealing Himself, but also His instrument of revelation to the whole world, a thing unique, a theocracy, i.e., a people raised up by God to do His will and to be governed by Him alone. In time this ancient people Israel was to develop into the Catholic Church which may thus be said to have had a continuous experience of God for more than three thousand years. As the result of this experience God's people have been constrained to make certain corporate affirmations. It is these corporate affirmations which we call the official teaching of the Church.

The Israelites looked upon their priests and kings, as

well as their prophets, as God's deputies for ruling His people; but because these were often unworthy representatives of God, they began to hope for a delegate from God who could perfect their covenant-relationship into the new covenant of the Spirit (Jer. 31, 31-33). Finally "in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son" to be the divine prophet, priest and king of His theocracy in fulfillment of these hopes. Hence Christ did not initiate God's self-revelation; what He did was to authenticate those elements of the Jewish tradition which were of permanent value to our religion, and amplify them into that fullness of truth which we call Catholic.

The content of the Faith under the Old Covenant consisted in three central doctrines, (1) the reality of God, (2) perpetuity of dominion for the throne of David, and (3) God's holy commonwealth of Jerusalem. As a result of our Lord's authentication and amplification, these have become the three mysteries of the Catholic Religion: (1) the mystery of God the Holy Trinity; (2) the mystery of the incarnation; and (3) the mystery of sanctification (i.e., the mystery of the Church). From these three affirmations of God's people proceed all the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Religion.

Revelation was progressive until our Lord completed it by giving us all the truth necessary to salvation and perfection. What remains now is for the Church to explore the truth which she has received, "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints" (Jude 3); for our Lord has promised that His Holy Spirit will guide us ever deeper and deeper into all the truth (John 16:13).

The Church is thus "the household of The Faith" (Gal. 6, 10), "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3, 15), and from this point of view is called "infallible" (i.e., that which does not bear false witness) and "indefectible" (i.e., that which will never be ultimately untrue to our Lord). Parts of the Church may turn false, but there will always be a faithful remnant living in the power of Christ and affirming the whole of Christ's teaching. Because of its continuous corporate life of over three thousand years we

think of it as present at Mt. Sinai in Moses' time (if we date Moses about 1350 B. C.); it was present also at the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ; it can, therefore, bear witness of these things out of its own experience.

Note three characteristics of this religion, it is corporate, institutional, and mystical: corporate because the revelation was made to a chosen people, and hence this religion can be apprehended by an individual only as he lives within the body corporate, and thus experiences the results of its corporate affirmations; institutional because the body corporate must have a means of functioning, and these were originally the various teachings and ordinances of the Law of Moses, but at present are the grace and truth which came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17) and are purveyed to us in the continuous life of the Church; mystical because the purpose of these divinely given institutions is to furnish each member of the body corporate with an immediate and personal experience of God. It is the corporate character of our religion which is so little understood today; note that you can only know Catholic truth by experiencing it within the Church.

3. The Catholic Conception of the Church

Like-minded individuals have formed casual associations which they call churches. Vastly different from such man-made organizations is the theocracy or organism known as the Catholic Church, a society created by God and governed by laws and officers instituted by Him. In the English New Testament the word church translates the Greek word ecclesia which is itself the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word that the English Bible renders as congregation. "Congregation" is first used in the sense of the theocracy in Exodus 12, 3, "Speak ye unto all the Congregation of Israel", and this theocratic idea is repeated again and again in various terms all through the Scriptures. For the word congregation as thus used refers, not to a collection of individuals, but to the Church's organic nature as a community whereby man has attained, here and now, to citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12, 22, 23). The Congregation is made up of folk scattered abroad

on earth, and of many already in eternity, yet united as one people in God. It is membership in the group that sanctifies, not individual members that sanctify the group, so that its members are called saints because this vast Congregation belongs to God. It is a body corporate, functioning through institutions which give its individual members the mystical experience which God has thereby ordained for them. So long as the divinely authorized institutional life of the Church is preserved, an inner spiritual unity remains in spite of any outward divisions or schisms.

An illustration of this is to be found in the first notable schism which occurred among God's people, that of their division into the northern and southern kingdoms after the death of King Solomon. But maintenance by each of them of their common heritage of religious institutions secured to them their oneness as the Congregation of Israel. So it is that in spite of the schisms which have divided Catholics into various ecclesiastical obediences, such as the Roman, Anglican and Orthodox, maintenance by each of them of essential Catholic institutions secures to them an essential unity in Christ, the author of these unifying institutions.

The institutional life of the Congregation of Israel centered in acceptance of the Law of Moses and observance of its ordinances. In the New Israel, the Catholic Church, it is not the Law of Moses but the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ (John 1, 17) that furnishes her institutional life. That is to say, wherever the Christ-given ministry of grace (i. e., the Apostolic Succession) is preserved, and along with this a corporate affirmation of Christ-revealed truth (i. e., the Catholic Faith) is constitutionally maintained (e. g., in canon law and liturgy), there the structural unity of the Christian theocracy remains intact. For the Apostolic Succession guarantees the validity of the sacraments, and the constitutional affirmation of this Faith guarantees a certainty of belief to all who seek it, no matter how much disbelief there may be on the part of individual members of the Church. In the Anglican Obedience coercive discipline is at a minimum, with the result that heretics are not often expelled, but this toleration of individual heretics is not the same thing as corpor-

ate acceptance of heresy inasmuch as the Anglican Communion is constitutionally committed to the whole of the Faith. However, the rejection of what the Church offers results in an impoverishment of religion to the unbeliever, for the spiritual experience which the Church is meant to give is largely dependent on our making the affirmations of faith which the Church makes. Heresy, even more than schism, is likely to prevent "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16, 26).

Since schism is a corporate sin, it would appear that the various separated parts of the Church are each in some sense schismatic, for surely the blame for breaches in communion can seldom be placed completely on one side of the schism. This corporate sin becomes an individual sin when the individual member of the Church has a schismatic spirit. There must be repentance on all sides before there can once again be visible unity in the Church on earth. The difficulties growing out of schism we should each take humbly and cheerfully as a penance to be performed in contrition for man's thwarting of Christ's desire that all His followers should be completely one in Him. In the days of the divided Israelitish Kingdom the only means of individual membership in the theocracy was membership in one or the other schism. So now, those who would belong to the Catholic Church can do so only by membership in one of its divisions. A question each Christian should ask himself is, Have I a schismatic spirit?

4. The Magisterium of the Church.

Since God instituted a theocracy, to which and through which to make Himself known to the world, it follows that His theocracy has the duty of proclaiming revealed truth. The authority thus inherent in the Church for propagating this revealed truth is known as the Church's magisterium. For the Church is the pillar established by God to uphold the truth, and the very ground upon which the pillar of truth rests (I Tim. 3, 15). Our Lord said that His Church had the power of binding and loosing, and that those who would not hear the Church were to be accounted as heathen (Matt. 18, 17).

The "tradition" of revealed truth (i. e., its handing on from generation to generation) is maintained by the Church in two ways, orally and Scripturally. "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1, 20, 21). Thus God's self-revelation was first declared in an oral form, and afterwards this oral tradition produced a written literature, from which the Church has chosen certain books as her written tradition.

We are told that God has had His prophets "since the world began" (Luke 1, 70). The oral tradition started with these prophets of old and culminated in the oral teaching of our Lord. Here must be noted a fact often forgotten: for forty days after His resurrection our Lord tarried with His Apostles that He might complete His teaching of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1, 3), and therefore the oral tradition of the Church may be expected to contain some matters not made clear in the subsequently written Gospels. We deduce from history that the Church of the apostolic and early post-apostolic period had a mind of her own which she believed to have been formed by Christ Himself and that therefore she has been prepared by Him to propagate not a part but the whole of the revealed truth.

However, the Church has a written record of some of her most important spiritual experiences. This record is known as the "inspired" Scriptures; and the Catholic principle is that neither one of her two traditions - the written or the oral - may be interpreted contrary to the other. Hence we read in II Peter 1, 20, that no Scripture is to be interpreted privately, by which we understand it is subject to the corporate interpretation which is found in the oral tradition. Anglican formularies say that the Church is a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ (Art. XX), and that nothing is to be taught as necessary to eternal salvation except it can be "concluded and proved by the Scripture" (Ordination of Priests). To prove here means to test, not to demonstrate to the point of compelling belief (cf. "proving" a yoke of oxen in Luke 14, 19). Hence the oral tradition is to be tested by the written one.

There are matters of authoritative teaching and practice resulting from this oral tradition which the Scriptures do not clearly teach, such as the observance of Sunday in place of the Jewish Sabbath, the baptism of infants, the necessity of the three-fold ministry of the Apostolic Succession. The written tradition grew out of the oral but does not entirely contain it. However, since the oral tradition is to be found in the consentient teaching of the ancient fathers of the Church and has been summarized in our three Creeds, it has, as a matter of fact, been put into writing. But the phrase "oral tradition" is a convenient designation for all the teachings of the Church, explicit or implicit in the Bible, or at least "agreeable to the same". If all the Bibles in the world could be destroyed, we would still have a source of revealed truth in the oral tradition of the Church. But Scripture is always in danger of being misinterpreted, hence we need the Church's oral tradition as a guide. And the oral tradition is always in danger of being corrupted, hence we need the Scripture as a means of testing it for purity.

Revelation was progressive until our Lord completed it, so that we now have in the Church's tradition all the truth necessary for our salvation and perfection (i. e., it is Catholic). Progress now consists in applying revealed truth to human life under every possible condition until the grace and truth which came through Him shall have been given a full exposition in creation, and an eternal order shall have been built up out of our temporal order, so that when the time has been fulfilled God will have gathered together in one all things in Christ, both those on earth and those in heaven (Eph. 1, 10). This sort of progressive development in truth was indicated by our Lord when He said that the Holy Spirit would guide His people ever more and more deeply into all the truth (John 16, 13). It is therefore possible for the corpus of doctrine to grow as a result of the Church's growth of understanding of the completed revelation even though no addition to revelation has occurred.

The resultant system of Catholic belief may be considered as falling into four categories: speculation, pious

opinion, provincial dogma, Catholic dogma. These are distinguishable from each other because of the differences of authority back of them.

Dogma results from authoritative definitions by the Church speaking in the name of God. Revealed truth, if it is to be taught, has to be formulated, and it is the Church's God-given duty to define it whenever obvious error is being taught in the Church's name.

Catholic dogma is a formulation of revealed truth to which the whole Church, East and West, agrees, i. e., a dogma which has "Catholic Consent". A provincial dogma is a formula agreed upon by only a part of the whole Church. (The Nicene Creed is an affirmation which has been made by the whole Church except for the "filioque clause" which is Western provincial dogma). It is as though the Church were saying: You must believe this because God has told us that it is so. Our belief in it rests finally upon God Himself, although the trustworthiness of the Church as a teacher sent from God is the immediate occasion of our belief. Hence we might say that we hold a belief because the Church teaches it, but we would mean by this that the Church teaches it because Christ who is truth incarnate taught it.

Since the Roman Church claims to be the whole Church, anything having Roman consent is in the Roman Obedience held to have Catholic Consent, and this claim gives little place in that Communion for provincial dogma. From an Anglican point of view, all that the Roman Church teaches in addition to that which is held by the rest of Catholic Christendom is Roman provincial dogma, binding those of the Roman Obedience, but not those whose ecclesiastical obedience does not make the affirmation. Provincial dogma is presumably Catholic dogma in process of formation unless it can be shown to be contrary to Catholic dogma, in which case it is of course heresy.

Speculative theology is a necessity because men are under a moral obligation to use their reason to apply Catholic doctrine to human life and to explain it in the

terms of the thought of the day. It is thus that the relevance of unchanging Catholic dogma is made manifest to the needs of the time, and only so can a "systematic theology" be developed in each age. Fundamentals, represented by dogmas, remain unchanged, but each new age may require a fresh systematization of theology. However, all such speculation represents the wit of the theologian in trying to understand God's revelation rather than the actual revelation itself. Some speculations attain such currency through repeated investigations and affirmations on the part of many theologians that they become established as beliefs practically taken for granted. These are "Pious Opinions"; "pious" because they have been shown to be congruous with the entirety of Catholic teaching, "opinions" because established in the court of reason as defensible and credible propositions.

At the time of the Reformation two Pious Opinions had gained such complete acceptance in Western Christendom (because of the distinguished theologians who had advanced them as being necessary inferences from the Faith) that to deny them was considered arrogant and impious self-assertion. They were an integral part of Western theology, and because of the Anglican principle of continuity and solidary with the Catholic past, since no authoritative Anglican rejection of them has taken place, they remain for us today what they were then, not dogmas to be accepted on faith as necessary to salvation, but Pious Opinions of great import. One concerns the fitting of the Mother of our Lord for her perilous vocation and the other her entrance upon the beatitude her Son had prepared for her.

The latter, commonly called the Assumption or the Repose of the Virgin, has been accepted by Catholics of both the East and the West since very early times. A good statement of the Assumption is to be found in the phrases of the Collect used on the feast in the English Sarum Use; "We do call to mind how the Holy Mother of God underwent temporal death; and how nevertheless death might not bind in bonds her who bare in the flesh thine only-begotten Son". In other words, from reverence for the sacred humanity of our Lord, Catholics rejected the idea that the body of

Mary, whom God created to be the fountain-source of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, was at her death turned into corruption and putrefaction, the more so that there is considerable evidence that the bodies of some virgin Saints (St. Clare, to give a late example) have not undergone that dissolution which is normal to mankind. Rather, our spiritual forefathers affirmed that almost immediately after death our Lady rose from the dead and was taken to heaven, and they averred that this belief was a tradition from the Apostles themselves.

It is interesting to note that no relics of her body have ever been shown, but only an empty tomb. Perhaps more important is the testimony which this Pious Opinion gives to the certainty with which the Church has asserted the resurrection of the body as the completion of the redemptive process which God has willed. The resurrection of the body is the perfecting of human life.

The translation of Enoch and Elijah is told in Holy Scripture, and the Catholic cannot but believe that our Lady has had a reward commensurate with her dignity, and we can believe of her death and eternity whatever the Bible is meant to teach us by the translation of those two servants of God. Where we cannot prove or understand, we ought at least to accept with all Catholic Christendom the principle here implied, namely, that the Blessed Virgin's death brought immediately a state of beatitude befitting her eminence in God's plan for the redemption of creation. She is the prototype of each Christian; she was totally redeemed from sin (this is what is meant by her Immaculate Conception), was totally united to Christ in life and death, and was given the total effect of all this in a consequent glorification.

As belief in the Assumption is ultimately the result of reverence for the Virgin's divine Son, so is the Immaculate Conception. The theological difficulty it solves is this: original sin implies a condition of rebelliousness or malice toward God, and if our Lady were ever in such a state, then she was in a condition of antagonism to her unborn Son, which is an idea completely contrary to that of her God-

given vocation to be His Mother. When God gives a vocation to one of His creatures, He endows it with the potentialities needed to fulfill its God-given destiny. She who was destined to become the Mother of His Son must have been given, from the first moment of her being, all that was necessary to this end.

That something extraordinary was connected with her conception so that, like Jeremiah (Jer. 1, 5) and John Baptist (Luke 1, 5 ff), she was sanctified from the womb, was early recognized by the institution of a feast in honor of her conception. (The Church would not keep a feast in honor of original sin.) This feast spread from the East to the West, and in 1129 began to be observed throughout England. Its liturgical celebration necessitated a consideration of its theological implications. No theologian was opposed to the idea that our Lord's Mother must have been given special privileges of grace. The objections which some theologians at first urged against the Immaculate Conception resulted from the fear that she was being thought of as not needing to be redeemed by Christ the Universal Saviour. Eventually this difficulty was solved through the Franciscan school of theology when the Pious Opinion was seen to involve these suppositions: (a) conception consists in two simultaneous acts, active conception or the act of generation on the part of the parents, and passive conception which is God's co-operative act of creating a new human person with a soul suitable to the body which is to be; (b) the immaculateness or spotlessness of her conception lay entirely within passive conception; (c) it consisted in deliverance from the macula (i.e., the spot) of original sin; (d) this stain, though described by a word indicating something positive (i.e., a spot), actually is the result of the absence of a certain gift of God which was bestowed upon the first parents of our race to enable them to serve God freely, which gift they forfeited by their rebellion, and so involved all their descendants in this same negative condition; (e) to cure this tendency to rebellion against God full restoration of the lost gift is needed; hence to fit her for the most difficult and dangerous vocation ever given to any of God's creatures, there was bestowed upon her at the first moment of her concep-

tion the grace commensurate with her need as the one who was to become the human parent of God-made-man; (f) Christ grants to us in baptism a measure of this grace which He granted in full measure to His unborn Mother in order to initiate the process of redemption in which the Christian now finds himself; thus the Pious Opinion of the Immaculate Conception maintained that this was the first act of His "plenteous redemption" (Ps. 130, 7).

The deterioration of belief in the sustaining and co-operating love of God toward His creation, whereby His will is constantly being worked out in it (i.e., His raising of the natural to a higher level known as the supernatural) often hinders the non-Catholic in any attempt to affirm postulates of revealed religion such as the Immaculate Conception of Mary, her virginal conception of Christ, His resurrection and ours (including Mary's "premature" resurrection), His gifts of sacramental grace, and above all His eucharistic presence and sacrifice. And, of course, that schismatic spirit which makes people ugly toward Roman Catholic authority because we feel they are ugly toward us, encourages denial of everything they affirm. In the past century Roman authority has imposed the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption as dogmas (matters of revelation, not of speculation), and so has provoked a fresh reaction against these beliefs. But for Anglicans they remain what they have been for us hitherto, permissible Pious Opinions. And not only permissible, but beliefs which we should have no desire to deny, even if we are unable to defend them in the way that was done by some of the Saints of our Order. We at least should take the attitude which many are obliged to take toward advanced scientific theories: the scientist can defend the quantum theory, for example, and therefore the non-scientist ought not to be so rash as to deny it on the grounds that he cannot provide any explanation of it.

5. The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

The emphasis placed upon the authority of the Bible by those who deny the authority of the Church has resulted in much misunderstanding as to the place the Scriptures should occupy in our religion.

The oral tradition of the Church says that they are inspired, but there is no detailed exposition of Scriptural inspiration which has Catholic consent. The Scriptures deal with the noblest conceptions of which a human being is capable, and they do this in the noblest manner known in all human literature, for which reason their inspiration should be considered self-evident.

Scripture is said to contain all doctrine necessary to salvation (cf. Art. VI). This is not the same thing as saying that it consists of all such doctrine. We have this heavenly treasure in earthen vessels. Some of the vessels are primitive and unpleasing. In other words, the Scriptures are a mixture of several things, such as (a) the Word of God (i.e., a record of what He would say to us), (b) man's reflection on this Word (sometimes contrary to what our Lord taught, e.g., the ruthlessness and cruelty manifested by God's ancient people, apparently at times with a good conscience), and (c) the record of man's resistance to the revelation which declares God's will. The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover millions of years of the earth's development. They are not given to us by the Church either as a scientific treatise or a literal account of prehistoric times. Neither is the Bible a textbook of religion. Rather it is religious literature of differing levels of spirituality, the product of many minds and many different ages, much amended and edited, and finally selected by the Church (which meant the rejection of some writings) as substantiating her oral tradition of the truth. What the Church understood Scripture to mean is therefore more important than what the original author may have meant. In exemplification of this, there is no one version of the Holy Scriptures which the Church has finally adopted (i.e., various ancient manuscript versions disagree with each other in some details), and the deuterocanonical books (commonly called the Apocrypha and rejected by most non-Catholics) have never had their exact position in the magisterium of the Church finally defined by Catholic consent. (The Roman Church accepts some of the Apocrypha as completely canonical.)

These points are presented as a warning against the

misuse of the Bible which attempts to make it an infallible guide to faith and morals apart from the living, developing and Spirit-guided theocracy which we know as the mystical body of Christ on earth, by which it is that Christ still dwells, works and speaks on earth.

The consensus of Catholic teaching, beginning with the patristic period, has been to exalt the spiritual content of the Bible and minimize its mere verbal expression, on the principle that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (II Cor. 4, 7). St. Jerome's comment (on Jer. 38, 10) may be quoted as summarizing the patristic attitude: "Many things in Sacred Scripture are expressed according to the opinion of the time in which they are represented as having happened, and not according to objective truth. Therefore, no passage of Scripture can legitimately be isolated from and interpreted contrary to its context. That context is not only the whole of Scripture (i.e., the totality of the written tradition) but beyond and besides this the oral tradition of truth in the Church.

6. The Doctrine of Catholic Consent.

Not merely what but why we believe are questions to be faced. There is need for an authority to solve controversies, especially those of which the Bible is the occasion. The Apostles claimed authority to deal with such matters, and this to the Catholic means that the Church in her continuous life is competent to deal with the questions that must have solution. However, to do so, the Church should act in her official or theocratic capacity. By this we mean that the Church as indwelt by the Holy Spirit will be guided by Him to make all necessary corporate affirmations. Each corporate affirmation has been a minting of doctrine from the double source of "oral" tradition and Scripture; and the impulse to do so comes from the Church's continuing spiritual experience of the truth which she is expressing in her life, which same causes her members to make affirmations from compulsive conviction. One way of describing this process is to say that dogma results from the confluence of two activities, namely, the Church's aristocratic and the Church's democratic action.

The aristocratic action of the Church is that of her best thinkers acting as leaders in the attempt to provide a definition of a point which needs clarification. But this so-called aristocratic activity is purely for the benefit of the faithful at large, to help them in their following of Christ. Hence the democratic activity of the Church is that of God's people as a whole, in their effort to dedicate themselves to God's will in this wicked world, to whose conscience the definition must speak with compelling force if it is to be accepted by them. Whenever they recognize the voice of their Master Christ in what has been thus proposed, there is the agreement of aristocratic and democratic action in the Church, and this constitutes Catholic Consent.

Sometimes the needed affirmation is achieved by acceptance of the decrees of a Council, but not always. The formulation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity in the first days of the Church, at a time when there was much confusion about the Christian doctrine of God, was accomplished thus: Tertullian a lay theologian proposed a definition to the effect that there are in God Three, each of Whom possesses all of God, and thereafter this definition was accepted by the faithful at large as an affirmation which they all could make, so that there was then a final agreement of the aristocratic and democratic action of the Church. Sometimes a Council, representative of the whole Church, was called to clarify a controverted point, resulting in what we have called aristocratic action. But no doctrinal decrees of a Council became effective until they were accepted by the democratic action of the Church at large. Some Councils, meant to be "general", made decrees which were rejected in whole or in part by this so-called democratic action.

Anglican formularies accept the decisions of the four "undisputed General Councils" (i. e., those whose decrees were accepted entirely by the Church), and by the same token we are obliged to accept the decrees of certain later Councils in so far as they were accepted by the Church as a whole. (There were three Councils which dealt with the unfinished business of the four undisputed General Councils.

Thus we reckon seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church as having given us the outlines of the religion of Catholic Consent.)

To summarize: out of these universal affirmations (i. e., Catholic dogma) in some places have grown corporate and official affirmations (i. e., provincial dogma) and in addition there are some teachings of theologians which are widely accepted by the faithful, not as beliefs necessary to salvation, but as solutions of theological problems (i. e., Pious Opinions).

Catholic dogma asserts that the Church is a theocracy, the mystical body of Christ, who as the God-Man neither did nor could sin. Growing out of her theocratic character is the magisterium of the Church and her sacramental system and means of grace (e. g., the Church's position that our Lord neither did nor could sin, and her assertion of seven sacraments, the eucharistic presence of Christ and the eucharistic sacrifice.)

Anglican provincial dogma is the Western (as distinct from the Eastern) development of the Faith which is to be found in Anglican formularies. Therein is affirmed something of the Western doctrines of grace, of sin (original and actual), and of the intermediate state (commonly called purgatory), and eternal punishment (commonly but inaccurately called hell, for in the Apostle's Creed the word hell is a neutral term, meaning the continuation of life after death).

From the foregoing beliefs proceed the practices of venerating and invoking the Saints and of praying for the dead; also of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, of "Catholic" ceremonial practices and the use of "sacramentals", such as holy water and blessed ashes for Ash Wednesday.

Conclusion

A man's foes are sometimes of his own household. Pressure from within as well as from without must be withstood. Hence, it is important to provide a bulwark for the Faith in our Congregation so that we may recognize our freedom to practice our religion unhindered by controversy within our own spiritual family or by harassments from outside.

Since we are Franciscans we must have a common ground of understanding with St. Francis and the chief Catholic teachers of all ages, so that the spirituality for which we strive will be in accord with the true mind of the whole Church. We do not wish to be guilty of intellectual schism from the total response of faith in the Faith which has been made in the past by God's people. Being at home with the Catholic past inevitably results from our sense of the continuity and solidarity of our religion back to Christ its author. But although we are heirs of the whole past we, as members of God's family on earth, like members of a human family, do not consider everything of our past history worthy of commendation or preservation (instance the Inquisition which we share with the Roman Church of today as part of our own past in Western Christendom).

Schism has been recognized by the Church as sinful, but it is a corporate sin (e.g., like racial prejudice), from which the individual must free himself by getting rid of a schismatical spirit. We need to be sympathetic and understanding in our religious attitude, so that we can claim the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Testament Church, and the Saints and Doctors of the new, as our spiritual kith and kin. Final fellowship with all of God's Saints in heaven demands practice of our fellowship with them here on earth.

What it comes to is this: different parts of Catholic Christendom make their affirmations of the Faith in ways that are the result of their several historical developments. Thus the Anglican, Roman, and Eastern Orthodox Communions affirm the whole of revealed religion, but each differs

somewhat in the details of affirmation. (A rough rule of reference is this: All that the Roman and the Orthodox Churches teach and practice in common is the Catholic norm for Anglicans.)

All the separated parts of Catholic Christendom affirm that schism is sinful, but that in spite of such schisms, they each have preserved the two essentials of unity, namely, Catholic Order in government and Catholic Faith as the basis of the spiritual life. Without Catholic Order the Church would not be Apostolic; without an affirmation of all of God's revelation of truth the Church would not be Catholic.

POSTSCRIPT

Because of present-day dislike and disregard of the Science of Theology (cf. pages 27-32 of our Third Order Manual), it has been suggested that a devotional approach to the Conception and Assumption of the B.V.M. may prove useful, on the grounds that the heart has reasons the mind knows naught of; that is, to think of them as the result of spiritual perceptions rather than as theological reasonings, though as a matter of fact they are both.

Since the Last Supper until now Catholic liturgy and private devotion has been preoccupied with its fundamental truth that God became Man. Why, when, where and how has been the constant theme of the faithful in prayer, hymn, antiphon and meditation. In years of exalted contemplation-guided, as we must believe by the Holy Spirit Who is the energizer and illuminator of the Church's fellowship of worship- the people of God must have received the gift of discernment. Mary's earthly beginning and end has been the concern of our greatest Saints and theologians as well as the common people of God ("plebs" as the Latin liturgy has it), not only because she was God's chosen means of giving us our Saviour and His salvation, but because our own salvation is chiefly concerned with our earthly beginning and end. We were conceived and born in "original sin" and must die as the penalty of sinfulness. But Christ by His grace delivers us from original sin's taint in Baptism and completes His redemption of us after death by giving us holy immortality and resurrection. All this is "super" - above the ordinary course of nature - super-natural, as we say.

Granted that man's mighty salvation was the "why" of the Incarnation, what of the how, where and when? How? by entering humanity through Mary. Where? in the Mother whom He had chosen and prepared for Himself. When? at the moment of her earthly beginning. Catholic devotion has felt assured of something out of the ordinary - a matter of special choice and grace - in the moment of the beginning of her who was destined to be the source and origin of the supernaturalizing humanity of the God-Man. And if her Conception was so specially blest by God as to make her "full of grace" from then on, what would be the result of the death of one so graced? As she was the first-fruits of the baptismal grace yet to come for the rest of us, was she not also the first-fruits of the resurrection grace yet to come? These were named "pious opinions" because theologians formulated them into reasoned theological statements (opinions) which are "pious" because they are congruous with the Faith and hence right and true sentiments of the Catholic heart.

Anglicans on the whole seem committed to the idea that Roman Papal Authority has erred in declaring, during the last century, that these ideas are more than opinions, that they are matters of revelation. How there can be unity of the Orthodox and the Anglicans with the Papal See without some re-consideration of the Roman position on these and other matters it is difficult to foretell. But nothing is gained for our soul's health or for the re-union of Christendom by a denial of these two Pious Opinions, whereas in our approval of them there is ecumenical sympathy with the outgoing devotion to the Mother of Jesus of oriental and Latin Catholics.