

tinue in unity with God and under his governance. I salute Alce, a beloved friend. Farewell in the name of the Lord.



GAMALIEL

(After mature reflection, the Editor has withdrawn the notice of dismissal given to Gamaliel in a moment of exasperation, and is pleased to continue the wise man in his employment.)

Q. The knowledge of the truth revealed by God, and the validity of the means of salvation, depend very largely on the human mind and will, both so liable to error. How much certitude can one have of divine truth, seeing that knowledge of the dogmas of faith depends largely on man's fallible word? How much certitude can one have of the validity of the sacraments, since their administration depends so much on human beings so liable to make mistakes even with the best of intentions? Is it not possible for example for a particular priest or bishop to have been invalidly baptized? In that case his orders would be invalid, and hence all his celebrations of mass and his absolutions.

So it seems that one can only *presume* that a particular priest really is a priest, or a particular host validly consecrated, or a particular absolution validly given; and one can only *presume* that one has been correctly informed when one reads or is told that such and such a doctrine is of faith. In view of all this uncertainty, how can one get that peace of soul, that comfort from the divine eucharistic presence, and that confidence in the reception of sacramental grace which surely is so desirable for one's spiritual life?

CONVERT

A. I want to answer two things: first that the uncertainties you set out are real and inescapable, and secondly that you are taking altogether too tragic a view of them, indeed an unrealistic view of them. Let us take first the question of our knowledge of revealed truth. It depends, in the last resort, not on what other people tell us, not even on what the Church or the Pope tell us,

but upon our faith in God; it depends upon our believing God, upon our assurance that *he* will never mislead us. We believe in God, not in men. It is because we believe in God that we also believe the truth he revealed to be genuinely and infallibly preserved by the Church he founded, even though that Church consists of far from infallible men. The only disturbing uncertainty we are left with—if we have faith in God—is the uncertainty involved in finding out what the Church actually does teach; and when you start using ordinary human intelligence and common sense, this uncertainty becomes trivial. Supposing Fr X assures you that it is infallible Catholic doctrine that all Protestants go to hell; this worries you (I hope), because it does not square with your natural human intelligence and common sense. Ask Fr X for his grounds for such an assertion, ask him to show it to you in an authentic and authoritative document; I doubt if he will be able to. Ask someone else if it is really true, what Fr X says. It will not take you long to find out that his assertion is not infallible Catholic doctrine, or what the principles of faith are by which the destiny of Catholics, Protestants and Hindus must be estimated. Or suppose that Fr Y assures you that you are to believe on faith that the Pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals; this also, let us suppose, seems to you hard to square with common sense. Consult Fr Z, and he will confirm it—he may also explain it, and show to your relief that the doctrine is not so unreasonable as you had feared. In both cases your intelligent co-operation is required. You can never have mathematical certitude, never the certitude that those in heaven enjoy on such matters—I agree. But why should you want it, since you are not dealing with mathematics, and are not yet in heaven? God has given you a way to walk here below for the time being—the way of faith. You can trust him not to be involving you in one enormous hoax.

It is very similar with the sacraments; you cannot tell whether this particular priest was validly baptized, or validly ordained, or whether the bishop who ordained him was validly ordained himself, or whether the priest who is hearing your confession has not perhaps forgotten to say the words of absolution—not with the sort of certitude you seem to demand. Something might have gone wrong somewhere. You can only *presume* that the mass you attended last Sunday was validly celebrated, and the host you

received at communion validly consecrated. But is it such a difficult presumption? Not, surely, if you trust God and stop wondering if he may not perhaps be playing a monstrous cat-and-mouse game with you.

The sacraments work by the power of God; but he has chosen to make them work through the instrumentality of men—otherwise indeed they would not be really sacraments. The instrument may go wrong; but if God is prepared to take his chance on that, I do not think it is very worrying for us to have to do so too. We can be quite sure that in nearly all cases the sacraments in the Catholic Church are validly administered by validly ordained ministers, because it is God's Church, watched over by his providence, and he endowed it with the sacraments in order to help us, not to tie us up in knots. Furthermore, God's grace is not confined to the sacraments, so even supposing you do some time or other receive invalid sacraments, your own intention of receiving God's sacraments still ensures you the divine grace and assistance.

The uncertainty you speak of is part and parcel of the human lot, and should not be regarded as incompatible with peace of soul.



A LETTER FROM INDIA

(addressed originally to Oblates of Prinknash Abbey)

Dear Friends:

Fr Raphael asked me some time ago if I would write and tell you something of my experiences in India. There is a good deal that I could say about what has been happening to me in these last six years, but I would like to tell you especially about an experiment I am making with some Benedictine oblates here, as I think that this will interest you very much. When I first came out here, Fr Raphael told me that there was an oblate of Prinknash here and I very soon made contact with him. At that time he was in charge of the first Cheshire Home in India, which he had established at his home at Kodaikanal. Kodaikanal is a place in the hills about a hundred miles from here in Madras State. It is seven