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Certain Questions on Church Unity.

A student submits the following questions which have proved difficulties for him in his discussions with non-Catholics:

1. What is there to the so-called "branch theory"? Certain Protestants have told me that their church is a branch of the Church established by Christ.

Ans. Our Lord settled the branch theory at the Last Supper when He said: "Unless the branch remain in the vine it cannot bear fruit." There are broken branches, separated from the True Vine; unless they return to the Vine - to union with the Church established on a rock (St. Peter), they cannot bear fruit.

2. I have been told by two different Protestants, one an Episcopalian and the other a Baptist, that their church is as old as ours.

Ans. Ask them for their proofs from history. There is a curious theory devised by a Baptist, but not held by many of his sect, that the Baptist Church was founded by John the Baptist and has been in existence ever since his time. He traces the descent from the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts xix) through various heresies that have passed out of existence. Your answer to him is as follows: a) They aren't even Christians if they are followers of John instead of Christ (but those men at Ephesus were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" as soon as they discovered their error); b) An existence carried on through various recognized heresies gives no proof of divine sanction; c) No such continuity can be established from history.

The case of the Episcopalians, or Anglicans, is different. They claim apostolic succession for their bishops, but this claim has always been rejected by the Catholic Church (which from the beginning of the heresy re-ordained convert-ministers who became priests); the matter was discussed thoroughly and settled by Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical on Anglican Orders. - But even if apostolic succession were present, it would still be necessary to account for the other marks of the True Church if the branch wished to claim incorporation with the Vine.

3. Certain Protestants have told me that there have been breaks in the line of Popes and that consequently the Catholic Church does not descend from Christ.

Ans. There has been no break in Apostolic Succession in the Catholic Church; no historian can risk his reputation by claiming such a break. An interregnum of a day or a week or a year between Popes means nothing if the next Pope is validly consecrated a bishop and validly elected Pope.

4. Why can't all Christians get together on the fundamental principles of Christianity and achieve Church Union in that way?

Ans. We have been together ever since the time of the Apostles; the fundamental principles on which we are agreed are those described by Christ as "whatsoever I have commanded you." When representatives of various Protestant sects and Orthodox bodies got together in Switzerland a few years ago for such an agreement, about the only thing they were agreed on was the existence of God - and some of the delegates were not so sure about that. They are free to pick and choose, however; we are not. We have a charter, a commission from Christ, which tells us what to teach; none of them ever saw Christ or talked with Him or received from Him any commission whatsoever.

5. May we refer Protestants to their own Bible for proofs, or is there so much difference between our Bible and theirs that this would be useless?

Ans. You may use the New Testament, which is little changed in essentials. Ask the question again some time about the Old Testament; we'll give you the changes in that.

PRAYERS: Deceased relatives of John Hackner and John Young; deceased friends of two students. Ill - the father of Jim. and Richard Schmidt; an aunt of Frank Hochreiter; a friend of John Kennedy. Five special intentions, one of them very urgent.