



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1854.

NO. 28.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RULE OF FAITH.

(From the Dublin Review.)  
(CONTINUED.)

Above all, we should require a Scriptural guarantee that those who use the Protestant rule of faith will be rightly guided by it in their interpretation of Scripture. It is a poor sophism to point to those texts which affirm that all Scripture was given for man's instruction. All this is insisted on equally by the Catholic Church; but the question at issue is, by what key (the Protestant or Catholic method of interpretation) the casket is to be unlocked. It is vain to say that though the mind of man is naturally weak and blind, it is yet enlightened by the Holy Spirit; for all this likewise is but a fragment of admitted Catholic doctrine. The point at issue is, whether the Holy Ghost, "who spoke by the prophets," and through whom alone they are intelligible, be given to the Church, and to the individual in union with and subordination to the Church;—or be given to individuals separately, and irrespectively of their union with the Visible Body of Christ. According to Catholic teaching the Holy Spirit is the mind of the Church; and though individuals can neither think one good thought, nor do one good action except through His aid, they cannot possess that aid except by union with Christ their Head, from Whom and from the Father, the Holy Spirit ever proceeds; nor can they maintain union with their Head, except through union with His mystical Body. Whatever be the covenant which God has made with man, it is according to that covenant, and on no other terms, that man can enjoy the Divine gifts. No one in secular matters, would be allowed to manage his own affairs who was incapable of distinguishing between the value of a gift, and the right means of using that gift; no one would be thought an honest man who perceived the distinction, and yet refused to acknowledge or attend to it. If it has pleased God to give us the Church as well as the Bible, and if we yet look for guidance to the latter only, we are in the position of one who should reject the New Testament, on the ground that St. Paul had assured Timothy that the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in which only he had been instructed from his youth, were sufficient to make him wise unto salvation. If the Church's teaching constitute even a part of the system God has instituted for our instruction, to discard her authority, on the ground that the Bible is sufficient by itself, must be as fatal an act of will-worship, as though we were to discard the Epistles, on the ground that all necessary lights may be found in the Gospels.

No one can be united to truth in its more spiritual forms, who despises it in the humbler form of Fact. Experience has in this matter tested the Protestant rule of faith. Protestantism is not the name of a religion, but of a thousand religions, and a single protest. From the earliest times it divided into innumerable sects, which appealed generally to the same rule of faith. A rule of faith which, in place of telling faith what it is to believe, sanctions equally the most opposite forms of belief, and thereby renders the exercise of faith impossible, is as clearly a failure as a key that will not open a lock, or a knife that will not cut. A rule that bends in the hand of him who uses it is no rule.

The allegation that the Protestant rule of faith only fails from lack of devotion in those that use it, is contradictory to fact. The Puritans and Anabaptists were at least as fervent in prayer as Protestants of a staid character, and beyond most others insisted on the doctrine of grace. Luther, who asserted the Real Presence, in a form of his own devising, and Zuinglius, who denied it in all forms alike, are both held by their followers to have been "men of prayer." Who will take on him to say that the late Dr. Channing, though a Unitarian, did not seek divine aid in the exercise of his private judgment, as well as Dr. Chalmers, and Dr. Chalmers as well as Dr. Pusey, though the latter thinks the Apostolical Succession one of the notes of Christ's Church, and the former was no believer in the "Sacramental system?" Do not the Quakers believe in the teaching of the Spirit? and have they not the Bible also?—Yet they believe that it is the Living, or Inward Word, not the Written Word, that is to guide us. A Protestant may say of his brother that he differs from him because he has not the Spirit, and is not a child of God; but he cannot prevent a rejoinder being made in the same words, and with precisely the same show of reason. Neither can he deny that his opponent shows all the same outward signs of grace which he shows himself. If, then, these signs are illusory in the one case, so may they be in the other; and if in his neighbor's instance a strong internal persuasion be also but an illusion, so may it be one in his own. It is worth observing here that a violation of charity is forced upon the Protestant by his rule of faith, to which a Catholic is never tempted. A Catholic is

never either called upon or permitted to judge an individual; because, though he knows that heresy is incompatible with salvation, he cannot tell whether any particular person be a heretic, or be excused by an "invincible ignorance" of the truth—that is, by an ignorance the result of circumstance, and not proceeding from the will. The Protestant, on the other hand, is obliged, either to give up the sufficiency of his rule of faith, or to account for its failure by the supposition that none of those whose belief differs from his own on fundamental points, can have those dispositions without which no one can see God.—True charity is exercised towards the individual, not towards the doctrine. Protestantism is forced to be latitudinarian as to doctrine, up to a certain point, and, beyond that point to be uncharitable to the individual.

Not less vain is the plea that those who use the Protestant rule of faith, sincerely and devoutly, differ among themselves only in matters not fundamental. It is, in the first place, directly opposed to fact, as is proved by the instances to which reference has already been made. To ground a statement that all Protestants are substantially orthodox, on the assertion that Socinians and Quakers are not true Protestants, is a juggle, not an argument. As a matter of fact, moreover, Protestant sects can never agree as to what are, and what are not fundamental doctrines;—nay, even an individual Protestant can hardly ever be prevailed on to state what doctrines he regards as fundamental. If he says they are those included in the Apostles' Creed, or in the Nicene, he cannot show that his own rule of faith, or even that a belief in the inspiration of the New Testament, ranks among them; and on the other hand, he finds that the doctrines of Limbo, and of the Double Procession, of their number. If he says that the fundamental doctrines are those contained in the Bible, he is prevaricating as much as if he boasted that he knew where to find a lost treasure, because he knew it was at the bottom of the sea. The question is not where the truth is, but what it is. If he says they are those which lie on the surface of Scripture, and concerning which there can be no dispute among the learned and the good, he knows that many truths, comparatively unimportant, lie on the surface of Scripture, and that disputants on all questions are looked on as learned and good by their own followers. If he says that they are the doctrines of the Trinity, and the Incarnation, he excludes from salvation multitudes who take the same rule for their guidance, and he includes multitudes who anathematize it. He denies, moreover, the essential character of doctrines most strongly insisted on, both in Holy Scripture and in the Creed.

But even if Protestants could draw up a catalogue of fundamental doctrines, their case would not be improved according to their own rule of faith, unless this catalogue could be authenticated from Holy Scripture. Now, Holy Scripture makes no such summary. If, again any authority on earth were able to decide this question with infallible certainty, it would necessarily be equally infallible on other points; and, consequently, it would be as much our duty to believe its statements on other matters as on this. So far as such an authority interpreted Christian doctrine to us, our duty would be to believe, and no further; and thus we should be at once brought from the theory of fundamental, and non-fundamental truths to the Catholic doctrine of implicit or explicit faith.

Let the Apostles' Creed, or any other imaginable summary of leading truths, be put forward as comprising all "fundamental doctrines," and the same inherent fallacy will be found in all such rules. When we assert that the Creed is true, do we refer to its letter, or its meaning? If to the meaning, then no one can in reality hold the Creed who denies what is legitimately deduced from it, and obstinately maintains a contrary doctrine. What is in the conclusion is in the premise; and if the conclusion be denied, the premise must have been only held in appearance. The Church added the Nicene Creed to the Apostles', because, the early heretics professing to accept the latter, but rejecting its true sense, it became necessary to clear up whatever might be ambiguous. Again, the Athanasian Creed professes to be the true meaning of that part of the Nicene which relates to the Incarnation: and the creed of Pope Pius professes to convey the true meaning of the Nicene in that part which makes mention of the Church. Should their claims be true, no one can accept the Apostles' Creed in reality who rejects the later explanations of it.

Multitudes, it is sometimes answered, have gone to heaven without having ever heard of deductions from articles of the Apostles' Creed. Doubtless;—but multitudes are also saved without an explicit knowledge of many of the articles included in that Creed. It is hard to say what is the least amount of

explicit knowledge, which may, in special cases, be necessary for salvation. The reason of this is, that the whole faith exists latently in but a small part of it, if rightly received. The whole Law was propounded to man in one Commandment. Perfect love to God is the keeping of the whole Law. But, on the other hand, to offend wilfully in any part, is to offend in all. The whole faith was virtually included in St. Peter's confession; but that confession would not have been the true faith relatively to St. Peter, had he refused to accept any doctrine really contained in it.

By essential doctrines of Christianity is meant, not that which may possibly be sufficient for an individual, a quantity which must vary according to circumstance, but that which suffices for the general company of Christians. In this sense essential truth cannot stop short of the entire revelation of God, as already defined, or as the necessities of future times may require its definition. If, for instance, heretics professed to accept the article, "Who spoke by the Prophets," but yet restricted Inspiration to the Prophetic Books of Holy Scripture; and if ampler definitions were resorted to by the Church to vindicate the authority of the Bible, could it be conceded that any one rightly understood that article of the Creed who refused to admit it in the sense of the Church? Faith belongs to the will as well as to the mind; and if the will believes rightly, the mind must believe with more or less of detail, in proportion as it is instructed. Ignorance relates to the mind only; denial to the will.

To say that a part of what we hold is essential doctrine, and a part is not, amounts to this, that a part of it is faith, and a part is opinion; that a part is divine, and a part human; that a part is revealed religion, and a part philosophical conjecture. Now, the latter part, in this case, not only cannot be an essential part of the Christian faith, but cannot be any part of it. The object of Faith is Revelation. It must be essentially necessary to believe in the whole of what is revealed and propounded to us; and it can be no duty to believe in aught beside. A faith, part of which is divine, and part human, carries with it a "body of death," which must infect the nobler parts. Simplicity of faith cannot be attained by believing no more than the Church had defined before denial rendered definitions necessary. As well might one endeavor to cut a man down to the dimensions of a child.

The theory of fundamentals regards the Christian faith mechanically, as though it were a bundle of separable notions, instead of being a Truth at once one and manifold, potentially contained in a single statement, yet capable of being indefinitely expanded. It reduces the Church to the littleness of the individual, instead of imparting to the individual the stature and the faith of the whole mystic Body. It affects to give us false immunities, while, in fact, it but deprives us of real privileges. It ignores the great truth that the same faith may exist implicitly or explicitly:—for, as for an implicit faith in the Bible only, as well might we profess to believe implicitly in whatever may be included in the "nature of things." An abstract faith in that which, for the very reason that it is a book, and therefore impersonal, can never test our sincerity by requiring us to accept in detail what we profess to accept generally, is no faith at all. Such a faith in Holy Scripture, a Mahometan may profess, as well as a Christian. The Bible is not the print and paper, but the meaning of the Sacred Book. If instead of discerning that meaning, we contemplate in the text but our own reflection, finding in Holy Scripture simply what our several acquirements or associations have enabled us to bring to it, what remains but to admit that we have thus changed the word of God into the word of man, and destroyed, by mis-using, the divine gift?—The Spirit is one, and the Word is one: but the religions which men profess to extract from that Word, by the aid of that Spirit, are so many, that Protestantism cannot answer the question, "What is Christianity?" Well may the devout Christian exclaim, "They have taken my Lord away, and I know not where they have laid Him."

A rule of faith to be sound ought not only to give us a certain interpretation of Scripture, but also the amplest as well as the deepest. The Protestant rule must ever give us the narrowest and the most superficial exposition of Holy Writ. It invites every one to criticise for himself, and it is entitled only to regard as truth the results in which those who devoutly and sincerely use the rule in question agree. Now the same circumstances which produce diversities of opinion in one age will produce them in all ages.—This is the cause of that which we observed at the outset, viz., that the secured results of Protestant theology are, and must be, a perpetually diminishing quantity. Protestantism was richest at first when, like the prodigal, it left its parent's house with its se-

parate portion. Ever since it has been spending, not gaining, or retaining; so that in the most Protestant country the most learned men have not only given up doctrine after doctrine in succession, but in multitudes of cases give up the dogmatic principle itself, and assert that Christianity is but a sentiment, and that doctrines are but "oppositions of science falsely so called." They abandon reasoning processes in religion as but a snare, or, with a courage more fatal than their timidity, they discard logic in reasoning, forgetting that to reason logically is simply to reason honestly. That religion alone admits of progressive knowledge which includes in it also the principle of permanence. If we endeavor to build without the plummet and square, the new work will be ever getting out of the perpendicular, and tumbling over.

The Protestant rule of faith is bound to discard every deduction from a text which does not follow from it by a sequence apparently almost self-evident. The mind of the Church, on the other hand, can interpret on a wholly different principle, being free from the disturbing influences that affect isolated individuals. It deals with Holy Scripture accordingly as the Apostles do, deducing from texts meanings which do not follow by any obvious and necessary inference; in other words, seeing a meaning where an uninspired eye could see none. This is why the Church is sometimes accused of false reasoning, the fact being, that she often refers to a text rather as a motto than as the basis of a logical argument. From texts even the most vague she can draw certain conclusions, because she brings to the study of Holy Scripture that mature faith and spiritual mind which alone have the gift of discernment. The individual, on the other hand, is forced to discard all texts that are not plain. That which is to him practically the Bible becomes shrivelled up into a small space; and the Bible of his Protestant neighbor is in words alone the same as his.

The rule of private judgment can deal only with the surface of the Bible. Holy Scripture is a book of unfathomable depth, as well as of inexhaustible riches. It is possible that not a single chapter of it has yet been fully explored. A single text is often so many-sided that it reveals meaning beneath meaning, as it is more and more deeply searched. For this reason the mystical interpretation of Holy Scripture has ever been insisted on by Catholic theologians, as well as the literal. But if isolated individuals are to interpret it, they cannot trust themselves to a method of interpretation which, in that case, would be the work of fancy alone. Who, for instance, could have felt certain, on his private judgment only, that the passage of the Red Sea was a type of baptism, that the history of Isack and Ishmael stood in a particular symbolic relation to Christianity, and that certain passages from the Psalms referred especially to our Lord? It is the apostolic Church only that can interpret Scripture according to the profounder method of the Apostles and yet with the same certainty. The contradictions of commentators on the book of Revelations sufficiently prove that the mystical interpretation, when carried out by individual caprice or imagination, is as unsafe a guide as omen and augury. Yet through the literal meaning alone the early Christian converts could hardly have discovered the new dispensation in the books of the Old Testament.

A comprehensive and manifold appreciation of Holy Scripture, like a deep one, is incompatible with the rule of private judgment. No text of Scripture can be explained by itself alone, or even with the aid of the context. It must be compared with other texts in other parts of the Bible. It might have pleased God to have presented us with all truths of moment, and all important moral principles in a compendious form, as in a creed, or a catechism, but it has pleased Him to do exactly the contrary. The great truths of religion are found scattered over the whole Bible. Nay, those truths, owing to their very greatness, are divided and subdivided, a portion being expressed in one text while another portion of the same truth is to be found elsewhere. Thus, in one place we read what might make us think that faith only is necessary, in another, that baptism is also a part of the Christian covenant. One set of texts instructs us that Christ is God, another that He is man. Figurative expressions are sometimes used, and in other places expressions which, if acted on literally, would lead us into superstition or error.—The confusion which must result from not distinguishing between the literal and the figurative, or from not combining texts which are mutually supplemental, is not guarded against by any provision made in Holy Scripture itself, simply because God has given us another guide also. If we reject that guide we endeavor to sail without a chart. What right has a man to affirm that the words "This is my body" are to be taken figuratively, just as "I am the door" is a figurative expression, if he condemns the Socinians