

# The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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## SELECTED.

Winter Evening Dialogue between John Hardman and John Cardwell, or THOUGHTS ON THE RULE OF FAITH, in a SERIES OF LETTERS, &c. &c. continued from p. 71.

### LETTER III.

Mr. Hardman's Perplexity. 2. Cause of Protestant Inconsistency. 3. Catholics duly reverence the Holy Scriptures. 4. Dr. Haverden's "Rule of Faith" truly stated."

Gentlemen, Kirkham, March 25th 1817.

Here Mr. Cardwell paused, as if he waited for my reply. I was, I confess, in a kind of reverie at the moment, reflecting on the striking contrast which he had just presented to my notice. I had often observed the fact, with a degree of surprise and envy, that a Papist never doubts about the truth of his religion; while Protestants of all descriptions are so apt to be disturbed with doubts about the truth, and scruples about the security of theirs. The instructed Papist, I was saying to myself, has something in his religion, which we have not in ours. He is fixed and immoveable in his faith. At the approach of death, as well as in the midst of the gaieties of life, he firmly believes that he is in the right road, and has only to follow it to obtain salvation. He feels neither fears, nor doubts, nor scruples on that point. Though we ply him with numberless texts of scripture, and reproach him with ignorance of the Bible; though we study to annoy and scandalize him with outrageous invectives in every shape, and with exaggerated tales of the tyranny of their Popes, the vices of their clergy, the persecutions of Mary, the horrors of the Inquisition—things which, if they were true, candour must allow, are no concern or fault of his; though we denominate his Church superstitious, idolatrous, and apostate; and call the Pope Antichrist, and other opprobrious nicknames; yet so it is: in spite of all our abuse and contempt of the Roman Church; nay, in spite of the painful oppression of severe penal laws, he smiles at our efforts; and remains as immoveable as a rock. He is as fixed, as we are unsteady. He is as much at peace, as we are uneasy. His religion has some principle of union and security, in which ours is a stranger. I have even known Papists amuse themselves at our expence, and make both our scruples and changes in religion a matter of ridicule and banter. I have sometimes heard them say, "Such an one was twenty years ago brought up a Churchman; then he turned Methodist; then Presbyterian; and last week he was dipped an Anabaptist in a horse-pond: where will the block-head's Bible lead him to next?"

However, recollecting myself, and having previously learnt my lesson from your pamphlet, I replied: "We Protestants do not believe what we please. We follow the Scriptures. The Bible is our only rule of faith. But how can you have the rule of truth? The doctrine of Christ and his Apostles makes no part of your religious education. With the New Testament you have no acquaintance. The generality of you are as ignorant of the words of Christ, as you are of the Alcoran."

2. Sir, replied my friend, your favourite authors of this invincible pamphlet, are blind guides, who have led you into a variety of mistakes. I have neither leisure nor inclination to follow them through all the wanderings of their groping blindness. But in compliance with your desire, I will endeavour to set you right in a few of the most essential particulars. Permit me, however to observe, that I do not at all admire that embarrassment and darkness of reasoning which both bewilders your authors, and puzzles their readers. I love clearness of ideas. I like to see my way before me. Allow me therefore to refer your attention to one remark which I have already made. The Catholic faith is one: the Protestant faiths are manifold. Our religion is always the same: yours as changeable as the wind. We are but one Church; you a collection of many different and discordant sects. This is a striking contrast, in which there is something radically wrong. This very fact, so visible and undeniable, if we attentively consider its origin, its nature, and its effects, is at first sight a very strong presumption that the Catholic is right, and the Protestant wrong. For truth is one and consistent, error is manifold and contradictory: and as unity is the characteristic of religious truth, so variation is the mark of religious error. But without urging this consideration at present, here let me ask you, whence arises this singular contrast? How comes it that we preserve that unity, which cannot sojourn among you? Every effect must have an adequate cause: and an effect so momentous as the stability of our faith, and the mutability and uncertainty of yours, must have a very powerful cause indeed—a cause which reaches to the very vitals of each system of religion. Sir, to go a little further than that which I have already advanced, the cause of this phenomenon, which is so honorable to us, and which is so humiliating, and ought to be so alarming to you, is not wrapped up in darkness, or veiled in impenetrable mystery. It is visible and manifest to every eye. It springs from this source. You follow a false and delusive rule of faith. We follow one, which

as it is quite different in its nature, so it produces quite different effects. You profess to be guided by the Bible alone, as interpreted by your own individual judgment. We adhere to the Bible as interpreted by the original, perpetual, and Universal Church. Yours teaches you to indulge the pride of individual curiosity and endless speculation, and consecrates all the errors which your ingenuity can invent. Ours teaches us the humility and wisdom of checking our own individual fantasies and submitting with the docility of faith to the truths which Christ and his apostles taught. You deny the infallibility of the Catholic Church; and yet you confer infallibility on every individual Protestant, be he wise or simple. Strange and unenviable inconsistency! you give to every one of your disciples more extensive authority, than we give to the Pope and the whole Church united. How can such a strange anomaly lead you to unity and truth? Shall I disclose the real fact? You may be said to have no rule of faith at all. The Bible is not a rule to you, but you are a rule to the Bible. You make it speak what you please.

8. But before I proceed to prove by argument, that your rule of faith is as false and delusive, as ours is safe, satisfactory, and conducive to truth, let me request your attention to a few considerations. If we deny that the Bible is the rule of faith, our motives are, not as your authors assert a preference of human opinions to the word of God, but a preference of the word of God to human opinions: not a contempt or neglect of the inspired writings; but a deference to the letter, a compliance with the spirit, an obedience to the voice of divine revelation. Our motives are a love of truth, and a respect for the Bible. We respect the Bible more than you do. We respect it so much, that we think it impious to pervert or abuse it, either by profanation or misinterpretation. You, notwithstanding the hollowness of empty profession, respect it so little, that you make it the instrument and sanction of unlimited and endless error. Our respect for the Bible watches over the purity of its translation. Your want of respect recommends erroneous and corrupt translations, as the word of God. To tell you the truth, Sir, your reverence for the Bible is apparent, and our real.

The Catholic Church, from her cradle in the Apostles' time, has been the chosen depository, the faithful guardian, and the successful preserver of the Holy Scriptures. To her and for her the whole of the New Testament was originally written. She has always duly estimated, as she now