

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER IX.

SECOND GENERAL PROOF, DRAWN FROM THE LITURGIES.

Can you account for this reserve, Sir? Can you explain why they were so fearful of committing the liturgy to paper? This question, you must allow, would have now embarrassed you, had it not been put to you before, at an earlier stage of this discussion. Indeed it is impossible, according to the notions of the Calvinists, and Zuinglians, to account for this ancient observance. The prayers of invocation would not have borne, indeed could not bear, any other sense than to ask of God to make the bread and wine, vile and common creatures, become the sign and figure, the emblem or memorial of the body and blood of Jesus Christ present in heaven, but absent from the earth. Now this petition is so simple and natural, so perfectly coinciding with the ideas, and suited to the taste of all mankind, that there could have been no possible motive for its concealment, but otherwise every reason in the world for its manifestation. Reflect here upon what has been said respecting the discipline of secrecy in general: the arguments there suggested by the subject return here upon us in their full force, and most naturally explain the extreme reserve of the church in regard to the prayers composing the liturgy.

But, you will say, it being once granted, that, for several centuries, the liturgies were not written, it must follow of course, that there was no fixed and determined formulary for the celebration of the holy mysteries, and that it is an error to attribute to the apostles the institution of the liturgies, such as we now have in writing.

This objection is partially, but by no means entirely founded on truth, as I hope soon to convince you. To come to a better understanding of the matter, a little explanation will be necessary.

1^o you know that the formulary of faith was for many ages preserved among the Christians without the help of the Scriptures. "The symbol of our faith and of our hope comes to us from the apostles, and is not written, said St. Jerome." No one writes the symbol, said St. Augustine, and it is not to be read. Repeat it in your mind, each day, rising and retiring to rest, your memory must be your book. *Sit vobis codex memoria vestra.* The like is to be said of the prayers of the liturgy. They were faithfully preserved in the memory of

the bishops and priests, as was the symbol in the memory of the faithful. In both cases, their memories were their books. This living rule was held to be established by Jesus Christ and his apostles: Hence the ancient usage of obliging the priests to learn the liturgy by heart; which custom is scrupulously recommended and observed among the Copts. This precaution of not writing the symbol, the formularies of the sacraments and the prayer of consecration owed its origin to the general discipline of secrecy, and ended together with it, about the time of the council of Ephesus, in 431.*

2^o I have one simple remark to make to you, and greatly should I rejoice were it to catch the eye of all those, who call in question the apostolic origin of the liturgies. All the fathers who for the four first ages make mention of the liturgies, before they were committed to writing, and all those who had occasion afterwards to speak of them, are of one mind in attributing their institution to the apostles. Of this we have supplied the proofs, What is the language held now a days? You sir, and your

*There was then no longer any reason for fearing that the mysteries should fall in to the hands of the Pagans, because the Emperors having embraced Christianity, the faithful were no longer compelled to give up the Scriptures. Now, therefore, was the time to commit the symbol and the liturgy to writing. Almost all the churches must have determined upon it, because the number of the Christians increasing to an infinite extent, and that of the priests augmenting in proportion, it could no longer be expected, that they should be all as fervent and enlightened as they were in and after the time of St. Justin, so as themselves to make suitable prayers adapted to persons and times, or that they should all have memories to learn and remember these prayers, without the possibility of ever reading them in a book.—Le Brun sur les liturgies, tom. II, p. 132, edi, in.

Up to this time we discover no trace of written liturgies, with the exception of the book of apostolic constitutions, falsely attributed to Pope Clement, but the real author of which is supposed by the best critics to have lived some time in the 4th century, between St. Basil and Nectarius, that is between 370 and 390. The liturgy is given in an abridged form in the 2d book, and at full length in the 8th.

The 85th canon is very remarkable: "These constitutions reduced into 8 books by me Clement for you a bishop, must on no account be divulged, because of the mysteries it contains." In the fourth age therefore they seemed to think that the discipline of secrecy was established from the beginning: they must therefore have been convinced that the liturgies were derived from the apostles, since the digesting of them is here attributed to Clement, the disciple and successor of St. Peter; and since in the eighth book the author positively declares that his liturgy came from St. James.

contradictory compeers, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, first begin to call in question the ancient origin of the liturgies. In sober seriousness, do you pretend to put your opinion in competition with the testimony of the whole Christian world, during the first six centuries? Have you any historical information bearing on this fact which was unknown to the ancients? Are you not at so great a distance from those times, and were not they so near them, that their testimony must evidently be preferred before the judgment you ventured to form? They belonged to the primitive times, the greater number of them were connected with the very origin of things by a very few intermediate links; the tradition if it was at least fresh and vigorous; and would you, who come fourteen or fifteen centuries after them, throw doubt, suspicion and uncertainty around their positive persuasion and unanimous deposition? Certainly it is now your greatest interest to divest the liturgies, if possible, of their apostolic origin, because in them you read your condemnation; but in former times men had no interest either in contesting their real origin or in palming a false one upon them. Catholics, Heretics and Scismatics were all agreed upon this fact. There was no dispute not reproach on either side. The conviction of all was equally strong—the belief universal. In your opinion, which of these two deserve the most credit? Would any tribunal, any unprejudiced person lay more stress upon the doubts of a few persons of the eighteenth century, than upon the positive affirmation of all the christian churches of antiquity, respecting a fact much more easily ascertained and of the first importance in those times, because it was every where intimately connected with the habitual celebration of the holy mysteries?

3^o Again, when we attribute the liturgies to the apostles, we do it as to their substance but not as to every particular part & portion of them. Every book of common usage, every collection of prayers & ceremonies is subject to change. What is adapted to one time may not be so to another. Public worship could not be the same during times of persecution as in the days of peace, neither could the mass be celebrated in subterraneous vaults, or in prison, with the same pomp and on the same grand scale, as they afterwards were in magnificent temples and basilicas. Particular circumstances, local calamities, or feasts newly established required new and appropriate prayers. The prefaces and coi-

*At Lyons for example, in 204, there was but one intermediate link between Irenaeus and St. John, Pothinus who could have known him, because he was 15 years of age when that apostle died, or Polycarp, who had been his disciple.