

# The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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## SELECTED.

### AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

#### LETTER III.

##### ON THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH.

Moreover, this principle of authority, so solidly established by tradition and holy scripture, gains greater strength, when contrasted with the principle of the reformation. It is evident that this would never have gained ground, any more than any other heresy before it, if it had submitted itself, as it should have done, to the authority that condemned it. It was obliged to commence its operations by rising up in revolt against that authority; and it was necessarily obliged to labour, in the first place, to overturn the rampart, which alone would have arrested its progress; and which all that time had been generally held in this world to have been established by Jesus Christ himself. The reformers therefore were continually repeating to the people, that all men were subject to error; and that no man, nor assembly of men, could arrogate a claim to infallibility; that it was the attribute of God, that the scripture, inspired by him, alone shared it with him; that the scripture alone was the rule of our faith, sufficiently clear, at least in every thing essential, for each one to understand it, to decide from it between good and bad doctrine, and thus form his religion according to his conscience. Let us pause a little on this principle, which substitutes private judgment for the uniform doctrine of the episcopal body.

The scripture alone the rule of our faith! The scripture sufficiently clear and intelligible to all minds! But begin then by teaching men to read. Three fourths of mankind cannot read, or they read so imperfectly that they hesitate at every word. Such are labourers, artificers, and those condemned to gain their bread by the sweat of their brow; who have neither the ability nor the time, nor the instruction necessary for learning.

The scripture alone the rule of our faith! sufficiently clear and intelligible to all minds! In the Acts of the apostles\* we read as follows: "Philip rising up went; and behold a man of Ethiopia, a Eunuch, of great authority under Candace, the Queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge over all her treasures, had come to Jerusalem to adore. And he was returning sitting in his chariot, and reading Isaiah the prophet. And the Spirit said

to Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot; and Philip running thither, heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and he said, Thinkest thou that thou understandest what thou readeest? Who said, and how can I, unless some man shew me?" Put, in their days, the scriptures into the hands of all those who know how to read, and ask the greater part, Do you understand what you read? If they are as honest as the Eunuch of Candace, they will answer you together with him; How can we, unless some man shew us?

The scripture alone, the rule of our faith! sufficiently clear and intelligible to all minds! And how comes it then that the sublime reformers, those even who were the first to make the scriptures the only rule of our faith, have never been able to come to an understanding upon the sense of this same scripture! How comes it that Luther, Zuinglius, Calvin, and those sprung from them, could not manage for their lives to agree together; I should not so soon finish, were I to enumerate all their differences. Here is a specimen: "It is clear from scripture, says Zuinglius, that we receive only bread and wine in the sacrament.—You deceive yourself, replies Calvin, it is clear from scripture that the true body and true blood are present; not in the sacrament, but to him that worthily receives it.—You neither of you understand any thing about it, exclaims Luther, stepping in between them, you are two asses; you hold this doctrine from the devil. It is clear from scripture, adds he in a more subdued tone; that we must accuse the Holy Spirit of lying, or believe that the sacred body and blood of Christ are truly and really present in the sacrament, as well as for him that receives it." If the scripture is so clear and intelligible, how do you account, I say, for their eternal disputes? & how came the reformation by following one & the same guide, to go astray in so many different directions? Often have they endeavoured to ral-

\* "It is of great importance (wrote Calvin to Melancton) that there should not be transmitted to future ages any suspicion of the divisions that exist amongst us; for it is beyond imagination ridiculous, after having quarrelled with all the world that we should agree so little among ourselves from the very commencement of our reform." He was speaking here of the disputes upon the sense of the words, *This is my body*.

Luther spoke still better, on the same subject. "If the world is to last much longer, I do declare, considering all these different interpretations of the scripture, there is no other means remaining for us to preserve the unity of the faith, than that of receiving the decrees of the councils and taking refuge under her authority." He therefore ultimately felt the necessity of unity in faith, and the impossibility of effecting it without the supreme authority of the

Church? Is it possible that after two hundred years more of experience, protestants should not be still more struck with and convinced of the justness of this reflection? Melancton and Chatillon, stupified with the confusion of ideas that prevail among them, declared, the former, "that it was well enough known whom to avoid, but not whom to follow;" the latter, that he doubted very much whether truth was or was not on their side.

"But in fine, in what a situation are our followers?" exclaims Dudingus: "dispersed, agitated by every wind of doctrine, carried away from one side to another. What is their opinion in religion to-day, you may, perhaps, ascertain; but what it will be to-morrow, it is impossible to conjecture. In what, I pray, do all those agree who make war upon the Roman Pontiff? Run over all their articles from the first to the last, you will see nothing advanced by one of our teachers, but it is immediately exclaimed against by another as an impiety.—They make themselves a new creed every month, *mensuram fidem habent*."

"The papists object to us our dissensions. I confess we cannot sufficiently deplore them. I confess, also, that the simple are troubled at them, so far as no longer to know where is the truth and whether there still remains for God a church upon earth."

"Nothing brings so much discredit on our gospel, as our internal dissensions."

"Where is the man, said a Calvinist, who can decide to the satisfaction of all, what are the dogmas necessary for salvation and what precisely are sufficient? I would take such a one to be a great prophet."

"Another Calvinistic author in his book on the reunion of Christianity, had written, 'that others who seemed to have had in view this general reconciliation, had not sufficiently distinguished what is fundamental from what is not so.' The equally Calvinistic author of the Remarks upon this work, makes an observation upon this passage, which also is worthy of notice: 'What (says he) is this man thinking of? Does he imagine that it is so easy a thing to agree upon what is fundamental and what is not so? Has it not hitherto been an incurable difficulty?'