

LECTURE ON THE APOSTOLICALITY OF THE CHURCH.

His Lordship the Bishop of London lectured on this subject on last Sunday evening. The following is a full report of His Lordship's exceedingly able and instructive lecture.

His Lordship began by reading the following verses from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans—x. 14, 15.

"How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed; or how shall they believe him of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher; and how shall they preach unless they be sent?"

The subject of this evening's lecture is the Apostolicity of the Church of Christ as an essential and exclusive mark thereof. The Church which is proved to be apostolic in doctrine, in public, in discipline, in mission, must be the Church instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the course of these lectures I have again and again shown that Christ, before His Ascension, organized His apostles into a teaching body or church—that He clothed them as such with His power and authority—that He commissioned them to be the teachers of His revelation, and to administer His Sacraments; that He promised them His special assistance in their office of teaching, and conferred on them, as a teaching and governing society, an existence and duration that would endure only with time. This society or church, body of religious teachers and guides, the only one constituted by Christ, the only one commissioned to teach His doctrine and His commandments, the only one that is authorized to receive believers into His communion by baptism, the only one that inherits the promise of His special protection during all the days of its existence down to the consummation of the world. This is the shepherd of Christ, and all who do not go into it by the door are thieves and robbers; this alone is the mystic body of Christ, and the organ of the Holy Ghost, and those alone belonging to it partake of the life of Christ and are really taught of God. This is the only Church which it is absolutely necessary to hear under pain of being reputed as a heathen and a publican. This society must exist to-day as it did in Apostolic times, for Christ Himself promised it an unending existence down to the consummation of the world. No matter what tempests of persecution might rage against it, no matter what angry waves of human passions might threaten it with destruction, no matter what revolutions might occur, destroying civil governments, overturning thrones and covering the earth with the broken wrecks of states and empires, this church, founded by Christ on the apostles and upheld by His almighty power, must continue unshaken and imperishable in the discharge of its mighty functions, down to the end of time.

It follows, therefore, that any Church claiming to be the Church of Christ must prove that it belongs to the Church founded by Christ on his apostles, that it is identical in doctrine and origin with it, that it inherits its teachings, its ministry and its authority from it, its ministry, that it is the continuation of that teaching society or church which Jesus founded and chartered for the salvation and sanctification of His people; it must show that it is apostolic in doctrine and in the perpetuation of the Apostolic ministry and authority to teach.

All Christians admit that apostolicity of doctrine and of ministry is an essential mark of the Church of Christ, and that the Church lacking it cannot be the Church of Christ and must necessarily be a falsehood and an imposture.

Hence Protestants loudly boast that in casting off the yoke of the Roman Church they merely returned to the purity of faith professed by the primitive church and to her apostolic ministry. The Nicene Creed declares apostolicity to be one of the marks of the true Church of Christ. It is evident from the teaching of holy writ that our Blessed Lord decreed that His church should always continue to profess and teach all the doctrines that He had revealed in His integrity and purity and without any alloy of error for all the ages. Our Divine Redeemer said to His apostles: "Going therefore teach all nations. He that heareth you heareth me. I will ask the Father and He will give you another paraclete that He may abide with you forever." John xiv. 16. "The paraclete whom the Father will send in My name. He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind whatsoever I shall have said to you." John xvi. 13. From these solemn declarations and assurances of our Redeemer it follows: First, that He instituted a church and that the apostles were its first authorized ministers and teachers. Second, that He committed the whole body of His revelation to the authority and guardianship of that church; 3rd, that He repeatedly promised that He and His holy spirit would ever abide with that church to guide and protect it, to preserve it from error in its office of teaching; and 4th, that this church, informed and enlightened by the Holy Ghost, would live forever in the office of a divine and infallible teacher. The Church of Christ must, therefore, exist to-day in the active discharge of its office of teaching the doctrines committed to the apostles, unless we are to admit, which God forbid, that Christ failed to keep His promises. The question now arises in what body of professing Christians, in which church, Protestant or Catholic, shall we find the perpetuation of apostolic doctrine?

We have just observed that the Church of Christ will, in virtue of the divine guidance and assistance, always continue to teach and promulgate all the truths committed to it by Christ, that it will ever hold them and teach them pure and undefiled, uncharged and uncorrupted.

It follows, therefore, that any new doctrine opposed to the actual teaching of the Church must be of its nature a false doctrine and a human invention, that any innovation in the actual creed of the church must be branded with the character of error. Truth is necessarily prior to error, falsehood is but the corruption or the denial of a pre-existing truth, the substance must necessarily exist before its shadow, the original before the copy, and hence any innovation in Christian doctrine must be false and spurious, must be either the

corruption or the denial of the teaching to which it is opposed. This truth the early Fathers strenuously inculcated on their disciples as to guard them against the wiles and snares of heresies. St. Irenaeus, one of the earliest Fathers, refutes all heresies by reference to the belief of the Roman Church with which all Christians should necessarily agree because of its primacy. "In all things," says Tertullian, "the truth precedes the image, the resemblance comes after the reality, the truth existed from the beginning, error came only afterwards, the good seed is first sown by God, it is but subsequently that cockle is sown over it by the devil's enemy. This parable manifestly designates the difference of doctrine, for in another place the good seed is said to be the word of God. Thus it is evident from the very order of time that what was taught first is the true and divine doctrine, and that what has been subsequently superadded is profane and false" (Tertullian de praescr. cap. 30).

In another place the same Father observes: "What the apostles taught, that Christ revealed to them, can best be learned from those Churches which the apostles founded. All doctrine which agrees with the faith of those original and Mother Churches is to be deemed true; all other is false; not coming from the apostles, nor from Christ, nor from God." Again, "to the authors of novel doctrines, the church has a right to say, 'who are you, when and whence did you come, what have you to do, foreigners, within my limits, what right have you, Marcion, to cut down my tree, who gave you leave, Valentine, to change the course of my streams, by what authority, Apelles, do you remove my boundaries? The possession is mine, I held it first, I held it from the beginning, I descend from the first owners. I am the heir of the Apostles.'" (Ibidem Caput 37). St. Vincent of Lerins thus enumerates the same principle when explaining the passage of St. Paul to Timothy, "Keep that which is committed to thy trust. (1 Timothy vi. 20.) What mean those words committed to thy trust? They signify that which has been delivered to you, not invented by you; what you have received, not what you have found out. Be careful to teach the same things which you have learned and thought; you should propound them in a true manner because of not proposing new doctrines; for to hold that which has been everywhere always, and unanimously believed, this is truly and properly Catholic." In conformity with these sound principles the Church acted in every age in her judgments of doctrines. Whenever men proposed a pretended mission to reform the Church and propounded doctrines antagonistic to the belief and teaching of the Church in their day, they were by the very fact condemned as innovators, and teachers of destructive error. No matter with what eloquence and gifts of genius they might have embellished their teachings no matter what appeals they might have made to words of Scripture, the fact of their teaching doctrines antagonistic to the faith and teachings of the existing Church branded them as rebels to the Church and as authors of soul-destroying heresy. New and strange doctrines were considered necessarily false. In conformity with these sound principles the innovators in every age were condemned as heretics. It was in this way and for this reason that Arius, Nestorius, Eutychius, Pelagius and many others were branded with the anathema of the Church. They propounded doctrines new to the Church, they appealed to the word of Scripture against her teaching, and were therefore condemned as heresiarchs. M. Rénan, who is an infidel, and therefore by no means partial to the claims of the Christian Church, when in lectures delivered in London, England, in the winter of 1880, speaking of the primitive church, made the following remarks, which are in strict harmony with the view we are insisting upon: "To confute a heretic," he says, "no reasoning was required; it was enough to show that he was outside the Catholic pale; and the rule was afterwards formulated by Vincentius of Lerins: 'Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus traditum' was already the test of truth." Now these principles if true and sound must hold good in every age, must be as applicable to the sixteenth century as to the first or fifth or tenth century. Our whole dispute therefore with Protestants in regard to the apostolicity of doctrine reduces itself to a question of fact: What were the tenets of the Christian Church when the Reformers arose? What were its teachings when they undertook their self imposed mission of Reformers? These tenets and teachings were those which are held by the Catholic Roman Church of to-day.

The opposing doctrines of the Reformers were novelties unknown to the existing church and were therefore false and heretical—they came too late to be identical with apostolic doctrine; and the church of their day might address the Reformers in the language of Tertullian, "Who are you? When and whence do you come? What have you to do within my limits? What right have you Luther, to cut down my forests? Who gave you, Calvin, authority to change the course of my streams? By what authority, Henry VIII, do you remove my boundaries? The possession is mine, I held it first, I held it from the beginning, I descend from the primitive owners, I am the heir of the Apostles." Now it is by these very principles laid down by the early Fathers as religious axioms that the Catholic Roman Church bases and triumphantly establishes its claim to apostolicity of doctrine. The Catholic Roman Church was in possession when the Reformers arose. It opposed no new doctrines antagonistic to existing doctrines, it rebelled not against, nor did it separate itself from, a more ancient Christian Church. It did not raise its altars against those of a pre-existing Christian society, and hence it rigorously follows that it is the same religious society which was founded by Christ and promulgated by the apostles, that it is therefore apostolic in origin and in the doctrine which it holds and teaches—that it is the body of Christ and the organ of the Holy Ghost, and that not one iota of the saving doctrines which it received from Christ and His apostles has it changed or corrupted. But, admitting for arguments sake, the possibility of such a change, if such a change took place, we would surely find some trace or proof of it in history.

We can lay our finger on the map of time, and point out the periods when the ancient heresies arose, and can tell the nature and character of the errors they propounded. And surely, in the same way and by the same means we could discover the doctrinal changes introduced by the Roman Church, and the precise period of their introduction, had such changes taken place. There would be question, in the case supposed, of the most vital interest of immortal souls, there would be question of corrupting doctrinal truths on which human salvation depended, there would be question of introducing religious tenets and forms of worship until then unknown, and in direct antagonism to the most cherished convictions of millions of human beings. How, we ask, could such a momentous event take place without raising the utmost commotion amongst the Church's children, how could such a thing occur without calling forth the most energetic protests from hosts of the clergy and laity. And yet in the whole history of the Church we do not find the slightest trace or proof, the faintest opposition or protest against the alleged changes and corruptions which are falsely asserted to have been introduced into Christian faith and worship by the Catholic Roman Church. This is a proof amounting to a demonstration that no such change or corruption had ever taken place, and that therefore the doctrines of the Catholic Roman Church have come down from the primitive church and are really and truly apostolic. It will not do to say, as some adversaries assert, that those changes were gradually and insensibly introduced; for all history as well as experience and common sense demonstrate that such a thing is an utter impossibility. We therefore conclude that the Catholic Roman Church, and discipline is apostolic in doctrine and holds in its bosom, pure and entire, the whole revelation of Christ, and that the distinctive tenets of Protestantism are of human invention and a congeries of the merest novelties.

But the Church of Christ must be apostolic, not only in doctrine, but also in its ministry and jurisdiction, that is to say, there must be in the church a public, perpetual, and uninterrupted succession of bishops from the apostles down to our time. We are now come face to face with the question in which of the two societies, Protestant or Catholic, do we find a perpetuation of the Apostolic ministry? In which do we find lawful mission and jurisdiction? It must be premised that Christ intended the apostolic ministry, which He instituted, would be continuing in the discharge of its saving functions down to the end of time. "All power," He said to His apostles, "is given to Me, in heaven and on earth." The evident meaning of this special commission is that the apostolic ministry should last in the world to the end of time, that though the apostles would die, we do other men they would live in their lawful successors, and the apostolic college, created and chartered by the Son of God, would continue forever in its office of teaching the doctrines of Christ and in the administration of His ordinances as long as there existed men to be taught and souls to be saved. This truth is further emphasized by St. Paul (in Ephes. iv. c. 11-13) writes that Christ gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and other evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry unto the edification of the body of Christ, till we all meet in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. But a constant, unbroken succession, of pastors, although necessary, is not sufficient to constitute a true Apostolic ministry in the full sense of the word, otherwise the early heretics such as the Nestorians, Eutychians, and Donatists could have claimed the Apostolic ministry, notwithstanding their errors and schism, so long as they retained a valid ordination. There is required, besides, a lawful mission, or the faculty and authority to teach and dispense the mysteries of Christ, conferred by competent authority. The Apostles undertook not the work of the holy ministry until duly commissioned to do so. No one should take the honor to himself, but he that is truly called of God. "Even," says St. Paul, (Hebrews v. 6.) "Christ did not glorify Himself to be made a High Priest, but He that said to Him, Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech." The Eternal Father, then, constituted our blessed Lord a High Priest and gave Him from all eternity His commission to teach mankind the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Christ commissioned his apostles, for he said, "As the Father hath sent me I also send you" (John xii. 22) and the apostles sent their successors, and so on down through the ages. This is the divine order established by God for the appointment and continuation of the legitimate ministry; and outside of this divinely appointed order, no one is authorized to preach the word of God, or to dispense the holy mysteries. Our Blessed Lord, before His ascension, organized the apostles into a teaching body, clothed them with His powers, and commissioned them to go and teach the world. "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth, going, therefore teach all nations, and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. xiii. 18, 20).

This teaching body was constituted a moral person which was to live forever in the execution of the divine commission. Peter is the head of the Apostolic College—the rock on which the Church was built—the superior who was assigned by Christ the office of confirming his brethren. It was to him and the other apostles our Lord said, "He that heareth you heareth me, he that despiseth me despiseth him who sent me" (Luke x. 16). To him and the other apostles constituting the teaching body, Christ said, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another paraclete, the spirit of truth, who will teach you all truth, and abide with you for ever." (John xiv. 16). The divine commission therefore, to teach all nations was given to the apostles and their lawful successors in the work of the apostolate. To no one outside of that body were the words, "Go and teach" addressed, and therefore no one outside of it has commission to do so. Any person else presuming to exercise the office of a

shepherd of souls would be rightly considered as not entering the sheepfold by the door, but by climbing up another way, and would, therefore, be a thief and a robber, coming to kill, and to steal, and destroy (St. John x. 1); he would be like those false prophets of whom the Lord complained through his prophet Jeremiah (xiii. 21), "I did not send prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." Hence St. Paul insisted on this lawful mission as the very basis of man's salvation. "How then," says he, "shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed, or how shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they be sent?" (Romans x. 14). Wherein the apostles proceed from invocation to faith, from faith to hearing, from hearing to preaching, and from preaching to mission; so that in the last analysis mission becomes, as it were, the basis of man's salvation; since, without mission, imparted by God to His preachers, the people could not have true faith, or the true worship of God. Mission has been at all times both in the ancient and in the new dispensation, by divine appointment, a necessary condition of a lawful ministry and it has in consequence been considered a wicked and profane usurpation for any person not commissioned to assume the offices and duties of the ministry. Hence God inflicted the awful punishment of being swallowed up alive into the earth upon Core, Dathan, and Abiron for having attempted to usurp the priesthood of Aaron and the authority of Moses. (Numbers 16, 24, 31, 33v.).

It is incumbent on those who claim to be apostles, or the heirs to their authority, to prove their mission and exhibit their credentials as ambassadors of Christ. Even in civil society it is necessary for ambassadors to prove by their credentials that they are duly commissioned by the government which they claim to represent; it is required from judges to prove that they are duly commissioned to judge causes and sit in judgment on their fellow-citizens.

We must, in scriptural language, try every spirit whether it be from God. The most arrant impostors have claimed the authority of Heaven for their self-improved missions and their destructive deadly errors. From Mahomet down to Joe Smith, founder of the Mormon, impostors and fanatics have given it out that they were of God. Mission, therefore, must be proved and must be easily, irresistibly proved, as God could not rest on doubts and uncertainties. He strictly requires submission and obedience to those who are in His name and more He owes it to His goodness and His justice and veracity to furnish to His true messengers, such testimonials and evidences of their mission as that all honest searchers for the truth can easily and surely discern them from mere impostors. And such in fact has been always the case. When God appointed Moses to be the leader of His chosen people, He empowered him with the most splendid and startling miracles in proof of His appointment and mission. The prophets proved their mission by miracles as well as by the fulfillment of their prophecies. The apostles proved themselves the envoys of heaven by the most astonishing prodigies, even Christ Himself repeatedly appealed to His works and miracles to show that He was sent by His Father. Hence it is by no means sufficient for a man to say that he has an envoy of heaven and holds a commission from God to preach and govern; he must prove it by incontestable miracles if he claims to be commissioned to establish a new form of religion. When a new order of things has been established, when religion is once founded, a lawful mission to teach and govern the people may be obtained in an ordinary and normal manner that is by communication from those who received the authority from God to grant it—that is, the body or organization originally constituted by God. In this is the former case there is a true mission from God, through the channel which He Himself appointed. 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