

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER X.

A RECAPITULATION UPON THE EUCHARIST.

Now the far greater portion of their discourses and writings were produced in these critical and perilous circumstances: consequently they must more frequently have expressed themselves with reserve, than with unrestrained freedom. At the same time, these measured expressions, this ambiguous phraseology, while they withheld from unbelievers the adorable mysteries, failed not to discover them to the christians, and were in fact such expressions as naturally presented themselves to the mind of the holy fathers. They sprang from the very nature of the Eucharist, which is composed of two parts, the one exterior & sensible, the other internal and invisible; the former terrestrial, the latter celestial: the one presenting to our eyes the appearances of bread and wine, the latter proposing to our faith the true and real body and blood of Christ present, but invisible. Under the former point of view, it is a sacrament, a sign, a symbol; under the latter, it is the true and real body and blood of Jesus Christ, the body that was born of the blessed virgin, and was nailed to the cross, the blood that flowed from his side, and purified the earth. When therefore the fathers had to disguise the mysteries, they had only to confine their expressions to the exterior appearances, and designate them according as they fell under the cognizance of the senses: and the faithful, instructed in the doctrine, had no difficulty in penetrating the veil, and passed on from the sensible appearances to the unseen reality.

The fathers spoke the truth—but did not say all the truth. They spoke the truth: for, considering the external part alone, the Eucharist is bread and wine: it is a type, figure, symbol, sign or sacrament: and we catholics to this day frequently employ the same expressions. They spoke not all the truth: for they were silent upon the invisible and principal part, which as it must be known to the faithful alone, and not discovered to any but the neophytes, was concealed from the rest, and clearly developed to them alone. Such, most assuredly was the situation of the fathers for more than four centuries: generally constrained to adopt a mysterious phraseology, occasionally at liberty to speak openly to the faithful, and in duty bound, on the great solemnities of Easter and Whitsuntide, to expound them clearly and explicitly to the neo-

phytes. The fathers therefore were true to their principles, varying their expressions according to circumstances, accommodating themselves to their readers and hearers; obscure and reserved to the non-initiated, clear to the faithful, and dogmatical to the neophytes.

After the lapse of many centuries, our age has been distinguished by the expedient resorted to on the part of your controversialists, who, to prop up their opinions by the authority of tradition, have gone in quest of numerous passages in the ecclesiastical writings, where the fathers were evidently constrained to speak with reserve, and confine their expressions to what was external and sensible in the Eucharist. Had they been honestly in search of the doctrine believed and taught in the primitive ages, instead of consulting writings in which the fathers were under the necessity of veiling their thoughts, they would have preferred those in which their inmost belief was necessarily brought to light. Why do not your teachers prefer the society of the faithful and the neophyte, and listen with them to the discourses delivered, with closed and guarded doors, by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Chrysostom of Antioch and Constantinople, Gaudentius of Brescia, &c. &c.? Why after the conclusion of the instruction, do they not assist at the liturgy immediately succeeding? Why do they not follow the priest to the altar? Wherefore not repeat with the pontiff, the admirable supplications addressed to heaven? Wherefore not advance to the sacred table together with the faithful, and the recently admitted christians, who for the first time are going to participate in the holy mysteries and adore them? He who at the present time seeks to become acquainted with the primitive belief would naturally adopt this method. It is the only rational way of proceeding. But your instructors turn to the writings that were published to the world, sit down with the catechumens and listen to their instructions. Acting thus they meet only with a few allusions to the Eucharist, thrown out on the way, or accidentally introduced by the subject. Assuredly there is nothing here to be learned but the passing and trifling information that the fathers thought proper to communicate to the uninitiated; and it is not at all to be wondered at that your instructors should discover no additional elucidation of the subject, so long as they persist in associating themselves with the catechumens. Let them join the initiate, and the bandage will be removed from their eyes and all obscurity will be at an end; if after this they mingle with the catechumens, the enigmatical discourses there delivered will be no longer to them a subject of embarrassment: Like the rest of the faith-

ful they will catch the hidden meaning designedly concealed under ambiguous expressions; and will know how to pass from the veil and appearance, to the object that is veiled and signified.*

If the professors of the protestant religion had pursued this proper and simple method, they would not have lost their time and labour in accumulating passages, in which the fathers referring, as behoved them, to nothing more than the sensible part of the Eucharist, have described it under the appellations of bread and wine, of a sign, a figure, a type, a symbol and a sacrament: † and catholic polemics would not have been obliged to compose so many works to explain the multitude of passages, which never will prove any thing else, than that they spoke obscurely of the mystery, when it was impossible for them to do otherwise. ‡

I am, however, far from wishing to deal fraudulently with you, and take you by surprise: if you still are in doubt and uncertainty as to the doctrine of the fathers touching the Eucharist, you are perfectly at liberty to communicate this letter and also the foregoing ones, to any of your instructors whom you wish to consult. I have but one request

* "We call it also a mystery, for another reason: which is, that we believe not what we behold, but behold one thing, & believe another: for such is the nature of our mysteries. I who am a believer, consider a thing after one manner; and the unbeliever considers the same thing after another. When he hears speak of baptism, he considers only the water; but I not only consider the visible matter, but much more the purification of the soul effected by the Holy Spirit, not judging by the eyes of the body of what appears there, but by the eyes of the soul. In like manner, when I hear mentioned the body of Jesus Christ, I conceive what is said, in one way, the unbeliever considers it in another: and as children, looking into books, know not the power and signification of the letters and understand not what they see; and us, when an illiterate person receives a letter, he sees nothing but ink and paper, while one who can read, discovers words, communicates with an absent friend, and can convey what answer he pleases in reply; so is it with the mysteries: although unbelievers hear them spoken of, they do not understand them; but the faithful being instructed by the Holy Spirit, know the virtue and efficacy of what is there concealed."—Sant Chrysostom, in his discourse on the treason of Judas.

† These expressions we ourselves are continually employing. They are found used by those fathers, who most clearly establish the doctrine of the real presence and transubstantiation. Recollect here the remarks we have made together on this particular.

‡ M. Nicole, among others, has, with unwearyed industry, entered upon a lengthened discussion of all the texts objected by his adversaries; and has demonstrated (the term is not too strong) that they are all reconcilable with the catholic doctrine and there is not a single one that is inconsistent with it.