

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BY A PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN. CCCLXXIX.

The correspondent says: "Early Christianity, so far as we know anything about it, was a reaction by the powerless in worldly things against the powerful."

Here we have this writer's evident animus towards Christianity, the disposition to represent it as growing up, one hardly knows how, out of some obscure road, embedded under the half-forgotten name of Jesus of Nazareth, until at last, about the middle of the second century, it comes more distinctly into view, under the government of the body of Bishops.

This style of talk might have been more effective fifty years ago, when the Tubingen school was still in its prime, which accommodated the first history of the Church to an a priori theory of Hegelian philosophy.

This began, by putting the whole New Testament, except Jude and Revelation, into the second century. The fourth Gospel it put as late as A. D. 170.

Soon, however, reflection began to show the absurdity of governing history by theory, instead of theory by history. As soon as the spell of the Hegelian formula was broken (which is of value in its place): "First Indifference, then Antagonism, then Reconciliation," scholars began to find themselves at liberty to draw conclusions according to evidence.

Thus left free, there was a rapid revision towards the original dates. The critical school, as represented by Adolf Harnack, while still clinging to some of the old opinions, now puts almost the whole of the New Testament into the first century, and even dates many books earlier than tradition has done.

Such an approach of the critical to the original schools would have been thought almost impossible a few years ago. Professor W. M. Ramsay of Aberdeen, the eminent archaeologist, began by putting the whole New Testament, b. d. into the second century. However, the farther he carried archaeological, and historical, and geographical research, the more flagrant he found the contrast between the atmosphere and conditions of the New Testament and those of the second century.

He has ended by replacing all the original dates, not to mention the original dates, by the date of the pressure of three different orders of facts, concurrent in results. He evidently agrees with the learned Quaker scholar, James Rendel Harris, that "the Catholic traditions have an obstinate way of verifying themselves."

Indeed Roman himself, who began by disbelieving the very existence of Jesus Christ, ended by presenting a figure of Him, which, however distorted and defiled by the sickly and purulent sentimentalism of Parisian semi-theism, evidently rests upon the reality of the majestic original.

Here then, whatever scope any one may choose to give to the legendary imagination of the first Christians, we are in full possession of the original archives of the Christian religion, written during the first two generations after the Ascension, from their earliest specifically Jewish form, as found in the first chapters of Luke, and of Acts, through the half-rabbinical half-Hellenic style which St. Paul's intermediate position made it expedient for him to use, to the Platonizing tone which St. John thought best to employ when the Greek philosophy began to be powerful, and dangerous, in the Church, and needed to be met on its own ground, partly for refutation, partly for assimilation.

We have, besides, the serene simplicity of Peter's first Epistle, breathing an atmosphere of undisputed ascendancy.

Then we have, almost before the canonical writings are completed, the non-canonical namesake of St. Barnabas, Clement, the teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Igratius, Polycarp, Quadratus, Aristides, Hermas, Athenagoras, Diognetus Papias, Hegesippus, Justin Martyr and Tatian, and others, until, with the Catholic Bishops, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and the Montanist presbyter, Tertullian, we are fairly ushered into the light of the third century. If anybody, with all this accumulation of evidence, will still have it that we enjoy only a dim, half-conjectural knowledge of early Christianity, he seems to be reserving certain convenient nooks of assumed obscurity, to which he may retreat if pressed by disagreeable facts.

There are many details of the early Church, to which we are imperfectly informed, but the essence of original Christianity is distinctly enough before us.

Was the Church originally a conspiracy of the poor against the rich and powerful? What else can be meant by calling it "a reaction" against them?

The Church might have been a reaction against the powerful in one of two ways.

It might, in the first place, have been a secret league, like some of our Anarchist sects, for the overthrow of the wealthy by using all convenient opportunities of fomenting disorder, in hope of securing a larger share of good things out of the general chaos.

I need not say that the early Church was anything rather than such a confederacy. In the exultation of the new deliverance, there were undoubtedly incipient stirrings of disorder, but these were promptly checked by the apostles. St. Paul bids believers remember that the constituted authorities, although heathen, and although often evil men, were God's own delegates for the maintenance of social order, and exhorts Christians to give the Emperor and his viceroys no occasion to suspect them of seditiousness. St. Peter says: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the King, as supreme, or unto governors, as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. As free, and not using

your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."

During the three hundred years of persecution, as we know, no rebellions are ascribed to the Christians, while robbery was accounted by them a mortal, and by the rigorists, a hardly venial sin.

Again, the Church, leaving the world to go its own way, might have required all her own neophytes, at baptism, to surrender their estates, and to renounce all eminent rank.

Of this, too, there is nothing, except in peculiar crises of the cause. The Saviour enjoys a free communication of soul, and indignantly denounces the contemptuous indifference of Divres towards Lazarus as worthy of damnation. Yet, as we see in St. Luke xvii, 7-10, the Lord assumes that even the Twelve might have servants, and land, and cattle, and in Chap. xxii, 25, 27, recognizes that there might be inequalities of means among them. Yet St. Luke is precisely the one that brings out most distinctly the communistic side of the Gospel. Nevertheless, in speaking of the temporary socialism of the Church of Jerusalem, he emphasizes the fact that it was purely voluntary, and shows that it was transient, soon mentioning "the poor of the saints," as distinguished from those who had no need of help from abroad.

St. John also, as we know, did not take the Virgin to an apostolic phalanstery, but "to his own home." As the ruler of the prosperous business man, Zebedee, and friend of the High Priest, he was probably of abler means than some of his brethren, even had he not been the son of the Virgin's kinswoman.

We will consider some additional facts. CHARLES C. STARBUCK. Andover, Mass.

FIVE-MINUTE SERMON

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost.

JOY IN GOD'S SERVICE.

Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, and be ye thankful. (Coloss. iii. 15.)

Of the several great lessons contained in to-day's Epistle, the one most insisted on and brought out is that of thankfulness and joyfulness in the service of God.

In the labors of St. Paul (and his labors were more abundant than all the Apostles), in his frequent tribulations and crosses, he never ceased giving thanks in all things—nor did he ever tire of inculcating this same duty on the first Christians. If, then, my brethren, thankfulness and joyfulness are such a great part of religion, it would be well this morning to see if they be characteristic of our service.

We have a multitude of reasons for being thankful to God, if we but thought of them—the gifts of nature—life, health, strength, the pleasures and gratifications of the mind, learning, objects of interest, of study and beauty, both in nature and art, the pleasures of home, the joys of friendship. These are real and great benefits; they are the causes of joy and motives of thankfulness. Our good God intended us to find enjoyment in the moderate use of them, not, indeed, as ends in themselves, but as means to our one great end. And so he has spread the charm of beauty over this place of our sojourn and made it pleasant and interesting, lest we lose heart and become sad, and languish on our journey to heaven.

But to speak of higher gifts and benefits: What motives of joy and thankfulness ought we not to find in the knowledge of God, His truth, mercy and goodness as made known to us in the Scriptures, and in His Divine Son, our Saviour and friend, the God-Man: in the gift of the faith, the spiritual riches of the Church and the sacraments, His mercies to us personally, His blessings on our labors, the removal of dangers from our paths, His gracious forgiveness of our sins, time and again. Then, too, what we expect and through His mercy count on for the future—the joys of heaven, those delights which pass our understanding. The life of heaven will be pure joy, and its one occupation thankfulness. Surely, then, this life should be a figure and foretaste of it; and so St. Paul thought, for he bids us "be thankful," "rejoice and rejoice always," "sing in the Lord in our hearts, and in every word and work giving thanks to God."

It is plain that, since God has done His part in bestowing the benefits in such abundant measures, we should do ours in returning thanks. For gratitude is the correlative of benefit. It is equally plain that the true religion is joyful. Now, is such our religion? Is this the way we act? Is it the way we consider God's service? We see, think, we are anxious and sad faces, than being our glad ones; and I fear that the joyfulness of the latter does not come generally from the reasons I have given. It comes too often from worldly causes, from success in temporal things, from hopes and prospects which relate to indifferent things, if they are not dangerous and positively bad. Whereas the common idea of religion is that it is an unpleasant, and uphill sort of a thing, which imposes restraints upon us, and far from being a cause of thankfulness and joy, is a great interference with the pleasures of life. Pious people, too, are regarded as dull, simple, spiritless creatures, quite the opposite of joyful.

This is all wrong, all false, and, if it be our religion, then we have not the true religion, at least practically. For as God's benefits are real and great, so our thanks and joy should be in them and correspond to them. Religion being our highest duty, should be and can be our highest pleasure. God says it is, and He is Truth; those who have tried say the same. "What shall I render to God for all He hath rendered to me?"—"better one day in thy courts than a thousand years in the tents of sinners."—"taste and see how sweet the Lord is." Our consciences and experience bear out the same truth; for surely evil cannot be compared to goodness, in fullness, in intensity, and above all, it will not wear, it will not last, and it leaves us dissatisfied, fearful, sad. The pleasure and joy of a

good life to a good man even here are far greater than the pleasure of sin to a sinner. Let us, then, make up our minds, once for all, that not only in religion the most necessary, but the wisest and the happiest thing for us. Let us serve God with thankfulness, both for what He has done and will do for us. If we are faithful. If He has done so much in this state of probation, exile, and punishment, what will He not do when the time of reward and enjoyment arrives. Surely, considering what we are and what we have done, the pains and crosses bear no proportion to the benefits, and we have cause even in present labors to be thankful and in every word and work to give Him praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

TALKS ON RELIGION.

SCANDAL, SACRILEGE AND SIMONY. I. A large and an extensive business is generally promoted and propagated by a number of agents. The kingdom of God is advanced by the clergy, the religious and the zealous faithful. The work of Satan is pushed and propagated by his agents. There are a great many who, though they have made no special compact with the devil, are yet zealous in his service and in opposing God and in promoting evil.

People who give scandal are agents of the devil. Scandal is like a stumbling block placed in the pathway of the innocent, causing them to fall. Though the innocent may not fall, the scandal giver is guilty of having placed such a cause, or for having given the bad example.

The scandal may be given by words, as by cursing and by blasphemy, or by being given by deed, or by omission, or by indirect means, or by conduct, or by omission of some duty, as to neglect to hear Mass. Then the spreading of bad literature or bad pictures is another fruitful source of scandal. Persons who advise others to steal, or parents who direct, or who teach, or induce their children to lie are to be numbered among the scandal-givers.

The murder of the body is a great crime, but it is not a crime so great as the murder of the soul, and scandal murders the soul. Hence our Lord says: "Woe to the man by whom scandal cometh." "It were better for him that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." Along the same lines are the words of St. Paul: "Destroy not him for whom Christ died." (Romans xiv, 15.)

Since each one is bound to save his own soul it is sinful to take scandal upon one to become its victim. We should avoid those who habitually give scandal on the principle, "If thy hand scandalize thee cut it off," which clearly indicates that we should not permit any one to endanger the loss of our soul. St. Paul says: "Evil communications corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. xv, 33.)

Weak brethren are apt to take scandal from things that are not really scandalous to persons better instructed and of better judgment. Of those St. Paul says: "Eat not a scandal in your brother's way." (Romans xiv, 13.) And again the Apostle of the Gentiles says: "From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves." (1 Thess. v, 22.)

It is quite plain that all those who are doing the devil's work, either by design or carelessness, are really his servants and his agents. If they continue in his service they will eventually get their portion with him.

Sacrilege is a sin which springs from the violation of a person, place or thing which has been consecrated to God or to His service. Violence offered to any one consecrated to God is not merely a sin against the individual, but it is an affront offered to God. An insult offered to an ambassador of a king is taken as an insult offered to the king himself. Unless ample apology and satisfaction be given, nations justify the avenging of the insult by war. God is not less jealous of His own honor in the persons of those who represent Him, than we are of our own honor, and do not "evil to my prophets." (Psalms civ, 15.)

When King Jeroboam stretches forth his hand from the altar in Bethel against the prophet of the Lord saying: "Lay hold of him; his hand which he stretch forth against him withered, and he was not able to draw it back again to him."—3 Kings xiii, 4.

We have here an example which shows that God miraculously avenged the violence which the king offered to the prophets who had spoken to him in God's name.

The honor due to God requires that those who are charged with His ministry should be treated with respect, not merely for their own sakes but out of reverence for the office they hold. "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech." Any act of violence against a priest is a sin of sacrilege. The Church herself punishes the person guilty of such a sin with the penalty of excommunication.

Places solemnly set aside for divine worship should be treated as sacred. "If anyone violate the Temple of God, him shall God destroy." (1 Cor. iii, 17.) We know that our Lord drove the money changers from the Temple saying: "My house is the house of prayer." If such safeguards were thrown around the temples of the old law how much more sacred are the temples of the new law, since they contain the Real Presence, Christ Himself.

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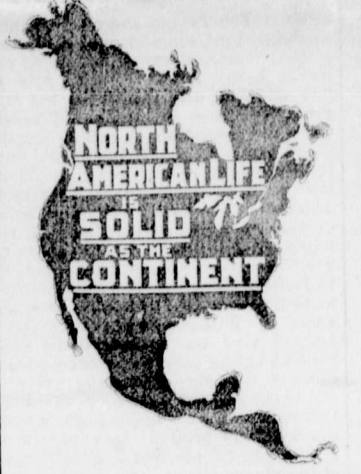
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OUR BOY

By Louisa The Present

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