



Jesus said to his disciples. Whom do you say that I am?

Simon Peter answered and said. Thou art Christ the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answering, said to him Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my father who is in heaven. And I say to thee that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I shall give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven. S. Matthew xvi. 15-19.

'Is the Church likened unto a house? It is placed on the foundation of a rock, which is Peter. Will you represent it under the figure of a family? You behold our Redeemer paying the tribute as its master, and after him comes Peter as his representative. Is the Church a bark? Peter is its pilot; and it is our Redeemer who instructs him. Is the doctrine by which we are drawn from the gulph of Sin represented by a fisher's net? It is Peter who casts it; Peter who draws it; the other disciples lend their aid, but it is Peter that presents the fishes to our Redeemer. Is the Church represented by an embassy? Saint Peter is at its head. Do you prefer the figure of a Kingdom? Saint Peter carries its keys. In fine, will you have it shadowed under the symbol of flock and fold? Saint Peter is the Shepherd, and Universal Pastor under Jesus Christ.' S. Francis of Sales. Controv. Disc. 42.

CALENDAR.

- May 14—Sunday—III after Easter, Patronage of S Joseph, Doubt class com &c
- 15—Monday—S Isidore C Doubt Sup
- 16—Tuesday—S Ubald B C Semid
- 17—Wednesday—S John Nepomucene M Doubt
- 18—Thursday—S Venantius M Doubt
- 19—Friday—S Peter Colesano P C Doubt cum &c
- 20—Saturday—S Bernardine of Sienna C Semid

LETTERS

By the Right Rev. JOHN HUGHES, D. D., Bishop of New York, on the importance of being in Communion with Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolical Church.

LETTER IX.

DEAR READER—

82. The whole of this subject of the Church, certainly the most important in the entire range of Christian theology, may, after what has already been said, be comprised in a few paragraphs. The great difference between Catholics and Private Reasoners is this: the former naturally, and by the institutions of Christ, look for the truth of Revelation in and through that Visible Society of men originally receiving it from Him, and perpetuated with a moral identity of continuation, until the present day. The Private Reasoners, on the other hand, discard this Society altogether, and seek for the truths of Religion without its intervention, prepared to build up what they call a Church formed from the results of their individual private interpretation of Holy Scripture. The Church of God on Earth is composed of men, but to these men Christ imparted the deposit of eternal truth, with command to preserve, and authority to propagate, the same until the end of the world. Now Catholics know, as well as Private Reasoners, that men, as such are fallible—but, they do not suppose, with Private Reasoners, that the fallibility of man's nature is to triumph over the wisdom and the power of Christ in the preservation and perpetuation of those saving truths which were originally communicated by Him for the salvation of the world, and the knowledge and certainty of which were as essential to all generations, as they were to that in which he spoke and taught.

83. Remark accordingly; that the Holy Scriptures and the early Christian writers, in their reference to the doctrines of Our Saviour, constantly point to the Society that had received these doctrines, and never, at least in a sense that would exclude the Society, to the doctrines themselves in the abstract. The principle involved in this mode of reference is analogous to that by which one would reach the soul of some fellow-being. Man is so constituted that he can take cognizance of the body in which it dwells, but not of the spirit itself, except through its manifestations in the body. Now, the inspired written word of God frequently designates the Church as the Body of Christ, as if to adapt the great institution of His spiritual Kingdom on the earth to the actual condition of our nature, so that we may not, like the Private Reasoners, be as children tossed to and fro, by every wind of doctrine, looking for the Spirit; but that seeing the Body around us, and in the midst of us, wherever the Church is found, from the rising to the setting of the sun, we may there find with certainty what they seek for elsewhere in vain. Where the body of Christ is, there is His Spirit, there are His promises, there is His Doctrine;—and as the soul in man manifests itself through corporeal faculties, so also the truth, and the teaching and the knowledge of God, as the soul of the Church, exhibit themselves in a sensible

manner through the organic faculties of this, Christ's mystical Body. The Church's manner of teaching is human, and such also was the manner of the Apostles, and of the Saviour by whom she has been founded, but this is only her earthly phase, this is only the process of bringing out to the visible world, the Divine light, once kindled, and now inextinguishable in her consciousness, and in her intelligence. The medium, if you please, dims in the transition, the brightness of the heavenly illumination which it transmits, but in this it is fitted and adapted to the feebleness of human vision, so that, when the eye of the mind comes to rest upon the awful mysteries which the Church teaches, the economy of God's institution is such, that the brightness does not overwhelm us. Men live and move in the light of day, but it comes to their sight reflected and not by direct beams, as if their eyes were strong enough to encounter the glare of the noon-day sun.

84. The Church is composed, therefore, of two parts, the one representing the Body of Christ, the other His Soul. Inasmuch as this Body is composed of men, it is human, but inasmuch as it is animated by the Spirit of Him whose Body it is, the Church is Divine. She proceeds in all her official acts either in determining the truth that God committed to her keeping, or in condemning the error specially opposed to any portion of that truth, in a two-fold manner. The first decision which she ever gave, in her corporate capacity, is that recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Apostles Acts; when some "coming down from Judea, taught the brethren that except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved." Here was a small specimen of what we have called Private Reasoning. Paul and Barnabas were present, and for a moment involved in the discussion. But, instead of deciding the question, either by appealing to the Bible, or to the authority of inspiration, which St. Paul undoubtedly possessed, the matter is referred to the Church in the aggregate of her prerogative. This is the proceeding according to the human form of the Body of the Church. Statements and counter-statements, having, no doubt, been submitted; diligence having, no doubt, been observed, and pains taken, after a human manner, to sift out from the extraneous matter, the true and precise proposition on which a decision was solicited. This done, the Church is about to pronounce, and Peter, in the name of the Church, utters the decision also, in a human manner, but, at the same time, with a direct leaning on the Divine and invisible element which constitutes the source of her eternal inerrancy.—"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rising up, said to them My brethren, you know that in former days God made choice among us that by my mouth the gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. And God, who knoweth the hearts, gave testimony, giving unto them the Holy Ghost as well as to us. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why tempt you God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we believe to be saved, in like manner as they also. And all the multitude held their peace."—Acts xv., 7-12

This may be regarded as the preamble, or introduction, to the final sentence which the Church was about to pronounce. But when that sentence is to be uttered, you perceive that it is not men alone, since, in the 29th verse we read, "For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay no further burthen," &c.

85. This example, which is recorded in the inspired volume, must necessarily have taken place in the practice of the Church, anterior to its being committed to writing. The Church has never deviated from the practical rule here laid down by her founders. At whatever period error appeared and was advocated, so that any portion of the Church of Christ was liable to be led from the faith, by its delusiveness, the Church, either by the assembling of the ancients under the primacy of Peter, in the person of his successor, employed diligence to investigate and study more thoroughly the relations of the primitive doctrine on the question agitated, as also of the error opposed to that doctrine, and all this in a human manner—but when, finally, the sentence was to be pronounced, discriminating between the article which was of faith, and the new heretical proposition, the judgment was always substantially uttered in the same language—it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us. After the sentence was once pronounced, there was no excuse for those who forsook the Church and attached themselves to the Private Reasoners of the several ages that have since elapsed. And as the human body, when in a sound and healthy condition, drives forth the noxious humours, and repels the infectious that would taint it, so the Church, by God's appointment, economised the wisdom of its interior life, by removing all the excesses of private error, which would at once have deformed its comeliness, and wasted the resources of its spiritual health, if they had been allowed to adhere to it. They might live or seem to live, for a little while, by the power of their late communion with her. But presently disputes among themselves, errors more extravagant than those first thought of—division and sub-division among them gave manifest evidence that in leaving the Church, they earned forth with them no perennial fountain of spiritual vitality. So it was with the Judaizers mentioned in the text, so with the Ebionites and the Nazareans. So with the Gnostics, the Nicolaitans, the Corinthians, the Basilideans, and Saturnians, the Valentians, the Marcionites, the Montanists, the Manicheans, the Sabellians, the Arians, the Nestorians, the Eutychians, the Pelagians, the Albigenses, the Wyckliffites, the Hussites, not to name thousands of other sects that seemed to live a little while, until the remnant of vitality which they brought forth from the Catholic Church was exhausted. Whilst they seemed to flourish, they were actually fading away—and so it is now with those who have seceded from the Church by the private reasoning of Calvin, Luther, Socinus, Cranmer, and the others. In the land of Luther, his followers have glided, almost unconsciously to themselves, into rank infidelity—whilst they read the Bible, however, and then reason upon it. In the land of Calvin it is the same. In England there is a genteel conformity among genteel people to certain statutory forms of religion—the ungentle, that is the lower classes, remaining enveloped in the thickest folds of brutal ignorance and vice. In this country the actual condition of Private Reasoners may be described in four words—Indifference in part, Fanaticism in part still, with a large portion of infidelity, on one side, and a small counterpoise of calm and sober "Religiosity" on the other. But whether you speak of Germany, Switzerland, France, or America, the word which expresses the general condition everywhere is Confusion! Confusion! Confusion!! That is to say, religious disagreement, religious controversies, religious divisions and subdivisions, to the end of the chapter. Such is the harvest which the enemy of truth is reap-

ing from the labors of those who were separated from the Church in the sixteenth century.

86. It is a great relief to the mind to turn away from this melancholy state of things among the private Reasoners to the calm, steady, and uniform course of the Church for a period of more than eighteen hundred years. She sends the same message of salvation to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, until she will have delivered it to all nations, and have imbued with its heavenly meaning the hearts of all people, and tribes, and nations. When individuals, or even mighty nations with their rulers, prove themselves unworthy of such an inheritance, she cuts them off, be they prelates, kings, nobles, or peasants. She knows no distinction, and when such interests are involved she has no consciousness of fear, no calculations of the contingencies of futurity. Nor is it necessary that the cause should involve the denial of all her doctrines. It is enough that any one doctrine of the deposit of Christ's revelation should be obstinately denied, to entail that sentence by which the infected member shall be separated from her communion. If by an extravagant supposition of an impossible contingency, all the Bishops of France, Germany, and Italy, should deny obstinately any one doctrine defined by the Council of Trent, she would excommunicate them with greater pain, but with as little reservation as if they were but as Ronge in Germany, or Kirwan among ourselves. On the other hand, while she is animated with the most ardent and tender zeal for the gathering of souls into the fold of Christ, she could not abate one jot or tittle of her doctrine to secure the return of the nations that have fallen from her faith, to the conversion of the whole world. If she were capable of doing the one or the other, she would not be the Church that Jesus Christ, established on the earth.

87. These remarks, however, apply only to the deposit of faith over which she has no control, except, that of Divinely appointed guardian witness, and unerring expositor. Hence the distinction, in the Church betwixt matters that are of original and Divine authority, and those which result from ecclesiastical legislation. The Church had a right to arrange the outward form of her self-government according to the exigencies of time and of circumstances. Certainly when she offered the Holy Sacrifice of her liturgy at the tombs of her martyrs in the catacombs and hiding places of Pagan Rome, she did not appear to outward vision the same as when she performs her symbolic rights surrounded by the pomp and magnificence—if anything that man can do in the worship of God deserves to be called magnificent—under the mighty dome of St. Peter's. So with regard to all ecclesiastical laws enacted simply by her authority—so with regard to her whole code of canonical legislation—so with regard to her entire discipline, so far as it derives its authority from her enactments—it is manifest in all these matters, that the same power which enacted the law, has the right, in certain given cases, to dispense with its observation, or if the exigency requires, to abrogate it altogether. The Church, herself as the witness, and the doctrines received by her from Christ and His Apostles, constitute together, the things of which testimony is to be borne, and the witness who is to testify. These are unchangeable—these are indestructible—these are infallible. Infallible truths revealed by the Son of God, and an infallible witness and teacher of them until the end of time. And hence nothing that has occurred in this world since the days of Christ and His Apostles can be made the ground-