

CONSIDERATIONS ON CATHOLICISM BY A PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN.

CCXXIII.

Sacred Heart Review.

In the cant phrase of these vulgar Protestant controversialists we have it continually recurring: "In the Middle Ages and especially during the Great Schism, there were two, and at last three infallible Popes, infallibly cursing one another."

Of course, as I have said, this is not so much ignorance as lying malice. Not only does Lansing, infinitely illiterate as he is, know that the Catholic Church holds that there can never be two genuine Popes at once, although there may be more than one claimant of the title, but he knows perfectly well, for he has read the Vatican definition, that even for the one authentic Pope the Church claims no such infallibility as would be imperilled by a temporary schism.

Lansing himself tells us this by quoting from the "Pastor aeternus." Here the Church claims only doctrinal infallibility for the Pope, and not even that except when he defines "ex cathedra." Now it so happens that every cathedraic definition has proceeded from an undisputed Pope.

Although not of faith, it is widely held that a Pope is infallibly guided in establishing a monastic order. Here also the Church is safe, for every order has been sanctioned by an undoubted Pope. Had it been otherwise, such a questionable order would have been simply tolerated until a Pope of certain title had either confirmed it or annulled it.

It is almost universally held, although neither is this of faith, that the Pope is infallibly guided in a canonization. Now only one saint, I believe, namely Charlemagne, has been canonized by an antipope. The Church, having judged that in this case the antipope acted wisely, has tacitly ratified the canonization. It therefore derives its authority, not from the antipope, but from his authentic successors. Yet even so it bears the taint of its origin. The honors of the altars are now rendered to the great Emperor only at Aix-la-Chapelle and in some parts of Switzerland.

We see then that the Church would suffer no serious trouble of conscience over questions of doctrines, or canonizations, or approvals of religious orders, even had the Popes of doubtful title been inclined to pass upon them; which we see they have not. In such cases the Church would simply wait until the title was settled. Should it prove unsound, all such decisions would collapse, unless ratified by an unquestioned Pope. Of course the matter has long since ceased to have any practical force.

Those who use this specious but superficial mode of attack upon the Catholic Church think that they have irresistible artillery when they remind Catholics that in the years before the Council of Constance there were three men claiming the papacy, each having a colorable title, and each obeyed in a part of the Church, yet concerning whom she has not positively determined, unto this day, that any one of them was an authentic Pope, as two of them must certainly have been spurious. It follows therefore, say these men, that all the bishops instituted by two, or by all three, were intruders, and all the matrimonial dispensations invalid, and all such marriages were concubinage.

These things do not follow at all. It is a first principle of canonical law, that when any one has a colorable title his acts of jurisdiction are valid. No one of these three exercised the supreme prerogative of defining, but his current acts of government within his obedience held good. Therefore the institutions and dispensations, alike of Balthasar Cossa, calling himself John XXIII., of Peter de Luna, calling himself Benedict XIII., and of Angelo Cornaro, calling himself Gregory XII., were all alike valid. Not until the obstinacy of de Luna refused to acknowledge Martin V. did his papal acts, in his little peninsula of Peniscola, become void.

Of course these arguments are for those a few steps above the level of the Lansings and Christians, and such trashy characters. This raff has neither patience nor sense for anything but the clatter of their

imbecile formula: "Three infallible popes, infallibly cursing one another." What good does it do to tell them, in language papally confirmed, that the Pope does not pretend to be "infallible or impeccable in his life and conduct, or in his political views, or in his relations with temporal princes and governments, or even in the government of the Church?" It does no good to remind them that an anathema, besides having no infallibility when it concerns a person, is no more a curse than the 28th of Deuteronomy, or St. Paul's sentence against the incestuous person, on the two of which it is modelled. They will listen to you for a moment, and then, like other people bereft of their wits, the one by nature, the other by sectarian malice, will begin again on the endless repetition of the old refrain: "Three infallible popes infallibly cursing one another." As long as they stick to this, they feel as safe as a blind horse going round in a mill. Cut them loose, and bring them out on the free ground of argument and historical consideration, and there would be danger of their becoming idiots outright.

Lansing tells us that John XXIII. was deposed for very shame of his crimes. True, he was a very evil man. Yet Lansing tells us that the crimes of Benedict VIII. were quite as great. An astounding assertion, seeing that nothing was ever alleged against either the title or the life of this Pope, although Milman thinks he might have been a little less fond of a brush with the enemy in the field. I should have surmised a slip of the pen, except that he elsewhere gives us the same number. In fact the man is about as well acquainted with the line of the Popes as of the Mikados. He drags poor Benedict VIII. before the Council of Constance, in happy unconsciousness that he died four hundred years earlier. This is a little ahead of his feat in resuscitating Cardinal Bellarmine a hundred and fifty years after his death, to poison Pope Clement XIV.

Of course the man means, as far as he is capable of meaning anything, Peter de Luna, who called himself Benedict XIII. How now is the Catholic Church answerable for the character of an antipope, whose title of Benedict XIII. was assumed by an authentic Pope in 1724?

However, Lansing is grossly calumnious (calumny, indeed, is the breath of his nostrils) in saying that the crimes of Peter de Luna were as great as those of John XXIII. Apart from his final rebellion against the Church, he was a man of spotless character. The learned and impartial Creighton tells us he was a man devout, able, and of blameless morals. The Bishop of London also exonerates him of fault in accepting the election, and in refusing to lay down the tiara as long as matters were so perplexed. However, when at last John XXIII. and Gregory XII. gave way, and the authentic Pope Martin was chosen, de Luna became a perjurer and schismatic by refusing to acknowledge the true Pope. The Council, in pronouncing him a heretic also, simply referred to the obstinacy of his schism, which was the common form of language at that time. In fact, his doctrine was unimpeachable.

The subsequent mildness of Rome towards de Luna's adherents seems to show that the obstinate old Spaniard was recognized as having become morally incapable of receding, so that we are not required to be very severe as respects his subjective blame worthiness.

And this is the man whom Lansing describes as stained with all the crimes of Balthasar Cossa!

Page 81 Lansing reproaches the Church that all the Popes, bad or good, are held "equally infallible." True, equally infallible in doctrine, when speaking "ex cathedra." Was not Caiaphas, the murderer of the Redeemer, as authentic a highpriest as the pious Jehoiada? Does not St. John attribute to him, officially, the gift of prophecy, which the Roman Church ascribes to no Pope as such?

Alexander VI. was the worst of the Popes, yet he never uttered a heresy. Does the man mean to tell us, against the Saviour and St. Paul, that orthodoxy always implies goodness?

He then says that "all" popes, even the worst, dying, "are canonized as 'saints.'" Hear the willing-

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ly ignorant falsifier! No Pope has been canonized for 190 years; only two in 600 years; only three in 1,100 years. Only one-fifth of the whole number have been canonized, almost all from the centuries of martyrdom.

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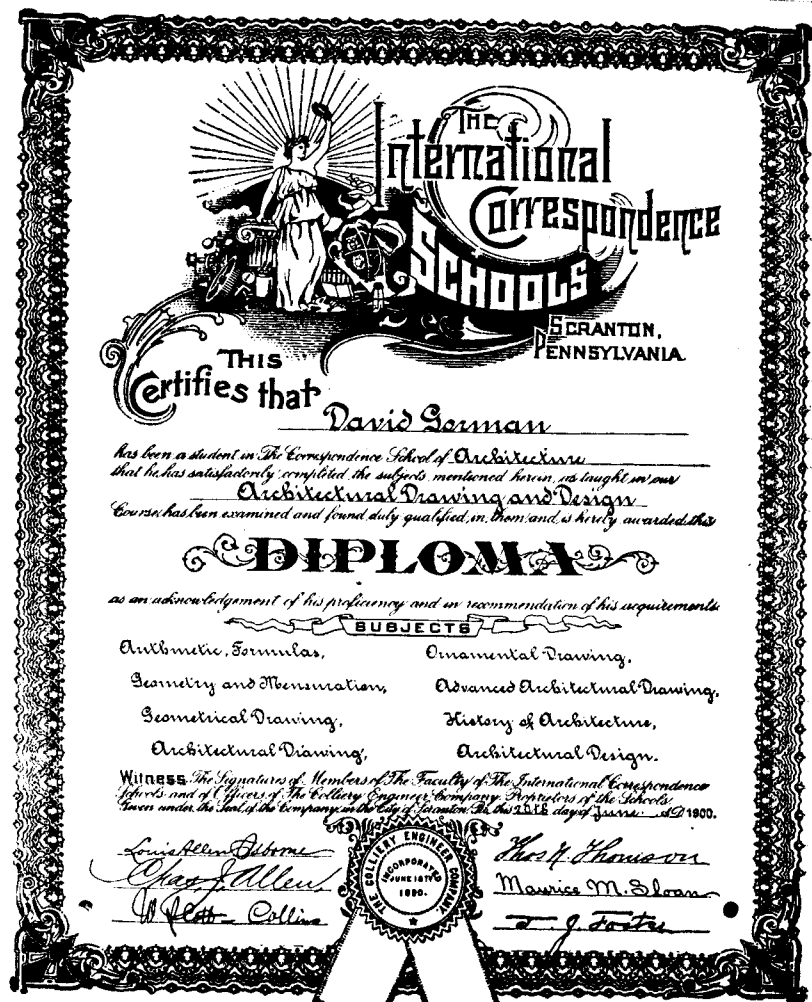
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