

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.

Simon answering, said to him. Blessed art thou, Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven: for 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 hoked into a house? It is a 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 his 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, and 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. Contriv. Disc. 42.

CALENDAR.

- JANUARY 30—Sunday—IV after the Epiphany S Felix IV P and Conf Doub Sup. 31—Monday—St Peter Nolasco Conf Doub. FEBRUARY 1—Tuesday—S Ignatius B M Doub. 2—Wednesday—Purification of B V. M. Doub. II class. 3—Thursday—St Dionysius P. C. Doub Sup com &c. 4—Friday—St Andrew Corant B C Doub. 5—Saturday—St. Agatha V. M. Doub.

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 I.

DEAR READER:—

1. Allow me to consider you, as one of those not in communion with the Church, to whom these letters are addressed; and let me entreat you, to meditate on their contents, as if they were written for yourself, alone. They are dictated, on my part, by a spirit of charity, so far as I can be conscious of motives, for I should have but little hope of Heaven's pardon, if I were capable of writing with any other intention, than that of bringing you to the knowledge and profession of the whole truth of Christianity, in this life,—as the appointed means of conducting you to the enjoyment of eternal happiness, in the better life which is to come.

2. I do not mean to notice these trivial writings which are published, from time to time, outside of, and against the Communion of the Catholic Church. The effect, on your mind, if they produce any, is to prejudice you against a faith which you do not believe, and to unsettle, perplex, and confuse you, in reference to what you do believe. Besides this, the means employed to produce these results in your mind and feelings, are generally unworthy of Christian writers. If you are at all familiar with the style and manner of these anti-Catholic writings, you must have perceived that they are remarkable for levity,—that a sneer, a sarcasm, a little anecdote, a stroke of ridicule, is deemed by their authors a sufficient argument for that world of readers on whom they intend to make an impression. On Catholics, let me assure you, they make no impression whatever, except it be one of regret and pity. What they put forth of real objection to the Catholic religion, has been said,—and better said,—more than two hundred years ago, and has been often and often, repeated since. But this also has been often, and often, refuted—so that now, there is, absolutely, nothing new, in the way of objection to the real doctrines of the Church.

In this statement of the case, dear Reader, do not accuse me of an attempt to mislead you. That whole outburst of pretended argument, with which the Reformers, as they are now almost ironically called, astonished the Christian world, was, leisurely reviewed, and logically, as well as theologically, refuted, by—(not to name others)—the brothers Wallenberg, Boesuet, Beccan, Bellarmine of the Society of Jesus, and others. Since that period, there have, of course, been many names appended to the list, on both sides; but the Question in dispute has ever remained the same.—

“Is the Catholic Religion the same which Christ revealed to that Society of men who adhered to His teaching when He was on earth?”

Writers in the Church—that is, the Society of men, originally constituted as above,—have always maintained the affirmative answer to this great question. Writers out of the Church, with rare exceptions, have always asserted the contrary. Little, if anything, now, can be said at this time, on either part. The writers outside the Church have, individually, their own mode of presenting the objection, the writers within have theirs, of sustaining the defence. In presenting the case, and discussing the question as I propose to do, in the following Letters, I shall, whenever I deem it right, repeat the arguments of those who have preceded me, using occasionally, if that be possible, some of my own,—and presenting the whole in my own, individual, way of viewing it. In doing so, I shall endeavor not to use a single word or epithet, not essential to the truth and force of my argument, which may give pain. My fixed resolution, with the grace of God, is to employ no such word. But if, through human weakness, I shall be found wanting at any time to this resolution, I crave your indulgence to advance.

3. When Christ came on the earth He did not undertake to refute, but on the contrary, professed to confirm, what God had revealed, and what had been believed by the Patriarchs, and the Jewish people. He did not come to oppose but to fulfil, what had been divinely foretold by the Prophets.

He came to be the perfect, but still, intermediate, term of that true, divine religion which, from the Fall of the human race, had its type and symbol of anticipation, in the present, its substance, and reality, in the future. The same events on which the Hope of true believers rested, before the coming of Christ, constitute the ground-work of FAITH, for all true believers, after the accomplishment of His mission, on the earth—so that, the coming of the Redeemer, as He came, was not less essential to confirm and seal the truth of the Jewish Religion, until then, than it was to lay the everlasting foundations of His own special church. But there is this difference, that whereas Christ was only typically present to the Jews, before His coming, He is eternally and substantially present with Christians,—in His espousals with His Church, in the Sacramental Institutions with which He enriched and adorned her,—Institutions, provided for the spiritual life of her children, the guardianship and administration of which are hers alone.

Pay attention, dear Reader, I pray you, to what this Blessed Saviour said, and did, while on earth. This, at least, cannot be objected to by writers outside the pale of the Catholic Communion. On the contrary, they would unite with me in recommending you to study the words and works of the Redeemer—and at this stage of the investigation, it is important that you should do so. Now, in doing this you will observe that our divine Lord, in addition to the signs of the Prophecy, recorded in the Old Testament, and as fulfilling a portion of them, wrought Miracles, to attest the divinity of His character and mission. Having established this, by indisputable evidence, He entered on the functions of His public office, as a teacher from God. He addressed the people of His nation;—some believed,—others refused to believe. The believers became His disciples. Among them were some whom He called by a more specific and personal invitation to follow him. Still, they remain confounded in the ranks of discipleship, until He distinguishes them from the rest, by a higher order of vocation, and constitutes them Apostles. He speaks to the multitude in parables, but to them He makes known the mysteries

of His Kingdom. They were Apostles, chosen and selected by him, to carry His words and works to the ends of the earth, and perpetuate them through all ages, until the consummation of time. So long as he remained on earth, they shared his lessons, and hung on His lips, in common with the rest of the “multitude,” but when He should return to His Father, they were to be His teachers, sent to all nations. To qualify them for this, He kept them more around His person, as friends and intimates. Much of His discourse, as recorded by the Evangelists is addressed to them especially, and exclusively. He thus distilled, day by day, his divine instructions into their hearts, and it was not without a providential purpose that He permitted them to exhibit such vagueness of belief, such dullness of comprehension, as showing the natural weakness of human powers to understand divine things—until the day of Pentecost,—when the Holy Ghost kindled the fire of the Apostles in their souls, and by its light, the natural darkness of their understanding in regard to heavenly things was removed, and all truth, whatsoever their master had said to them, was brought to their mind.

5. But twelve Apostles, invested with equal authority, might disturb the order, and defeat the object, which their Lord had appointed them to establish and secure. His kingdom was to be one—united in itself—His sheep were to be comprised in “one fold,” under “one shepherd,” and not under twelve. Accordingly, out of the twelve, being all Apostles, and, as such, equal in dignity and authority, He selected one, Peter; and in addition to the Apostleship, which he enjoyed like the others, conferred on him special, singular, and individual, prerogatives and power, which had not been conferred on the other eleven, either singularly or collectively,—and, as our Lord had said many things to the multitude, at large, and some things to the Apostles alone,—so, also, He addressed many instructions to the Apostles as such, including Peter, and some things, to Peter alone, in which the others had no direct lot or part. Satan, he said, desired them, (all,) that he might sift them as wheat, but He prayed for Peter, that his faith might not fail; and that he, being once converted, should confirm his brethren. The efficacy of this prayer of the Man-God, has been realised in His Church, from the days of Cephas himself, through the whole line of his successors, down to the exercise of the Chief Apostleship, in our own times, by the great and illustrious Pius IX.

6. The epitome of the foundation of the Church, ought to be to you, dear Reader, a subject of earnest investigation. It involves the great outline of her spiritual organization, her outward policy of union, so to call it, as appointed by Christ. All were believers and professors of His doctrines. Some appointed teachers thereof, to preserve it for those who believed already, and preach it to those who did not,—and one, for the sake of unity and order, to be supreme of the “some” teachers, and over the “all” believers. Nearly two thousand years have since rolled by, and yet this is still the Church’s form. Other institutions have, meanwhile, taken their rise, run their career, of a few centuries, at most,—have flourished, and faded, and passed away, whilst she, the Church, has returned, even in her extended relations to the “ends of the earth,” her pristine form and organization, as received from the hand of her Divine Founder, or, as the Fathers would express it, as she came forth from the wounded side of her Spouse and Lord, on the Cross.

7. As to form, order, subordination, the Church

was complete, at the moment of His Ascension into Heaven. But, as to the divine economy, by which He would kindle up the elements of her existence into spiritual life and activity, she was not meant to have been complete, until the fiery tongues of the holy spirit should descend on the Apostles, to light the inexhaustible lamps of their mission and ministry. From that day, all the members of the Church began to understand, in a sense far higher and holier than “flesh and blood had revealed,” their mutual, subordinate, and harmonious, relations, one to another.—Such is the outward model of episcopal government appointed by our blessed Saviour for the purpose of preserving certainty of doctrine, and unity of spirit, among the members of the society founded on the belief of His divine relations to man.

8. This society is His Church. All His promises are made to her. She is the “pillar and ground of truth.” Her divine builder is her foundations on the rock of Peter, and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.” Her ministers, as His representatives, He has appointed the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. Who should “hear them, should hear Him,” who should not hear them, should be as “a heathen and a publican.” They should teach all nations, and He would be with them, all days, until the consummation of the world. They preached His doctrines to a world buried in sin, prejudice, and error; and as often as the word of life took effect, and faith began to grow, in the heart of any one, it was necessary that she should profess his belief, and seek admission into the existing society of the Church, by the rite thereof,—Christian Baptism. Being once entered, he was made partaker of all the fullness of truth, and all the treasures of grace, which Christ has provided in the Church, and not out of her, for the sanctification of those who would be saved.

9. You may have been told that the Church became a false guide, and thus fell away from the purpose which Christ instituted her to fulfil and accomplish. But, although such statements may have made an impression on your mind, yet, on reflection, you will perceive that this is not only improbable, but that,—if Christ is a true teacher,—it is impossible. Ye, poor mortals, have some knowledge of things past, but the knowledge of things future, is wisely concealed from us. Not so, however, are we to judge of our divine Redeemer. As the God-man, all things were present to his mind. The Church and her teachings, through all generations then future, were necessarily known to him. If she were to be, at any time, an erring Church, He, as a divine instructor, should not have referred his disciples to her guidance and communion. That he did so refer them, is indisputable; so that if you believe in Christ, you must believe in his Church—and if you reject his Church, it must be because you have not entire confidence in his words and promises. That persons who do not believe in him, should adopt this line of argument would not surprise me, but that it should be taken up and urged by those who believe in profess in Him, although cut of the communion of the Church, is indeed an astonishing and painful consideration. It is the same as if they said, “Christ directs you to be guided by the Church and in order to afford divine security for your faith, He has promised to be with the ministers of that Church all days, forever. But we will you not to put confidence in His words—to have nothing to do with his Church—to fly from her communion, if you belong to it,—and to keep away if you do not.”

10. If you are told that you have the inspired