

The Catholic.

Quod semper, quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER III.

ON THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

We have just seen that unity in faith and government is an absolutely essential dogma, taught by Jesus Christ, by the apostles and their successors from age to age, recognized and set forth in all the Churches and in all the communions of the christian world. When we are all of us, without exception, once agreed upon admitting the principle, we must of necessity be agreed upon admitting its immediate and necessary consequence, which is, that Jesus Christ has supplied us with some means of preserving and maintaining this unity. For, to oblige us all, under pain of damnation, to have but one baptism and one faith, to form of ourselves but one only body, one only Church, and to leave us without the means or the possibility of arriving at this, would be inconsistent with his providence and justice. Now we all know and we loudly profess that his providence and justice have never been wanting and never will be wanting to man. We are therefore, all convinced that Jesus Christ has not left us without the means of being able to fulfil his great commandment. We have only therefore to examine what are the means appointed by him, in order that, following his direction and his wish, we may all with one consent have recourse to them, that we may adopt them with sincerity and attach ourselves exclusively to them.

If each one of us were directed by an immediate revelation, a particular inspiration, there is no doubt that we never should depart from unity. But that this is not the means that providence grants us, no person, how enthusiastic or fanatic soever, can reasonably doubt. Every one sufficiently feels within himself that he is not supplied with this miraculous assistance.

But perhaps Jesus Christ may have left his doctrine to our private interpretation; perhaps it was his wish that for the explanation of his dogmas and the understanding of his law we should have no other guide but ourselves, no other judge to attend to but our private opinion. If he had come to establish upon earth a variation in the belief and a plurality in the government of his church, well and good: for we have already seen and soon shall still more plainly see, that the liberty of interpreting just according to our fancy and of preferring and following our own conceits, is the infallible means of introducing disputes, quarrels, and dis-

cords, and of multiplying sects *ad infinitum*: it is diametrically opposed to unity, and is therefore proscribed. We are under the necessity of looking out for another mean, and we shall never find it except in a supreme authority, that speaks with a tone of authority, which presses equally upon all which has the right to declare what is revealed and what is not, what we must believe, what we must reject; and which consequently, itself being secured from error, shall protect us from it, by subjecting us to her decisions. This is the powerful, the efficacious, the only means we can conceive capable of holding us together, circumstanced as we are. Without it, it is impossible we should ever be united; with it, impossible we should not always be so; it has therefore been established; we cannot doubt of it. It necessarily follows from the principle of unity as an effect belongs to its cause, and a consequence flows from its principles. Were there no scripture in the world, were there no monument of primitive tradition, we should not on that account be less certain of the institution of this eminent and infallible authority, when once the necessity of being but one in belief and in communion is demonstrated to us,

But, thank God, we have the holy Scripture, we have the unbroken tradition of all centuries, since the preaching of the gospel, from age to age, down to our days; both attesting in the most authentic manner the positive institution of this authority.

1^o Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, appeared again at different times during forty days in the midst of his apostles and disciples to console them and give them his last instructions, speaking to them of the kingdom of God, which without doubt means his church, and of its progress and its obstacles, of its combats and its triumphs, of the forms essentially necessary in its hierarchy and government and of its unavoidable connection with the powers of the world. It was in his last appearance to them, that he announced to his apostles the termination of his mission and the commencement of theirs, when he solemnly addressed them in these important words: "All power is given me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore teach ye all nations—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." What an authority to go and instruct! Never was such given to man before. It comes to them from the Almighty himself, and subjects the whole human race to them. What security, what confidence is there not given to their teaching by this holy word, *I am with you!* Go, fear nothing: let men and devils rise up against you,

their efforts, their illusions shall not prevail: I hold them under my hand: all power is given to me in heaven and on earth, and by virtue of this power from this moment I stand by your side, and shall unceasingly remain with you, without the least interruption, even of a single day, to the end of time. A potentate may assemble his ministers and say to them, Go, bear my orders to all my empire, inform my people of them: he has a right to do so, he can do it: But is there one who could say, Inform *all nations* of them? Such a command could only come from him to whom the whole human race was subjected. And again should this potentate have conquered the universe, would he presume to add: *I am with you even to the consummation of the world*; he who is feeble and mortal as ourselves, he whose power expires with his life, and is buried in the same tomb with him? This promise becomes Jesus Christ alone, and truly shows us what he is. He made it like a master; he keeps it like a God. By this promise he secures his church against all error in its doctrine, and ensures the perpetuity of its existence and its indefectibility to the end of time. Already has this promise preserved his church against earth and hell for nearly two thousand years; and this without doubt is sufficient to convince us, that it will support it even to the consummation of the world, come when it may.

He had formerly said to the chief of his apostles when he took from him the name he had till then borne, to give him one that was symbolical and mysterious; "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and to his apostles in general "And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete—the Spirit of truth—When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will teach you all truth." These passages are so clear, that at the first glance they immediately discover to us the stability of the edifice he proposed to raise (an edifice not to be overturned by all the powers of hell) and the namissible purity of doctrine in his Church, with which the spirit of all truth is to reside for ever.

I am not surprised that, intending the Apostles to represent him one day and reserving for them a tutelary and continual assistance from on high, he should in the course of his preaching have said to them, and also to the sixty-two disciples. "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." A simple expression this, but yet vigorous enough to put forth at one single stroke and in the highest degree, on the one side, the authority to teach, and, on the other, the duty to