

one, or that the Bible, the true source of knowledge concerning it, is difficult of access. The reverse of this is the case. The declarations of Scripture regarding the Church are most simple and clear; and if they appear otherwise, it is because they have been obscured by "deceitful handling," by human renderings and interpretations. Human learning and interpretation have certainly entangled this question with amazing ingenuity. They have created a labyrinth for the student of theology into which it is difficult to penetrate, and out of which it is hard to escape. Our space will not permit us to discuss what has been written by learned men, or what has been expressed in the public confessions of Christendom about the Church. All that we can do in this way is to state, without comment, one or two of the most prominent definitions which have been given of the Church, by way of introduction to our brief Scriptural consideration of the question.

The Roman Catholic definition, as given by Cardinal Bellarmine: "The Church is the society of men united by the profession of one and the same Christian faith, and the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of legitimate pastors, and especially of the only vicar of Christ here on earth, the Roman Pontiff."

The Tractarian definition, as given by Palmer in his "Book of the Church": "The Church is the whole society of Christians throughout the world, including all those who profess their belief in Jesus Christ, and who are subject to lawful pastors."

The Augsburg Confession says: "The Church is the congregation of the Saints in which the Gospel is correctly taught, and the sacraments are properly administered."

The Articles of the Church of England say: "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

The Westminster Confession says: "1. The Catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be, gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof, and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. 2. The visible Church, which is also Catholic or universal under the Gospel, (not confined to one nation, as before the law,) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

We might multiply definitions, but these are sufficient to show the nature of the doctrinal statements which, in the conflicts of modern times, have been made concerning the Church. The question then is, which of these, or whether any one of these, is the true definition, or contains all that such a definition should include? This question cannot be determined by mere preferences or arbitrary beliefs. It must be tried by some acknowledged standard that will be satisfactory to reason and conscience. Where then, shall we find such a standard? Not certainly in the decretals of Popes, the decisions of Councils, or the traditions of Christianity. These are all fallible as our own judgments are. They have only at the best a "jus humanum;" and while their wisdom and antiquity may, to some extent, win our respect and admiration, they are and can be no substitute for the "jus divinum," which alone we can acknowledge in a matter of this kind. We must, therefore, appeal to the word of God, which, as the revelation of spiritual things to the world, is the only standard for the determination of such a controversy as this.