

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BY A PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN.

I have already criticized as infelicitous Professor Foster's declaration, on page 169, that the Church of Rome claims the right to prescribe what men shall believe, since this naturally means that she claims the same discretionary power over faith which she exercises over discipline, whereas she claims only the power to declare faith, but none whatever to prescribe it.

So also when he says that the Church of Rome claims the right to prescribe what course of practical conduct men shall follow. Apart from certain particular and variable rules of discipline, the chief of which are, the conditions of a valid marriage-contract, she claims no more authority over morals than over faith.

Neither, she maintains, is a matter of Church jurisdiction. Each is purely a matter of Divine revelation. Where there are several interpretations of a principle of essential Christian morals, Catholics believe that Rome is unerringly guided in declaring, or defining, which of the interpretations is true, or, if none is, what is the true interpretation. They do not believe, and she does not believe, that she has a human option in the case, as she would have in any point of discipline.

I suppose we may say, that while the pastoral power of the Church has been frequently exercised over particular applications of Christian morals, her power of defining immutably has been used more sparingly than in questions of faith. It has been used more sparingly, because there has been less occasion for its use. As the Jesuit philosopher Cathrein says, the essential principles of morality seem to be discernible by the very nature of man, even of uncivilized men. Savages themselves could be shown the wrongfulness of adultery, of malicious homicide, of slander, of robbery, of the indulgence of animal appetite to the prejudice of the mind and soul, and many such things. Even the duty of working towards the general fellowship of mankind is something which it is not difficult to bring a bright-minded barbarian to perceive, however hard it may be to root it in his habits of thought and action. As Goldwin Smith says, it is far enough yet from being rooted in the thought or action of the Anglo-Saxons.

The earliest cultivated nations show a high development of morality. Where superstition has not crossed this, it often needs little amendment for the present time. In the tones of the Old Testament, extolling justice, benevolence, truthfulness, chastity, care of the poor, championship of the oppressed. In China, where religion has never been perverted either to lust or to cruelty, you might, as Professor Cathrein shows, quote whole series of moral precepts from their ancient canonics, which would need but a little alteration for use in a Christian treatise, although, it is true, Confucius has introduced elements of insincerity and of revenge which has greatly injured later Chinese development. Moreover, while Christendom, under the influence of the Saviour's equal benediction on man and woman, is slowly working out to the triumph of the stronger sex, Confucius, whose morality is wholly of earth woman is incontestably less robust, in mind and body, than man, sanctions such a tone towards her as makes it positively disreputable in China for the husband to show honor or affection to his wife.

Furthermore, in China filial devotion, so admirable in itself, is exaggerated into pure idolatry, is intermingled with the worship of spirits, and is raised into a crushing predominance, which completely enslaves the present to the past.

A Christian China, therefore, would need profound and heartshaking readjustments of morality. Yet the substance of the present morality, reduced to the just proportions of the various parts, purged of its taint of heathenism, and clothed in that beauty which, as Dante says, and Emerson re-echoes, can never be severed from eternity, might well remain. The early Jesuit missionaries appreciated this, although, as the Holy See decided, they hardly took sufficient account of the darker side of the case, and of the impossibility of converting China, so to speak, unconsciously.

I need not speak of the high moral standard attained, at least in theory (how much more can we say of ourselves) which is so grandly apparent in Aeschylus and Sophocles, and which, crossed and stroked, it is true, by many deformities and defilements, is presented so magnificently by Plato. Therefore it is not strange if the early Church, and the later Church, have needed comparatively few formal definitions of morals. The Saviour still asks us in each matter: "Why judge you not in your own selves what is right?" Christians, in this sphere, have not so much needed formal definitions as the uniform teachings of the whole magistratum, and perhaps not so much even these as continuous exhortation and persuasion. A zealous, and perhaps somewhat narrow-minded Protestant, dwells, nevertheless, on the simplicity and scriptural fullness of the medieval sermons, so that it appears that on the whole the Christian people received then what they most needed.

Yet a fundamental commandment may not always be capable of a precise specification binding on every age and country. For instance, "Thou shalt not kill," is not supposed by any one, except a fanatical lunatic, to prohibit absolutely the taking of human life. There are, it is true, idiots, whom I remember the Outlook to have once highly recommended, who interpret it as forbidding the killing of a tick or a flea. I understand, however, that the Outlook excepts the killing of a Filipino—of course pro bono publico—as too mer-

itorious a deed to be subject to any prohibition whatsoever.

But fools and their patrons apart, all will agree that "Thou shalt not kill" certainly forbids the taking of human life for private ends, or for public ends without due public authority. For instance, we all, with the law, should declare him to be a murderer who put to death a condemned murderer without a warrant from the State. It was with this plain principle that the Paritan Amayas Paulet met Elizabeth's murderous insinuations. Yet we see that in early Israel, and even in later times and countries, the execution of justice on the murderer was entrusted to the "avenger of blood," the nearest of kin. Here then was an act identical in form with that which we should now count worthy of death, but identical in fact with the present act of the officer of justice. Moreover, this primitive custom long continued in various Christian countries, and perhaps has not quite died out of all even yet.

It is plain then that the Church has had occasion for infinite watchfulness and discrimination in her pastoral judgments, not according to her arbitrary pleasure, but according to the actual variations of time and place. On the contrary, she recognized as bound to give the law, and as inflexible doctrinal definitions, concerning the outward form of acts. Even so, in the Middle Ages, when a man had been duly declared a traitor, or which was then esteemed the highest form of treason, a heretic, he was often proclaimed *vogelfrei*, "free as a bird," that is, liable, like a bird, to be killed by the first one that met him. In our time, when justice has become so much more strictly regulated, and when spiritual offences have ceased to be punishable to the civil power, we should at once condemn to death a man that did such a thing. Yet it would be most unjust to denounce as accomplices in assassination a Luther, or Knox, or Melancthon, or Mariana, or Charles Borromeo, or the compilers of the Canon Law. When men stood on the dividing line of two ages, some looked back to the past, some forward to the future. The latter are to be commended, but the former are not therefore of necessity to be condemned.

Now how preposterous it would be to require that the Roman Church should put forth a dogmatic definition, setting those who, in earlier ages, acted according to the apprehensions and usages of those ages, in one category of guilt with those who, at the same time, acted as if no Christian dominion would endure such a judgment passed upon its elder leaders, nor should it.

This matter is worthy of further consideration. CHARLES C. STARRBUCK, Andover, Mass.

The Precious Blood of Christ. The power and efficacy of the holy Sacrament came from the Most Precious Blood shed on the Cross, which merited for us all graces. The Sacraments of the Church are, therefore, in a close connection with the Precious Blood. The Sacraments and their effects flow directly from the blood of Christ. As often as you receive any Sacrament worthily you honor thereby the Most Precious Blood of Jesus as often as any one receives a Sacrament unworthily he dishonors thereby the Most Precious Blood of the Redeemer, and makes himself guilty of a sacrilege.

THE QUESTION BOX by Father Conway, is a book of some six hundred pages, being the replies given to questions received during missions to non-Catholics. It has a good index—often a neglected part of many other questions from the days of St. Peter—was he ever in Rome?—down to the fads of the day, like Christian Science, have been asked in these missions, and in this book find an answer. We predict for this work a large circulation and much good. Just such a little book as Catholics might have and hand to their non-Catholic neighbors. It is bound in paper and can be had for 20c. post-paid from the CATHOLIC RECORD OFFICE, London, Ont. The sale has already in one month reached 30,000.

A PARABLE REVEALED. ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL SCENES OF PALESTINE. The traveler in Palestine sees not infrequently a parable of the Gospels acted out before him. One of these living pictures passed before Frances Power Cobbe, as she was riding through the low hills which bound the blighted flats of the Dead Sea. In her "Life, by Herself," she describes the beautiful sight and the impression it made. While riding alone, a few hundred yards in advance of the caravan, she met a man, the only one she had seen since passing a few black tents eight or ten miles away. He was a noble-looking young shepherd, dressing in the camel's hair robe, and with the powerful limbs and elastic step of the child of the desert.

Round his neck, and with its little limbs held gently by his hand, lay a lamb he had rescued and was carrying home. The little creature lay as if perfectly contented and happy, and the man looked pleased as he strode along lightly with his burden. As Miss Cobbe saluted him with the usual gesture of pointing to heart and head and the "Salam alik!" (Peace be with you) he responded with a smile and a kindly glance at the lamb to which he saw her eyes were directed.

"It was actually," writes the delightful writer, "the beautiful parable of the Gospel acted out before my sight. Every particular was true to the story; the shepherd had doubtless left his 'ninety and nine' in the wilderness round the black tents we had seen so far away, and had sought for the lost lamb 'till he found it,' where it must quickly have perished without his help. Literally, too, 'when he had found it, he laid it on his shoulders, rejoicing,'

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CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER. "Then I cried to the Lord; He heard my voice from them that drew near against me; and His Who is before all ages and remains for ever, He shall answer me."

From these lines we gather that the prayer which the psalmist sent up to the Great White Throne must have been efficacious, for he sings that when he cried to the Lord the sound of that crying was heard and the enemies that drew near in battle against him were stricken down in defeat.

Then, in a tone of triumph, he points out one of the attributes of the God who has answered his prayer, saying of Him that He "is before all ages and remains for ever."

And finally he deduces the moral that we should cast our cares upon Him, since He is so mighty to sustain us. "I may pray in confidence"—in other words, that it obtains its effect—is evident to every one who has accepted revelation—for we know with that knowledge which comes by faith that the ear of the Lord is ever listening to catch even the faintest whisper of prayer.

But why does the psalmist speak of the eternity of God in connection with His power to answer prayer? We know enough of God's nature to realize in an imperfect manner that as He "is before all ages and remains for ever," so His all-embracing knowledge must partake of the same quality of eternity. His mind, therefore, foresaw from the beginning and with inflexible certainty all the prayers that would be offered up to Him. He saw, moreover, the connection and relation they would have with all other things of His making, and He planned His work accordingly. Consequently, in the scheme of creation prayer became an essential factor, a part and parcel of one great whole, and into its working entered the rational beings. Hence man's duty to pray to preserve the symmetry of creation, and hence also the right of the Creator to the prayer of man.

Prayer, therefore, has as much reality for existence and as much a reality as anything we can see or touch.

This must be the meaning the psalmist would have us put upon his words: that God foresaw both his danger and his prayer, and determined the result. With this interpretation, the assertion of modern rationalism, which not only denies all efficacy to prayer but scolds it as an absurdity, becomes a profound lie; for instead of the natural universe being put out of joint by the fulfillment of prayer, it is, on the contrary, clothed with infinite peace and "bound by gold chains around the feet of God."

Revelation—the promises of God—is the only means we have to prove that the prayer is really heard; but where is the proof that God would have to stop the machinery of the world to make prayers availing, as rationalists claim?

The stability of nature, on which they rely, is the uniform working of cause and effect, provided no higher power interferes; the sacredness of nature, so dear apparently to them, is in itself obedience to the Creator, in subservient moral as well as physical ends—both mere expressions, both the creation of Him "who is before all ages and remains for ever."

Why, the mother who bends over the cradle to kiss her fever-stricken child knows this! She knows that the God who struck down David's foes has also the power to cure her son.

Thus the element of prayer, instead of being a disturbance to the pre-arranged order of things, becomes at once a proof of its complex beauty, and the God who is moulding the tear on that mother's cheek becomes at once the same God who can stop the sun in its course and take the stars from the heavens.

Since, then, prayer is part of God's design, it falls upon every man the obligation to pray. Such also is the psalmist's conclusion, for he says: "Cast thy cares upon the Lord and He shall nourish thee," and this asking for God's nourishment or protection is nothing but an act of prayer.

Yes! let us by prayer cast our cares upon the Lord, "for more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Let us learn from the words of the psalmist to pray that God will not only avert spiritual but even physical evils from us. Thus, we have seen, is God's will, and the eternal fitness of the things in His creation is crying out for it, and the cry must be heard. It is God's will.

Beauty of Death. Men seldom see any misery in life so great as to outwight the misery of leaving it. But yet it comes to all of us, that He who made death made it, like all things else, to be beautiful in its time. When life has lived its days but in happiness, grown old with constantly accumulating joys, and then at last before decay has touched it, the grounds soften under its feet, the door opens, and it enters into the new world of eternity; when a young man has tried his powers here and dedicated them to God, and then is called to the full use of their perfected strength in the very presence of the God whom he loved; when a man has lived for his brethren, and the time comes that his life can not help them any longer but his death can put life into dead truths, and send enthusiasm into fainting hearts; when death comes as a rest to a man who is tired with a long fight, or as victory to a man who leaves his enemies baffled behind him on the shore of time—in all these times, is not death beautiful?

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OUR RELIGION.

All Christians, no matter under what particular name they worship God, agree upon the common ground that our Lord established a Church. This was necessary in order that His doctrines might be prepared for future generations. To conclude otherwise would be to confess that He came only to save those who lived during His own time. Such a view implies that His mission of opening the way that heaven for all mankind was a failure. In as far, therefore, as the scheme of redemption was thus not universal it was fruitless and without merit. Admissions of this character, however, are destructive of all Christianity.

Again, our Lord established but one institution, not many. That is, one Church, not a number of Churches with diverse doctrines. This we learn from St. Paul, who speaks of one Lord, one faith and one baptism. Such an institution was necessary in order that the doctrines taught by our Lord might continue to be taught free from error. To this end He commissioned certain men to teach. These He taught Himself, first, that there would be no error, and, secondly, that they might transmit faithful His sacred truths to others. Furthermore, it is a holy institution. First, because its Founder was all-holiness and could not be the Author of anything unholy. Secondly, it is holy in its purpose, namely, the salvation of souls.

These are fundamental facts. Unfortunately, however, the Christian world is not in harmony with them. To cast one's gaze over this field is to meet with the spectacle of a confused Christianity. A multiplication of churches and creeds with little or nothing in common and each claiming to be the institution established by Christ and the custodian of His holy truths. All cannot be true, because a diversity of doctrine is taught. Some, therefore, are teaching the very thing which our Lord sought to guard against in founding His Church, namely, error.

This, then, brings us to the all-important consideration which is the duty of discovering which is the Church established by our Lord. In other words, which is the true Church. This is a duty every Christian is under penalties to satisfy. Nor should he be discouraged by the confusion. The task is by no means as difficult as it may appear. He who seeks the solution under the prayerful guidance of God will find it.

All save one are man-made. Each has its history which is easy to trace. Upon that founded by our Lord have been stamped certain marks which time has not and cannot efface. He Himself placed them thereon and there they must remain. These we have already hinted at, namely, oneness, holiness, Catholicity and Apostolicity. The Church which does not possess them is not the Church of God. We shall next apply the test.—Church Progress.

The Instructible Line of Popes. "The text of the Papacy has furnished the text of many a commentary on current events," remarks the Catholic Transcript. "Jubilant prophecy has, however, had to give way to the sternest of sober fact. It was wonderful that men do not see that the powers of this world can no more destroy the Pope than they can destroy his Divine Master. . . . Popes have a habit of singing the De Profundis over those who strut their brief hour in the enjoyment of rights and privileges to which they have not the shadow of a claim. The gates of hell can not prevail against the Church. Earthly powers enter upon a hopeless task when they set out to uproot the Papacy. Age-long Pontiffs may not in their day see avenged the wrongs perpetrated against them. God is patient and time is but a speck of eternity."

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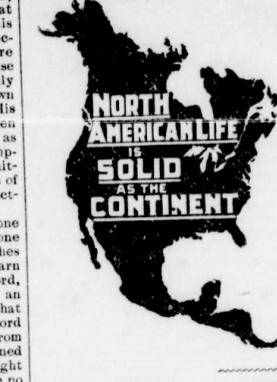
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