

CONSIDERATIONS ON CATHOLICISM.

By a Protestant Theologian.

Sacred Heart Review.—CCLXXXI.

The 'Advance' winds up its singularly futile arguments against taking much interest in a Pope or his administration by declaring that it is hard to suppose that anybody seriously believes in such a thing as a Vicar of Christ.

This declaration, although decent in form, is in reality the severest accusation, short of calling her Antichrist, ever brought against the Roman Catholic Church. Even such an indescribable blackguard as John Christian, nowhere that I can recall, implies a doubt that the overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics profoundly believe that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, and would lay down their lives for the proposition. Indeed, within four years, hundreds, or rather thousands, of Catholic Christians in China have quietly suffered martyrdom for their religion, of which an essential part is, that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ. True, multitudes of Protestant Christians also willingly suffered martyrdom for the name of Christ, but assuredly no part of their testimony in death was directed against the claims of the Pope.

We have been wont to hear a great many charges against the Catholic Church, but we did not look for a sudden accusation, from such a quarter, that the most numerous denomination of Christians in the world is a body of hypocrites, professing a tenet, and ready to die for it, and actually dying for it in throngs, in which, nevertheless, they do not believe! Nobody doubts that had this one point been singled out for rejection, they would have been just as ready to die for this as for the whole Catholic creed.

I do not remember precisely when the Popes exchanged the style of "Vicar of Peter," for that of "Vicar of Christ," but it can not well have been much less than a thousand years ago. The following centuries have been the age of many of the most illustrious Christians of the Church, of Anselm, Bernard, Langton, Edmund Rich, Hugh of Lincoln, Francis of Assisi, Brigitta of Sweden, Bradwardine, Nicholas of Cusa, Gregory V., Las Casas, Isabella the Catholic, Francis Xavier, Catherine of Aragon, Thomas More, John Fisher, Abbot Whiting, Edmund Campion, Robert Southwell, Francis Borgia, Urban VII., Innocent XI., Innocent XII., Fenelon, Bossuet, de Rance, Charles and Frederic Borromeo, Vincent de Paul, Madame Chantal, Joan of Arc, Jane of Valois, St. Lewis, Catherine of Siena, and an innumerable company of holy men and women besides.

Now, most probably, all of these illustrious Christians would have been quite as ready to die for the proposition that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ as the Chinese Christians of today. Indeed, multitudes have in fact died for it, specifically as More, Fisher, Campion, Southwell, the monks of the Charterhouse, besides the thousands slowly tortured to death by the Huguenots and the Dutch Calvinists because they would not disown the claims of the Pope. What a singular body of hypocrites!

Who ever heard of a company of hundreds of millions marching under the banner of a false pretence, in which they themselves did not believe, and yet in this sign making conquests for ages throughout the world! This declaration of the 'Advance' is not only insulting in the last degree, but also irrational in the last degree. Who would have looked for it among the American Congregationalists, a denomination perhaps the least virulent and most broad-minded in the country? I naturally, for propriety, except my own Episcopal Church.

Pray what is there so hard of belief in the proposition that Christ has a Vicar on earth? We all believe that He has a diffused vicarship on earth, that every individual Christian is, in a profoundly important sense, a representative, or vicar of Christ. As said a pious monk of Paris to the late Dr. Muhlenburg, smiting his

breast in humility: "Sum parvulus Christus," "I am a lesser Christ." We believe that as the endowment of goodness, wisdom, prudence, energy, ascends, Christians become in ascending measure representatives, that is, vicars, of Christ. We must believe it possible that there may be one Christian in whom all the qualifications for such a delegation from the Redeemer are so conjoined as to make him Christ's representative in a unique sense. Such a one would certainly be Christ's Vicar on earth.

True, the editor will say, but this would be a vicarship of holiness and endowments not of office. True, but one vicarship need not exclude the other. Was not Judas, though not as worthily, yet as truly, an Apostle as Peter and John? No one can accuse the Church of Rome of having ever disparaged the claims of pre-eminent sanctity, or its power and rights within the Church. The talk of "sacerdotal government" in the Church must be profoundly qualified by regard to the reverence felt for the minds of the saints, whether men or women, learned or simple, laymen or priests. The staunchly Protestant 'Spectator' has designated the Roman Catholic Church as pre-eminently the Church possessed with the love of moral excellence. In this respect she is the direct antipodes of the original Lutheran Church, in which the doctrine was early preached, and widely received, that moral excellence is "prejudicial to salvation" and in which the doctrine that the Holy Spirit renews the hearts of believers was denounced by the horrified Flacius as an unendurable innovation.

When Eugenius III. writes to St. Bernard: "Men call you the Pope's pope," assuredly he does not imagine that he is disparaging his own prerogatives by putting the great Abbot spiritually above himself, any more than Pius X. in hesitating to put himself on a level with St. Anselm. Nay, when Gregory XI. listened to the inspired injunctions of the virgin of Siena to return to Rome, he did not deem that he was derogating from the majesty of his chair by receiving her exhortations as in a manner commands. He thereupon obeyed them, and thereby, as Emile Gebhard remarks, probably saved the impending schism from becoming perpetual. Thus his prerogatives and her inspirations worked harmoniously together. And after his death, when the self-pleasing French Cardinals set up the worthless Robert of Geneva at Avignon, St. Catherine summoned the Holy Monks and Nuns, of all Italy to be, with her, the support of the Roman Chair, and thus, in the end, secured the triumph of the legitimate line.

Here, assuredly, spiritual and papal vicarship were not found at variance. The maiden of Siena and the royal widow of Sweden were as free and bold towards the Popes as a Covenanting preacher, but it was to build up, not to pull down.

No one disputes that official representation of Christ, for its highest efficacy, needs the fulness of Christ's spirit. No one imagines that the Church could accomplish her destiny under a line of Borgias or even of Medici. The Pope reigning in 1517 and his four or five predecessors brought on the Church the judgment of the great Northern defection. Yet no doubt this editor fully believes, with the Evangelical Alliance, that Christ has appointed a definite external ministry, who are therefore his special representatives, or vicars. He would not be beaten out of this admission by the objection that many of the laity are holier than many of the ministry. If he should conclude that he had been baptized or married, or ordained, by worldly clergymen, he would not therefore have himself re-baptized or re-married, or re-ordained.

In other words, he would acknowledge that a duly constituted outward ministry has a special warrant of authority, over and above its spiritual excellence. The Pilgrim Fathers religiously were strong democrats, yet they refrained from the sacraments for several years for lack of an ordained minister.

Of course Episcopalians and Lutherans freely acknowledge that the ministry may rise in various

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degrees, each ascending step, therefore, involving a fuller representation of Christ. And the Lutheran Harnack sees no reason why such a hierarchy might not culminate in a Pope, who assuredly, therefore, would be Vicar of Christ, not in an exclusive, but in a unique sense. The bishops are "assumed into a part of the papal solicitude" and the priests into a part of the episcopal. Yet this common representation of Christ, which in its degree is a true vicarship, does not stand in the way of the incommunicable prerogatives and dignity of the bishops, nor these again in the way of the unique authority and dignity of the Pope.

There is an interesting point remaining, which I wish to mention next.

CHARLES C. STARBUCK,
Andover, Mass.

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