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Catholic Arguments - Protestant Admissions

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CHAPTER VIII.

CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS—PROTESTANT ADMISSIONS.

But what of the Catholic argument that there has been an unbroken line of authority from Peter to Leo XIII.; and running parallel with that line of authority, a continuation of all that is essential to the Gospel, both in doctrine and ordinances? My reply is: Of what avail is argument in the face of facts which contradict it? The facts of both history and prophecy are against the contention that there has been such a line of divine authority, accompanied by a continuation of all the essentials of the Gospel; and therefore, the argument is worthless. But that we may see how weak the argument is in itself, let us examine it.

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost * * * * And lo I am with you to the end of the world.”^a On this Catholic writers remark: “Now the event has proved * * * * that the apostles themselves were only to live the ordinary term of man’s life; therefore the commission of preaching and ministering together with the promise of the divine assistance, *regards the successors of the apostles, no less than the apostles themselves.* This proves that there must have been an uninterrupted series of such successors of the apostles, in every age since their time; that is to say, successors to their doctrines, to their jurisdiction, to their orders, and to their mission.”^b

Cardinal Gibbons, commenting on the same passage, says:

“This sentence contains three important declarations: 1st.

^aMatt. xxviii: 19, 20.

^bEnd of Religious Controversy (Rev. John Milner), p. 281.

the presence of Christ with his Church, 'behold, I am with you;' 2nd, his constant presence without an interval of one day's absence, 'I am with you all days;' 3rd, his perpetual presence to the end of the world, and consequently the perpetual duration of the church, 'even to the consummation of the world.' Hence it follows that the true church must have existed from the beginning; it must have had not one day's interval of suspended animation, or separation from Christ, and must live to the end of time."^c

Of the conclusion here arrived at, it is only necessary to say that it is founded upon an assumption. Look again at the passage upon which the argument is based, in connection with its context:

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying: All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, Go ye therefore, and teach all nations; * * * * and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."^d

It will be seen that the promise was to the eleven apostles, not to the church. To say that this promise "regards the successors of the apostles no less than the apostles themselves," is an assumption unwarranted by the text; and it is upon that assumption that the Rev. John Milner and other Catholic writers, base their conclusions that the word of Jesus is pledged to an uninterrupted continuation of his church in the earth.

The argument of Cardinal Gibbons is still worse than that of Dr. Milner. He says the promise of Jesus to the apostles contains three important declarations, the first of

^cFaith of our Fathers, p. 72.

^dMatt. xxviii: 16-20.

which is: "The presence of Christ with his *church*." This is worse than assumption. The learned Cardinal has written "church," where he should have written "apostles;" and therefore the conclusion he reached, namely, the perpetual duration of the church, is based upon a misstatement; and as the premises upon which the argument is based are untrue, the conclusion is false.

The argument by Catholics is thought to be invulnerable, because the promise of Jesus to be with the apostles to the end of the world is impossible of fulfillment, unless it "regarded the successors of the apostles no less than the apostles themselves." But to be with their successors is not to be with the apostles. Hence the device arranged by Catholics for the fulfillment of this promise of the Lord, misses its purpose altogether. Moreover, there is no need of such device to explain how the promise of Jesus could be fulfilled. "In my Father's house," said he, addressing these same men, "are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, * * * *that where I am there ye may be also;*"^e And there they are with Jesus in the place he prepared for them, and they will continue to be with him even unto the end of the world.

No less erroneous is the Catholic argument for the uninterrupted continuation of the church of Christ on earth, based on the passage in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, when Jesus in the course of a conversation with Peter says to him: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. "By this promise," says a foot-note on this passage in the Douay Bible—the version accepted by the Catholic Church,—“we are fully assured that neither idolatry, heresy, nor any pernicious error whatever, shall at any time prevail over the

^eJohn xiv: 2.

church of Christ." "Our blessed Lord clearly intimates here," says Cardinal Gibbons, "that the church is destined to be assailed always but to be overcome never."^f The argument of Catholics is, that if the great apostasy took place which, as we have seen, is clearly predicted in the scriptures, and, as I believe, confirmed by the facts already presented to the reader in this volume, then the express promise of Jesus Christ that the gates of hell should not prevail against his church has failed. If the prediction of our Savior about the preservation of his church from error be false, then Jesus Christ is not God, since God cannot lie. He is not even a prophet, since he predicted falsehood. Nay, he is an imposter, and all Christianity is a miserable failure, and a huge deception, since it rests on a false prophet."^g

This argument and its conclusion is based upon too narrow a conception of the Church of Christ. That church exists not only on earth, but in heaven; not only in time, but in eternity. It has not been prevailed against, because men on earth have departed from it; corrupted its doctrines, changed its ordinances, transgressed its laws. The Church of Christ in heaven, consisting of "an innumerable company of angels—the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven"^h—the church there has been far beyond the reach of the powers of hell; and ultimately here on earth it shall be triumphant. To repeat an illustration I before used: Truth may lose a single battle, it may lose two or three, and yet be victorious in the war. So with the Church of Christ: many of those enrolled as its members may be stricken down by cruel persecution; those remaining may capitulate with the enemy, and by compromises betray the cause of Christ, and put him to an open shame. Repose and

^fFaith of our Fathers, p. 72.

^gFaith of our Fathers, p. 87.

^hHeb. xii: 22, 23.

luxury, the reward of the above perfidy, may bring in such floods of wickedness that virtue can scarce be found among men, and no abiding place found on earth for the church of the Redeemer. That church, however, still exists in heaven, in all the glory of the general assembly of the firstborn; and from time to time dispensation after dispensation of the gospel will be sent from thence to the children of men, until a people shall be found who will remain true to all its doctrines, accept its ordinances, obey its precepts, preserve its institutions, and the Church of Christ everywhere become triumphant as well on earth as in heaven. The promise of the Lord Jesus will not fail—the gates of hell will not finally prevail against his church.

The reader's faith in the above view will doubtless be strengthened if I remind him that the apostasy contended for in the foregoing pages, is not the first time in the experience of men that the gospel has been taken from among them. It is written by Paul that, "the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith preached before the gospel unto Abraham. A little further on the apostle asks: "Wherefore then serveth the law?" Referring to the law of Moses. That is to say, if the gospel was preached unto Abraham, wherefore serveth the law of Moses? His answer is, "It was added because of transgression till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made * * * Wherefore the law was our school master to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith." Having in the third chapter of his epistles to the Hebrews referred to the dealings of God with the children of Israel in the wilderness,

ⁱThis should be remembered by the student of the Bible. The law of Moses, with its formalisms and numerous rites, does not reflect the fullness of divine wisdom. It was not the best and highest code of laws and morals which God could give, but the best the people could be induced to accept.

and having in the opening verse of the fourth chapter warned the saints against similar sins to those committed by Israel, Paul says: "For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them [ancient Israel], but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The only conclusions to be drawn from these passages is this: In very ancient times the Gospel was introduced among men; but because of their disinclination or inability to keep its laws and live in harmony with its precepts—"because of transgression," it was taken from among them. God, however, not willing to leave his children utterly without light, gave unto them a less exalted law—the law of carnal • commandments. A law better suited to their condition, wherein were forms and ceremonies foreshadowing things to come, designed to act as a school master to bring the people to Christ.

Taking away the gospel from the earth, then, is not a new thing; not a thing peculiar to the first centuries of the Christian era. It had been done before when transgression led the people to depart from its ordinances and disregard its precepts. So, too, after the introduction of the gospel by the personal ministry of the Son of God, when men transgressed its laws, and corrupted its teachings and ordinances by their vain and foolish fancies, or by their efforts to modify it to make it acceptable to a pagan nation, because of transgression, it was taken from among them. Not abruptly. Not in such a sense as that the Christians some night in the third century all laid down to sleep good, faithful saints and awoke next morning stripped of the Gospel and turned pagans. No; but as the elders and bishops who held divine authority were destroyed by persecution, or passed away by natural death, the people with each succeeding generation growing worse and worse, and less and less worthy of the

gospel—false teachers without authority from God usurped power, corrupted the gospel and the church until the false displaced the true, and anti-Christ sat in the temple of God.

Nothing remained but fragments of the gospel; here a doctrine and there a principle, like single stones fallen and rolled away from the ruined wall; but no one able to tell where they belonged in the structure, and so many of the stones missing that to reconstruct the wall with what remains is out of the question.

The fragmentary accounts of the gospel, as recorded by some of the apostles, and their associates, is all that was left to the world. All! But this was much. It has stood to the people since the days of the great apostasy as the law of carnal commandments did to Israel after the transgression which occasioned the gospel to be taken from them. Those fragments of the truth, however disconnected, have been as the light of the moon and the stars to the night traveler; not the sunlight, indeed, which makes so clear the way, but light which, however dim, is still better than absolute darkness; and will, I trust, yet lead many of our Father's children into the sunlight of Christ's restored gospel.

It will not be necessary to examine at length the Protestant argument, viz.: The gospel had been corrupted, and buried under the rubbish of idolatry for ages it is true, but the "Reformers" of the sixteenth century cleared away the rubbish and brought to light again the gospel, and restored the Church of Christ in all its simplicity of organization, and efficacy of power. Of this one need only say that the gospel having been taken from the earth, and divine authority lost, the only way for their restoration is through the re-opening of the heavens and giving a new dispensation of the gospel to men. As this answers the argument, it is only necessary to prove that Protestants admit the apostasy.

Luther said of himself: "At first I stood alone." Calvin in his epistle says: "The first Protestants were obliged to break off from the whole world."^j The editor of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the Rev. H. H. Milman, a Protestant divine, writes in his preface to that work: "It is idle, it is disingenuous to deny or to dissemble the early depravations of Christianity, its gradual and rapid departure from its primitive simplicity, still more from its spirit of universal love."

The reader is already acquainted with the declaration of Wesley that the Christians had turned heathens again and only had a dead form of faith left."^k

In Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*—the work is endorsed by sixty-three learned divines and Bible scholars—the following occurs: "We must not expect to see the Church of Christ existing in its perfection on the earth. It is not to be found thus perfect, either in the collected fragments of Christendom, or still less in any one of those fragments."^l

Roger Williams refused to continue as pastor over the oldest Baptist Church in America on the ground that there was no regularly constituted church on earth, nor any person authorized to administer any church ordinance; "nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the great head of the church for whose coming I am seeking."^m Alexander Campbell, founder of the sect of the "Disciples," says: "The meaning of this institution (the kingdom of heaven) has been buried under the rubbish of human tradition for hundreds of years. It was lost in the dark ages and has never, until recently been disinterred."ⁿ

^jQuoted by Rev. John Milner in *End of Religious Controversy*

^kSee pp. 94-5.

^lSmith's *Dict. of Bible*, p. 163.

^m*Picturesque America*, p. 502.

ⁿ*Christianity Restored*, p. 184.

And lastly, that greatest of all Protestant sects, the Church of England in its homily on the Perils of Idolatry, says: "Laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages and sects and degrees have been drowned in abominable idolatry, most detested by God and damnable to man, for eight hundred years and more."^o

Recently my attention was called by the Episcopal Bishop of Salt Lake City to a slight inaccuracy in the quotation from "Perils of Idolatry" here quoted, and inasmuch as I hold the Bishop in the very highest esteem, both on account of his learning, fairness, and high Christian character, and because it will give an added value to this quotation which has been so frequently used in Mormon literature, to have not only an exact quotation of the passage but also the interpretation put upon it by an authoritative representative of the great English Church, and also what may be said in reply thereto, I give the Bishop's letter *in extenso* and my own answer thereto.

BISHOP'S HOUSE,
444 FIRST SOUTH ST., SALT LAKE CITY,
Feb. 19, 1910.

Mr. Brigham H. Roberts,
Templeton Building,
Salt Lake City.

My Dear Mr. Roberts:—Knowing your desire to be careful and accurate in any statement you may make, I am taking the liberty of calling your attention to an error in the quotation printed by you on page 127 of the first volume of your "New Witnesses for God," from the Book of Homilies of the Church of England, and quoted doubtless from you by Dr. Talmage in his book "The Great Apostasy." I discov-

^oPerils of Idolatry, part iii, p. 216. American Edition—1855.

ered the error in preparing a lecture which I hope to deliver in St. Paul's Church on March 11th upon the Church of England and "The Great Apostasy." The quotation is not on page 3, but occurs in the third part of the sermon "Perils of Idolatry," on page 216 of the American edition of 1855. The following is an exact quotation :

"And thus you see, how from having of images privately, it came to public setting of them up in churches and temples, although without harm at the first, as was then of some wise and learned men judged; and from simple having them there, it came at the last to worshiping of them; first, by the rude people, who specially (as the scripture teacheth) are in danger of superstition and idolatry, and afterwards by the bishops, the learned, and by the whole clergy. *So that laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sects, and degrees of men, women, and children of whole christendom (an horrible and most dreadful thing to think) have been at once drowned in abominable idolatry, of all other vices most detested of God, and most damnable to man, and that by the space of eight hundred years and more.*[†] And to this end is come that beginning of setting up of images in churches, then judged harmless, in experience proved not only harmful, but exitious and pestilent, and to the destruction and subversion of all good religion universally."

You will see, however, that the statement refers to one definite case of superstition and irreligion and does not involve the admission of the break in continuity which you and Dr. Talmage quote it to prove. That this is true seems to me to be proved by the preface to the Ordinal of the Prayer Book of 1549, published two years after the Homily, which reads as follows :

"It is euident[‡] unto all men, diligently readine holye scripture, and auncient aucthours, that frō the Apostles tyme, there hathe bene these orders of Ministers in Christes church, Bissh-

[†]Italics are mine.—R.

[‡]The authography in the quotation is the Antique English.

oppes, Priestes and Deacons, which Offices were euermore had in such reuerent estimacion, that no mā by his own priuuate aucthoritie, might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined and knowen, to haue suche qualities, as were requisite for the same. And also by publique prayer, with imposition of hands, approued, and admitted thereunto. And therefore to the intent these orders should bee continued, and reuerentlye used, and esteemed in this Church of England, it is requysite, that no man, (not beyng at thys presente Bishop, Priest, nor Deacon) shall execute anye of them, except he be called, tryed, examined, and admitted, accordyng to the forme here after folowinge.”

And also from Canon 3 of the Canons of 1603 which is printed in the same volume with the Homilies :

“III. the Church of England, a true and Apostolical Church. Whosoever shall hereafter affirm, That the Church of England, by law established under the king’s majesty, is not a true and apostolical church, teaching and maintaining the doctrine of the apostles; let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored, but only by the archbishop, after his repentance, and public revocation of this his wicked error.”

I hope you will pardon the liberty I am taking in calling your attention to this matter but I know that you, like myself, desire to be scrupulously accurate in any statements we make and especially with reference to an important matter like this.

(Signed)

Yours faithfully,
F. S. SPALDING.

FEB. 28, 1910.

*Rt. Rev. F. S. Spalding,
444 East First South St.,
City.*

My Dear Bishop:—I thank you for your very kind favor of the 19th inst. calling my attention to the quotation in my

first volume of *New Witnesses*, page 127, from the *Book of Homilies of the Church of England*.

I have not yet seen Dr. Talmage's work on the "Apostasy" so cannot say what application he makes of the passage in question, or whether he makes a more extended quotation than I use or not. While between the passage as quoted in your favor of the 19th inst. and as given in my book "*New Witnesses*," there are some words omitted in the latter, yet I think no injustice is done the Church of England, since the universal idolatry proclaimed in her Homily is not made more emphatic by the abbreviated quotation than in the more extended one kindly given by you. In fact the abbreviated one is less forcible on the universality of the Idolatry than the more exact one given by you.

I understand, however, that your complaint of my use of the passage is that I quote it in proof of universal apostasy of the Church, whereas from your viewpoint it can rightly go only to the question of idolatry in the church. Desiring, as you say, to be accurate and careful in any statement I may make in matters of this kind, I shall hereafter be careful to point out the distinction made by you in any future use I may make of the passage (and a new edition of the first Vol. of *New Witnesses* is soon to be undertaken); but will you pardon me if I suggest that the distinction which appears so material to you, does not impress me as important. For if it is truthfully said of Christendom that—quoting the passage as you give it in your letter—"*So that laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sects, and degrees of men, women, and children of whole christendom (an horrible and most dreadful thing to think) have been at once drowned in abominable idolatry, of all other vices more detested of God, and most damnable to man, and that by the space of eight hundred years and more.*" And to this is come

that beginning of setting up of images in churches, then judged harmless, in experience proved not only harmful, but exitious and pestilent and to the destruction and subversion of all good religion universally." After such a condition as to idolatry, has prevailed universally and for "eight hundred years or more," I am doubtful if any valid orders or true Church of Christ can survive such a wreck of religion—or, as the Homily puts it, "the destruction and subversion of all good religion universally."

By the way, if I can make it convenient, I should be very pleased to listen to your lecture on the 11th of March, and promise myself that pleasure if I can be in town. And again thanking you for your very kind letter, and your desire to be frankly helpful to me, I am,

Very truly yours,

B. H. ROBERTS.