

BX
9178
.B83

THE CALLING
OF
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
AND THE
RULE OF HER FAITH:

TWO DISCOURSES.

By ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE, D.D.

262.51 B7

2-010.

THE CALLING

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST:

A DISCOURSE

TO ILLUSTRATE THE POSTURE AND DUTY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

~~~~~  
Delivered at the opening of the General Assembly of 1842.

~~~~~  
By ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE, D. D.
= *refer*
Moderator of the previous Assembly.

PHILADELPHIA:

WILLIAM S. MARTIEN.

1842.

Gift
Tappan Presb. Ass
3-7-1932

THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH.

We pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.—2 **THESS.** i. 11.

FATHERS AND BRETHREN, chosen representatives of a great and wide-spread communion, I stand before you this day to perform one of those remarkable official acts required by Divine Providence of but a man here and there in successive generations, and, as yet, with us, of no man a second time. Deeply impressed with the solemnity of the occasion, let us fervently rejoice in the many evidences upon which we are allowed to trust, that the God of Jacob, the God of a chosen people, is still with us as our refuge and our strength; let us reverently seek in his dealings and his commands, for the knowledge of our peculiar posture and vocation, as an important portion of his visible kingdom; and let us humbly address ourselves to him for grace to be found worthy of our high calling, and for faith to fulfil all the purposes of his infinite goodness towards us.

I. The Church of the living God, is one, and is eternal. It is the light and the hope of this guilty and ruined world. The real history of man, when truly read, is a history of religious ideas, in their progress, revolutions, and results. Though these have been often wrong and often disastrous, yet, in all their manifestations, they establish the universality and the intensity of the religious constitution of man. And amid the mass of deplorable errors which have covered and polluted the earth, a stream of clear and life-giving truth, issuing from the throne of God, has urged its way onward and onward through

perishing generations, and has rolled its increasing and purifying waters, even as far as unto us.

The perversity of man which forfeited the benefits of the covenant of works, in an aggravated form has availed to deprive our race of the full blessings of every successive development of the covenant of grace. The antediluvian dispensation of personal visitation from the heavenly intelligencies, the Abrahamic covenant which brought with it a visible and gathered Church, the Mosaic economy which was replenished with the blessings of a permanent, written revelation, and the personal ministry of the Lord of glory, God descended amongst men to perfect his work; all these passed away, leaving but a very small remnant to save the whole earth from the fate of Sodom. The free dispensation of the Divine Spirit, early perverted by an incipient hierarchy, was at last swallowed up, over the whole Western Church, by the successive corruptions of a spiritual oligarchy, tyranny, and despotism; until the bride of the Lamb, driven into a waste and howling wilderness, sat, for weary centuries, weeping over her murdered children and sorrowing at the long delayed coming of her Lord.

Prone as man is to every false religion, and greedy of every corruption of the true, no lesson has been more sternly taught him, than that the spirit of all these falsehoods and corruptions is fatal even to his earthly hopes. It was not therefore without resistance, though often ill-conceived and ill-directed, that Antichrist rose to such authority and ruled with such absolute sway. The civil power throughout Europe sought in vain to curb his iron rule, and to reform the church upon the bosom of which he sat proclaiming himself a God. The whole learning of the west banded itself against him again and again, only to make manifest its emptiness in such a conflict. The Church itself over which he reigned, often and by its most numerous and powerful councils sought without success its own reformation in its head and in its members, confessing before earth and heaven, and trembling at the

sight of its dreadful apostasies. And more than all, the true children of God, throughout these fearful and protracted ages, lifted up their voices in solemn testimony, from the depths of dungeons, and from the dust into which they were trodden, and from the racks on which they perished. At length when the cup of abominations was full, and that of suffering had been drained to its dregs, the Spirit of God, in infinite compassion, re-visited the earth; the light of the Incarnate Word broke forth once more upon the nations; and down-trodden men arose and shook off their gross darkness, and flocked with mingled lamentations and rejoicings to be healed by the beams of the bright and blessed day-star. Thought, which had slept for ages, awoke as a strong man refreshed by slumber. Inquiry, which as to all useful objects had been fettered and as to most stifled, burst a bondage no longer possible when thought was free. The conscience, long blinded, partook of the same impulse that enlightened the understanding, quickened the perceptions, and sharpened the faculties of man; and his moral emancipation followed immediately, if indeed it did not, step by step, accompany his intellectual. And then the triumphs of personal and public liberty crowned and adorned the glorious fabric of the Reformation.

There is a profound and pervading sympathy amongst all the grand interests of man. Even the convulsions which his sins and follies render necessary, subvert obstacles otherwise irresistible and consolidate a progress which would be imperceptible and uncertain. The advance of modern civilization and the development of all those great elements which constitute the grandeur and strength of our present social state, have been co-ordinate with the progress of that spiritual revolution which, though it had long worked, gained its first decided victories in the fore part of the sixteenth century. Nor is the unity of the religious standards of the Reformation less striking than the co-ordination of all the great interests of society with the spirit of the Reformation itself.

The various national churches which emerged from the apparent chaos of that tremendous struggle, were all designed to be constructed, and except where untoward obstacles in a few cases hindered the work, were all constructed on the same plan, from the same divine model; evangelical in doctrine, pure and strict in morals, simple and free in order, faithful and exact in discipline—they were, with few exceptions, essentially apostolical, Presbyterian. And from that day to this, as states and communities have most thoroughly felt the power of those great principles on which repose their highest glory and success, they have in a corresponding degree cherished the true spirit of Reformed Christianity. The era of the Synod of Dort, or that of the Westminster Assembly, or that of our own Assemblies of 1837 and 1838; the case of the Puritans, of the Covenanters, or our own; the struggles and results in Switzerland, in Holland, or in Scotland, where nature has done least, and where of all the old world, the principles of the Reformation had the freest scope; the synchronous rise of liberty and Christianity in our own land, their mutual relations, and their widely diffused and increasing influences, starting from our bosom and operating through so many channels and in so many lands; all these things and ten thousand like them, are so many proofs of this sympathy which we assert, this unity which we observe amongst all the elements of human progress. A progress easy to be traced whether in its grand combination, or in its separate elements moving side by side across the track of ages. A progress which has been not only real and immense, but *total*, that is in all things; and which for three centuries past, has advanced, and is still advancing with a progressive ratio inconceivable to those who have not attentively compared successive generations with each other, and all with the standard of eternal truth.

It is not pretended that this progress has been uniform; nor even that its separate elements have been steadily developed. We have already shown how in re-

gard to religion the basis of all, it has been remarkably otherwise; and in regard to freedom, to knowledge, to civilization, and to every other element, the same truth, which on our theory would be inevitable, might easily be separately established upon indisputable proofs. Nor is it for us to say that this progress either separately or generally considered, will be more uniform in the ages to come than in those that are past. It is our part to learn what has been, and what is: and while we survey with steadiness and intelligence our present position, and courageously perform our present duty, meekly but confidently commit the future into his hands with whom is the disposal of all its issues. And blessed be the name of God, whether he condescends to use our poor services or not, one thing is certain, he will never forget them.

II. There can be but two aspects in which religion can be presented in its last analysis. It is of God, or it is of man. It ascribes every thing to God; or it ascribes something, more or less, to man. And this something, however minute, so that it be essential, conditional, and meritorious, makes it, at the hinge of our destiny, man's work and religion, and not that of God. Under the grand dispensation of revealed truth, from the first Prophet to the last Apostle, the form in which this fundamental and all pervading error most frequently exhibited itself, was in the way of dishonour to the person and glory of the Lord Christ. For these eighteen centuries, its prevailing manifestation has been in derogation of the work of God the Eternal Spirit. Whether it be the Man of Sin who claiming that vicariate of Christ which Christ himself hath assigned to the Holy Ghost, thereby blasphemes unpardonably; or whether the teachers of that subtle infidelity, which, in various forms, impeaches the personal existence of the Divine Spirit; or whether that pest of Christianity which passes under the name of Pelagius, and reasons away the necessity of his Almighty work; or whether that madness of wild sectaries, which claims his miraculous powers and inspiration; or whether that

boastful and obdurate reliance on a mere form of godliness in which no power abides; still, and alike throughout, it is the person, the work, and the glory of the ever-blessed Spirit which men attack.

The innocence of error is amongst the most absurd imaginations of a corrupt and shallow philosophy. It is indeed our duty to maintain with modesty all possible opinions, since nothing is more certain than that even the wise and good have erred; and to extend even to apparent errors, a charity heightened by the remembrance that our own foundations are often esteemed immovable, only because we have not carefully examined them. But to maintain the innocence of error is to confound all the distinctions of good and evil, truth and falsehood, to obliterate the characteristics of our moral and rational nature, and remove the very foundations of all religion. So far otherwise is the truth, that the worst errors in religion have their origin far more in the derangement of our moral, than in the mistakes of our intellectual faculties. And it seems unquestionable, not only that heresy in general is to be classed with moral delinquencies, but that each particular form of it is invested with its own peculiar and uniform moral character, which will be found to differ as widely from the standard of righteousness as its opinions do from that of faith.

The grand mission of the Church of Jesus Christ is to perpetuate and extend the truth committed to her. The great obstacles to her success are corruption in her own bosom, and oppression from the outward and surrounding kingdom of Satan. When she has been openly pursued with fire and sword, when she has been terrified into silence, when she has been bribed into unholy support of wicked rulers, when faithless intruders have been forced upon her, when she has been seduced into adulterous union with secular authorities—when she has sunk down into a sinful conformity to the world; in all such cases, we see her hallowed mission arrested by the influence of outward wickedness upon her. But when we

see her resting in dead forms and outward ceremonies ; opening her arms to embrace as her children, those who have nothing of the spirit of her Master ; throwing wide her portals to the entrance of every form of doctrine ; mitigating her testimony against sin, explaining away the glorious but hated peculiarities of her faith, lowering the exalted tone of her piety, shorn of her eager and intrepid zeal : then it is the working of inward folly that defeats the end of her sacred vocation, and reveals her self-convicted before God. Who shall say that the dangers from within are less than the dangers from without, or that less grace is needful to deliver a Church from false but pretended friends than from open enemies, to restore her from an insidious poison consuming her vitals than to sustain her under storms beating upon her head ?

Fathers and Brethren of the General Assembly, it is to the work of inward purification of our beloved Church, and thereby of her perfect preparation for the whole performance of her divine mission, that we have been called. This has been emphatically our lot, the matter for which God did set us. And as it was the temper and fashion to consider the danger but small, until we had well nigh been swallowed up ; so, is there now danger that we shall consider the signal deliverance but little more than ordinary, and the work complete before all its blessings are obtained. I thank God for this peculiar opportunity to testify to the greatness of that work which he has wrought for our Zion ; to record, as her organ, her grateful sense of his blessed interposition ; and to exhort her, in his name, to perfect in faithfulness that to which she has set her hand.

For that form of renunciation of God's religion, and adoption of man's religion—which, under the general assault upon the office and work of the Spirit of life and grace, goes under the name of semi-Pelagianism ; and which, under a form of sound words, attacking the very essence of religion in the soul, as well as the very ground of man's acceptance before God, manifested, both to-

wards God, the sinner, and the Church, a shameful perfidiousness as its chief moral characteristic ; had so entered amongst us, and so spread its insidious spirit, and so shot forth its roots and branches, that it remains an equal wonder how it so grew, and how, having so grown, it was ever cast off.

In the year 1801, a treaty under the name of "A Plan of Union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the new settlements," was formed between our General Assembly, and the General Association of Connecticut, by force and virtue of which the outward form of Presbyterianism, was, to the whole extent of the operation of the treaty, prostrated, for the benefit of the peculiar and antagonist principles of Congregationalism ; but with the avowed purpose of ultimately transferring the interests that might grow up under the treaty, to the sole care of this General Assembly. This extraordinary act, performed under the hope of advancing the general interests of Christ's kingdom, was steadily used to ruin those of the chief party to the act itself. Though by its very terms it was in derogation of Presbyterianism, and therefore upon the clearest principles was to be strictly limited to the cases specified in it ; yet was it used as a pretext for every thing needful to be done to break up our Church order, and substitute one the opposite of it in many important particulars. Though it related exclusively to Church order and discipline, it was made the instrument of introducing, fostering, and spreading amongst us every sort of doctrinal and speculative error. Though it was, by its terms, confined to frontier and destitute places, it was adhered to, and the interests growing up under it consolidated and extended until it covered four entire Synods, had insinuated itself extensively into three or four others, and had affiliated, as its friends boasted, six hundred ministers, and sixty thousand communicants, in a single section of the Church, who, as the event proved, had adopted our standards without embracing them, and in order to wield the whole power of those who really believed them.

Though it was meant to be temporary, it was, after more than thirty years of forbearance mixed with anxious and oft expressed solicitude on our part, and on theirs with solemn and repeated protestations calculated to soothe our inquietude, at length claimed to be eternal and unalterable. And the final result is that the system generated under this treaty—the bastard union of Presbytery and Independency impregnated with Pelagianism—has set itself up not only as the *best*, but as the *true and only* representative of the Presbyterian Church in these United States, and has appealed, and notwithstanding its signal discomfiture, still appeals to the civil tribunals to maintain itself in this honest, moderate, and conscientious claim.

They who believe that God has revealed a system of Church order for the government of his people in their associated character, as nearly all Christians profess they do believe; and they who hold that the Presbyterian system embodies all the principles of this revealed government, as every Presbyter, whether ordained to teach and rule or only to rule, has solemnly declared he does hold; must see at once, that if no question beyond one of Church government had been involved in this case, conscientious men had no alternative, but that proposed by the Assembly of 1837 to the four Synods; and that conscientious men ought never to have proposed, and never could accept that put by the Seceders to the Assembly of 1838, and rejected by it. “Become real Presbyterians, as you have long been nominally, and abide with us in peace; or remain what you please, and leave us in peace;” was the language of the Assembly to the four Synods in 1837. The reply was, “We will alter nothing; we will not be Presbyterians, which we have sworn we are; we will continue what we are, and still be Presbyterians.” In 1838 the demand of a riotous secession was, “Take back the four Synods, as they are, and as though they were Presbyterian, which they refuse to become; or else we, a minority of yourselves, will become forthwith, and by an act of mingled fraud and violence, the only true

Presbyterian Church." And even without awaiting an answer, they proceeded by preconcerted and perfidious counsels to attempt the violent revolution of a Church, whose tribunals they had bound themselves by covenant to obey and whose peace they had vowed they would study. Guided even in their last extremity by that master instinct to which their whole career had been subordinated, they pronounced themselves to be the Church which they forsook, as soon as it was apparent they could not thoroughly undo it; and, concealing their final attempts to destroy it under expressions of reverence and love, made the extinction of the Church, as then organized, the indispensable condition even of a peaceful separation.

But the fate of our Church was staked on questions far more momentous than any relating merely to her outward organization. Infidel theories of moral and mental philosophy, shallow views of the doctrines of grace and salvation, false principles of action, wild impulses and methods, had sprung up afresh in the land. And while all the Christian denominations were, in their turn, troubled with heresies and disorders from which it was hoped the Church, having tried and rejected most of them before, was finally delivered; the Presbyterian Church, became, from many causes, the battle-field on which was to be decided, once more, a contest between the religion of heaven and that of earth. For a long time attempts were made to prove that the new theology was not essentially different from the old. Then it was conceded that there was an apparent difference, but it was zealously contended that this lay more in terms and forms of expression, than in substance. After this came the apparently frank admission that there was a real and substantial variance; but then it was argued that this regarded only the philosophy, and not at all the facts either of morals or theology. After another interval came another change, and then the proclamation went forth that the new system and the old were indeed fundamentally different; that

the former was not only most consistent with common sense and the Scriptures, and in a signal manner owned of God the Spirit in his using it and its adherents to convert sinners, but that the old system was absurd and ruinous to the souls of men. And when at length, in the Assembly of 1836, the long sought hour of complete triumph had apparently arrived, the leaders of the party stood boldly forward and said, "The time is come to decide whether men who hold such dangerous errors can be tolerated any longer." And they proceeded to acquit and discharge men condemned for grievous heresy; to vindicate *in these* opinions subversive of the doctrines of grace; to destroy our cherished plans of benevolence; and to deny, for the benefit of voluntary corporations, the great, important, and before unquestioned powers of the Church in the prosecution of her Master's work. But even in such a crisis this extraordinary party could not lay aside its moral characteristics; and after doing so much to destroy the Church and corrupt its faith, they drew up and recorded a confession not only at direct variance with their own published declarations, but more orthodox than many who dreaded and opposed them, ever held.

During all this period, a period so far from brief that its origin is laid in the days of our fathers, this mass of persons professed to have received and adopted *ex animo* the forms of doctrine, order, and discipline of the Presbyterian Church. And yet they could have had no settled views at all, and were constantly varying their opinions; or, what is perhaps worse, they were firmly holding doctrines directly opposite to those they publicly confessed, and were by little and little revealing their real sentiments, as they supposed they had prepared the minds of men for their reception. And when obliged to defend such conduct, they did it on principles utterly at war with all sound morality. Some said they never meant to be bound more than "*for substance of doctrine*;" and claimed the right to be exclusive judges of the sense in which

they made an unqualified adhesion to public standards, as well as of the sense of the standards themselves. Some said it was not clear what the supposed standards really contained, nor perfectly certain what constituted the standards; whence came the practical inference that as the subject matter of the oath was vague, men might swear positively and precisely to that in regard to which they were wholly uncertain. Others more dexterous, swore not at all; but evading all open compact with those towards whom they had premeditated a breach of faith, declared themselves to be of us, gained entrance through bye paths to us, and assumed station and authority amongst us. At the bar of conscience it is perfectly clear that none of them were ever for one moment lawfully entitled to so much as a shoe latchet from that Church, which even until now they claim as absolutely and totally their own; and that such proceedings instead of being defensible on Christian principles, are incompatible with the well being, if not the existence, of any social system whatever.

Such conduct and such principles were united to a theology equally intolerable. What was the peculiar doctrinal system against which we have been called, in the fear of God, to contend so earnestly, can never be a matter of doubt to any honest inquirer. In the newspapers, periodicals, and more permanent and systematic works of the prominent persons in the ranks of the New-theology, that system as expounded by its teachers and embraced by their disciples, remains for the impartial judgment of posterity. In the formal testimonies and deliberate decisions of many of our Church courts of every class, the doctrines of the orthodox and their judgment upon the heresies that have so vexed and polluted the Church, stand also, along with the writings of such of our brethren as have publicly defended God's truth, for the judgment of coming generations. This venerable court, attentive to its high calling and sacred obligations, has not failed to bear its formal and repeated testimony against those de-

plorable errors, which, at the last, it so firmly, and through God's mercy, so triumphantly withstood; and especially in the years 1835 and 1837 adopted detailed statements of those which it judged to be most common and most dangerous. The earliest, the simplest, and the most remarkable public proceeding against the disorders which had inundated the Church, was perhaps "*The Act and Testimony*," issued by a few persons met in the city of Philadelphia on the 27th day of May, 1834, and which, before the meeting of the next following Assembly, had received the adhesion of five Synods, thirty Presbyteries, and above two thousand ministers and ruling elders of the Church. In that instrument the errors charged are classed under the following seven heads, viz. 1. Our relation to Adam. 2. Native Depravity. 3. Imputation. 4. Ability. 5. Regeneration. 6. Divine Influence. 7. Atonement. On all these fundamental points it sets forth "doctrines and statements" which it rightly pronounces "dangerous and heretical, contrary to the Gospel of God, and inconsistent with our Confession of Faith," and which it asserts had extended so far and been so long connived at by the Church courts, that there appeared no escape for the Church from "dissolution," or "corruption in all that once distinguished its peculiar testimony"—but a solemn appeal for instant and effective action, to the "ministers, elders, and private members" of the Church. That appeal it proceeded to make; and by God's blessing it so resulted, that within five years from that time, the General Assembly of 1839 in providing for the commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary, no longer had occasion to warn the Church against wide-spread errors and disorders in her own bosom; but could call upon her to rejoice that the first "great cycle in her history had been characterized by a series of remarkable deliverances from imminent dangers which threatened her purity, her peace, her Christian order, and her sacred liberty."

Well did it become the Church thus to rejoice; and well does it become her still to keep fixedly in her remem-

brance the nature and extent of those deliverances in which she rejoiced, and the character of that work to which this blessed interposition so plainly calls her. We never rejoiced, as we have been falsely accused of doing, in the misfortunes and exposure of such multitudes who once called us brethren; much less, would be glad because of their rejection of the truth, or because of all the evils which must overtake them on that account. But we should and do rejoice, because God allowed us not to fall after the same manner of unbelief; and because he allowed not them, having thus fallen, to subject us to their yoke in the house of our fathers. We rejoice not that our Church should be diminished in numbers, and shorn of much wealth and power and many distinguished names; but we do and will rejoice that while thus curtailed in outward circumstance, she is more pure, united, and efficient than she ever was before, and that she has a better title to the favour of God than she ever had before. We do not pretend that the work has been complete. But while we pray for grace to perfect it in the fear of God, we rejoice in the benefits already conferred both upon us and others. Those who injured us so deeply, and who meditated evils so much more serious against us, even they have been led, in many instances, to pause and examine more carefully that for which they have paid so great a price; and there is perhaps less deep and pervading error in the ranks of the New-theology at the present moment, than during the heat of their contention with us. Sister churches, which stood by in cold distrust, careless of the truth, and such as in carnal self-seeking, hoped by a feigned neutrality to gain at our expense; left to us the whole burden and odium of the strife, and therewith the whole glory, but not as we rejoice, the whole blessedness of a victory, which, if they be faithful now, will many ways strengthen their ancient foundations. The world around us has been obliged to hear discussions which have made all men more clearly understand the great doctrines of Christ, and the peculiar errors that

now assail it. Society at large has profited by the firm and righteous settlement of some of the most difficult questions which are to be reconciled in establishing the absolute freedom of the churches and the legitimate supremacy of the civil power. Error long bold and insolent, has been stripped and abashed, and has learned to dread the truth whose long-suffering she despised, and whose strength and courage she misdoubted. And the Church itself, roused by the fear of losing its most precious deposit, has come to love that treasure more, by how much she was agonized at the prospect of its loss; and her true members, valuing more justly those rights and mercies now assured unto them, feel more keenly the obligation to bestow them upon those perishing for lack thereof. Nor is it too much to say, that, dating from 1831, the Church has, by divine grace, done more for the cause of her adorable Lord within the intervening ten or eleven years, both in what she has pulled down and what she has set up, than in any period of double the same length, since her first plantation on this continent; nor to add, that nothing but want of fidelity to her Master and of faith in his name, can prevent her from advancing with increasing power on her bright and holy career, wherever that may lead, or however it may be marked by sufferings or by triumphs.

Fathers and Brethren, let us accomplish our destiny as becomes men whom God has set for a chosen service. The indications of Divine Providence are extremely remarkable. The posture of the Church as well as that of the nations, indicates an immense revolution already wrought, and one still more stupendous ready to be achieved. A body such as ours, covering so large a portion of this vast empire, embracing such and so great elements of power and influence, combining so many and such varied resources, moving side by side with the progress of the country from its first settlement by civilized men, imbued with the spirit of its institutions and identified with all the elements of its strength and glory; such

a body, thus placed at an era like the present, cannot fail to be the means of incalculable good or evil to mankind. Let us then prove ourselves worthy of our lot. Let the Spirit of our high calling burn within us. As long as God is in our midst we cannot be moved. Let us but be assured that the Lord of hosts is with us: then we will not fear, though the heathen rage and the kingdoms are moved, and the waters roar, and the mountains shake and the earth itself be removed. And whatever may be our perils by sea or by land, in the city or the wilderness, from our own countrymen or from strangers, from public oppressors or from pretended brethren, we shall still fight the good fight, keep the faith, finish our course with joy, and receive at last, from the righteous Judge, that crown laid up for all "that love his appearing."

III. In contemplating the nature and extent of the mission which God has entrusted to his Church, every reflecting mind must be struck with awe, at its majesty, its difficulty, and its boundless scope. The religion of Jesus, is the religion of universal man. No truth is more clearly revealed, more cordially embraced by every child of God, or more thoroughly incorporated with the practical life of every real soldier of the cross, than that the healing streams must flow till they have effaced from the whole earth the last trace of sin and the curse.

Labourers together with Christ—depositories of that truth by which a world is to be saved—separated unto God by his own eternal and free calling as chosen instruments of his most gracious purposes—how illustrious, how sublime is the vocation of his people!

And yet, themselves by nature the children of wrath even as others, prone to mistake alike the truth and the providence of God, and by their sins and their follies coming short in all things; cast too upon a battle field where every combatant is armed against them, every power of earth and hell in league for their destruction, and the fundamental principle of their whole warfare, blazoned in letters of light upon their blood-stained ban-

ner, rendering all peace or even truce impossible; how appalling to the carnal heart are the difficulties of this glorious calling!

And then the scope of the work! From the creation of this apostate earth God has had a church in it: and yet, after sixty centuries of long suffering, perhaps not a sixtieth part of its inhabitants truly know or honour him. For eighteen centuries and more, the Lamb of God has been held up to the view of a ruined world as the only and the all-sufficient remedy for its wretched inhabitants, sunken in guilt and misery; and yet who shall venture to estimate the overwhelming proportion of its buried generations who lived and died without Christ, or who can contemplate, without a shudder, the millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions now living in the flesh, who are without God and without hope? We have indeed scarcely broken the first ranks of the king's enemies. The church has only gathered in a few early ears of a harvest not only ripe but rotting before her face in its boundless profusion. The light of life has but dimly glanced upon the edges of the perishing nations.

Oh! do not our hearts burn within us as we catch the inspiration of a subject so stupendous—of a theme so awful! Instead of being discouraged, every noble and every holy emotion should be mightily stirred within us. If we can do nothing else for the truth, we can seal its testimony with every treasure of our lives; if we cannot save our perishing brethren, we can embrace them in the arms of our love and pour out our sorrows over them; if we cannot serve our Lord with profit and acceptance, we can at least go and die with him, and if need be for him.

But, blessed be God, if we can do nothing worth, our Master can do all things. All our fitness, all our sufficiency, is of him. It is by *faith* that the church is built, established, delivered, enlarged. By *faith* we not only perish not with them that believe not; but by it we work

righteousness, receive the promises, wax valiant in fight, subdue kingdoms, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens. By it, confessing our own emptiness and nothingness and clearly discerning the vanity and worthlessness of all human devices in accomplishing the decrees of God, we yet learn not to despise the day even of smallest things; since with him who rules all things by the same infinite wisdom and power, nothing is great and nothing small except as his favour or his frown is upon it. And well do we know that he who makes the death of one accursed and reputed a malefactor, the only life of the world, is able, even by "things which are not," to bring to nothing all the powers of darkness.

This principle is the very life of the Church of God. By it we "acknowledge ourselves naked of all virtue, that we may be clothed of God; empty of all good, that we may be filled by him; slaves to sin, that we may be liberated by him; blind, that we may be enlightened by him; lame, that we may be guided, weak, that we may be supported by him; divested of all ground of glorying, that he alone may be eminently glorious, and that we may glory in him." Away then, with all human trust, all human contrivances. With a doctrine taught of God, an order revealed by him, an efficiency communicated from him, a mission entrusted to us of him; all carnal devices of whatever kind are at once a hindrance to us and an insult to the majesty of heaven. God has laid for himself the model of his kingdom: why should we mar, by our foolish additions, the workmanship of infinite wisdom? He has committed to his Church, as his Church, the means of saving the world: why should she with an imbecility at once faithless and presumptuous, confessing herself an insufficient *agent* and claiming at the same moment to be an all-sufficient *counsellor*, turn over to others, no matter to whom, her own appropriate, nay her express work? The germ of all apostasy is concealed in this defection. For if the objects set before God's people are not addressed to their *faith*, they come with

no obligation to his Church: but if they do address themselves to our *faith*, then they specifically appertain to the kingdom of Messiah. In the one case we divest the sacred investiture of Christ; in the other we substitute as his, the commandments of men. In either case a principle is enthroned in the bosom of the Church, which is sufficient if fully acted out, to remove every landmark established by God, and to bring in every invention ever devised by man. It is a defection whose principle covers the totality of revealed religion. For the instant we settle it, as the mind of God, that the office of his Church is, not *to do* his work, but to *see it done*; then the whole position of the Church as well towards God and his people as towards this guilty world, is utterly changed from the ground on which the Apostles, the Confessors, and the Reformers have all placed it. But until this be done, there is an end of all reason by which to justify the least departure from the simplicity of faith.

To our immediate portion of the kingdom of Christ these considerations are of the more importance, as it has been in some sort the especial vocation from generation to generation, of that part of the blood-bought host, to testify for the simple and sacred appointments of God. To testify for them, in all their completeness and spirituality; or, if men will have it so, in all their nakedness. We have no catch-words, nor cant-phrases, nor reserved helps, nor short methods, nor royal ways either by land or water, whether by Oxford, by Rome, or by Purgatory. We lay no stress on the efficacy of this or the other rite, ordinance, compliance, conformity, or succession, any more than on might, or power, or blood, or the flesh, or the will of man. They who make these things stand in the place of the powers of an endless life, and they who so far imitate such madness as to deface the truth they really teach with such pitiable follies, are, surely, already enough and to spare, and have won over to these idle and wicked fancies enough and to spare of our fallen race. Why should we, at this late day, turn aside

from our long descended testimony, and seek to build upon the foundation upon which Christ has established us, such miserable wood, hay, and stubble? The period of a great deliverance is rather the period to cultivate with fresh ardour, a spirit appropriate to our great and peculiar work. To stand more boldly than ever for our distinctive testimony. To contend more earnestly for those heaven appointed ways in which we have found salvation, those doctrines of grace which are the support of our souls. To uphold with renewed zeal the established ordinances of God, and to resist with redoubled energy every thing that even tends to impair or dishonour what he has established.

IV. There are two aspects, both of them peculiar, in which the nominally Christian world as it exists before us, must impress every close observer. The first is the position of Christianity with respect to all other religions; the second is the relative position and spirit of its own various sects.

The most accurate modern scholars estimate the whole population of this earth at about six hundred and fifty or sixty millions of souls. Of these about two hundred and thirty millions are nominally, but alas! to a woful extent only nominally Christians; while the remaining four hundred and twenty or thirty millions, excepting four or five millions of Jews, are divided between various degrading forms of superstition and idolatry.

There can be no question, in any rational mind, that Christianity in name and form at least must assuredly and perhaps rapidly extend over the whole world. Indeed it is extremely remarkable that it has not done it long ago. For perhaps every system of religion now existing, with a single exception, is, in its present form, of later origin than Christianity; and that only exception, the religion of the Jews, by the universal dispersion of those professing it and by their clear and enduring testimony to some of the fundamental truths of all true religion, would have appeared fit rather to have prepared the

way of Christianity, than to have permanently obstructed its progress. But when the present posture of the various religious professions amongst men is considered, it is obvious that every element of power and stability as well as all means of enlargement, are wholly with Christianity and against all other systems. Whatever of liberty, commerce, knowledge, civilization, or national wealth, power or glory exists amongst men, belongs out of all proportion, it might almost be said exclusively, to those nations that profess the Christian religion; and to them also belongs, nearly alone, the spirit of intense and eager proselytism. It is not only well nigh inconceivable that any other result except the universal spread of Christianity, in name at least, should result from the present position and action of human society; but if the mode of conversion common in all ages before the Reformation were now resorted to with vigour and perseverance for a few generations, there is nothing in the condition of the world to prevent its early and entire success.

The grand divisions of nominal Christianity when stated as they were for ages contemplated, would give to the churches of the west about one hundred and sixty millions; and to the Oriental churches, principally to what is called the Greek Church, about seventy millions. Dividing the churches of the west again into Papal and Protestant, giving to the latter about fifty millions and to the former about one hundred and ten millions (of whom however many millions are geographically amongst the Oriental rather than the western churches;) and we have the three general, grand divisions of Christendom. Although the papal element is still numerically the largest separate element of the three, yet it is to be remembered that three centuries ago the combined anti-papal portion of Christendom instead of being, as it now is, decidedly the strongest both numerically and otherwise, was in fact protected against the pope either by its obscurity or by the shield of antichristian powers. To this let it be add-

ed that several of the principal anti-papal powers of the earth, as Russia, Prussia, Holland, and these United States, have been created since the Reformation; that England perhaps the leading nation of the world, has quadrupled her power within the same period; that no papal power in the old world has increased its relative strength, and very few their positive, and that some, as Spain, have rapidly and decidedly sunk, in the same time; and a clear idea is obtained of the progress and position of the parties. The probability is that, all things considered, the actual force of the three great divisions of Christianity is not very unequal at the present moment; and that the Protestant and Oriental elements have at least as much affinity for each other, as either has for popery. It is to be conceded however, that as most of the Oriental churches are prelatical, and God has never yet blessed the world with the sight of a pure prelatical Church; if the issue ever seriously comes, the Oriental churches, following the spirit now so painfully manifest in Anglican and Anglo-American Episcopacy may prefer a relapse into popery before a thorough reformation.

With these facts before us, it becomes a question of overpowering interest and importance—in what form shall Christianity be the religion of the world? Shall it be Popery with its dark tyranny, its ferocious spirit, its besotted ignorance, its open idolatry, its shameless immorality? Shall it be the cold, dead, childish, stagnant, formal superstition that has so long reigned in most of the Oriental churches? Shall it be glorious Protestantism, with her open Bible, her universal education, her regulated liberty, her wise and vigorous spirit, her noble institutions, her benign influences?

It is as vain as it is unworthy to shut our eyes to an issue so stupendous and so inevitable. The Protestant and the Oriental churches, might indeed, exist together permanently on the earth, so far as the original spirit and inherent principles of both, in their best estate, are concerned. Not so with Popery. With it, there is no

other question but death or Papism. It offers to mankind but this alternative, to embrace it or to extirpate it. And there is too much reason to apprehend—whether we examine the character of this great apostasy, or reflect on the course of God's providence, or ponder his divine revelation—that this terrible abitrament is hastening apace, and that it will be submitted at last to the edge of the sword. The world's destiny must be decided on the field of Armageddon when great Babylon shall come in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

All that is worth contending for on earth is involved in this contest. It must be vehement; it may be protracted. The power of Antichrist is immense and thoroughly consolidated. More than a hundred millions of the human family wait on his nod. A stupendous ecclesiastical organization, extending from his throne to the remotest corners of the earth, and controlling with absolute authority, the minds, bodies, and goods of all who have received his mark, are obedient to his will. Many kings and potentates, many principalities and powers, wear his yoke as an ornament of gold; and prostrate nations adore him as the vicar of God abiding in the midst of his invincible hosts. All the corrupt propensities of our fallen nature cry, day and night, for the advance of his standards; and the dregs of our generation, impregnated with the very genius of disorder and excess, work without ceasing for the overthrow of every barrier against his progress. He proposes as the rewards of success, in this world, signal vengeance, uncontrolled indulgence, unlimited power, absolute supremacy; in the world to come, endless glory. What a mixture of power, enthusiasm, passion, and superstition! What a force—what a prize! But his spirit is adverse to the better spirit of the age; his system revolting to the common sense of mankind; his despotism odious to every good impulse of our nature. Every enlightened motive that stops on this side the grave, impels every good man, amongst his own fol-

lowers, to forsake him; and every one that penetrates that dread future beyond the tomb, eagerly requires every being not subdued to his debasing sway, to strive for the liberation of the world. With us are freedom, light, the whole force of movement, the power of knowledge, and the consolations of eternal hope. God and the right are ours. And though we wait long and suffer much, we look with unshaken *faith*, for the glorious appearing of the great God, our Saviour Christ, to raze this synagogue of Satan, to destroy the mother of harlots who has ruled in it so long—to bring to nothing the kings of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornications, to lead forth to victory and to glory his saints whose blood has been ever found in her, and amid the rejoicings of heaven and earth, of all blessed and of all redeemed things, to establish a throne upon which he will reign King below, as now he reigneth King in the highest!

V. Fathers and Brethren beloved in the Lord, there are two duties so imperative upon us, and so obvious in a crisis like this, that they can hardly fail to command your cordial assent. The first is to cultivate assiduously in our own hearts and in the hearts of our people, the spirit of our high vocation—our great mission. The second is to cultivate an intimate and cordial union and cooperation with all the true followers of our divine Redeemer. These two reflections seem to me to contain the sum of that practical wisdom, to which these meditations would conduct us.

When we reflect how absolute has been the wreck of all human organizations, how invincible is the destructive force of time and chance, how certain is that fiat, that every thing which can even be shaken, must be one day removed; it is not the dictate of modesty, wisdom, or grace, to rely with certainty on the permanent endurance of the best works of our hands. Where Paul planted, and Apollos watered, and God himself gave the rich increase, the glorious Master and the faithful servants have been alike forgotten. Alas! what are we, and what the

objects of our care and love, to deserve a different destiny? But though outward ordinances perish, and visible organizations pass utterly to nought, the spirit which forsakes their lifeless remains neither perishes nor passes away. Let this be the object of our incessant cultivation—the spirit of our calling and of our work. If any thing can eternize the institutions we so much love, it will be to baptize them into the spirit out of which they grew; and if nothing can, the transmission of that spirit in undiminished vigour and untarnished purity, is a better and holier end, than all the boastful nothingness of an empty and vapid existence, spun out in ignominy to the end of time. Wherever God's people are, there is God's church; which indeed "may exist without any visible form"—as Calvin truly saith, but which cannot exist at all, without the power of his indwelling Spirit. A holy zeal for God's ordinances, an unquenchable love for his truth, a consuming earnestness in his service, an intense eagerness to save men's souls; this is the spirit that we need; a spirit without which, we shall do nothing worthy of our name, our era, our calling, or our hopes.

Such a spirit is the farthest possible from bigotry and intolerance. It is indeed the only spirit in which we can establish on true and permanent foundations, the intimate fellowship of the true followers of the Lamb; since truth is the basis on which we must unite, love the power that binds us to each other, and faith the living and moving principle of the whole spiritual bond.

Nothing is more unjust and absurd than the common outcry against the Reformed Churches, on account of their alleged diversity of faith. It is unhappily too true that many who pass under the Protestant name, like the bulk of the members of the Latin and Greek churches, are Christians only in profession; and that some whose views of divine truth are more scriptural, are governed too much by the temper of that apostasy from the midst of which God, in tender mercy, called their fathers. But the undeniable truth is, that the great body of Reformed Chris-

tians, are and have always been essentially agreed in their faith; and that the largest branch of this great family has been so truly one spiritual body, as to have used the same confession, or interchangeably the confessions of each other. What is now insisted on is, that this oneness of spirit and faith, and as far as possible of order and practice, is a matter of exceeding great importance and value; that where it exists it should be carefully cultivated; and where it may have been broken or allowed to sink into forgetfulness, all favourable occasions should be eagerly seized to restore it. And it is believed that the peculiar dispensation upon which we have fallen and into which we are still further hastening, imperatively calls upon all the Protestant communions that sincerely love the Lord Jesus, to draw closer and closer the bonds that unite them to each other; while the peculiar character and position of the body represented in this General Assembly, eminently fit it to take a leading part in a work so good and so necessary.

How far the bonds of Christian union can be extended, it is not possible to decide until the experiment has been made in humble and earnest dependence on God. But the wonder is that it has not been more thoroughly cemented between those great families of Christians, who not only agree entirely in every important part of religious faith and duty, but actually use and have long used the very same formularies of doctrine, discipline, and order. The Presbyterian body throughout the world forms by far the largest portion of Protestant Christendom; and that portion of it scattered over Great Britain and her dependencies, and the United States, is by much its most numerous and powerful part. And these latter without exception, so far as they adopt the Presbyterian name, also adopt the standards arranged by the Westminster Assembly, to express their views of Christian doctrine and practice. They are really, and should be visibly as far as possible, one body.

We are drawing very near to the second centennial

period of that illustrious Assembly. The first day of July 1843, will complete the two hundredth anniversary of its meeting. If any thing effectual is done towards commemorating on that great occasion, the remarkable event it recalls, it seems to devolve on this General Assembly to do it, and to begin the work during its present sessions. I have not felt myself at liberty to omit a suggestion, which, if properly taken up by this venerable court, cannot fail to produce very precious and lasting results. And I am the more emboldened in this when I recall, with gratitude to God, the circumstances attending the first suggestion of the general religious observance of our late semi-centennial period, and contemplate the results, actual and probable, of that movement. That the occasion is capable of being so used as greatly to promote, under God's blessings, the highest interests of truth, the mutual love of God's people, and the general strength of his kingdom, seems not to be questioned.

It is true we are nothing, and of ourselves can do nothing. Mournful confessions, and but the more humiliating as we behold how much is to be done, and how unspeakably important it is that it should be done well and at once. But through Christ strengthening us we can do all things. And when we consider his promises—when we contemplate the excellency of the work set before us—when our conceptions dilate to the vastness and grandeur of the assured results; then it is we know the sweetness and fulness of the truth that God is indeed with us, our refuge and our strength. Oh! may he abide with us continually, and make us a joy and a praise in the whole earth. The work is his, and the faith whereby it may be accomplished is his free and divine gift. The vocation is his, and it is only of his mere good pleasure that he doth fulfil by it his infinitely beneficent purposes towards those he has purchased with his blood. The power is all his, and so shall be all the glory. Amen.

THE
RULE OF FAITH:

A DISCOURSE,

TO VINDICATE THE INCARNATE WORD.

DELIVERED

By order of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian
Church in the United States of America,
for 1841, before that for 1842.

~~~~~  
By ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE, D. D.

Moderator of the former Assembly.  
~~~~~

PHILADELPHIA:
WILLIAM S. MARTIEN.
1842.

THE RULE OF FAITH.

FAITH SHOULD NOT STAND IN THE WISDOM OF MEN, BUT IN THE
POWER OF GOD.—1 Cor. ii. 5.

THE service which I am about to perform, Fathers and Brethren of the General Assembly, and the theme which I am to discuss, were both assigned to me by your immediate predecessors in this venerable court. Called to address them while then in session, and by them, thus, a second time distinguished,* only on account of my known devotion to the great principles of the Reformation, and my humble but abundant labours in defence of the common doctrine of the Reformed Churches; I hail with joy these proofs of the reviving interest of the people of God in these great subjects, and proceed to the discussion of the one before me, as to that which presents one of the broadest lines of demarcation between an age of darkness and an age of light, between a Church in bondage and a Church set free, between a pure and evangelical faith and a blind, perfidious and cruel superstition. For that faith which rests upon the wisdom of man, cannot fail to be unstable, contradictory, corrupt and false as the nature of him, who at his best estate is altogether vanity; while that which stands in the power and demonstration of God, must needs be like himself, perfect and eternal.

I. There is, no doubt, an apparent resemblance between the religion of the Bible and that of Rome; a resemblance strengthened by the addition of the name *Christian*, to those of *Catholic*, *Roman*, and *Apostolic*, adopted

* See printed Minutes of the Assembly of 1841, p. 432 and p. 437.

by the followers of the Pope; and still further, in our age and country, by vague and hollow claims of fellowship with us, by those whose creed demands our blood and whose annals are crowded with their cruel mockings and pitiless butcheries of our brethren in Christ Jesus. But this resemblance exists only in appearance, and vanishes utterly before the slightest inspection of the two systems.

Thus, there is an apparent resemblance in this, that both the Bible and Rome teach the unity of the Godhead, as the grand distinction and chief foundation of revealed religion. But the Bible holds up to us the one only and self-existent God—as the sole object of all religious worship, and denounces all worship rendered to any other object, or even to this glorious God himself by the intervention of images, as heinous sin. Rome, on the contrary, teaches that divine worship is due to the Virgin, to the consecrated host, to the true cross; and that religious adoration is to be paid to angels, to departed saints, and even to their relics, yea to pictures and images. So that they whose faith stands in the power of God, differ from those whose faith stands in carnal wisdom, even as to the grand and fundamental question of the object of religious worship.*

So as to the way of access to the only true and adorable God, and the whole method of salvation for sinful men—the religion of the Bible and that of Rome, however apparently alike to the superficial observer, are in fact wholly irreconcilable. For the one teaches us that the only access to God is by the blood of a divine Redeemer, who is Christ the Lord, and who is the way, the truth, and the life; and that it is solely through faith in his name, effectually manifested in godly repentance and new obedience, that we are made partakers of the benefits of his work of redemption. But the other teaches, that there

* See Stillingfleet's "*Discourse Concerning the Idolatry of the Church of Rome*;" and his Defence of that Discourse entitled, "*An Answer to Several late Treatises*," &c.—See also the Decrees of the Council of Trent.

are multitudes of intercessors for us with God, to whom we ought to apply, and to whom an important part of our salvation is to be ascribed; that the merit of our good works is efficacious with God, and a proper ground of our hope before him; that the sacraments have an inherent power to commend us to God; and that faith in Christ is not the true method of a sinner's justification. So that their teachings are precisely opposite to each other upon the most vital parts of practical religion.*

Again, as to the nature of sin, of holiness and of the retributions of the world to come, however, at first sight, we may suppose a certain resemblance to exist, there is in reality an exact contrariety. The Bible teaches that nothing is sinful but want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God, but that every sin deserves his wrath and curse; Rome, that the transgression of *her* commands is heinous sin, that the violation of many of those of God is only a venial offence, and that separation from her communion draws after it the perdition of the soul. The Bible teaches that holiness of heart and life is the fruit of free grace, and the efficacious work of the divine Spirit in the soul of man, and that without this holiness no man shall see God's face in peace: Rome, that men are regenerated by baptism, kept in an estate of salvation by confirmation, confession, penance, fasts, alms, the sacrifice of the mass, &c. &c., and finally assured of salvation by virtue of indulgences, absolution, and extreme unction; the doctrine of the new birth as held by all Christians of all ages, being pronounced by her, not only false but accursed. The Bible teaches that this life is our only season of probation, and that after it the bodies of men remain under the power of death till the great day of God Almighty, at which they shall be reunited to the souls, which, if they be of the just have been in heaven, or if of the unjust in hell—since their

* See Decrees and Canons of of the Council of Trent, on *Justification, the Sacraments, the Mass, Indulgences, and the Invocation of Saints.*

separation; and after that the judged enter upon an unchanging state of punishment or blessedness: Rome, that there is a purgatory, which is neither heaven nor hell, that souls in it are purified by sufferings more or less protracted, and make satisfaction more or less complete, and that the prayers of the faithful here and the power of the church are efficacious towards the relief of souls from this place of torment. Thus showing a difference as thorough in regard to the state, the necessities and the destiny of man, as in regard to the nature and influences of true religion, and the character and claims of God *

Thus, too, in regard to that great department of religion which concerns its outward manifestation, and treats of the visible church, the communion of saints, the nature of ecclesiastical power, and the whole extent of discipline and government; the difference is not less absolute. Rome teaches that God has established on this earth, in the person of the Pope, a vicar, who is invested with all the direct powers in and over his Church, which Jesus Christ himself would exercise if personally reigning upon earth, and with all such indirect authority over the nations, as is necessary to protect and extend the Church; that this Church, of which he is the visible head, is endowed with miraculous gifts, infallible knowledge, and the perpetual and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; and that subjection to it is not only necessary to salvation, but that conformity with it is to be enforced by the power both of the temporal and spiritual sword.† On the contrary, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only King and Lord of Zion; that his word of inspiration is the only statute book of his earthly kingdom; that the miraculous and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, have long ago ceased; that

* In addition to the Decrees and Canons of the Trent Council already referred to, see those on *Purgatory, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Orders, Extreme Unction.*

† See Bellarmin, *De Summo Pontifice*, and *De Ecclesia Militante*. Also the *Corpus Juris Can.* Tom. iii. Part ii. *Titulus vi. De Judiciis.*

the bond of union between his people is a spiritual bond ; that the visible Church has no commission but to preserve and to extend the revealed truth of God, and that by means exclusively spiritual ; and that the soul of man, is, and from its own nature, as well as that of true religion, must be exempt from every species of physical violence. So that not the honour of God only, nor the concerns of the soul only, nor the issues of eternity only, but all these, and all the present and outward interests of man, whether socially or individually considered, are directly involved in this controversy between Christ and Anti-Christ.

It is not, then, to be wondered at, that those who differ so thoroughly in regard to the matter of their religious belief, should differ equally as to the sources of it, and the proper methods of arriving at a comfortable assurance concerning it. They whose faith is so opposite could hardly be expected to agree as to the rule of faith itself ; and I shall best fulfil my present duty by clearly explaining that of the Church of Christ, and in contrast, that of the Church of Rome.

II. And what is the precise meaning of the terms in which our subject is expressed ? A *Rule* in things *physical*, is a measure of the proportions of material and sensible objects ; in things *intellectual*, it is a measure or law by which we determine a thing to be *true* or *false* ; and in things *moral*, whether they be *good* or *evil*. It is, in general terms, a measure, by agreement or disagreement with which, we judge of all things of that kind to which it belongs. *Faith*, though often and properly enough used in a general sense, yet as a term in theology technically means *the belief of truth upon divine authority*. *The rule of faith* must, therefore, needs be that measure by which we regulate our belief in divine things. And the precise question between us and the papists is, *What is the rule, or measure, or law, by which we are to judge what things we ought to receive as revealed to us by God ?**

“The first creature of God,” says the profoundest of

* See Tillotson on the Rule of Faith.

all thinkers, "in the works of the days, was the light of the sense: the last was the light of reason: and his Sabbath work ever since, is the illumination of his Spirit. First, he breathed light upon the face of the matter or chaos; then he breathed light into the face of man; and still he breatheth and inspireth light into the face of his chosen." Thus, "truth," he saith, "which only doth judge itself, teacheth, that the inquiry of truth which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoyment of it, is the sovereign good of human nature."*

Truth, then, is the sole object proposed by God to our belief, which is indeed its sweet enjoyment; and the light of reason in all human things, to which in all moral ones that of conscience is superadded, and in all heavenly ones the illumination of God's gracious Spirit, is that by which our inquiry for her must be guided, and our assurance of her presence certified. Truth, which, "though this ill hap wait on her nativity that she never comes into the world," as Milton saith, "but like a bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth; till time, the midwife rather than the mother of truth, have washed and salted the infant, declared her legitimate, and church'd the father of his young Minerva from the needless causes of his purgation;" yet is she "as impossible to be soiled by any outward touch, as the sunbeam;" for "truth is but justice in our knowledge, as justice is but truth in our practice;" "the daughter, not of time, but of heaven, only bred up here below in Christian hearts, between two grave and holy nurses, the doctrine and discipline of the gospel;" and to universal knowledge, "strong next to the Almighty," needing "no policies, nor stratagems nor licensings, to make her victorious."†

In seeking after truth, God has furnished us with

* Lord Bacon's First Essay.

† Milton.—Tract on Prelatical Episcopacy.—Dedication of the Doct. and Dis. of Div.—Eikonoklastes, Sec. xxviii. And Areopagitica.

means and instruments to use, some of which are common to every search we undertake, some more peculiar to special occasions and kinds of knowledge. He has endowed us with great faculties, with deep emotions, with vast desires; and set before us every motive, here and for ever, to seek, to know, and to love the truth. He has endowed our minds with power to perceive intuitively, the unmixed and fundamental truths of nearly every part of knowledge; and in minds of the highest mould this precious gift is carried so high, that observation and reflection nearly supply the place of all instruction, and reason to them is more an instinct than a faculty. He has blessed us with capacities to prove and try all sorts of things of which those are the methods to arrive at certain knowledge; and our minds are so, by him, created, that we may not only assure ourselves by proof, but that we cannot without proof, believe such things, of which proof is the appropriate evidence. He has established such relations between certain kinds of truths, that they are capable of being subjected to that compact process which we call demonstration; and our minds are not only made capable of receiving this evidence, but when rightly trained, incapable of rejecting it. And to all these he has added that mighty power of truth to verify itself, known to its inmost votaries; that all-pervading sympathy of truth with truth, all fortifying all throughout creation; that lofty freedom of the human soul, as from the highest mount of truth it overlooks "the errors, wanderings, mists and tempests in the vale below,"—capacious to discern amid the general chaos, every piece into which wicked deceivers have hewed the lovely form of truth; in search of whose mangled limbs her sad friends go up and down, gathering them as they may be found, and looking for the Master's second coming, who then "shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection."*

* Milton, *Areopagitica*; Bacon, *Essay on Truth*.

The highest kind of truth, is doubtless, that which concerns God and our relations to him. That this should be excepted from the influence of those principles which regulate our inquiry, our acquisition, and our belief of all other truth, is in itself absurd; for in all things else the higher we mount upwards the more rigid is the force of general laws. Nothing, then, can be more clear than that if truth in general is the only thing proper to be believed, divine truth is the specific thing on which religious faith must rest. But as divine truth is concentrate, at last, in the mere word of God, the rule of divine belief can be no other, than that word which is itself the truth. And the grand difference between this and other cases, lies chiefly here, that God has given to his word of truth, a power, an efficacy, and an unction beyond all other truth, and that he has added therewith the enlightening, convincing, life-giving Spirit.

Thus, then, stands our case. God has given to us a nature, one of whose strongest impulses is a religious instinct insatiable but in the fruition of himself. He has endowed us with faculties capable of directing the outgoings of this profound emotion. He has set himself before us, as the sole object of our supreme and everlasting love. That lost image of himself in which we were created, he has restored to us, through a Redeemer, by a new, spiritual and divine creation. And now he proposes to us, as the sweet, infallible and perfect rule of faith, of duty and of love—his own unerring statement of his own glorious being, high decrees, infinite grace, majestic works, eternal providence. And to crown all, he sheds abroad within our hearts the eternal Spirit, the inspirer and Spirit of truth itself, to keep us clear lighted on our heavenly way, and fast bound in the free, unbroken covenant of his love. Oh! blessed faith that binds to such a God! Oh! blessed rule by which to keep that faith!*

* On the general subject of the perfection of Scripture as a rule of faith, consult *Turretin, Institutio Theologiæ, Pars Prima, Loc. Sec. quæstio 16, 17*; and his two tracts *De Scrip-*

In all fair reason, there can be but two questions perplexing the Christian's firm conviction. Is this, our rule of faith, indeed the word of God? If so, what does God say?

To the *first*, we might well say it is no question between us and Rome; for while she has impiously added to the word of God things which he never uttered, she admits as his, all that we assert to be so. But besides this, it is enough to add that the authenticity, the inspiration, and the uncorrupted preservation of the divine oracles, are not only capable of being impregably established upon such and so high evidence as is most perfect in such inquiries; but, it is not too much to say, that human ingenuity cannot demand in its most perverse mood, a body of proof so overwhelming as that on which the heavenly rule of faith rests its claim to our acceptance. Let him who doubts, but make the trial.

To the *second* question the answer is not less clear. God has revealed to us a rule of faith and obedience declared, by himself, to be perfect. The means by which he requires us to ascertain what he has thus revealed, are, in part, those common to the acquisition of knowledge laid up in other written records. To these peculiar helps are added in the ordinances, teachings, privileges, and sacraments, of his visible kingdom. And all is crowned by the guidance and teaching of the promised and purchased Spirit. And so effectual are these means, that in all lands and in all generations, this rule has conducted all God's children to the same Saviour, by the same faith, through the same baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.

For it is never to be forgotten, that the perfect sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to make men wise unto salva-

turæ Sacræ Autoritate, published in his *Disput. Miscell.*—Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants a Safe Way, &c.*—Also De Moor, *Com. Per. in Joh. Markii Comp.* the whole of the second chapter, in which a vast body of matter is drawn together in the compass of a few hundred pages.

tion, the absolute completeness of the power of God to the entire exclusion of man's wisdom as the sure foundation of our faith; has been, from the beginning, the universal testimony which martyrs have sealed with their blood,* the unanimous confession of every true Church of Jesus Christ,† the very germ and heart's-blood of the blessed reformation of the sixteenth century,‡ and the clear, reiterated, and ever living assurance of God himself, by the mouths of all holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.§

This last consideration is, by itself, conclusive with every truly renewed heart, as it should be with every reflecting mind. The religion of God is a matter of pure revelation, in every thing that regards its essential form, substance, sanctions, and issues. By it alone are we taught that we can be saved by faith (Eph. ii. 8—10.) in a divine Redeemer crucified for us, (1 Cor. i. 23, 24.) and in no other way (Acts iv. 12;) and that this faith is itself the fruit of a divine operation of the Spirit of God, (Gal. v. 22,) and the act of one born of him. (John i. 13, 14.) But the very same authority assures us that the only infallible rule and guide of this saving faith, is respectively, the word (Gal. i. 8, 9, and 2 Tim. iii. 15—17,) and Spirit (John xiv. 26, and xvi. 13—15,) of God himself. Fortified, then, by the plain declarations of revelation concerning our duty in that about which we know absolutely nothing except through the medium of this very revelation; we are not only infallibly assured that we are right when we reject the wisdom of man and choose the

* See Fox's *Acts and Monuments*—Beza's *Icones*, &c.

† See the *Magdeburg Centuriators*, for the period preceding the Reformation; and the *Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum* for that subsequent to it.

‡ Consult D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation*—*Pas-sim*.

§ See John xvii. 17, and v. 39, and xx. 31; Luke i. 3, 4, and xvi. 29; Rom. i. 16, and xv. 4; 1 Cor. ii. 5, and x. 11, and xvi. 3; 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16; Heb. i. 1—3, compared with ii. 1—4; 1 James i. 21; 2 Peter i. 19—21, &c. &c.

power of God as the foundation of our faith; but in the nature of the case, it is wholly impossible to prove that our rule can be wrong, or that any other can be right. Nor can a case be made which shall even conduce to an opposite result, which will not, as the facts exist, subvert the possibility of all divine faith whatever, by attacking on the one hand the competency of man as the receiver, and on the other the veracity of God as the imparter of divine truth.

Stand firm, therefore, Brethren and Fathers, in this faith so clearly delivered, so firmly held, and so precious to the saints. Hold fast to this rule, made plain to our souls by a spiritual demonstration full of divine power. Contend earnestly for the freedom of the human spirit; the priceless freedom of a sure and open access to God. Uphold the majesty of the divine Lawgiver, the all sufficiency of the Incarnate Word, the infinite efficiency of the Spirit of truth. For in these questions lie hid the destinies of this ruined world, and of the Church which Jesus Christ has purchased with his blood.

III. But the church of Rome proposes a *rule of faith* which she asserts, is more simple and more certain than the mere word of God! A bold proposal, and so daring in its impiety and folly, as to seem nearly beyond the limits of human presumption; yet set forth in every form and by every authority in that apostate body, within the few last centuries; and particularly in the decrees of its last General Council, that of Trent, and in its universal creed, that of Pius IV., made out of the Trent decrees and issued in the form of a Bull in the year 1564.

This creed, to which every follower of the pope is obliged to swear as a bond of papal unity—is later, by many years, than all the principal creeds of the Reformed churches. Later, for example, than that of Augsberg, which is the creed of the Lutheran body; than the Helvetic Confession, which exhibits the faith of the Swiss churches; than the French Confession, which contains the faith of the glorious Huguenots; than the Belgic Con-

fession, which is that of the Reformed church of the Netherlands; and finally amongst others, than those of the Bohemian, the English, and the Scottish nations.* So that the boasted antiquity of the faith of Rome, and her derision of the novelty of that of Christ's Church, are but tricks to blind the simple. Our summaries of faith are more ancient than her own, as well as more pure. And if she will go behind her present standards to some more ancient, and thereby confess her faith has varied, and so give up her boasted infallibility, on which all her other claims repose; why then we will prove the sin of schism on her. For all the Reformed churches have always believed and openly professed the ancient creeds of Nice, of Chalcedon, of Constantinople the first, of Ephesus, as well as those commonly called of Irenæus and Athanasius; and yet holding these, are cursed and cast out by Rome; although Rome herself, in this very Council of Trent, and until the Council had made the matter for a new creed, had none to use, whereby to show her public but long-forsaken faith, but one of these.† Or if she will go behind them all, up to the pure light of God shining directly from his eternal word, then will we see in her deformed and monstrous state, the true secret of her mortal hatred of that light which makes her manifest; and the full force of that confession, extorted in the very front of this creed of Pius IV., that it is the symbol, not of the *Christian*, but of the "*Roman church*."‡

* Consult the *Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum*.

† *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino*, Lib. ii. F. Paolo Sarpi. The English translation of this great work goes under the name of *Polano*—an anagram on the author's real name.

‡ The reader will find this Creed of Pius IV. at the end of every edition of the Decrees of the Council of Trent.—Also, in *Labbius and Cossart*, vol. xiv. pp. 944—6. Also in English and Latin, in *Cramp's Text Book of Popery*. p. 387, and p. 450. Also in English in the *Spirit of the XIX. Century* for February, 1842, p. 75. Also in Latin and English in the *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine*, for February, 1835 p. 32.

What, then, is the rule of that faith, thus confessed and sworn to be of Rome, rather than of Christ?

1. Can you believe it, when you are told, that it is in part at least, the same as our own—the holy word of God? Can you credit it, that Rome with all her hatred of the Bible, teaches her subjects to say, “*I also admit the Sacred Scriptures*”? It is even so. Rome admits that the Bible is *part* of her own rule of faith. Thus confessing that God has some right to speak to us, and we some capacity to understand him; that some parts of the Scripture are in theory at least, innocent and intelligible; and that the Christian rule of faith has some show of reason and some foundation in truth.

But here as every where, the agreement between Rome and us is only apparent. For while adopting the word of God, theoretically, as a portion of the rule of her belief, she has carefully provided that all edifying, much less all common use of it, shall be impossible. For, in the first place, she has corrupted the written word of God by adding to it whole books, and a number of them, as inspired, which have no seal of the Holy Ghost upon them:* thus polluting the waters of life at the fountain head, and braving the terrible curse of God. In the next place, she has by a solemn and formal decree made the ultimate appeal to that which is not Scripture at all, in any proper sense; declaring the Latin version, instead of the Hebrew and Greek originals, to be “*authentic*”;† and handing over to damnation, every soul of man that will not take as the last answer to his inquiries for the mind of God, that voice of man instead of this of God. In the third place, she has effectually closed her work, by prohibiting the free printing of the Scriptures even in the dead tongue, the free translation of them into any vulgar tongue, and the free use of them or any version of them:‡ all which acts of insult to man,

* Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sess. IV.

† Labbeus and Cossart, Tom. xiv. p. 746—7.

‡ *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Romæ 1819, pp. ix.—xiv.

and audacity towards God, are backed by the common argument of Rome to gainsayers, "let him be accursed," who would ward off such strokes aimed at the very root of our salvation.

2. Having made her end sure against the form of God's word, under the pretext of receiving it, she next proceeds against its sense. "*I also admit the sacred Scriptures according to the sense which the holy mother church has held and does hold.*"* Such is the first limitation. God shall be heard so often as he uses the mouth of "holy mother church." So much of his word as escapes the corruption of Apocryphal additions, so much as shines through an imperfect version in an unknown tongue, so much as eludes the prohibitions of spiritual tyrants; that much, if it will consent to array itself in the speech of Ashdod instead of that of Canaan, and to be superscribed "thus saith Babylon the Great," instead of "thus saith God;" why then it shall be, so far, a rule of faith and practice. That is, it shall be, if Rome shall ever condescend to give the world, what she has never yet done, an exposition of Scripture judged by herself to be infallible.

"According to the sense" of "holy mother church." Who is she? Where is she? How is her sense to be obtained? Is it the whole body of the faithful? Their sense has never yet been taken; nor did the thousandth part of those in the Roman communion ever read over the hundredth part of the Bible. The whole priesthood only? The prelates only? The General Councils? The Pope alone? Who is this holy church, "mother and mistress of all churches," that we should stop our ears to God and listen to her only? Is it Rome Arian, with Pope Liberius and the Councils of Sirmium, Seleucia, and Ariminum, as her expositors? Or Rome Infidel, with Leo X. guiding her infallible interpretations? Or Rome Pelagian, cursing the evagelic faith of God's elect, by the

* Second article added to the creed of the first Council of Constantinople, by the Creed of Pius IV.

mouth of Clement XI., in the constitution *Unigenitus*? Or Rome governed by strumpets for generations together, and so sunken into worse than heathen pollution while divinely illuminated to expound Christian morals, that her own historians call fifty popes in succession apostatical rather than apostolical?* Or Rome drunk with the blood of martyrs, and staggering under her load of murdered saints, that shall teach us lessons of charity and good will towards men? Or Rome, divided between two and three rival popes, and tearing out her own bowels in mutual rapine, that is to be our instructress in the great doctrines of the saints' communion, and the Church's unity? Or Rome, even down to our own day, and to the reigning pontiff, leagued with tyrants and fulminating curses against the sacred and indefeasible rights of human nature, from whom we shall acquire, with all docility, lessons of good doing to our fellow men?

Alas! that we can no where find this "holy mother church," to whom "it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,"† who alone is "holy, Catholic, and Apostolical"—"the mother and mistress of all churches;"‡ who alone holds and teaches that "true, Catholic faith, out of which none can be saved;"§ who, though the Trent Council, by a strange and fatal oversight failed to define or even to describe her, yet if we should ever find her, will be infallible—for whoever or wherever she may be, one thing is certain, she "cannot err in faith or morals."|| Infallible! That is a hard doctrine; and it is hard to say whether it be true or false, of one who can nowhere be found. It is easy to show that the General Councils, the Popes, the saints, yea saints working miracles, the universities, the doctors, the prelates, and the priests of this church of Rome, have all erred, and that most egregious.

* See Genèbrard IV.—Platina, 138.—Du Pin, 2, 156.

† Creed of Pius IV.

‡ Idem.

§ Idem.

|| Catechism of the Council of Trent, p. 102.

ly, themselves being judges.* If all these can err in every thing, and yet their "holy mother" still remain the infallible expositor of Scripture, and her decisions the infallible rule of faith; then it is clear that both her rule and herself, even though infallible, are worse than useless; since her followers have fallen into the most fatal errors on every point of Christian doctrine, and in every part of Christian practice; and her hierarchy, for above twelve hundred years, has filled every land to which its power extended, with ignorance, misery, and crime.†

3. Next to this imaginary and undefined corporation, comes a monster with three crowns, two swords, and keys *ad libitum*, before whom we are required to fall prostrate as we say, '*I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Bishop, the successor of Saint Peter, the prince of the Apostles and the vicar of Jesus Christ.*'‡ The ultramontan faction in the papacy, which nows wields all the spiritual power of the whole body, sustained by its most accredited doctors with Baronius and Bellarmin at their head, and backed by many Councils, in front of which stand those of Florence and Latran under Popes Eugenius and Leo, calls the Pope the "church virtual," and pronounces him infallible. And while they and all the rest differ as to the subject matter and whole extent of this infallibility, all admit that it extends to all his official and authorized decisions touching the faith. The Popes therefore—all Popes, past, present, and to come, enter, in some form, into the Roman rule of faith; and that by virtue of a solemn oath. Whether as a Roman Bishop, or universal pastor; whether alone, or with a General Council, or after universal consent of the faithful; whether

* Edgar's *Variations of Popery*, puts this part of the controversy to rest.

† For a very clear refutation of the pretended infallibility of the church of Rome, see Bayle's *Critique Generale de L'Histoire du Calvinisme, de Maimbourg Lettre xxix.*

‡ Thirteenth article added by the creed of Pius IV., to that of Constantinople the first.

personally, or only when speaking *ex cathedra*; whether in questions of fact and discipline, or those of morals and faith only; these are points for the faithful to decide, when their oracle has spoken, in order to ascertain whether his infallibility be then infallible or no. For us that are without, let the question come unto us in its simplest and strongest form—and so we meet it with a flat denial that Peter was ever Christ's vicar—that the bishops of Rome are Peter's successors or Christ's vicars—that any Christian man owes them any obedience on any of these grounds—or that any one of them was infallible in any thing whatever. And as these are all questions of fact, which before it is lawful to believe them must be proved, and which if true, are readily susceptible of being proved; we then join issue and demand the proof.*

And for further plea, we say, first, that no man knows, or ever can know, how many of the two hundred and fifty or sixty pretended bishops of Rome have come in canonically, or been true Popes, according even to the judgment of Rome herself. Therefore, no man can ever know how many of these so-called Popes, were, in any sense, infallible. Moreover, that as there have been, according to the Jesuit Maimbourg, twenty-nine schisms in the bosom of the papacy, dividing that body between different heads; and as the mode of electing the Pope has suffered fundamental changes, not less than thirty times;† it is wholly impossible for us to be assured that any Pope, from the time of the first schism and the first fundamental change in the mode of election—ever was truly Bishop of Rome; just as at the Council of Constance, “it was morally impossible to decide who were true Popes and who antipopes,” as the same Jesuit tells us—and therefore the council rejected and deposed all three then exercising the functions of Christ's vicar; as we for a like

* The reader will find in Barrow's '*Treatise on the Pope's Supremacy*,' a learned and candid exposition of that whole branch of the controversy with Rome.

† *Histoire du Grand Schisme D'Occident*, pp. 2—15.

reason, may reject all. And further yet, admitting all who ever claimed the office, or any part of them, to have truly held it; still it is impossible for us to know what so many persons have said and written in so many centuries, as to the true Christian faith; and therefore their opinions, which in the nature of the case we can never know, cannot form any part of our rule of belief. Or even if we knew all their opinions, not one of them could be a rule of divine faith to us, without gross impiety, until its author was shown to have uttered it by divine inspiration; which cannot be shown without contradicting that Scripture, which Rome has already conceded to be a portion of the true rule.

This added plea we reinforce by this second argument. Judging the Holy Scriptures to be a divine rule, which Rome herself confesses; and knowing the illumination of the Holy Spirit to be not only real, but indispensable; it follows, that as no man can know infallibly that this divine illumination is ever, much less constantly bestowed upon another particular man; no man can ever be infallibly assured that any other man is qualified infallibly to guide his conscience. If any shall pretend that the Scripture guides his conscience for some other man, he makes himself above the Scripture, and usurps at once the office of the Holy Spirit and dominion over the human conscience. But a man may far more certainly know whether he himself understands the word of God, than whether another man doth; whether the Spirit illuminates his own mind, than whether it doth that of another man; whether his own conscience inwardly approves as good what his mind receives as true, or whether that of another man doth; and no man can know of any other, any thing more certain than this, viz.: that no other man can be so good a judge of his religion as he is himself. So that we are not only obliged from certain knowledge about which it is impossible to err, to reject the claims of the Roman Pontiff; but it is because he assumes this infallibility over the word of God and the consciences of

men, that Christians call him Antichrist; who the Scripture tells us shall "sit in the temple of God"—as it were opposite to God, "exalting himself above all that is called God or is worshipped." (2 Thess. ii. 4.) "That is to say, not only above all judges and magistrates, who though they be called Gods, are far beneath infallible; but also above God himself, by giving law both to the Scripture, to the conscience, and to the Spirit of God within us."* It is God that gives the word, the Spirit that enforces it, the conscience that is sanctified by it; but if the meaning of the word is to be given infallibly by the Pope—then is he lord of all; and claiming this, then is he Antichrist.

And for a third argument we say it is inconceivable that a pure, wise, and righteous God, ever selected as his vicars or the infallible expositors of his most holy will, such men as the great mass of these Roman pontiffs have always been. From John VIII. to Leo IX., a space of one hundred and fifty years, there were fifty Popes pronounced by their own historians to have been monsters of iniquity. John XII. was convicted by a Roman Synod, of blasphemy, perjury, profanation, impiety, simony, sacrilege, adultery, incest, constupration and murder. Boniface VII. is called by Cardinal Baronius, a thief, a miscreant, and a murderer. Gregory VII. is pronounced by Cardinal Benno and by the Councils of Worms and Brescia, guilty of simony, sacrilege, magic, sorcery, treason, impiety, fornication, adultery, heresy, perjury, and murder. Boniface VIII., to every other enormity added that sin for which Sodom perished. John XXIII. has come down to us, black with every crime and villainy, proved upon him by the General Council of Constance. Sixtus IV. was an assassin and debauchee. Alexander VI., by the general consent of historians, made Rome the sink of filthiness, prostitution, rapine and blood—and was himself the horror and execration of Europe. Julius II., was a drunkard, a Sodomite, and a man of blood.

* Milton's *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes.*

Leo X. was an unchaste sensualist, and most probably an Atheist and a Sodomite. Besides these, who are but specimens of most of these "servants of the servants of God"—many have been heretics, simonists, persecutors, corrupters of the earth, men of immoral lives, perjured persons, sinners exceedingly both against God and man. Indeed of all that have reigned since the apostasy began, that is to say for these twelve hundred years and more—the fewest number have been men of blameless lives, and almost none have exhibited the genuine marks of true Christians.*

Now upon this state of fact we demand, is it credible that God has chosen these men to be his vicars upon earth? That he has invested them with authority to decide what faith his children shall cherish? That he has set them up as models of that belief and practice, by which a guilty world is to be won back to him? Did he know them? Is he thus supremely indifferent to virtue and to faith? Does he select his chosen representatives, the predestinated vicars of his own thrice glorious, nay God-like presence amongst men—amongst the very outcasts of human filth and crime and beastliness?—When light and darkness are all one, when sin and virtue are twin-sisters, when the chaste spouse of Christ and the vile whore of Babylon become the same, when God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, all sit down on one divided throne; then will that faith which stands in carnal wisdom, be fit for union with that which stands in the mighty power of God.

4. The next general limitation put by Rome around the word of God, hindering its free course, is the decrees of what she calls her General Councils; according to the sense of which, the voice of God is to be understood. For in her doctrine, those Councils which she admits to

*See *Variations of Popery*, by Edgar, pp. 109—125, for a full citation of authorities and references, on this part of the subject. Consult also De Potter's *L'Esprit de L'Eglise*, Tom. iii. iv. v. and vi. Also Platina and Baronius.

be Œcumenical, are, as to all definitions of faith, guided immediately by the Holy Ghost, and therefore cannot err. And so she teaches her subjects to say, "*I profess and undoubtedly receive all things delivered, defined, and declared by the sacred Canons and General Councils.*"* What relates to the "sacred Canons" will be noticed separately. As to the Councils, it is obvious the article in the creed is much broader than the mere subject of faith; and it is notorious that the divisions in the Roman sect have been as fierce, as thorough, and as various, in regard to the infallibility of Councils, as to that of popes, or that of the Church itself; about which something has been already said. But we need not here transcend the limits of the immediate subject, and as to that, every papist is sworn to receive with undoubting conviction, and as a portion of his rule of faith "all things delivered, defined, and declared, by the General Councils, and particularly by the holy Council of Trent."

How many ecclesiastical Councils may have met in the bosom of the nominally Christian church, since that first grand assemblage of "apostles and elders and brethren" at Jerusalem, whose decisions inspired by God and left on record in his holy word, (Acts xv.) settled, for us poor Gentiles, our enduring Christian liberty; it passes the knowledge of man to tell. That many of these have done well and wisely, none will deny. That many have met only to establish their own sinful ends, who can doubt? As they have done well or ill—to their own master they stand or fall. But that any, or all of them, since the Lord's apostles all fell on sleep, should be set up as rules of divine faith, without whose guidance we cannot understand that plain word of God now in our hands, and which itself guided them so far as they went right; is an absurdity so monstrous, that even they who propound it seem scarcely to believe themselves. Are individual men infallible? Then surely each can guide himself. Is every

* Creed of Pius IV., last article but one.

priest, and every prelate, and minister of religion, inspired? If so the Council cannot control the voice of God within them. If not, the union of a thousand fallible men cannot make an infallible council.

That councils, and they the largest and most ecclesiastical, may err, and that out of all bounds of reason, of pity, and of truth, will stand an eternal stigma upon our race, until the record of that great council of the entire then visible Church of God—which madly preferred a murderer to the Lord of life, and with wicked hands, by God's determinate counsel, took and slew the Prince of Peace, is blotted out from under heaven. And that the true successors, in spirit and in deed, of those bad counsellors, have often since assembled, even in the name of him their fathers did betray; none can truly gainsay, while the blood of whole nations butchered in the name of God cries to his throne for vengeance, and the memory of the confessors and martyrs of the Most High, abides the rich heritage of his struggling church. Away with your infallible councils! We take our Master's cross, in preference to the judgment of his murderers; our brethren's bloody winding sheet and fiery bed, rather than guidance from hands gory with the warm currents of their life. Councils infallible! Councils in which the Holy Ghost did dwell! Beleaguered by strumpets, beset with fiddlers and buffoons, cursing God's truth, and leaving tracks strewed with bastards and dead men's bones! Councils, the very names, order, and number of which, papists themselves dispute; and know not which or how many to propound to us, as inspired. Holy Councils; and above all that of Trent!! Which by the amazing wrath of God, cursed with judicial blindness and seared consciences, did gather into one vast monument, those scattered proofs which covered the long track of ages, and those errors and corruptions bred in the slime and filth of the whole apostasy; and reared them up, with patient and laborious vice, through eighteen years of God's long-suffering, the final land-mark, the last limit of his en-

duration with this great, bloody and drunken Babylon. So that when Rome teaches her children to condemn, reject, and curse, as she makes them swear they do and will, all things contrary to her God-forsaken Councils, and chiefly that of Trent; she brands upon their foreheads the proof that she and they are alike apostatized from God; and establishes them in ways that lead to death.*

5. "*The sacred Canons*" too, as we have seen, as well as "*all constitutions and observances*"† of the holy Roman church, form an important part of that confused and heterogeneous mass which she calls her rule of faith.

The *Canon Law* is the system of authorized jurisprudence in the papal body. The Canons of the Greek church appear to have been originally used by Rome, and to have formed the basis of her code. About the beginning of the sixth century, the code of *Demys le Petit* became the standard; and with the Decretals of the popes from Siricius to Anastasius, constituted the body of the Canon Law down to the eleventh century; and with the Capitularies of Charlemagne, was generally adopted in the Latin church. Upon the basis of this code repose what are called the Liberties of the Gallican church, which are known to be wholly inconsistent with many of the claims of the papal see—and which are sustained by rejecting every thing of a subsequent date added to the canonical jurisprudence, and also all the Decretals of popes preceding Siricius; the former as no way binding, the latter as false and forged. But the Roman see adding the before unknown Decretals from St. Clement to Siricius, the confusion became so great as to render a new modelling indispensable, and in 1151, *Gratien* published his work entitled "*Concordance of Dis-*

* For a very clear argument on the authority of Councils, see *Calvin's Institutes*, book iv. chap. ix. And for a short statement of the matter of fact as to the number, names and acts of the so-called General Councils, see *Papism in the XIX Century*, pp. 44—56.

† The first article and the last but one, added by Pius IV., to the Creed of the Council of Constantinople the first.

cordant Canons," which became thenceforth the foundation of the code of Rome, and which professes to give the sense of the Bible, the Councils and the Fathers, upon all matters ecclesiastical. To *Gratien* the Benedictine, therefore, Rome assures us, all must go, who would go to heaven. The Decretals of popes from 1150 to Gregory IX. in 1229, form a kind of second part of the Canon Law. In 1297, Boniface VIII. continued this collection of Decretals to his own times. John XXII. added to it, under the name *Clementines*, the constitutions of Clement V., his predecessor, in five books; and subsequently twenty constitutions of John himself under the name of *Extravagants*, and some other constitutions of his successors, were added. All these things, viz., the dicta of Councils, the guesses of fathers, the rescripts of popes, the sophisms of ecclesiastics, the vagaries of popish doctors, and the Roman conjectures of the sense of Scripture, unitedly form that mass of folly, cruelty, and chicanery which published in three folio volumes, goes under the title, "*Corpus Juris Canonici*;" which every papist swears he receives as a portion of his Christian faith, and by the light of which the Bible itself must be interpreted in order to be understood.

The simplicity and excellence of this infallible portion of the Roman rule of faith, must be so manifest from the mere statement of its contents and of the manner of their being brought together; that nothing more need be said in commendation of it, unless it should be to add, that it has been no unusual thing for Protestants to edify themselves by large collations of multitudes of its provisions, flatly contradicting not only the word of God, but each other.* A most important privilege of infallibility; and one which the Jesuits, the best subjects of the pope, have so used in their instructions touching practical mo-

* At the end of the *Synopsis Papismi* of Andrew Willet, is generally printed his *Tetrasyllon Papismi*, in the iv. Pillar, and 4th part of which, he gives 100 contradictions of the Canons against themselves.

ality—as to prove, that as one may believe contradictory propositions and still be consistent with an infallible rule of faith, so may he also perform opposite moral acts, and be still under the guidance of an infallible religious authority.* So that the practical as well as the rational end of the matter is, that to him who is infallible all faith and all practice is the same; for being a guide unto himself, the truth of principles and the morality of acts alter as he himself changes. Which, in the logic of Protestants would be equivalent to this, that as we are all sinful and blinded creatures, and therefore certain to go astray when left to ourselves; any pretence of infallibility which renders all admission and correction of error impossible, forces us when once we get wrong to be wrong for ever; and obliges us, every time our belief or conduct is inconsistent, to defend opposite things as equally true, and so to destroy all true faith and all sound morality; the result of our infallibility being that we must infallibly and incurably err. And so thoroughly does the fact agree with the reason of the case, that we may easily find in the infallible Canon Law, a positive provision or an implied rule, directly at variance with every leading duty and every practical truth of the Christian religion.

The existence and uses of this Canon Law, suggest one of the most palpable arguments against what is by sufferance called the *church* of Rome, but what is in reality far more a state than a religion. The Pope of Rome calling himself a vice-God, and his see the imperial, the sacred, and the eternal city—claims a dominion and authority extensive as the family of man. He parcels out the kingdoms and commonwealths of the earth amongst his lieutenants whom he calls patriarchs, primates, and bishops; and gives to them larger or smaller territories and powers as his own supreme will dictates. In these he establishes tribunals, erects prisons, collects taxes, distributes honours, inflicts punishments, administers justice;

* See Pascal's Provincial Letters; and De Pradt's Jesuitisme Ancien et Modern.

in short *reigns*. This Canon Law is his code of judicature, which supersedes alike the codes of God and of the nations—and reveals its authors and prime administrators, as at once audacious usurpers of the prerogatives of heaven and systematic oppressors of the human race.* Thanks be to God, who has allowed the interests and hopes of man, even in this world, to be so indissolubly connected with the glory and permanence of his own authority, that this accursed Antichrist cannot destroy us without dishonouring him; and that the same acts which vindicated his own eternal majesty, released a world sighing for deliverance.

6. The impiety of Rome, forms a regular climax. To the Church, the Pope, the Councils and the Canons, she adds, as infallible expositors of the mind of the Spirit, and so infallible guides in matters of faith, those she calls "*the fathers*," of whom she teaches her children to say, that while they "*admit the sacred Scriptures*," they will never "*take or interpret them otherwise, than according to the unanimous consent of the fathers*."†

Who "*the fathers*" are, in the sense of the Roman standards, is a question never yet settled. And it is probable no binding decision will ever be made on the subject; since the object of all these impious decrees is not to settle the substance of faith, but to establish the supremacy of Rome; and the more uncertain it is what men ought to believe, the more complete is the authority of that See, subjection to which is indispensable to salvation. What "*the fathers*" really wrote, how much of that which has come down to us under their names was real-

* The reader will find the argument glanced at in this paragraph developed with great eloquence and force by M. Jurieu, in the *Prejuges Legitimes Contre Le Papisme, Premiere Partie, chap. xii. and xiii.*

† Creed of Pius IV., second additional article. Council of Trent, fourth session, *Decree on the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books*; there were present at this session only fifty-eight persons, who, in the name of the universal church, perpetrated this horrible impiety.

ly theirs, and how far it is possible for us to understand their mind truly, from those mutilated fragments which constitute all that is left of many of the most respectable of them; are questions of literary history and criticism, about which learned men are entirely divided, in regard to which the mass of mankind never can arrive at a solid conclusion, and which being supremely indifferent to the peace and welfare of our souls, cannot, without the grossest folly, be alleged to have any connexion with the true meaning or perfect obligation of God's holy word. The more ancient the fathers are, the fewer of them have escaped the wreck of time and chance, and the less do we know about their real sentiments; insomuch, that we have not the undoubted writings of more than seven or eight of those of the first three centuries, and even of some of these but fragments; and nothing at all, certainly known to be much, if any, earlier than the middle of the second century. It is to be considered also that the Christian writers of those early ages, were engaged on topics so entirely different from those which now occupy our thoughts, that their labours, even where they have been preserved, are of very little use in settling any dispute between us and Rome. For example, those of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and some others, against the religion and the gods of heathenism; those of Irenæus and of the same Tertullian against the Gnostics; and those of Cyprian, who discourses almost wholly upon the virtues of the church and its discipline. But as to transubstantiation and the adoration of the host, the supremacy of the pope, the worshipping of images, and the like; perhaps not a man in the whole church of Christ, for the first three centuries, ever spoke or wrote upon one of them. Moreover, let us never forget, that if we had full and unquestionable proof that many persons, from the earliest times, held to every dogma of Rome, it would be no better presumption in favour of the truth of those errors, than now exists in favour of those which, as we know from the

New Testament Scriptures, prevailed not only under the Jewish dispensation, but were, from the very beginning insinuated into the churches of the new; so that if Rome could prove by the fathers, which indeed she cannot, the antiquity of all her heresies—it would be perfectly easy to prove, and that by more unquestionable witnesses, that those of the Pharisees and Sadducees, of the Nicolaitans and many others, were more ancient—and therefore, by her own argument, more respectable.

The truth however, is, that no age of the Church can be selected in which her doctors and pastors have *taken and interpreted the Scriptures*, with any thing approaching to a *unanimous consent*; and that if instead of confining our inquiries to the earliest ages, we are obliged to come down so low as to the twelfth century in order to embrace St. Bernard, whom the papists class with the most renowned names of the preceding centuries; we shall find a heterogeneous mass of folly, propagated by learned teachers and high ecclesiastics, as incapable of being reduced to a general consent, or even to sense itself, as the tongues of Babel. And even the earliest and most respectable of 'the fathers' have erred, not only singly but in companies, and have strenuously contradicted each other upon points of the gravest importance; and what is more perfectly *ad rem* in our present discussion, they have been often and utterly disallowed by Rome herself, in points precisely held by the most and the ablest of them, and in some of which they were beyond all controversy right, and Rome wrong. Thus, it is evident that the ancient fathers, with Augustine, Chrysostom, and Ambrose at their head, believed that the virgin Mary was conceived in original sin; which the Council of Trent denies. Again, Melito of Sardis, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, St. Hilary, Epiphanius, Athanasius, Ruffinus, and St. Jerome, are not only wholly at variance, with the same Council of Trent as to the Cannon of Scripture, but with

nearly all antiquity fall under its curse for their opinions on that subject. So, too, Bellarmin himself admits,* after Michael Medina who asserted it openly in the said Council of Trent,† that St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, Sedulius, Primasius, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Oecumenius, and Theophylact, had all fallen into what he calls the error of Aerius viz., that the difference between a bishop and a priest was not of divine but only of ecclesiastical right.‡

But whoever or whatever the fathers may have been, whatever they may have held, and by what means soever we may now ascertain their thoughts, nothing concerning them can possibly be more evident, than this, that they could not speak with the clearness, the authority and the conviction of God, and therefore cannot be indispensable to us in finding out his will from his own word. It is not pretended that they were inspired : but the prophets and the apostles were. While we receive, therefore, with gratitude, all the aid they can give us in our progress to the eternal world ; we recognize in them all, sinful men like ourselves, no better instructed in divine things than hundreds, perhaps than thousands, now in the flesh ; and reject their pretended unanimity as a shallow imposition, and the sanctity and authority attributed to their opinions as an insult to the majesty of God.

7. The cap-stone of this temple to papal infallibility, built out of the defaced ruins of all divine ordinances and all human hopes, is laid with the confused noise of the rabble of apostate bishops, venal councils, and pretended saints—whose rescripts, dreams and rhapsodies they call “*apostolical and ecclesiastical traditions*,” and

* Bellarm, de cler. l. 1, c. 15.

† *Istoria del Con. Trid.*—F. Paolo, l. 7.

‡ Daillius de Usu Patrum.—Cave, *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum. Hist. Lit.* Du Pin's *History of Eccl. Writers.* Sir Peter King's *Inquiry.* Taylor's *Ancient Christianity* ; are sources of authentic information in regard to “*the fathers*”—so called.

not only oblige the subjects of the pope to say they "*most firmly admit and embrace*"* them all, but have decreed infallibly, that they "*are to be equally received and revered, as the books of the Old and New Testaments.*"†

A declaration like this can escape the charge of blasphemy, only by the clearest proof that there are *unwritten traditions*, which having been received from Christ by the apostles, have come down to us in clear and unbroken succession. Upon this we take issue, and expressly deny that there are any such traditions; that there is even any Catholic tradition that such traditions ever were or should be; and in particular, that the present church of Rome which is the *synagogue of Satan*, ever had any unwritten traditions of any kind committed to her by any authority binding on us. We expressly charge, moreover, that this Roman Papacy, if she ever had any traditions committed to her keeping, has proved herself to be utterly unworthy of trust in regard to them; for by her own admission, she, being made the depository of the written word of God, has kept it so faithlessly that as she declares, several entire books are lost and the originals of all the rest have become corrupted; a testimony, which though it be false, is fatal to her. Still further we say, that this pretext of *tradition* corrupted the Jewish church, and was expressly condemned by Christ; that it is a pretence which, if allowed, permits corrupt popes to manufacture Scripture at pleasure; and finally, that if the doctrine were true and the *unwritten traditions* established, they could not control the *written* word of God, upon any rules of evidence or interpretation ever allowed in any well ordered tribunal; the one being a divine record which proves and interprets itself, the other, idle words standing in uncertain and suspicious human declarations of mere hearsay, for eighteen centuries.‡

* Creed of Pius IV., first additional Article.

† Council of Trent, IV. Session.

‡ Upon the general subject of tradition the reader will

If any one will but reflect upon the manner in which these traditions have been preserved, and consider for a moment the present sources from which they must be drawn; he will perceive that the only use of them is to obscure the way of salvation, and so to increase the necessity of reliance on a corrupt and tyrannical priesthood. For where are we to look for these unwritten traditions which are as much entitled to our reverence as the written word of God? Is it to the parish priest? Then he is to me in the place of God, and vile as he may be, I become his abject slave; or refusing to be so, risk the salvation of my soul. Or if I be sent to the bishop or the pope, the result is the very same; and they by becoming the infallible expositors of God's unwritten will, become in fact, Gods themselves. But as popes, bishops, and priests have shown themselves, too often, to be cruel, false, and corrupt, this fearful authority can never be vested in any of them, without manifestly drawing after it the subjugation and degradation of the human race. Moreover, from the nature of the case, such an extraordinary investiture *from* God, can only be proved *by* God himself; seeing it is not possible for man, by himself to prove to us, what happened between God and himself alone; and God has himself provided beforehand the everlasting tests of these pretensions. Let the pope, the bishops and the priests, then, show us a plain declaration of God in his acknowledged word; or else let them work miracles in our presence. But, however the Roman church may attempt to prove the existence of this divine power in her priesthood, that proof, whether propounded in the form of miracle, of revelation, of argument, of evidence, or of force, must in the nature of the case, be submitted to the reason of every man in

find important information in Tillotson's admirable *Treatise on "The Rule of Faith;"* in Title iv. and v. of the *Preservative against Popery*, especially chapter iii. of Title iv.—and in Du Pin, *Dis. Prel. sur la Bible*.

particular ; and so we establish and sanctify the mother principle of Protestantism—the divine right of private judgment, to which Rome herself must take her final appeal. If she appeal to force, there is an end of religion, which to be true must be free. If she appeal to miracle, that is a resort to the bar of reason, and she must deposit her high pretensions, her blood basin, and her sacrificial knife—at the door of that sacred court. If she go to the word of God, behold it is our own glorious rule. Let the living hierarchy then stand aside ; for they are not the depositories of these dread and mystical secrets.

Shall we resort next to buried generations, and seek amid the crumbling fragments and mouldering dust of unknown ages, for some glimmering light generated by the corruptions of the dead, to guide our footsteps along a path upon which the sun of righteousness sheds his own living rays ? And whither shall we go ? To the long line of pontiffs true and false, and grope amid their countless bulls and constitutions, their treaties of war and peace, their charters, laws, sermons, letters, and disquisitions ; is it amid this mass through which no single mortal ever yet fully penetrated, that the child of God is to search until he finds the hidden and costly pearl ? And lest there be some fragment still neglected, shall we then with patient toil hear one by one, the doctors, fathers, casuists, and schools, of ten or fifteen centuries ; sifting and purging uncounted loads of chaff and blasted grains, to find one mustard seed buried and lost by chance ? And then shall we go round the innumerable councils small and great, true and false, and with heavy hearts and weary limbs, like Isis searching for the mangled body of Osiris, seek amid these mitred tyrants, if perchance some fragment of the Lord's unwritten truth, neglected by his own blessed apostles, may not have been preserved by this priesthood of Antichrist ? And lest we miss our end at last, shall we wake from their dread abodes, (like her of Endor pleasing a mad-man,) those crazed self tor-

turers whom Rome calls saints, and listen to their howls, and moans, and maniac ravings, and idiot chattering, as if the sweet and ordered voice of heaven had ever mingled with sounds like these? Or, if not with popes, and fathers, and councils, and saints, and doctors—where, then, shall we find these lost messages of Christ?

Fathers and Brethren, God is not far from every one of us. His word is nigh unto us, even in our mouths and in our hearts. That word is his voice, speaking through his written law, and in his blessed gospel; and his promise is express, that if we will confess his Son, and believe his word, we shall be saved.* Away then with all the inventions of men, all the devices of a corrupt priesthood, and all the snares of the great enemy of souls. By the mercy of God, his Bible has been enfranchised from the chains in which an apostate church, fearing its light, had long bound it. We have found out a better way, than any Rome can show us. We have learned our Master's voice, and will not follow the voice of strangers. We know him and the power and blessedness of his most precious truth; and shame and wo be unto us, if we cast away Christ and embrace the Pope; or forsaking his pure free, and sweet service, sell our liberty, our birthright and our hopes, for the bondage of a polluted, irrational, unscriptural, empty and tawdry superstition.

IV. Fathers and Brethren of the General Assembly, this is not a question of abstract philosophy; nor of curious research into dangerous but exploded errors; nor of difficult practical duty, about which men may differ, and yet walk together in Christian harmony. It is a question of daily and hourly application, involving the instant duties of every rational creature, determining the personal and spiritual estate of every human being, the position and destiny of man in his associated condition, and the rights of God himself to and over us. As it is decided one way or the other, and the decision thus made is consistently

* Acts xvii. 27—Rom. x. 8, 9—Deut. xxx. 10.

carried out, man must be personally, mentally and morally free or a slave; civil society must be independent and enlightened, sovereign and vigorous, or reduced to a condition of imbecility and blindness, abject dependence, and galling servitude; and the Church of God must be a pure, free, and glorious spiritual commonwealth, whose only King and Head is the Lord Jesus, or a subjugated, shorn, and oppressed appenage of a cruel and besotted despotism wielded by the Pope.

Such are the issues involved in this inquiry. For there can be but two ultimate grounds upon one or other of which it must terminate, and with it the whole spiritual destiny of man. We may appeal to authority, or we may appeal to truth; there is nothing else to which we can appeal. There are but these two foundations of religion. Starting from them, the argument of the one is force, of the other reason; the handmaid of the one is ignorance, of the other knowledge; the proofs of the one are addressed to a slavish superstition, of the other to an enlightened conscience; the influence of the one is manifested in carnal observances and self-righteousness, of the other in a holy heart and a holy life; the effect of the one is to degrade and enslave all the nobler faculties of man and so to obstruct the personal and social developement of the race, of the other to simulate and enlarge every pure aspiration of our being, and so to extend and fortify the triumphs of civilization; the ultimate sanctions of the one cluster around a weak and sinful mortal like ourselves, whom they have invested with the authority of God; those of the other penetrate into the unsearchable bosom of eternity and rest upon the throne of the infinite majesty, at which every one must give an account of himself at last.

These are, respectively, the systems of Rome and of the Reformed churches, of God and of the Pope, of Christ and of Anti-Christ. For ages they have striven ceaselessly with each other. Behold them still face to face, in mortal conflict.

God has called us, in our day, to stand for his precious truth, for his adorable name, for his covenanted people. Let us gird ourselves with tried armour, and quit ourselves like men. So shall our faith be established like the everlasting hills, so shall our country be saved from impending danger, so shall our memory be precious to good men who come after us, so shall our end be peace and our reward certain and eternal. Amen.