SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.

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*§ 7. Office of the Church as a Teacher.*

*A. The Romish Doctrine on this subject.*

Romanists teach that the Church, as an external, visible society, consisting of those who profess the Christian religion, united in communion of the same sacraments and subjection to lawful pastors, and especially to the Pope of Rome, is divinely appointed to be the infallible teacher of men in all things pertaining to faith and practice. It is qualified for this office by the plenary revelation of the truth in the written and unwritten word of God, and by the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to the bishops as official successors of the Apostles, or, to the Pope as the successor of Peter in his supremacy over the whole Church, and as vicar of Christ on earth.

There is something simple and grand in this theory. It is wonderfully adapted to the tastes and wants of men. It relieves them of personal responsibility. Everything is decided for them. Their salvation is secured by merely submitting to be saved by an infallible, sin‑pardoning, and grace‑imparting Church. Many may be inclined to think that it would have been a great blessing had Christ left on earth a visible representative of himself clothed with his authority to teach and govern, and an order of men dispersed through the world endowed with the gifts of the original Apostles, men everywhere accessible, to whom we could resort in all times of difficulty and doubt, and whose decisions could be safely received as the decisions of Christ himself. God’s thoughts, however, are not as our thoughts. We know that when Christ was on earth, men did not believe or obey Him. We know that when the Apostles were still living, and their authority was still confirmed by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Church was nevertheless distracted by heresies and schisms. If any in their sluggishness are disposed to think that a perpetual body of infallible teachers would be a blessing, all must admit that the assumption of infallibility by the ignorant, the erring, and the wicked, must be an evil inconceivably great. The Romish theory if true might be a blessing; if false it must be an awful curse. That it is false may be demonstrated to the satisfaction of all who do not wish it to be true, and who, unlike the Oxford Tractarian, are not determined to believe it because they love it.

B. *The Romish definition of the Church is derived from*

*what the Church of Rome now is.*

Before presenting a brief outline of the argument against this theory, it may be well to remark that the Romish definition of the Church is purely empirical. It is not derived from the signification or usage of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament; nor from what is there taught concerning the Church. It is merely a statement of what the Church of Rome now is. It is a body professing the same faith, united in the communion of the same sacraments, subject to pastors (*i.e.,* bishops), assumed to be lawful, and to the Pope as the vicar of Christ. Now in this definition it is gratuitously assumed,—

1. That the Church to which the promise of divine guidance is given, is an external, visible organization; and not the people of God as such in their personal and individual relation to Christ. In other words, it is assumed that the Church is a visible society, and not a collective term for the people of God; as when it is said of Paul that he persecuted the Church; and of Christ that He loved the Church and gave himself for it. Christ certainly did not die for any external, visible, organized Society.

2. The Romish theory assumes, not only that the Church is an external organization, but that it must be organized in one definite, prescribed form. But this assumption is not only unreasonable, it is unscriptural, because no one form is prescribed in Scripture as essential to the being of the Church; and because it is contrary to the whole spirit and character of the gospel, that forms of government should be necessary to the spiritual life and salvation of men. Moreover, this assumption is inconsistent with historical facts. The Church in all its parts has never been organized according to one plan.

3. But conceding that the Church is an external society, and that it must be organized according to one plan, it is a gratuitous and untenable presumption, that that plan must be the episcopal. It is a notorious fact that diocesan episcopacy did not exist during the apostolic age. It is equally notorious that that plan of government was gradually introduced. And it is no less notorious that a large part of the Church in which Christ dwells by his presence, and which He in every way acknowledges and honours, has no bishops until the present day. The government of the Church by bishops, Romanists admit, is one of the institutions which rest not on Scripture, but on tradition for their authority.

4. But should everything else be conceded, the assumption that subjection to the Pope, as the vicar of Christ, is necessary to the existence of the Church, is utterly unreasonable. This is the climax. There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament or in the apostolic age, that Peter had any such primacy among the Apostles as Romanists claim. There is not only the absence of all evidence that lie exercised any jurisdiction over them, but there is abundant evidence to the contrary. This is clear from Peter, James, and John, being mentioned together as those who appeared to be pillars (Gal. ii. 9), and this distinction was due not to office, but to character. It is moreover clear from the full equality in gifts and authority which Paul asserted for himself, and proved to the satisfaction of the whole Church that he possessed. It is clear from the subordinate position occupied by Peter in the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv.), and from the severe reproof he received from Paul at Antioch (Gal. ii. 11‑21). It is a plain historical fact, that Paul and John were the master‑spirits of the Apostolic Church. But admitting the primacy of Peter in the college of Apostles, there is no evidence that such primacy was intended to be perpetual. There is no command to elect a successor to him in that office, no rules given as to the mode of such election, or the persons by whom the choice was to be made; and no record of such election having actually been made. Everything is made out of the air. But admitting that Peter was constituted the head of the whole Church on earth, and that such headship was intended to be continued, what evidence is there that the Bishop of Rome was to all time entitled to that office? It is very doubtful whether Peter ever was in Rome. The sphere of his labors was in Palestine and the East. It is certain he never was Bishop of the Church in that city. And even if he were, he was Primate, not as Bishop of Rome, but by appointment of Christ. According to the theory, he was Primate before he went to Rome, and not because he went there. The simple historical fact is, that as Rome was the seat of the Roman empire, the Bishop of Rome aspired to be the head of the Church, which claim after a long struggle came to be acknowledged, at least in the West.

It is on the four gratuitous and unreasonable assumptions above mentioned, namely, that the Church to which the promise of the Spirit was made is an external, visible organization; that a particular mode of organization is essential to its existence; that that mode is the episcopal; and that it must be papal, *i.e.,* the whole episcopacy be subject to the Bishop of Rome;—it is on these untenable assumptions that the whole stupendous system of Romanism rests. If any one of them fail, the whole falls to the ground. These assumptions are so entirely destitute of any adequate historical proof, that no reasonable man can accept them on their own evidence. It is only those who have been taught or induced to believe the extant Church to be infallible, who can believe them. And they believe not because these points can be proved, but on the assertion of the Church. The Romish Church says that Christ constituted the Church on the papal system, and therefore, it is to be believed. The thing to be proved is taken for granted. It is a *petitio principii* from beginning to end.

*C. The Romish Doctrine of Infallibility founded*

*on a Wrong Theory of the Church.*

The first great argument of Protestants against Romanism concerns the theory of the Church.

God entered into a covenant with Abraham. In that covenant there were certain promises which concerned his natural descendants through Isaac, which promises were suspended on the national obedience of the people. That covenant, however, contained the promise of redemption through Christ. He was the seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. The Jews came to believe that this promise of redemption, *i.e.,* of the blessings of the Messiah’s reign, was made to them as a nation; and that it was conditioned on membership in that nation. All who were Jews either by descent or proselytism, and who were circumcised, and adhered to the Law, were saved. All others would certainly perish forever. This is the doctrine which our Lord so pointedly condemned, and against which St. Paul so strenuously argued. When the Jews claimed that they were the children of God, because they were the children of Abraham, Christ told them that they might be the children of Abraham, and yet the children of the devil (John viii. 33‑44); as John, his forerunner, had before said, say not “We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (Matt. iii. 9.) It is against this doctrine the epistles to the Romans and Galatians are principally directed. The Apostle shows, (1.) That the promise of salvation was not confined to the Jews, or to the members of any external organization. (2.) And therefore that it was not conditioned on descent from Abraham, nor on circumcision, nor on adherence to the Old Testament theocracy. (3.) That all believers *oi* *ek pisteos* are the sons, and, therefore, the heirs of Abraham. (Gal. iii. 7.) (4.) That a man might be a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised on the eighth day, and touching the righteousness which is of the law blameless, and yet it avail him nothing. (Phil. iii. 4‑6.) (5.) Because he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; and circumcision is of the heart. (Romans ii. 28‑29.) (6.) And consequently that God could cast off the Jews as a nation, without acting inconsistently with his covenant with Abraham, because the promise was not made to the Israel *kata sarka* but to the Israel *kata pneuma* (Rom. ix. 6‑8.)

Romanists have transferred the whole Jewish theory to the Christian Church; while Protestants adhere to the doctrine of Christ and his Apostles. Romanists teach, (1.) That the Church is essentially an external, organized community, as the commonwealth of Israel. (2.) That to this external society, all the attributes, prerogatives, and promises of the true Church belong. (3.) That membership in that society is the indispensable condition of salvation; as it is only by union with the Church that men are united to Christ, and, through its ministrations, become partakers of his redemption. (4.) That all who die in communion with this external society, although they may, if not perfect at death, suffer for a longer or shorter period in purgatory, shall ultimately be saved. (5.) All outside of this external organization perish eternally. There is, therefore, not a single element of the Jewish theory which is not reproduced in the Romish.

*Protestant Doctrine of the Nature of the Church.*

Protestants, on the other hand, teach on this subject, in exact accordance with the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles: (1.) That the Church as such, or in its essential nature, is not an external organization. (2.) All true believers, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, are members of that Church which is the body of Christ, no matter with what ecclesiastical organization they may be connected, and even although they have no such connection. The thief on the cross was saved, though he was not a member of any external Church. (3.) Therefore, that the attributes, prerogatives, and promises of the Church do not belong to any external society as such, but to the true people of God collectively considered; and to external societies only so far as they consist of true believers, and are controlled by them. This is only saying what every man admits to be true, that the attributes, prerogatives, and promises pertaining to Christians belong exclusively to true Christians, and not to wicked or worldly men who call themselves Christians. (4.) That the condition of membership in the true Church is not union with any organized society, but faith in Jesus Christ. They are the children of God by faith; they are the sons of Abraham, heirs of the promise of redemption made to him by faith; whether they be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free; whether Protestants or Romanists, Presbyterians or Episcopalians; or whether they be so widely scattered, that no two or three of them are able to meet together for worship.

Protestants do not deny that there is a visible Church Catholic on earth, consisting of all those who profess the true religion, together with their children. But they are not all included in any one external society. They also admit that it is the duty of Christians to unite for the purpose of worship and mutual watch and care. They admit that to such associations and societies certain prerogatives and promises belong; that they have, or ought to have the officers whose qualifications and duties are prescribed in the Scriptures; that there always have been, and probably always will be, such Christian organizations, or visible churches. But they deny that any one of these societies, or all of them collectively, constitute the Church for which Christ died; in which He dwells by his Spirit; to which He has promised perpetuity, catholicity, unity, and divine guidance into the knowledge of the truth. Any one of them, or all of them, one after another, may apostatize from the faith, and all the promises of God to his Church be fulfilled. The Church did not fail, when God reserved to himself only seven thousand in all Israel who had not bowed the knee unto Baal.

Almost all the points of difference between Protestants and Romanists depend on the decision of the question, “What is the Church?” If their theory be correct; if the Church is the external society of professing Christians, subject to apostle‑bishops (*i.e.,* to bishops who are apostles), and to the Pope as Christ’s vicar on earth; then we are bound to submit to it; and then, too, beyond the pale of that communion there is no salvation. But if every true believer is, in virtue of his faith, a member of that Church to which Christ promises guidance and salvation, then Romanism falls to the ground.

*The Opposing Theories of the Church.*

That the two opposing theories of the Church, the Romish and Protestant, are what has been stated above is so generally known and so unquestioned, that it is unnecessary to cite authorities on either side. It is enough, so far as the doctrine of Romanists is concerned, to quote the language of Bellarmine,1 that the marks of the Church are three: “Professio verae fidei, sacramentorum communio, et subjectio ad legitimum pastorem, Romanum Pontificem. Atque hoc interest inter sententiam nostram et alias omnes, quod omnes aliae requirunt internas virtutes ad constituendum aliquem in Ecclesia, et propterea Ecclesiam veram invisibilem faciunt; nos autem credimus in Ecclesia inveniri omnes virtutes,—tamen ut aliquis aliquo modo dici possit pars verae Ecclesiae,—non putamus requiri ullam internam virtutem, sed tantum externam professionem fidei, et sacramentorum communionem, quae sensu ipso percipitur. Ecclesia enim est coetus hominum its visibilis et palpabilis, ut est coetus Populi Romani, vel regnum Galliae aut respublica Venetorum.” The Lutheran Symbols define the Church as, “Congregatio sanctorum.”2 “Congregatio sanctorum et vere credentium.”3 “Societas fidei et Spiritus Sancti in cordibus.”4 “Congregatio sanctorum, qui habent inter se societatem ejusdem evangelii seu doctrinae, et ejusdem Spiritus Sancti, qui cords eorum renovat, sanctificat et gubernat; “ and5 “Populus spiritualis, non civilibus ritibus distinctus a gentibus, sed verus populus Dei renatus per Spiritum Sanctum.”6

The Symbols of the Reformed Churches present the same doctrine.7 The Confessio Helvetica says, “Oportet semper fuisse, nunc esse et ad finem usque seculi futuram esse Ecclesiam, *i.e.,* e mundo evocatum vel collectum coetum fidelium, sanctorum inquam omnium communionem, eorum videlicet, qui Deum verum in Christo servatore per verbum et Spiritum Sanctum vere cognoscunt et rite colunt, denique omnibus bonis per Christum gratuito oblatis fide participant.”8 Confessio Gallicana: “Affirmamus ex Dei verbo, Ecclesiam esse fidelium coetum, qui in verbo Dei sequendo et pura religione colenda consentiunt, in qua etiam quotidie proficiunt.”9 Confessio Belgica: “Credimus et confitemur unicam Ecclesiam catholicam seu universalem, quae est sancta congregatio seu coetus omnium fidelium Christianorum, qui totam suam salutem ab uno Jesu Christo exspectant, abluti ipsius sanguine et per Spiritum ejus sanctificati atque obsignati. Haec Ecclesia sancta nullo est aut certo loco sita et circumscripta, aut ullis certis personis astricta aut alligata: sed per omnem orbem terrarum sparsa atque diffusa est.”10 The same doctrine is found in the answer to the fifty‑fourth question in the Heidelberg Catechism. In the Geneva Catechism to the question, “Quid est Ecclesia? “ the answer is, “Corpus ac societas fidelium, quos Deus ad vitam aeternam praedestinavit.”11

Winer in his “Comparative Darstellung,”12 thus briefly states the two theories concerning the Church. Romanists, he says, “define the Church on earth, as the community of those baptized in the name of Christ, united under his Vicar, the Pope, its visible head. Protestants, on the other hand, as the communion of saints, that is, of those who truly believe on Christ, in which the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments properly administered.”

*Proof of the Protestant Doctrine of the Church.*

This is not the place to enter upon a formal vindication of the Protestant doctrine of the nature of the Church. That belongs to the department of ecclesiology. What follows may suffice for the present purpose.

The question is not whether the word Church is not properly used, and in accordance with the Scriptures, for visible, organized bodies of professing Christians, or for all such Christians collectively considered. Nor is it the question, whether we are to regard as Christians those who, being free from scandal, profess their faith in Christ, or societies of such professors organized for the worship of Christ and the administration of his discipline, as being true churches. But the question is, whether the Church to which the attributes, prerogatives, and promises pertaining to the body of Christ belong, is in its nature a visible, organized community; and specially, whether it is a community organized in some one exclusive form, and most specially on the papal form; or, whether it is a spiritual body consisting of true believers. Whether when the Bible addresses a body of men as “the called of Jesus Christ,” “beloved of God,” “partakers of the heavenly calling;” as “the children of God, joint heirs with Christ of a heavenly inheritance;” as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification and sprinkling of the blood of Christ;” as “partakers of the like precious faith with the Apostles;” as “those who are washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God;” as those who being dead in sin, had been “quickened and raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus;” it means the members of an external society as such, and because such, or, the true people of God? The question is, whether when to the men thus designated and described, Christ promised to be with them to the end of the world, to give them his Spirit, to guide them unto the knowledge of the truth, to keep them through the power of the Spirit, so that the gates of hell should not prevail against them, he means his sincere or his nominal disciples,—believers or unbelievers? These questions admit of but one answer. The attributes ascribed to the Church in Scripture belong to true believers alone. The promises made to the Church are fulfilled only to believers. The relation in which the Church stands to God and Christ is sustained alone by true believers. They only are the children and heirs of God; they only are the body of Christ in which He dwells by his Spirit; they only are the temple of God, the bride of Christ, the partakers of his glory. The doctrine that a man becomes a child of God and an heir of eternal life by membership in any external society, overturns the very foundations of the gospel, and introduces a new method of salvation. Yet this is the doctrine on which the whole system of Romanism rests. As, therefore, the Apostle shows that the promises made to Israel under the Old Testament, the promise of perpetuity, of extension over the whole earth, of the favour and fellowship of God, and all the blessings of the Messiah’s reign, were not made to the external Israel as such, but to the true people of God; so Protestants contend that the promises made to the Church as the body and bride of Christ are not made to the external body of professed Christians, but to those who truly believe on him and obey his gospel.

The absurdities which flow from the substitution of the visible Church for the invisible, from transferring the attributes, prerogatives, and promises which belong to true believers, to an organized body of nominal or professed believers, are so great that Romanists cannot be consistent. They cannot adhere to their own theory. They are forced to admit that the wicked are not really members of the Church. They are “in it” but not “of it.” Their connection with it is merely external, as that of the chaff’ with the wheat. This, however, is the Protestant doctrine. The Romish doctrine is precisely the reverse. Romanists teach that the chaff is the wheat; that the chaff becomes wheat by external connection with the precious grain. Just so certain, therefore, as that chaff is not wheat; that nominal Christians, as such, are not true Christians; just so certain is it that no external society consisting of good and bad, is that Church to which the promise of Christ’s presence and salvation is made. It is as Turrettin says,13 “proton pseudos pontificiorum in tota controversia est, ecclesiam metiri velle ex societatis civilis modulo, ut ejus essentia in externis tantum et in sensus incurrentibus consistat, et sola professio fidei sufficiat ad membrum ecclesiae constituendum, nec ipsa fides et pietas interna ad id necessario requirantur.”

*D. The Doctrine of Infallibility founded on*

*the False Assump­tion of the Perpetuity of the Apostleship.*

As the first argument against the doctrine of Romanists as to the infallibility of the Church is, that it makes the Church of Rome to be the body to which the attributes, prerogatives, and promises of Christ to true believers belong; the second is that it limits the promise of the teaching of the Spirit, to the bishops as successors of the Apostles. In other words, Romanists falsely assume the perpetuity of the Apostleship. If it be true that the prelates of the Church of Rome, or of any other church, are apostles, invested with the same authority to teach and to rule as the original messengers of Christ, then we must be bound to yield the same faith to their teaching, and the same obedience to their commands, as are due to the inspired writings of the New Testament. And such is the doctrine of the Church of Rome.

*Modern Prelates are not Apostles.*

To determine whether modern bishops are apostles, it is necessary in the first place to determine the nature of the Apostleship, and ascertain whether modern prelates have the gifts, qualifications, and credentials of the office. Who then were the Apostles? They were a definite number of men selected by Christ to be his witnesses, to testify to his doctrines, to the facts of his life, to his death, and specially to his resurrection. To qualify them for this office of authoritative witnesses, it was necessary, (1.) That they should have independent and plenary knowledge of the gospel. (2.) That they should have seen Christ after his resurrection. (3.) That they should be inspired, *i.e.,* that they should be individually and severally so guided by the Spirit as to be infallible in all their instructions. (4.) That they should be authenticated as the messengers of Christ, by adherence to the true gospel, by success in preaching (Paul said to the Corinthians that they were the seal of his apostleship, 1 Cor. ix. 2); and by signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Such were the gifts and qualifications and credentials of the original Apostles; and those who claimed the office without possessing these gifts and credentials, were pronounced false apostles and messengers of Satan.

When Paul claimed to be an apostle, he felt it necessary to prove, (1.) That he had been appointed not by man nor through men, but immediately by Jesus Christ. (Gal. i. 1.) (2.) That he had not been taught the gospel by others, but received his knowledge by immediate revelation. (Gal. i. 12.) (3.) That he had seen Christ after his resurrection. (1 Cor. ix. 1 and xv. 8.) (4.) That he was inspired, or infallible as a teacher, so that men were bound to recognize his teachings as the teaching of Christ. (1 Cor. xiv. 37.) (5.) That the Lord had authenticated his apostolic mission as fully as he had done that of Peter. (Gal. ii. 8.) (6.) “The signs of an apostle,” he tells the Corinthians, “were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” (2 Cor. xii. 12.)

Modern prelates do not claim to possess any one of these gifts. Nor do they pretend to the credentials which authenticated the mission of the Apostles of Christ. They claim no immediate commission; no independent knowledge derived from immediate revelation; no personal infallibility; no vision of Christ; and no gift of miracles. That is, they claim the authority of the office, but not its reality. It is very plain, therefore, that they are not apostles. They cannot have the authority of the office without having the gifts on which that authority was founded, and from which it emanated. If a man cannot be a prophet without the gift of prophecy; or a miracle‑worker without the gift of miracles; or have the gift of tongues without the ability to speak other languages than his own; no man can rightfully claim to be an apostle without possessing the gifts which made the original Apostles what they were. The deaf and dumb might as reasonably claim to have the gift of tongues. The world has never seen or suffered a greater imposture than that weak, ignorant, and often immoral men, should claim the same authority to teach and rule that belonged to men to whom the truth was supernaturally revealed, who were confessedly infallible in its communication, and to whose divine mission God himself bore witness in signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. The office of the Apostles, as described in the New Testament, was, therefore, from its nature incapable of being transmitted, and has not in fact been perpetuated.

There is no command given in the New Testament to keep up the succession of the Apostles. When Judas had apostatized, Peter said his place must be filled, but the selection was to be confined to those, as he said, “which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that He was taken up from us.” (Acts i. 21, 22.) The reason assigned for this appointment was not that the Apostleship might be continued, but that the man selected might be “a witness with us of his resurrection.” “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.” And that was the end. We never hear of Matthias afterward. It is very doubtful whether this appointment of Matthias had any validity. What is here recorded (Acts, i. 15‑26), took place before the Apostles had been endued with power from on high (Acts i. 8), and, therefore, before they had any authority to act in the premises. Christ in his own time and way completed the number of his witnesses by calling Paul to be an Apostle. But, however this may be, here if ever *exceptio probat regulam.* It proves that the ranks of the Apostles could be filled, and the succession continued only from the number of those who could bear independent witness of the resurrection and doctrines of Christ.

Besides the fact that there is no command to appoint apostles, there is clear evidence that the office was not designed to be perpetuated. With regard to all the permanent officers of the Church, there is, (1.) Not only a promise to continue the gifts which pertained to the office, and the command to appoint suitable persons to fill it, but also a specification of the qualifications to be sought and demanded; and (2.) a record of the actual appointment of incumbents; and (3.) historical evidence of their continuance in the Church from that day to this. With regard to the Apostleship, all this is wanting. As we have seen, the gifts of the office have not been continued, there is no command to perpetuate the office, no directions to guide the Church in the selection of proper persons to be apostles, no record of their appointment, and no historical evidence of their continuance; on the contrary, they disappear entirely after the death of the original twelve. It might as well be asserted that the Pharaohs of Egypt, or the twelve Caesars of Rome have been continued, as that the race of apostles has been perpetuated.

It is true that there are a few passages in which persons other than the original twelve seem to be designated as apostles. But from the beginning of the Church until of late, no one has ventured on that account to regard Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Titus, as apostles, in the official sense of the word. All the designations given to the officers of the Church in the New Testament, are used in different senses. Thus, “presbyter “ or “elder,” means, an old man, a Jewish officer, an officer of the Church. The word “deacon,” means, a domestic, sometimes a secular officer, sometimes any minister of the Church; sometimes the lowest order of church officers. Because Paul and Peter call themselves “deacons,” it does not prove that their office was to serve tables. In like manner the word “apostle” is sometimes used in its etymological sense “a messenger,” sometimes in a religious sense, as we use the word “missionary; “ and sometimes in its strict official sense, in which it is confined to the immediate messengers of Christ. Nothing can be plainer from the New Testament than that neither Silas nor Timothy, nor any other person, is ever spoken of as the official equal of the twelve Apostles. These constitute a class by themselves. They stand out in the New Testament as they do in all Church history, as the authoritative founders of the Christian Church, without peers or colleagues.

If, then, the Apostleship, from its nature and design, was incapable of transmission; if there be this decisive evidence from Scripture and history, that it has not been perpetuated, then the whole theory of the Romanists concerning the Church falls to the ground. That theory is founded on the assumption that prelates are apostles, invested with the same authority to teach and rule, as the original messengers of Christ. If this assumption is unfounded, then all claim to the infallibility of the Church must be given up; for it is not pretended that the mass of the people is infallible nor the priesthood, but simply the episcopate. And bishops are infallible only on the assumption that they are apostles, in the official sense of the term. This they certainly are not. The Church may make priests, and bishops, and even popes; but Christ alone can make an Apostle. For an Apostle was a man endowed with supernatural knowledge, and with supernatural power.

*E. Infallibility founded on a*

*False Interpretation of the Promise of Christ.*

The third decisive argument against the infallibility of the Church is that Christ never promised to preserve it from all error. What is here meant is that Christ never promised the true Church, that is, “the company of true believers,” that they should not err in doctrine. He did promise that they should not fatally apostatize from the truth. He did promise that He would grant his true disciples such a measure of divine guidance by his Spirit, that they should know enough to be saved. He, moreover, promised that He would call men into the ministry, and give them the qualifications of faithful teachers, such as were the presbyters whom the Apostles ordained in every city. But there is no promise of infallibility either to the Church as a whole, or to any class of men in the Church. Christ promised to sanctify his people; but this was not a promise to make them perfectly holy in this life. He promised to give them joy and peace in believing; but this is not a promise to make them perfectly happy in this life,—that they should have no trials or sorrows. Then, why should the promise to teach be a promise to render infallible. As the Church has gone through the world bathed in tears and blood, so has she gone soiled with sin and error. It is just as manifest that she has never been infallible, as that she has never been perfectly holy. Christ no more promised the one than the other.

*F. The Doctrine contradicted by Facts.*

The fourth argument is that the Romish doctrine of the infallibility of the Church is contradicted by undeniable historical facts. It therefore cannot be true. The Church has often erred, and therefore it is not infallible.

Protestants believe that the Church, under all dispensations, has been the same. It has always had the same God; the same Redeemer; the same rule of faith and practice (the written Word of God, at least from the time of Moses), the same promise of the presence and guidance of the Spirit, the same pledge of perpetuity and triumph. To them, therefore, the fact that the whole visible Church repeatedly apostatized during the old economy—and that, not the people only, but all the representatives of the Church, the priests, the Levites, and the elders—is a decisive proof that the external, visible Church may fatally err in matters of faith. No less decisive is the fact that the whole Jewish Church and people, as a church and nation, rejected Christ. He came to his own, and his own received him not. The vast majority of the people, the chief priests, the scribes and the elders, refused to recognize him as the Messiah. The Sanhedrim, the great representative body of the Church at that time, pronounced him worthy of death, and demanded his crucifixion. This, to Protestants, is overwhelming proof that the Church may err.

Romanists, however, make such a difference between the Church before and after the advent of Christ, that they do not admit the force of this argument. That the Jewish Church erred, they say, is no proof that the Christian Church can err. It will be necessary, therefore, to show that according to the principles and admissions of Romanists themselves, the Church has erred. It taught at one time what it condemned at another, and what the Church of Rome now condemns. To prove this, it will suffice to refer to two undeniable examples.

It is to be borne in mind that by the Church, in this connection, Romanists do not mean the true people of God; nor the body of professing Christians; nor the majority of priests, or doctors of divinity, but the episcopate. What the body of bishops of any age teach, all Christians are bound to believe, because these bishops are so guided by the Spirit as to be infallible in their teaching.

*The Arian Apostasy.*

The first great historical fact inconsistent with this theory is, that the great majority of the bishops, both of the Eastern and Western Church, including the Pope of Rome, taught Arianism, which the whole Church, both before and afterwards, condemned. The decision of three hundred and eighty bishops at the Council of Nice, ratified by the assent of the great majority of those who did not attend that Council, is fairly taken as proof that the visible Church at that time taught, as Rome now teaches, that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. The fact that some dissented at the time, or that more soon joined in that dissent; or, that in a few years, in the East, the dissentients were in the majority, is not considered as invalidating the decision of that Council as the decision of the Church; because a majority of the bishops, as a body, were still in favor of the Nicene doctrine. Then, by parity of reasoning, the decisions of the two contemporary councils, one at Seleucia in the East, the other at Ariminum in the West, including nearly eight hundred bishops, ratified as those decisions were by the great majority of the bishops of the whole Church (including Liberius, the bishop of Rome), must be accepted as the teaching of the visible Church of that age. But those decisions, according to the previous and subsequent judgment of the Church, were heretical. It has been urged that the language adopted by the Council of Ariminum admits of an orthodox interpretation. In answer to this, it is enough to say, (1.) That it was drawn up, proposed, and urged by the avowed opponents of the Nicene Creed. (2.) That it was strenuously resisted by the advocates of that creed, and renounced as soon as they gained the ascendancy. (3.) That Mr. Palmer himself admits that the Council repudiated the word “consubstantial” as expressing the relation of the Son to the Father. But this was the precise point in dispute between the Orthodox and semi-Arians.

Ancients and moderns unite in testifying to the general prevalence of Arianism at that time. Gregory Nazianzen says,14 “Nam si perpaucos exceperis, . . . . omnes (pastores) tempori obsecuti Bunt: hoc tantum inter eos discriminis fuit, quod alii citius, alii serius in eam fraudem inciderunt, atque, alii impietatis duces antistitesque se praebuerunt.” Jerome says: “Ingemuit totus orbis terrarum, et Arianum se esse miratus est.”15 He also says:16 “Ecclesia non parietibus consistit, sed in dogmatum veritate, Ecclesia ibi est ubi fides vera est. Ceterum ante annos quindecim aut viginti parietes omnes hie ecclesiarum haeretici (Ariani) possidebant, Ecclesia autem vera illic erat, ubi vera fides erat.” It is here asserted that the whole world had become Arian; and that all the churches were in the possession of heretics. These statements must be taken with due allowance. They nevertheless prove that the great majority of the bishops had adopted the Arian, or semi-Arian Creed. To the same effect Athanasius says *“*Quae nunc ecclesia libere Christum adorat? Si quidem ea, si pia est, periculo subjacet? . . . . Nam si alicubi pit et Christi studiosi (sunt autem ubique tales permulti) illi itidem, ut Prophetae et magnus ille Elias, absconduntur, . . . . et in speluncas et cavernas terrm sese abstrudunt, aut in solitudine aberrantes commorantur.”17 Vincent of Lerins18 says: *“*Arianorum venenum non jam portiunculam quamdam, sed gene orbem totum contaminaverat, adeo ut prope cunctis Latini sermonis episcopis partim vi partim fraude deceptis caligo quaedam mentibus effunderetur.” To these ancient testimonies any number of authorities from modern theologians might be added. We give only the testimony of Dr. Jackson, one of the most distinguished theologians of the Church of England: “After this defection of the Romish Church in the bishop Liberius, the whole Roman empire was overspread with Arianism.”19

Whatever doubt may exist as to details, the general fact of this apostasy cannot be doubted. Through defection from the truth, through the arts of the dominant party, through the influence of the emperor, the great majority of the bishops did join in condemnation of Athanasius, and in subscribing a formula of doctrine drawn up in opposition to the Nicene Creed; a formula afterwards renounced and condemned; a formula which the Bishop of Rome was banished for two years for refusing to sign, and restored to his see when he consented to subscribe. If, then, we apply to this case the same rules which are applied to the decisions of the Nicene Council, it must be admitted that the external Church apostatized as truly under Constantius, as it professed the true faith under Constantine. If many signed the Eusebian or Arian formula insincerely, so did many hypocritically assent to the decrees of Nice. If many were overborne by authority and fear in the one case, so they were in the other. If many revoked their assent to Arianism, quite as many withdrew their consent to the Athanasian doctrine.

*The Romish Evasion of this Argument.*

In dealing with this undeniable fact, Romanists and Romanizers are forced to abandon their principle. Their doctrine is that the external Church cannot err, that the majority of the bishops living at any one time cannot fail to teach the truth. But under the reign of the Emperor Constantius, it is undeniable that the vast ma­jority, including the Bishop of Rome, did renounce the truth. But, says Bellarmine,20 the Church continued and was conspicuous in Athanasius, Hilary, Eusebius, and others. And Mr. Palmer, of Oxford says,21 “The truth was preserved under even Arian bishops.” But the question is not, whether the truth shall be preserved and confessed by the true children of God? but, whether any external, organized body, and specially the Church of Rome, can err in its teaching? Romanists cannot be allowed, merely to meet an emergency, to avail themselves of the Protestant doctrine that the Church may consist of scattered believers. It is true as Jerome teaches in the passage above quoted, “Ubi fides vera est, ibi Ecclesia est.” But that is our doctrine, and not the doctrine of Rome. Protestants say with full confidence, “Ecclesia manet et manebit.” But whether in conspicuous glory as in the time of David, or in scattered believers as in the days of Elias, is not essential.

*The Church of Rome rejects the Doctrines of Augustine.*

A second case in which the external church (and specially the Church of Rome) has departed from what it had itself declared to be true, is in the rejection of the doctrines known in history as Augustinian. That the peculiar doctrines of Augustine, including the doctrine of sinful corruption of nature derived from Adam, which is spiritual death, and involves entire inability on the part of the sinner to convert himself or to cooperate in his own regeneration; the necessity of the certainly efficacious operation of divine grace; the sovereignty of God in election and reprobation, and the certain perseverance of the saints; were sanctioned by the whole Church, and specially by the Church of Rome, cannot be disputed. The eighteenth chapter of Wiggers’ “Augustinianism and Pelagianism,” is headed, “The final adoption of the Augustinian system for all Christendom by the third ecumenical council of Ephesus, A.D. 431.” It is not denied that many of the eastern bishops, perhaps the majority of them, were secretly opposed to that system in its essential features. All that is insisted upon is that the whole Church, through what Romanists recognize as its official organs, gave its sanction to Augustine’s peculiar doctrines; and that so far as the Latin Church is concerned this assent was not only for the time general but cordial. It is no less certain that the Council of Trent, while it condemned Pelagianism, and even the peculiar doctrine of semi‑Pelagians, who said that man began the work of conversion, thus denying the necessity of preventing grace *(gratia preveniens),* nevertheless repudiated the distinguishing doctrines of Augustine and anathematized all who held them.

G. *The Church of Rome now teaches Error.*

A fifth argument against the infallibility of the Church of Rome is that, that Church now teaches error. Of this there can be no reasonable doubt, if the Scriptures be admitted as the standard of judgment.

1. It is a monstrous error, contrary to the Bible, to its letter and spirit, and shocking to the common sense of mankind, that the salvation of men should be suspended on their acknowledging the Pope to be the head of the Church in the world, or the vicar of Christ. This makes salvation independent of faith and character. A man may be sincere and intelligent in his faith in God and Christ, and perfectly exemplary in his Christian life, yet if he does not acknowledge the Pope, he must perish forever.

2. It is a grievous error, contrary to the express teachings of the Bible, that the sacraments are the only channels of communicating to men the benefits of redemption. In consequence of this false assumption, Romanists teach that all who die unbaptized, even infants, are lost.

3. It is a great error to teach as the Church of Rome does teach that the ministers of the gospel are priests; that the people have no access to God or Christ, and cannot obtain the remission of sins or other saving blessings, except through their intervention and by their ministrations; that the priests have the power not only of declarative, but of judicial and effective absolution, so that those and those only whom they absolve stand acquitted at the bar of God. This was the grand reason for the Reformation, which was a rebellion against this priestly domination; a demand on the part of the people for the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, the liberty to go immediately to him with their sins and sorrows, and find relief without the intervention or permission of any man who has no better right of access than themselves.

4. The doctrine of the merit of good works as taught by Romanists is another most prolific error. They hold that works done after regeneration have real merit *(meritum condigni),* and that they are the ground of the sinner’s justification before God. They hold that a man may do more than the law requires of him, and perform works of supererogation, and thus obtain more merit than is necessary for his own salvation and beatification. That this superfluous merit goes into the treasury of the Church, and may be dispensed for the benefit of others. On this ground indulgences are granted or sold, to take effect not only in this life but in the life to come.

5. With this is connected the further error concerning Purgatory. The Church of Rome teaches that those dying in the communion of the Church, who have not in this life made full satisfaction for their sins, or acquired sufficient merit to entitle them to admission into heaven, do at death pass into a state of suffering, there to remain until due satisfaction is made and proper purification is effected. There is no necessary termination to this state of purgatory but the day of judgment or the end of the world. It may last for a thousand or many thousands of years. But Purgatory is under the power of the keys. The sufferings of souls in that state may be alleviated or shortened by the authorized ministers of the Church. There is no limit to the power of men who are believed to hold the keys of heaven in their hand, to shut and no man opens, and open and no man shuts. Of all incredibilities the most incredible is that God would commit such power as this, to weak, ignorant, and often wicked men.

6. The Romish Church teaches grievous error concerning the Lord’s Supper. It teaches, (1.) That when consecrated by the priest the whole substance of the bread and the whole substance of the wine are transmuted into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. (2.) That as his body is inseparable from his soul and divinity, where the one is there the other must be. The whole Christ, therefore, body, soul, and divinity, is present in the consecrated wafer, which is to be worshipped as Christ himself is worshipped. This is the reason why the Church of England in her Homilies pronounces the service of the Mass in the Romish Church idolatrous. (3.) That Church further teaches that the body and blood of Christ thus locally and substantially present in the Eucharist are offered as a true propitiatory sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin, the application of which is determined by the intention of the officiating priests.

7. Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but in the worship of the true God by images. The second Commandment of the Decalogue expressly forbids the bowing down to, or serving the likeness of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath. In the Hebrew the words used are, *shackanah* and (xxx). In the Septuagint the words are, *ou proskuneseis autois, oude me latreuseis autois*. In the Vulgate it reads, “Non adorabis ea neque coles.” The precise thing, therefore, that is forbidden is that which the Church of Rome permits and enjoins, namely, the use of images in religious worship, prostration before them, and doing them reverence.

8. Another great error of the Church of Rome is the worship of saints and angels, and especially of the Virgin Mary. It is not merely that they are regarded as objects of reverence, but that the service rendered them involves the ascription of divine attributes. They are assumed to be everywhere present, able to hear and answer prayer, to help and to save. They become the ground of confidence to the people, and the objects of their religious affections. They are to them precisely what the gods of the heathen were to the Greeks and Romans.

Such are some of the errors taught by the Church of Rome, and they prove that that Church instead of being infallible, is so corrupt that it is the duty of the people of God to come out of it and to renounce its fellowship.

*H. The Recognition of an Infallible Church incompatible*

*with either Religious or Civil Liberty.*

A church which claims to be infallible, *ipso* *facto,* claims to be the mistress of the world; and those who admit its infallibility, thereby admit their entire subjection to its authority. It avails nothing to say that this infallibility is limited to matters of faith and morals, for under those heads is included the whole life of man, religious, moral, domestic, social, and political.

A church which claims the right to decide what is true in doctrine and obligatory in morals, and asserts the power to enforce submission to its decisions on the pain of eternal perdition, leaves no room for any other authority upon earth. In the presence of the authority of God, every other disappears.

With the claim to infallibility is inseparably connected the claim to pardon sin. The Church does not assume merely the right to declare the conditions on which sin will be forgiven at the bar of God, but it asserts that it has the prerogative to grant, or to with­hold that forgiveness. “Ego to Absolvo,” is the formula the Church puts into the mouth of its priesthood. Those who receive that absolution are saved; those whom the Church refuses to ab­solve must bear the penalty of their offences.

An infallible church is thus the only institute of salvation. All within its pale are saved; all without it perish. Those only are in the Church who believe what it teaches, who do what it commands, and are subject to its officers, and especially its head, the Roman pontiff. Any man, therefore, whom the Church ex­communicates is thereby shut out of the kingdom of heaven; any nation placed under its ban is not only deprived of the consolations of religious services, but of the necessary means of salvation.

If the Church be infallible, its authority is no less absolute in the sphere of social and political life. It is immoral to contract or to continue an unlawful marriage, to keep an unlawful oath, to enact unjust laws, to obey a sovereign hostile to the Church. The Church, therefore, has the right to dissolve marriages, to free men from the obligations of their oaths, and citizens from their alle­giance, to abrogate civil laws, and to depose sovereigns. These pre­rogatives have not only been claimed, but time and again exercised by the Church of Rome. They all of right belong to that Church, if it be infallible. As these claims are enforced by penalties in­volving the loss of the soul, they cannot be resisted by those who admit the Church to be infallible. It is obvious, therefore, that where this doctrine is held there can be no liberty of opinion, no freedom of conscience, no civil or political freedom. As the recent ecumenical Council of the Vatican has decided that this infalli­bility is vested in the Pope, it is henceforth a matter of faith with Romanists, that the Roman pontiff is the absolute sovereign of the world. All men are bound, on the penalty of eternal death, to believe what he declares to be true, and to do whatever he decides is obligatory.

# **FOOTNOTES**

*1 De Ecclesia Militante, III.* Disputationes, edit. Paris, 1608, vol. ii. p. 108, d.

*2 Augsburg Confession,* art. 7.

3 *Ibid.* art. 8.

*4 Apol. A. C.,* art. 4, pp. 144, 145, Hale.

5 *Ibid.* p. 146.

6 See Hase, *Libri Symbolici.*

*7* See Niemeyer, *Coll*. *Confess.*

8 II. cap. 17, p. 499, Niem.

9 Art. 27, p. 336, *ibid.*

10 Art. 27, p. 379, *ibid.*

11 Page 135, *ibid.*

12 Page 165.

13 Locus XVIII. ii. 12.

14 *Orat*. xxi. t. i. p. 387, edition Paris, 1609.

15 *Dialogus contra Luciferanos, 19,* vol. ii. p. 172 c., edit. Migne, Paris, 1845.

16 Comment. on Ps. cxxxiii., vol. vii. p. 1223 a, edit. Migne.

17 “Ad Solitariam Vitam Agentes Epist.,” Works, p. 846, edit. Paris, 1627.

18 *Comm.* I. iv. p. 642, Vol. 1. Migne. *Patrol.,* Paris, 1846.

19 *On the Church, p.* 160. Edited by W. Goode. Philadelphia, 1844.

20 *De Eccclesia, lib. iii. c.16.*

21 *On the Church, vol. ii. p. 187.*