

BOOK I.

INTRODUCTORY MATTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE NATURE AND AMOUNT OF CHRIST'S PROMISES OF
AN ECCLESIASTICAL PERPETUITY AND PURITY.

Two remarkable prophetic promises stand upon record, as having been personally made by our Blessed Saviour himself: the one, before his passion; the other, after it: promises, which involve matter of very serious consideration to all the members of those various Churches which profess to have been reformed in the sixteenth century.

I. The first of these two promises was made in the course of a conversation with his disciples relative to the opinions which were entertained of him.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesaræa-Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying: *Whom do men say, that I, the Son of man, am?* And they

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said: *Some say, that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the prophets. He saith unto them: But whom say ye that I am?* And Simon Peter answered and said: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee: That thou art Peter: and upon this rock, I will build my Church: and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*.*

The promise before us obviously contains two distinct clauses.

Of these, the first clause respects *The foundation upon which Christ would build his Church*: while the second clause respects *The perpetuity of the Church when built.*

1. With regard to the first clause, the Rock, upon which the Lord here declares that he will found his church, is, according to the most authoritative, because the most ancient, interpretation, *Peter's heaven-inspired Confession that his Master is at once the promised Messiah and the Son of the Living God†.*

Now, in the judgment of the Primitive Church,

* Matt. xvi. 13—18.

† Καὶ ἔφη, Τὸν Θεὸν Χριστὸν, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἀποκάλυψιν, ἐπέγνω αὐτὸν, ὡς τὸν μαθητὴν αὐτοῦ, Σίμωνα πρῶτον καλούμενον, ἑσπόμενον Πέτρον. Καὶ τὸν Θεὸν γερραμένον αὐτὸν ἐν ταῖς ἀπορρημέναις τῶν ἀποστόλων αὐτοῦ ἔχοντες, καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν

The Son of the Living God is a phrase, which denotes the proper and essential divinity of Christ: because it exhibits the only-begotten Son of the Father, as being consubstantial with the Father, and thence as being true God from true God begotten not made*.

Hence the first clause of the promise imports: that *Christ would found his church upon the vital complex doctrine of his human Messiahship and his proper Divinity.*

2. From the foundation of the Church thus constituted, the second clause advances to *Its perpetuity in such a constitution.*

Agreeably to the tenor of this second clause, Christ would not only *build* his Church upon a doctrine of such vital importance that it might justly be deemed its foundation; but likewise, when viewed as thus doctrinally founded, he would effectually provide, that the gates of Hades should never *prevail* against it.

For a better understanding of the second clause, it will be proper to observe, that the imagery, which marks it, refers, in point of ideality, to the invisible condition of disembodied spirits previous to the reuniting day of the resurrection: while, in

λέγοντες, νοήσαμεν ὅσα καὶ πρὸ πάντων πνευμάτων, ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς δοξάμεν αὐτοῦ καὶ δοξῆναι προέδοσαν. Justin Martyr. Dial. cum Tryph. A. D. 137. Oper. p. 255.

* See my Apostolicity of Trinitarianism, book ii. append. II. numb. 10.

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point of poetical machinery, it is clearly borrowed from those large excavated catacombs, which were used for the interment of the dead, and which were securely closed with ponderous doors or gates of solid stone or iron*.

Hence, when associated with the first clause, the plain import of the second clause will be: that *A condition of Sepulchral Invisibility, or a*

* Poetis fere omnibus id sæpenumero usu venit, ut, vel occasione inducti, vel necessitate prope coacti, in eum locum incidant, in quo, multo cum ornato et amplificatione, utpote in re gravi magnaque, describendi sunt Inferi, sive Vita Functorum Status: hoc est, id clarè explicandum, quod quale sit, nemini mortalium concessum est omnino mente percipere aut conjectura consequi.—Quid vero vates Hebræi?—Nimirum idem hoc in loco fecisse videntur, quod in cæteris omnibus: nam, quæ palam et in aperto essent, vulgoque constarent, de mortuis, hoc est, de mortuorum cadaveribus, ex iis generalem quandam imaginem confecerunt, quam, in describendo vita functorum statu, unicè et constanter usurpant; quamque, si modo fas sit, appellare possumus Hebræorum Infernum Poeticum. *Sheol* ipsi vocant; Græci, *Hades*; Latini, *Inferum* sive etiam *Sepulchrum*: neque sanè aliunde sumpta est Hebræis tota hæc imago, quam de more rituque sepulture apud ipsos recepto; qui ejusmodi erat, ut materiam præberet ornati poetico satis accommodatam. Hebræorum enim sepulchra, saltem honestiora, quæque familiis principibus patria erant ac gentilitia, speluncæ erant amplæ, sub terram, ex nativa rupe, arte manumque excavatæ; laqueare testudinato; quedam tam spatiosæ, ut columnis suffluerentur. Ad latera, circumquaque, excidebantur cellæ recipiendis sarcophagis. Ii, sculptili opere, aptè ornati erant: singulique, singulis cellis, condebantur. Nullam omnino lucem admittebat specus: quippe, angusto aditu,

state of Utter Disappearance from off the face of the earth, shall never be the lot of the Church which Christ would build upon the complex doctrine of his human Messiahship and his proper essential Divinity.

In other words, its import will be : that, *To the very end of time, there shall always be in the world a Visible Church, holding and teaching the funda-*

quique advoluto saxo obstruebatur. Multa hujusmodi conditoria etiamnum in Judæa visuntur : duo præ cæteris magnifica, quæ regum habentur sepulchra ; alterum in ipsis Hierosolymis, cellas habens viginti quatuor ; alterum, bis totidem continens, in urbis pomerio.

Quod si eos locos omnes excutimus, quibus sacri vates Inferos ornatu poetico describunt, liquido, nisi valdè fallor, apparebit, eos mentem in hujusmodi sepulchrorum imagine per omnia intentam et defixam habuisse.—Cum viderent corpora vita functa in terram cadere, eoque modo, quo dictum est, sepulchro coudi ; percrebuit apud Hebræos, ut apud cæteros, etiam, opinio quædam popularis, agi sub terra vitam mortuorum deinceps consequentem : quam ut adsciscerent vates sacri etiam necesse erat, si modo de hac re omnino loqui et intelligi vellent. Lowth, de Sacra Poesi Hebræor., prælect. vii. p. 86—90.

Our Lord's promise, I believe, is very commonly understood to intimate, that Satan, with all the banded powers of hell, should not be able to prevail against the Church.

Certainly, this is a great and important and consolatory truth : but, in point of ideality, it is not precisely the truth here announced by Christ. The promise is, that the Church should never die and be buried, so as to become invisible : as the dead became invisible, when consigned to those gloomy sepulchral caverns which were deemed the images of *Sheol* or *Hades*. Accordingly, our Saviour no doubt said, in his native tongue,

As the first promise laid the foundation of a Visible Church in the complex doctrine of Christ's Messiahship and Divinity ; while it declared, that that Church should never disappear from off the face of the earth : so the second promise, while it similarly announces a condition or a privilege of unfailing perpetuity, harmoniously suspends an admission into the same Church upon a baptism in the name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, which involves the doctrine of Christ's Godhead, and which in its ecclesiastical application involves also the doctrine of his Messiahship.

Thus far, therefore, the second promise, in a manner, repeats and confirms the declaration of the first promise.

But here it stops not. On the contrary, it additionally sets forth : that *Christ would be always with his Apostles, even unto the end of the world.*

Whence, since his promised perpetual presence is chronologically concurrent with the world's duration, it likewise sets forth : that *Christ, even to the end of the world, would be always spiritually present, in the way of ordinary support and assistance and sanction and approbation, with the ministerial successors of the Apostles, no less than with the Apostles themselves.*

Now, though a Visible Church may hold sound doctrine, respecting the person and character of Christ : it does not therefore, of necessity, follow, that it *must* also be sound in every other

mental complex doctrine of the human Messiahship and the true Divinity of its blessed Master-Builder.

II. The second of the two promises was made, either immediately before, or very shortly before, Christ's ascension to glory.

Go ye, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

1. This second promise obviously comprehends all the provisions of the first promise : but, then, in point of spiritual superstructure upon an indispensable foundation, it advances considerably beyond it.

The justice of such a remark will readily appear from the following analysis.

that the gates of *Sheol* should never prevail against his Church : and, thence, St. Matthew has justly and accurately expressed the Hebrew *Sheol* by the Greek *Hades*. The same ideal language is employed in the Apocalypse respecting the two witnessing Churches. *Their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city :—and they of the people—SHALL SEE their dead bodies three days and a half ; and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put into a SEPULCHRE.* Rev. xi. 8, 9. That is to say : the two Churches may be corporately dissolved as Churches ; but they shall not pass into a state of defunct invisibility, as a body passes when consigned to one of the sepulchral caverns of the East.

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

essential doctrine and in every *other* enjoined practice of the Gospel ; so as to warrant a rationally scriptural belief, that *Christ has always continued to be, with itself and its Clergy, with the taught and the teachers, spiritually and approbatively present.*

For some visible Branches of the visible Church Catholic may, both in doctrine and in practice, corrupt themselves ; while *other* visible Branches may, both doctrinally and practically, remain incorrupt : though *all*, nevertheless, continue to hold the indispensable fundamental doctrine of Christ's Godhead and Messiahship. Nay, so far as the tenor of the first promise is *strictly* concerned, that promise would not have failed of its accomplishment, even if the *entire* Visible Church should have lapsed into grievous errors both of doctrine and of practice, so long as it held the indispensable complex doctrine upon which professedly it was founded.

Hence we may perceive the immense importance and absolute necessity of the second promise.

Christ declares : not only, as in the first promise, that *His Church shall never disappear from off the face of the earth* : but likewise that *He himself WILL BE SPIRITUALLY PRESENT, with his Apostles and their ministerial successors, always, even unto the end of the world.*

But, where erroneous doctrine, in vital essentials, prevails ; and where a line of doctrinally

dependent practice, directly opposed to Holy Scripture, is inculcated and adopted: it certainly seems, even though the fundamental tenet of Christ's Godhead and Messiahship be still soundly maintained, nothing less than a contradiction in terms to say, that Christ is *there* alway SPIRITUALLY PRESENT.

Consequently, unless an inquirer be prepared boldly to assert, that the Visible Church, in no one of its branches, has ever lapsed into vitally erroneous doctrine and practice, we are compelled, by the stubborn necessity of historical facts, to interpret Christ's second promise *partially*, not *universally*.

By the joint consent, therefore, as we may well say, both of the Romanist and of the Reformed, the second promise can only be understood as intimating: that *Christ would so be SPIRITUALLY PRESENT with his Apostles and their successors, that, alway and even to the end of the world, there should never, in the worst of times, be wanting some one Visible Church or Churches, which, whatever might be the condition of other Branches of the Catholic Church, should evince that SPIRITUAL PRESENCE, by a faithful adherence to all the grand essential doctrines of Christianity, and by a due rejection of all those tenets and practices that on full evidence stand directly opposed to the teaching and temper of the Gospel**.

* Even Bossuet himself makes the very important admis-

2. That such is the true explanation of the second promise, is certain: both from matter of

sion: that, *The perpetuity of the Christian Religion depends not upon the preservation of any particular locality or of any particular race of mankind.*

Dans la Religion Chrétienne, il n'y aucun lieu ni aucune race qu'on soit obligé de conserver à peine de laisser périr la Religion et l'Alliance. Avertiss. v. sur les Lettres de M. Jurieu. § 25.

Bossuet says this, to extricate himself from Jurieu's theological vindication of the House of Orange. But he perceives not, that, while he is avoiding Charybdis, he is running foul of Scylla. For, if the fact be as he states: then, by a plain consequence, the preservation of Rome in her asserted character of *The Mother and Mistress of all Churches* and in her alleged function of *The Centre of Ecclesiastical Unity*, is quite unnecessary to the preservation of Christianity. Should the mere superfluous adjunct be destroyed, Christianity, according to the Bishop of Meaux, would still continue to flourish, in unabated strength, in immortal vigour, and in heaven-born vivaciousness.

With an expression of such sentiments it seems scarcely consistent to maintain, that the promises of Christ must needs be accomplished in the Roman Church and in no other: and the inconsistency is heightened, when the remarkable phraseology of Scripture itself is considered.

In the figured language of prophecy, a Church is symbolically represented by a Golden Candlestick, bearing an ignited candle, and thus communicating light throughout the whole extent of its action. See Rev. i. 12, 20.

Now a Candlestick is not a fixture: on the contrary, both it and the light which it bears are capable of removal from one place to another place. Accordingly, in strict adherence to this ideality, the Saviour actually threatens such a removal, in the event of flagrant and hardened unfaithfulness. Rev. ii. 5.

Such being the case, unless Rome can shew scriptural cause

fact, as I have already hinted; and, likewise from the concurrent voice of prophecy.

for pleading an exemption from the common possible lot of all other Churches, nothing can be more idle than for her to claim a special and indefeasible right to promises, which were made generally to the Church Catholic in some one or other of its branches, and not to any one branch as contradistinguished from all other branches.

I may here remark, by the way: that the argument, through which Bossuet would fain overwhelm all the sound Protestant Churches of the Reformation, most effectually and most tremendously tells against the arbitrary phantasy of Socinianism or (as its adherents delight to term it) Unitarianism.

If this utterly unsupported speculation be indeed the mind of the Gospel and the doctrine of the Apostles: then, agreeably to the tenor of Christ's promises, it must have been faithfully held, during all the middle ages of *corrupt apostasy to the dogma of the Trinity* (as Dr. Priestly speaks), by some one or more Visible Church or Churches; for, otherwise, the requisite ecclesiastically-doctrinal connection, between the asserted Socinianism of the Primitive Church and the real Socinianism of these latter days, can by no possibility be established.

But no such Visible Church or Churches can be shewn, from history, to have existed, throughout the long period of the middle ages.

Therefore, if Socinianism be the true sense of Scripture: then Christ's promises of the perpetual preservation of a doctrinally pure Visible Church must inevitably have failed. And, conversely, if Christ's promises relative to the perpetual preservation of such a Church have not failed: then Socinianism cannot be the true sense of Scripture.

The dilemma, in short, is this.

We must either reject Socinianism: or we must confess, that Christ's promises have not been accomplished.

(1.) In regard to mere historical matter of fact, if Christ meant to intimate, that he would so be alway spiritually present with his Apostles and their successors as to preclude the possibility of even any one particular Church ever falling into mortal error either doctrinal or practical: then, plainly, there never could have been such a thing as an ecclesiastical lapse into heresy.

But both the Romanist and the Reformed equally admit and even contend, that *This circumstance has actually occurred*. For the Romanist contends; that the national Churches of England, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, and many others, have thus lapsed: while the Reformed contends; that such a lapse, both doctrinal and practical, is justly chargeable upon the Church of Rome and all the Churches which are in communion with her.

Hence, by common consent based upon the undeniable necessity of facts, it is, on all sides, fully allowed: that *The second promise can only relate to some Branch or Branches of the Universal Church, and can in no wise be extended to the entire Universal Church itself*.

Nor can the Romanist be permitted to draw back from this acknowledgment, on the plea: that the Catholic Church, meaning his own particular Church, never fell into error either doctrinal or practical; and that those Communities, which differ from her, are not to be esteemed Churches.

For, even if, for the sake of argument, we were to admit this absurd assumption; still the *real* state of the case will remain just as it was: because it cannot be denied, that the Reformed Churches, which in the estimation of a Romanist have fallen into heresy, were *once* in communion with the Church of Rome, and therefore *once*, also in the estimation of a Romanist, real Churches. Whence it clearly follows: that, on the very principles of Romanism itself, Branches of the true Church may lapse; and thus may shew, even practically, that Christ has not always been present with them.

(2.) In like manner, so far as the concurrent voice of prophecy is concerned, exactly the same result is brought out.

It matters not, in regard to the present question: *how* St. Paul's prophecy of a great apostasy from sound faith, immediately associated with a sitting of some eminent apostate in the temple of God, and therefore obviously associated with error and heresy within the very pale of a Visible Church, is specifically expounded; or *how* the apocalyptic prediction of the two witnesses, defined to be two candlesticks, and thence of necessity representing two Churches, is actually interpreted*. Let the true *application* of these oracles be what it may, their *general drift and purport* are so plain, as to enforce alike the agree-

* 2 Thessal. ii. 3, 4. Rev. xi. 1—4. Compare Rev. xi. 4 with Rev. i. 20.

their too evident lapse from sound faith and from scriptural practice, they assuredly cannot be said to have enjoyed the promised perpetual presence of Christ*.

* I beg it to be here understood: that, in strict accordance with what the nature of my subject requires, I speak of Churches *collectively*, not of Church-members *individually*. Corruptions, which shut out the very idea of Christ's approving spiritual presence with an apostatic Church *collectively*, and which (it is to be feared) operate as deadly poison upon the great bulk of the erring members of such a Church, may, nevertheless, through the mysterious agency of God's grace, prove innocuous to *particulars*, who, in the midst of superstitions sincerely though mistakenly received, have been sanctified by the Blessed Spirit, and who thence are animated by a living principle of interior religion. With these holy persons *individually*, Christ is spiritually present: though, from their Church *collectively*, his spiritual presence has been withdrawn.

If, in this view of the matter, I be inconsistent, as some may think: I must even be content to symbolise with the inconsistency of our judicious Hooker. See Disc. of Justificat. § 9—20.

The true *rationalè* of the remarkable fact before us (for I venture to style it a *fact*) I take to be this.

Christ declares, that he will build his Church upon the Rock of Peter's Confession. He declares, therefore, that he will build it upon the Doctrine of the united Divinity and Humanity of the Messiah. Such being the case, a departure from evangelical truth in subordinate particulars constitutes nothing more than a *corruption* more or less intense: but a departure from the Rock of Peter's Confession is an *absolute digging up of the very foundation of the Church*. Hence, wherever the Foundation is held, grievous as may be the apostatic declension of the *collective* Communion which holds it; still, in such Communion,

ment of the Romanist and of the Reformed: for *both* parties concur in believing, that they foretell a season, *when, on account of the widely spread apostasy and degeneracy of mankind* (I use the words of the popish Bishop Walmsley), *all Christian Churches should be reduced to a single Church, all faithful ministers of God should become so few as to officiate at one altar, and all good and zealous Christians should make up so small a number that they might well be represented as collected in only a single temple paying their adoration to God: while the great multitude of those, who, for want of the spirit of religion, enter not into the temple, stand unmeasured, as it were, in the outer court**.

But it is clear, that no such *general apostasy* either could or can occur, unless there were *many apostates*: and it is equally clear, that there could never be such a *multitude of apostates*, who yet, under their predicted head the Man of Sin, should take possession of the very temple of God or (in a manner) of almost the entire Visible Church, unless *whole Churches and Districts* lapsed into heresy and misbelief and impiety.

Such apostate Churches, however, were once, by the very terms of the proposition, true and sincere Churches.

Yet, in the day of their apostatic heresy and impiety, whatever may be the precise nature of

* Walmsley's General History of the Christ. Church, under the name of *Pastorini*, p. 326.

Therefore the second promise must inevitably be interpreted with the limitations which have been specified.

Its import, consequently, will be this: that, God, through his own mighty working and in harmony with the very principle of a Foundation, has never ceased to have a people *individually*.

They are not all faithless, says the wisely discriminating Hooker, *that are weak in assenting to the truth or stiff in maintaining things opposite to the truth of Christian Doctrine. But, as many as hold the FOUNDATION which is precious, though they hold it but weakly and as it were with slender thread, although they frame many base and unsuitable things upon it, things that cannot abide the trial of the fire: yet shall they pass the fiery trial and be saved, which indeed have builded themselves upon the ROCK which is the FOUNDATION of the Church.—If the name of FOUNDATION do note the principal thing which is believed, then is that the FOUNDATION of our Faith, which St. Paul hath to Timothy: God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit: that of Nathanael; Thou art the Son of the living God, thou art the King of Israel: that of the inhabitants of Samaria; This is Christ, the Saviour of the world. He, that directly denieth this, doth utterly raze THE VERY FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH.—Forasmuch, therefore, as it may be said of the Church of Rome; she hath yet a little strength, she doth not directly deny the FOUNDATION of Christianity: I may, I trust, without offence, persuade myself; that thousands of our fathers in former times, living and dying within her walls, have found mercy at the hands of God.* Disc. of Justificat. § 14, 16, 17.

This view of the matter will, I apprehend, teach us the true principle and full import of the language, which St. John has employed respecting Antichrist and the Spirit of Antichrist.

The precise and accurately distinctive characteristic of Anti-

With one Branch or other of the Catholic Church, so that, either singly or severally, a succession of witnesses to the truth may be kept up, Christ will be present alway, even to the very end of the world; providentially precluding a total lapse into gross and deadly error either of faith or of practice; though not interfering to such an extent, as to produce a perfect agreement at all times in points unessential.

christ and the Spirit of Antichrist is a DENIAL OF THE FOUNDATION: whether such denial be heightened, it may be, into absolute Atheism; or whether it be variously modified, in different ages and societies, by a formal rejection, sometimes of the Humanity, and sometimes of the Divinity, of Christ. This, then, is explicitly stated and defined to be the badge or characteristic of Antichrist.

Now the very name of *Antichrist* imports a direct and formal opposition to Christ: and, accordingly, the Apostle carefully limits that opposition to a DENIAL OF THE FOUNDATION. *He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.—Every spirit, that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.—Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.—We know, that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This person (Gr. Οὐτως) is the true God and eternal life. 1 John ii. 22, 23. iv. 2, 3, 15. v. 20.*

No Communion, therefore, which holds the FOUNDATION, can be legitimately deemed a Branch of Antichrist, as the character of Antichrist is defined by St. John. And, thence, in a

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This incapability of falling *universally* into mortal error, which is promised by Christ to his Church, and which in truth of necessity enters into the very idea of a Church in the legitimate acceptance of the term, Bossuet, we may note, would transmute into perfect infallibility, vesting it exclusively in the single Church of Rome*.

Communion which *does* hold the FOUNDATION, grossly corrupt in doctrine as such a Communion may be *collectively*, there is no moral impossibility, that God should have, *individually*, a holy and salvable people.

Here, we are encountered by no contradiction. But to say, that *A member of the Foundation-denying Antichrist can also be, at the same time, a member of the Foundation-laying Christ*, strikes upon my own apprehension, as something very like a contradiction in terms.

* Hist. des Variat. livr. xv. § 3.