

The Bible or the Church (The Buddha of Christendom)

by Robert Anderson

The sermon argues that the Reformation was necessary to establish the Bible as the supreme authority and to break the continuity of guilt with the old Catholic Church of England.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 40:8, John 5:39, Acts 17:11, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23, 2 Peter 1:20

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Church Reformation"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the urgent need to reexamine the supremacy of the Bible in the face of a national lapse towards superstition and rationalism. He questions the consequences of dethroning the Bible and emphasizes the importance of defending the Scriptures against narrow interpretations and the influence of rationalistic criticism. Anderson highlights the Reformers' aim to establish the Bible's supremacy and the struggle between the Bible and the Church's authority, shedding light on the apostasy and corruption within the Christian Church. He challenges the notion of the Church as the oracle of God and advocates for a return to the authenticity and divine authority of the Bible.

Transcript

THE BIBLE OR THE CHURCH

by Sir Robert Anderson

PREFACE and Contents.

THE subject of these pages is one of the highest interest, and it is only those who are in some way behind the scenes who can judge aright of its peculiar urgency at the present moment.

"The greatest achievement in English history" is a distinguished historian's estimate of the Reformation ; but in this flippant and shallow age we seem to be letting slip what the Reformers won for us. For a national lapse toward superstition upon the one hand, and rationalism upon the other, is one of the marked characteristics of the day. And altogether apart from religious controversy these movements deserve the earnest attention of the thoughtful. For the dethronement of the Bible eliminates the most important factor in the formation of our national character, and it is not easy to estimate the effect which this will have on the life of the people of this country.

The superstitious phase of the apostasy, with which the following chapters chiefly deal, was the burden of a volume published ten years ago, with the title *The Buddha of Christendom*. And as that book is now out of print, the greater part of it is incorporated with the present work.

The title, *The Bible or the Church?* implicitly raises the question whether the Bible can still be accorded the place which it held with the Reformers as a Divine revelation. And I intended to deal with this question in a concluding chapter. But a defence of the Scriptures within such narrow limits would necessarily be so inadequate that it might serve only to prejudice the issue. I have decided therefore to omit it, trusting that my other writings will be accepted as proof that I do not ignore the subject in any aspect of it. I will only add that my deepening and now settled belief in the authenticity and Divine authority of the Bible owes much to the study of rationalistic criticism.

R. A.

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CHAPTER ONE

"It was the main purpose of the then rulers of the Church to put prominently forward the supremacy of the Bible." These words are quoted from the Archbishops' decision in the famous Incense case; and they indicate the chief aim of the leaders of the Reformation in England. For the Reformation was not merely a revival, it was a revolt. And ecclesiastical supremacy was the bondage from which those brave and noble

men delivered us. That Church which is the vital unity of the Body of Christ Rome confounds with the visible Church on earth - the public organisation entrusted to human administration.

But more than this, the Church on earth, which, according to Scripture, is the congregation of the faithful, the Romish system represents as an authority established to govern the faithful, with power to control not only their acts but their beliefs. The following words of Cardinal Newman will afford an admirable text for the discussion of the question here at issue. With reference to the dogma of Transubstantiation, he writes: "I had no difficulty in believing it as soon as I believed that the Catholic Roman Church was the oracle of God, and that she had declared this doctrine to be part of the original revelation."

Transubstantiation, the Reformers maintain, "overthroweth the nature of a sacrament." Simple and clear though this statement be, people fail to grasp its meaning. A sacrament is merely a sign or symbol to represent some spiritual reality. In the Eucharist, for example, the bread is bread and nothing more, but it represents the Lord's body. If therefore the bread be regarded as being in fact His body, it is no longer a "sacrament" at all. But let us analyse Cardinal Newman's words.

Why should we believe that a piece of bread is flesh, seeing that, judged by every possible test, it is not flesh but only bread? The Roman Catholic replies that we should believe it on the authority of the Church, for the Church is the oracle of God. But why, we demand again, should we believe the Church to be the oracle of God? We should believe it, the Roman Catholic tells us, because the Church is thus accredited by Holy Scripture. Is it not then our plain duty to test this claim by referring to the Scripture?

"Certainly not," is the emphatic rejoinder; "that is Protestant heresy of the worst kind. For the Church is the oracle of God, and therefore the authoritative exponent of Scripture; and instead of using our own judgment or reason, we must accept the Church's teaching on the subject." To the enlightened this may be the highest wisdom; but to the benighted Protestant it bears a sinister resemblance to the artifice which, in another sphere, the vulgar describe as "ringing the changes."

"Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?" the Lord demanded of the unbelieving Jews. But while faith is the highest exercise of reason, Newman's position is the complete abnegation of reason. "Come now, and let us reason together," was the Divine appeal to His people in the old time, even in days of apostasy. And coupled with that appeal was the Divine lament, "My people doth not consider." and the word is emphatic and significant. It means using their intelligence, and thinking for themselves, instead of blindly following their religious leaders, or in other words "obeying the voice of the Church."

That the Church is "the oracle of God" is a figment unsupported by evidence and disproved by facts. But no matter how able and pious a man may be, if he stultifies his reason by accepting it, he has "no difficulty in believing" that a piece of bread is the flesh of the Lord of Glory. In the same way he would have "no difficulty in believing" that this earth is not a planet but a fixed plane and the centre of the solar system; that the drivel contained in some parts of the Apocrypha was divinely inspired; and that the tortures of the Inquisition and the fires of Smithfield were divinely sanctioned and blessed!

Superstition such as this explains the advice which Pascal gave to those who found a difficulty in accepting the dogmas of the Church. Take to religion, he said in effect, "for that will make you stupid and enable you to believe." (Footnote - He is dealing with the difficulties of people who say they cannot believe, and he urges them to act as if they believed, using the ordinances, holy water, masses, &c. &c., and he adds: "Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abétira.")

The passage is given by Matthew Arnold in the preface to *God and The Bible*. No wonder that Pascal's Port Royal editors suppressed words so cruelly cynical, though so true. For while Christianity elevates or ennoble the whole being, human religion seems to make men either fools or fiends. It is important to notice, first, that the Church for which this monstrous claim is made is not "the Catholic Church of undivided Christendom," but that section of it called the "Catholic Roman Church"; and secondly that the claim is not based on a history marked by purity of faith and morals such as might be deemed proof of divine calling and favour.

Any appeal to considerations of that kind would be fatal; and Rome discreetly founds its claims upon the figment of "Apostolic succession." This was made emphatically clear by the Papal Bull of September, 1896. Exposing the duplicity and ignorance of the Anglican Romanisers, who sought Papal recognition of Anglican Orders, that Bull declared : - - - "A new rite was publicly introduced under Edward VI.; the true Sacrament of Orders, as introduced by Christ, lapsed, and with it the hierarchical succession."

While the Anglican conspirators sought to ignore the Reformation, the Pope of Rome thus insisted on its importance. To quote Cardinal Vaughan, "They have persuaded themselves that their clergy are really sacerdotal ; - that they possess sacrificing powers, and that they hold direct continuity from the old Catholic Church of England, as founded by St. Augustine." A "strange and almost incomprehensible belief," he justly calls it, for a main object with the Reformers was to break that continuity of guilt, and to set the national Church upon a basis only and altogether divine. '(Footnote - I am reminded of one of my visits to the Cardinal.

It was in connection with an unpleasant Police case. I gave him certain facts which led me to believe that one of his priests was a thoroughly evil man. He listened with an incredulous air, and then, opening the "Clergy List," he showed me that the delinquent was a beneficed clergyman of the Cht~ch of Ejigland. My apology for troubling him was, that the man called himself a Catholic priest, and my officers never doubted that he was a Roman Catholic. To which the Cardinal replied, "My dear Mr.

Anderson, these men call themselves Catholic priests, but they are double - dyed Protestants!") And what was the action of the English Archbishops in this matter? Instead of seizing the opportunity to reaffirm the principles of the Reformation, they openly took sides with the conspirators. Their "letter" of 19th February, 1897, was in effect an appeal to their "venerable brother Pope Leo XIII." to acknowledge that the Clergy of the Church of England were sacrificing priests and that they ought to be recognised as such by Rome.

Did the Prelates never stand by the Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford? Or were they so blinded by the superstitions to which they thus pandered that they failed to realise that Cranmer and Ridley and Latimer, who were there burned to death, stood for the Chuzch of England, or rather for the truth of God, and that the guilt of that hideous crime rests upon the apostate Church with which they thus basely sought to ally themselves? Was there ever a more shameful betrayal of the National Church!

In the days of Pagan Rome the Church was on the side of the martyrs. But under Papal Rome the martyrs were the victims of "the Church." The Reformers of the sixteenth century were the proscribed antagonists of the religion of Christendom. The struggle for the truth, and for the liberty which we owe to the maintenance of the truth, was waged by men who dared to stand out against "the Church," denouncing its errors and defying its power. But in these strange days of ours, the great question which till lately we supposed the Reformation had settled for ever, is again reopened in all kinds of insidious ways.

And a superstitious and false view of "the Church" is the main cause of our troubles. According to the Reformers "the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached." But, according to Rome, the Church is, as already noticed, an institution set up to lord it over the "congregation of faithful men," and to mediate between them and God. Such a conception of the Church is essentially anti-Christian; and even if the Historic Church of Christendom had been always pure, and true to its high ideals, it would be none the less an outrage upon Christians and Christian truth.

But there are many who, though they have no sympathy with Rome, consider that the work of the Reformation was marred by fanatical excess. The Reformers, they would tell us, ought to have been content to fall back upon "the Primitive Church of the Fathers." But those great men acted with full knowledge of facts and truths which are now forgotten or ignored. They knew that the much vaunted Church of the Fathers was tainted with the errors and evils which were afterwards developed in the Romish system.

While at Scotland Yard I watched the excavations for the building which has been erected on the then vacant ground across the way. The removal of a deep layer of river mud, permeated by the foul refuse of centuries, disclosed a rich bed of sand which had been thrown up by the sea in an earlier age. That sand was pure and wholesome in comparison with the filth which had been heaped upon it. But it was cleared away, and the foundations of the new building were laid on the rock which lay beneath.

This parable needs no interpreting. The Reformers knew well what they were about when they refused to build even upon "the Primitive Church of undivided Christendom," and insisted on going back to Apostolic times, and laying their foundations deep and firm on the bedrock of Holy Scripture. In his exposition of the parable of Matthew Xli. 43 - 45, Dean Alford, after explaining its primary reference to the Jewish people, goes on to notice its application to "the Christian Church."

Here are his words: "Strikingly parallel with this runs the history of the Christian Church. Not long after the Apostolic times, the golden calves of idolatry were set up by the Church of Rome. What the effect of the captivity was to the Jews, that of the Reformation has been to Christendom. The first evil spirit has been cast out. But by the growth of hypocrisy, secularity and rationalism, the house has become empty, swept and garnished: swept and garnished by the decencies of civilisation and discoveries of secular knowledge, but empty of living and earnest faith.

And he must read prophecy but ill who does not see under all these seeming improvements the preparation for the final development of the man of sin, the great repossession, when idolatry and the seven [more wicked spirits] shall bring the outward frame of so-called Christendom to a fearful end." These words have no reference to the Church regarded as the Body of Christ, the vital unity. Between the Bible and the Church in this its first and highest aspect, there can be no conflict, no antithesis.

The Lord's promise is eternal, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Dean Alford's words refer to the Professing Church on earth, "the outward frame" entrusted to the care of men. And keeping this clearly in view - we shall recognise that the Church on earth has apostatised from the place divinely given to it, and has utterly failed to fulfil its mission. And justifying the conduct and attitude of the Reformers, we shall avoid the superstitions and errors from which they sought to deliver us. To defend their acts and words is my main purpose in these pages.

And my method will be to give plain facts and clear testimony for the consideration of the thoughtful. "Muck-rake" work in the filth of pre-Reformation times is not sufficient. It is necessary to go farther

back, and by an appeal to the writings of the Fathers themselves, to throw light upon the condition of the "Primitive Church." But all this suggests a preliminary inquiry. The history of all ages and of every land gives proof that in the sphere of religion man always drifts away from God.

What explanation can be offered of this strange and sinister law of gravitation in the spiritual sphere? The following investigation of the problem is conducted on new lines. And it is here placed first, because the solution of it will prepare the way for all that follows.

CHAPTER TWO

UNIVERSALITY OF RELIGION

"AS soon as man grew distinct from the animal he became religious." No one gifted with a sense of humour could have gravely penned a suggestion so grotesque as this. That the remote descendant of an ape might become intelligent, philosophical, mathematical, musical, poetical, scientific—all this possibly we could understand; but why should he become religious? And yet this dictum of Renan's is most important as a testimony from such a quarter to the fact that man is a religious being.

The universality of religion has, indeed, been denied; but the denial is based on grounds that are inadequate. "The statement," says Professor Tiele, "that there are nations or tribes which possess no religion, rests either on inaccurate observations, or on a confusion of ideas. No tribe or nation has yet been met with destitute of belief in any higher beings, and travellers who asserted their existence have been afterwards refuted by facts. It is legitimate, therefore, to call religion, in its most general sense, an universal phenomenon of humanity."

And in quoting these words, Professor Max Muller declares: "We may safely say that, in all researches, no human beings have been found anywhere who do not possess something which to them is religion." And Charles Darwin himself admits that "a belief in all-pervading spiritual agencies seems to be universal." Accepting the conclusion, therefore, that man is by nature religious, the question remains, How can this fact be accounted for? Philosophers may amuse themselves with the theory that it is due to his losing a tail and learning to talk; but all who acknowledge the reign of law, and insist on seeking a cause for an effect, will see in it a proof of that, as even heathen poets taught, man is in a special sense the offspring of God.

This conclusion suggests the inquiry why it is that he is so unworthy of his origin. Were there a competent court to issue the writs, what damages human nature might obtain in libel actions against biological science and Augustinian theology! Bad as it is to proclaim that man is the child of an anthropoid ape, it is almost worse to declare that, through and through, and in every sense, he is only and altogether bad. True it is that the history of the race has been black and hateful.

No less true is it that wrong-doing is easy, whereas well-doing calls for sustained effort. But in this connection such facts, important though they be, are not everything. In a real sense the truest test of a man is not what he does, but what he approves; not what he is, but what he would wish to be. Vicious indulgence may have so depraved him that vice seems no longer vicious, for just as his physical faculties may be destroyed by abuse, so his conscience may become "seared as with a hot iron;" but this in an abnormal condition.

What is called the "moral" law is so described because it is the law of our being. It was not the commandment which made thieving wrong. It was because it was wrong that the commandment was given. It has been said, indeed, by a modern disciple of Hobbes, that "Thou shalt not steal" is merely the selfish precept of the hog in the clover to warn off the hog outside the fence. But such teaching is the outcome of a reprobate mind, and merely exemplifies the fact that a man may sink morally to the level of a hog.

But, it may be urged, we can point to communities that see no evil in theft. True; and we could also point to a nation whose women have stumps instead of feet. But let the lowest savage and the Chinese woman be removed in infancy from the influences which distort the conscience of the one and the limbs of the other, and in both cases nature will assert itself. A full discussion of this problem would fill a volume. But no such discussion is necessary here. For no infidel will raise the question; and in the case of the believer an appeal to the Scripture should settle it.

Its testimony is clear: "When Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience. It may be useful to note that it is not the law, but the work of the law, which is written in man's heart by nature bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them." Words could not be plainer. A heathen, though destitute of a Divine revelation, has a knowledge of good and evil, for that is inherent in man.

That such a knowledge was implanted in him by his Creator will be very generally admitted, but the popularity of a belief is no pledge of its truth. According to Scripture man was created innocent, and it was his lapse from innocency that brought him the knowledge of evil. But the knowledge of good and evil would not of itself make man religious. He was religious before he acquired that knowledge, and the atheistic evolutionist is theoretically right in holding that he might possess it now apart from religion.

The fact is that what is so commonly mistaken for "conscience" is but a subordinate characteristic of conscience. For it is what may be termed God-consciousness, and not the knowledge of good and evil, which constitutes man a religious being ; and it was this that the Creator implanted in him when He made him a spiritual being. Here then is the question : Man being the "offspring of God," and having instincts be-fitting his origin, how is it that he does not always choose the good and turn from the evil?

Who will dare to answer that it is because he cannot? Not the Christian, certainly ; for his Scriptures assert the responsibility of man; and indeed the whole doctrine of future judgment is based upon that truth. Nor yet the infidel, for the dignity of humanity is his favourite theme. But the fact remains that while some, not only among Pagans, but even among those who, like Renan for example, affect to ignore all religions, can lead worthy and excellent lives, these are few and exceptional.

The lives of the vast majority of men are evil. And they choose the evil in spite of knowing that it is evil, and in spite of a fitful desire to shun it. Apart from special depravity, a man's higher nature turns toward the good even while he yields to the evil. He praises virtue though he practises vice. It is his will that is paralysed, not his judgment. He is like a bird with a broken wing, whose instincts prompt it to fly while it flounders helplessly on the ground. Man has instincts and aspirations which indicate for him a noble origin and a still nobler destiny, but yet he is practically a failure.

How is this to be accounted for? In the whole range of nature, man excepted, there is nothing to correspond with it. It must of course be due to the operation of some law which applies only to the human

race. All other creatures fulfil the patent purpose of their being; man alone not merely falls short of this but out-rages it. How is this mystery to be explained? It may be said perhaps that man's vices are merely the natural propensities of the brute from which he is derived.

But here we can silence the evolutionist once again by appealing to the phenomena of religion. The religious instincts of the race are certainly not derived from the brute, and it is precisely in this sphere that the corruption and perversity of human nature are most manifest. If it were merely a question of animal-worship among Pagan races, the evolutionist might again bring in his theories. But the fact to be explained is that, in the most advanced civilisations, whether of classic heathendom or of modern Christendom, religion has invariably tended to degenerate, and to make its votaries a prey to superstition.

Let us approach the matter from another standpoint. The bird is unable to fly: is it unreasonable to suppose that some mishap must have occurred to it? Let us then tentatively adopt the suggestion that some disaster in the moral and spiritual sphere befell the human race in primeval times; and let us consider what results might be expected as the consequence of such a catastrophe? Man's moral equilibrium would of course be disturbed. The machinery of his moral being would, so to speak, be thrown out of gear.

But the effect upon his spiritual nature, by reason of its greater delicacy and sensitiveness, would be absolutely disastrous. A broken water-pipe may in a measure serve its purpose, but no electricity will pass along a broken wire. And is not this precisely in accordance with experience? In the sphere of morals men differ vastly from one another. Apart from Christianity altogether, some men lead pure and excellent lives. Others are steeped in vice. And the fact that some are moral is proof that all might be so.

In this limited sphere, indeed, we may, even at the risk of being made the quarry in a heresy hunt, adopt the dogma of Pelagius, "That as man has ability to sin, so has he also not only ability to discern what is good, but likewise to desire it and to perform it." And the truth of this is recognised when our selfish interests are involved. If a man steals his neighbour's cash, he goes to gaol; for "original sin" is no defence to a criminal charge. True it is that a thief comes in time to weaken his moral power to keep his hands out of his neighbour's pocket.

But prison discipline is rightly deemed a useful tonic in such a case. And what the fear of human judgment is to the criminal, the fear of Divine judgment is intended to be to the sinner. But orthodoxy so dings it into men's ears that they have no power to live moral and virtuous lives, that they naturally believe it, and cease to make the effort. That they can, but will not, is the righteous basis of the judgment that awaits them. The vital error of the Pelagian heresy was the application of it in the spiritual sphere.

But in the fifth century, revealed truth had been so obscured by theology that the distinction was ignored. A traveller who has missed his way in a forest can stand upright and walk like a man; but so long as the heavens are shut out from his view, he cannot direct his steps, he is lost. The morality of Saul of Tarsus, the profane persecutor, was as unimpeachable as that of Paul, the inspired apostle; but his splendid morality only served to bring into stronger relief the depth of his spiritual blindness and depravity. (Footnote - Some people are held in high esteem by all who do not know them: the Apostle Paul could appeal to those who had known him from his youth (Acts xxvi. 4, 5).

"I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day," he could declare in the scene of his early life (xxiii. i). His life throughout had been blameless (Phil. iii. 6). Never perhaps did any other mere man live a life so perfect. therefore it was he wrote the words: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save

sinner, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15). The claim to stand forth as "first" in all the long line of sinners, was not inspired (as with thousands who since have adopted the words) by "the pride that apes humility;" it was due to the fact that while he had had advantages which raised him above all other men, his religion had served only to make him a God-hater, "a blasphemer and a persecutor."

Mere religion always drags a man down spiritually.) Man, then, is a religious being, not moral, merely, but religious. And he is religious because he is spiritual. Here is the parting of the ways, where we must break once for all with the mere evolutionist. It is idle for him to talk to us of "embryonic developments" - dog's teeth and donkey's ears, and any amount besides. Even if we accept his account of the origin of man's animal structure, the fact remains that the spiritual element in his complex being must have come from God.

But this only serves to emphasise our difficulties. Were we to reason out the matter a priori, we should expect to find complete unity in the religious beliefs of the race, and they would have for us the same certainty as the truths and facts which are apparent to reason or the senses. And further, religion would always and inevitably tend to elevate and ennoble mankind. But if we could imagine any so ignorant and simple as to cherish such dreams, the records of the past and the facts of life on earth should bring them a rude awakening.

As for the religious beliefs of the world, there is nothing too crude, too wild, too false, too monstrous, to find enthusiastic adherents. And whenever a great teacher has appeared, and has sought to elevate the religion of men, his system has soon been perverted and depraved. It has ever been so. Of the early Egyptian religion, all that was sublime was demonstrably ancient, and its last stage was the grossest and most corrupt. In China the lofty system of ethics formulated by Confucius has suffered the utmost deterioration.

In India the pure nature-worship of the Vedas has ended in superstitious puerilities. And the teaching of Gautama, sublime in its rejection of all idolatry and priestcraft, has ended in the gross asceticisms and superstitions of modern Buddhism. The Divine revelation of Judaism was degraded to the level of "the Jew's religion," which made the race the common enemy of God and His people. And Christianity itself has been almost swamped by "the religion of Christendom," that tangled skein of Divine truth and Pagan superstition.

The whole history of the race records no exception to the rule. It is a law, like that of gravitation, that religion ever tends to degenerate, and in its decadence to corrupt and deprave man-kind. This subject will claim further notice in these pages. The question here is, What explanation can be given of facts so patent and yet so extraordinary? In the moral sphere we have to account for the phenomenon of a right judgment thwarted and violated. But in the spiritual sphere the problem is stranger still.

It is not that the bird has a broken wing, but that instead of endeavouring to fly, its normal instinct is utterly perverted, and it clings to the ground and even struggles to burrow into it. How is this mystery to be accounted for? Only one solution of it has ever been proposed, and that is the story of the Eden Fall. And that explanation is so entirely reasonable and adequate that if it had been left for some thinker to suggest it, the discovery might well have evoked an exclamation such as that with which Huxley is said to have greeted the Darwinian theory of the origin of species, "How stupid not to have thought of that!" I do not stop to inquire whether the story of the Fall should be taken literally or as an allegory, for I desire to avoid here all side issues. If any choose to regard the forbidden tree as a "sacrament" (I use the word in the

classical, not the superstitious and pagan, sense), it will not affect the argument.

CHAPTER THREE

IS "Christian Religion" True

ONE of the most obvious consequences of the conclusion reached in the preceding chapter is neglected or refused by many who profess to accept that conclusion most unreservedly. If it be the spiritual side of man's complex being that has suffered most by the disaster which has befallen him, it is here that the result will be most apparent. And while his moral nature may be capable of self-adjustment, we shall expect to find that, in the spiritual sphere, he is absolutely dependent upon a Divine revelation.

In fact, nothing relating to man should be regarded with so much distrust as his religion, and yet this is precisely the sphere where self-satisfaction most prevails. The phenomenon is all the stranger because every one is convinced that all religions are wrong save one; the exception of course being the particular cult of which he himself is a votary. And, the unanimity felt by people who agree becomes to them a strong confirmation of their faith. After shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

"with one voice, about the space of two hours," the worship of Diana is raised to the level of "things that cannot be spoken against." At the close of his *Essays on Religion*, John Stuart Mill states thus the result of his argument: "It follows that the rational attitude of a thinking mind towards the supernatural, whether in natural or revealed religion, is that of scepticism as distinguished from belief on the one hand and from atheism on the other." This position is generally regarded as hostile to faith; but our nature being what it is, it becomes a test and safeguard of faith.

No matter how excellent my chronometer may be, I am glad at all times to test it by the sun in the heavens. And as I belong to a fallen race, and it is in the sphere of religion that the effects of the catastrophe are most felt, I ought to be ever ready to test my religious tenets by whatever standard is the true one. Men may differ as to the standard, and as to how the testing process should be carried out, but all will agree upon the principle here enunciated." What guarantee have we that the religion which prevails in Christendom to-day is true?

To many the very statement of the question will seem scandalous and profane. They will set themselves angrily to shout it down, as the Ephesian Diana worshippers treated what they deemed to be the Christian heresy. But thoughtful people will welcome the inquiry. Assuming that Christianity is a Divine revelation, the question still remains, How far may we not have departed from "the faith once for all delivered"? We know how we can test our chronometers. Is there any standard by which we can test our religion?

"All who profess and call themselves Christians" will reply with united voice in pointing us to the Bible. But this unanimity is merely apparent, not real. The vast majority of Christians will object to our appealing to the Bible directly and immediately. We must, in turning to it, subject our minds to an authority that claims to be its interpreter. Every citizen is supposed to know the laws of his country; but though the statute-book is the standard of authority, the interpretation of the statutes does not depend on the citizen's private reading of them, but on the decisions of competent tribunals.

So also in the religious sphere. The Bible is the only, as it is the infallible, standard of faith and practice, but the Church claims to be its authorised exponent. At first sight nothing can be simpler than this, nothing more reasonable, nothing more practical. But no sooner do we attempt to act upon it than difficulties

overwhelm us. What is the Church? and where are we to find it? There are rival claimants to the title; to which of them shall it be accorded? Answer will be made that the Eastern Church is heretical.

But what tribunal has so decided? And by what standard? The tribunal, we shall be told, was the Catholic Church, and the standard was the common faith. But this is a most transparent begging of the question. What took place was that the head of the Western Church excommunicated the Eastern Church for refusing to acknowledge his supremacy, which supremacy the Eastern Church denounces as "the chief heresy of the latter days." Which, then, is in the right? If we appeal to the Church of England, her answer will be definite and clear, that both are wrong, and that they have "erred, not only in their living and manners of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith."

Nor need we look to the Church of England to claim for herself the place she refuses to accord to any other Church, of being "the witness and keeper" of the truth. Hers is the humbler position of being "a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ"; and to that supreme authority she appeals as the only sanction for her practice and her teaching. But, we are told, Christ did not write a book; He founded a Church; and He speaks in and through the Church; our part, therefore, is to commit ourselves to the Church's teaching and guidance.

This is merely an attempt to get behind the question which it pretends to solve. How do I know that Christ founded a Church? And how do I know that I can trust myself to the teaching of what claims to be the Church? The only, possible answer to these questions is an appeal either to the Church itself or else to the New Testament. IF the former, then I am to trust the Church because the Church claims my confidence - a flagrant case of what in another sphere is known as "the confidence trick."

If the latter, then by all means let me turn to the New Testament. But no "thimble-rigging" can be tolerated here. If the Church speaks with inherent authority, I must render unreasoning obedience to her teaching; but if she appeals to Holy Scripture, she must place an open Bible in my hands. If we accept the former alternative we find ourselves again at the point from which the argument has moved away. What, and where, is the Church? Is this question to be decided by a plebiscite?

Are we to be content to settle it by blindly joining the biggest crowd? Or are we to yield to whichever authority presents its claims with the greatest arrogance? It is not thus that in sublunary affairs the thoughtful direct their conduct. But it is precisely thus that in highly-favoured England, in this enlightened age, people of culture decide a question which concerns their eternal destiny! If our choice must be limited to one or other of the two most ancient Churches, it is extraordinary that educated Englishmen, acquainted with the history of both, should hesitate for a moment which to choose.

That Rome should loom greater in our view is natural, but that Rome should engross our attention can be accounted for only by our insular ignorance and prejudice. For, as Dean Stanley writes- "That figure which seemed so imposing when it was the only one which met our view, changes all its proportions when we see that it is overtopped by a vaster, loftier, darker figure behind. If we are bent on having dogmatical belief and conservative tradition to its fullest extent, we must go, not to the Church which calls itself Catholic, but to the Church which calls itself Orthodox." And yet the fact is clear that in a book addressed to English readers the Eastern Church may be ignored as absolutely as though it had no existence.

Papal supremacy is the special characteristic of the Western Church. Even if the history of Christendom had run differently, and this dogma were accepted by Christians of every name, a sceptic would be none the less entitled to ask on what authority it rests. Christ, we are told, entrusted to the Apostle Peter the

keys of the Church, thus conferring upon him the primacy of the Church. Peter became Bishop of Rome, and every after occupant of the See of Rome has succeeded to the Primacy.

The Bishop of Rome, therefore, is supreme Pontiff, Christ's Vicar upon earth. By all means let us investigate this without prejudice or passion. Let us refuse to be influenced by the fact that some of those who have filled the Papal throne were shameless profligates of infamous character. Let us refuse also to take account of the high personal qualities of its present occupant. And his environment is nothing to us. Gorgeous vestments, a magnificent ceremonial, regal dignity and pomp - all these serve but to prove the faith of those who accept his claims.

What concerns us is the evidence on which those claims are based. Suppose it be conceded that the Apostle Peter held the place thus claimed for him, what ground is there for believing that his successors in the See of Rome had equal precedence and power? The only ground is that they themselves have asserted it, and that half Christendom has yielded them the position. Evidence there is absolutely none. What ground, again, is there for believing that the Apostle Peter was ever the Bishop of Rome?

The only ground is that the Roman Church asserts it. Evidence there is absolutely none. Indeed the very statement itself implies an anachronism as glaring as if it were asserted that the apostle was a cardinal. Of course there must have been bishops in the Church in Rome, as in the other Churches, but the thought of a bishop with a diocese or see, belongs to post-apostolic times; the New Testament knows nothing of it. And as Dean Alford bluntly says, "The episkoptoi of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our bishops."

Moreover bishops were appointed by an apostle, and therefore if Peter was a bishop in Rome he must, instead of being superior to any of his brethren, have become subordinate to them - a complete *reductio ad absurdum*. It is proverbially difficult to prove a negative; but the absence of all reference to Peter in Romans makes it reasonably certain that he had no relations with the Church in Rome when that Epistle was written: the last chapter of The Acts makes it practically certain that he was not in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment; and the last chapter of 2 Timothy leaves no doubt whatever that he was not there during Paul's last imprisonment.

And to turn to a witness of post-apostolic times, Clement of Rome will confirm us in this conclusion. He was admittedly bishop of the Church in Rome before the end of the first century, and his Epistle to the Corinthians is admittedly genuine. Can any honest-minded man believe that his Epistle was written with the knowledge that the Apostle Peter had ever preceded him in the bishopric? (Footnote - The letter in question was written in the name of the Church of Rome. The only reference which it contains to Peter is in the following passage: "Peter by unjust envy underwent not one or two, but many labours, and thus having borne testimony unto death, he went unto the place of glory which was due to him) Lastly, what ground is there for supposing that the Apostle Peter was entrusted with the "keys of the Church?"

The only ground is the fact that to him were given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and the Church which proudly boasts of being the keeper of Holy Writ is so ignorant of Scripture that it confounds "the kingdom of heaven" with the Church! Every well-instructed Sunday-school child is aware that the book which records these words is the Hebrew Gospel, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" - in a word, the book which presents Him as Israel's Messiah.

It deals only with the favoured nation - the covenant people - to the exclusion of Gentiles altogether. The gospel of the Grace is not in it. The very word "Grace" does not occur in it even once. And the reason why

the Apostles were twelve in number was because the "tribes of Israel" were twelve in number. And among the twelve, Peter held the foremost place. To him were committed "the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" - an expression that is found only in connection with Israel.

To him, therefore, it was that, at Pentecost, the proclamation of the great amnesty to Israel was entrusted. And when "the word which God sent unto the children of Israel" was to be carried to Gentile proselytes, he was the appointed messenger. Throughout what theologians describe as "the Hebraic portion" of the Acts, his ministry is pre-eminent. He is the foremost, the commanding figure. But when Israel proved again impenitent and finally rejected the gospel of the kingdom, the very name of "the Apostle of the Circumcision" disappears from the narrative.

Nay, more, it disappears from the New Testament, save for his two Epistles addressed to "the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion" (that is of Israel), and for a passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, which proves to demonstrate that he had no precedence whatever except in relation to Israel. In the Church of this Gentile dispensation the pre-eminence is with "the Apostle of the Gentiles." We are not dealing here with deep theological problems beyond the power of common men to investigate.

And the conclusion is clear; first, that even if it could be shown that Peter was "the Vicar of Christ on earth," the fact would give no such precedence or dignity to the Roman Popes - a bishop might as well claim to be a cardinal or a marquis because his predecessor in the see wore the hat of the one or the coronet of the other; secondly, that the story that Peter was ever Bishop of Rome is the merest legend, and absolutely inconsistent with his office of Apostle; and, thirdly, that the figment of his having had a position of supreme authority in the Church is not supported by the Scripture to which appeal is made in its support.

Some errors are based on misread passages of Scripture. Others grow up apart from Scripture altogether, and Scripture is afterwards perverted to support them. In this latter category is the figment of the supremacy of Rome. It had its origin in the pride begotten of citizenship in the Imperial city - in what Augustine himself described as "the insolence of the city of Rome." Such is the foundation upon which rests the claim of the Pope to be the Vicar of Christ on earth. And yet his pretensions are acknowledged, not merely by ignorant peasants and superstitious women, but by educated and sensible men; by men reputed to be thinkers and scholars; by some even who are trained lawyers, holding high judicial offices.

How, then, is the phenomenon to be accounted for? In presence of such facts evolution - talk is idle. When human ingenuity can suggest an answer, it will claim consideration. Meanwhile the story of the Eden fall holds the field. Until I came to pen these pages I had not read any Roman Catholic work on this subject; and I have always supposed that a fair *prima facie* case could be made out for the Papal claims. But a perusal of Rev. Luke Rivington's *Primitive Church and the See of Peter* - work of high repute, to which Cardinal Vaughan contributed a preface - has destroyed that illusion.

Any one who is either versed in Holy Scripture or accustomed to deal with evidence will search these 480 pages in vain for either. All that the writer proves may be freely conceded - namely, that the Pope has been acknowledged by vast numbers of people from very early times.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dr. Pusey's Teaching

A THEORY, a legend, and a blunder - such, as we have seen, are the pillars upon which rest the proud pretensions of the great Western Church of Christendom. And the discovery may well lead us to distrust that Church's teaching, and fearlessly to investigate the truth of every dogma for which she claims our faith. Now if these dogmas be true, they are transcendental truths; and therefore it is idle to appeal to any human experience or authority in their support. A Divine revelation alone can justify our accepting them.

Have we such a revelation? And will an appeal to it convince us of their truth? To the first of these questions Christians of every name and creed will reply in perfect Unison. But when we come to the second, our suspicions will be aroused, not only by the fact that some of these doctrines the Churches of the Reformation repudiate, but also by the reluctance of those who champion them to permit an unfettered appeal to the authority on which they are supposed to rest. The Church is to limit and control our access to the Scriptures, either directly, in virtue of its own mystical authority - one of the very points at issue - or else in - directly, by insisting that we shall interpret the Scriptures in accordance with the writings of the Fathers.

Scripture, we are told, is "reverenced as paramount." "The Old and New Testaments are the fountain, the Catholic Fathers the channel, through which it has flowed down to us. The contrast, then, in point of authority is not between Holy Scripture and the Fathers, but between the Fathers and us." They are not "equalled, much less preferred, to Holy Scripture, but only to ourselves: i.e. the ancient to the modern, the waters near the fountain to the troubled estuary rolled backward and forward by the varying tide of human opinion, and rendered brackish by the continued contact with the bitter waters of the world."

' This is the language of Dr. Pusey - a teacher than whom no one has borne bolder testimony to the supreme authority and value of Holy Scripture. In the preface to his *Daniel The Prophet*, he writes: "No book can be written in behalf of the Bible like the Bible itself. Man's defences are man's word; they may help to beat off attacks, they may draw out some portion of its meaning. The Bible is God's Word, and through it God the Holy Ghost, who spake it, speaks to the soul which closes not itself against it."

That one who wrote such words as these should seek to identify the Bible with the writings of men, gives proof how well he knew that, apart from the writings of men, the Bible would lend no sanction to the system with which his name is associated. And yet how plausible it is! It seems the perfection of reasonableness. The simple reader might suppose that in regard to doctrine and practice the Fathers were agreed. But the Fathers differed, and the Churches with which they were severally connected differed; and their differences led to many a division, many a feud.

And so Dr. Pusey goes on to warn us that no one Father in particular is to be accepted as our guide, and we are to follow them only so far as their teaching was "universally received." "It is this only," he adds, "which according to Vincentius' invaluable rule, was received 'by all, in all Churches, and at all times,' which has the degree of evidence upon which we can undoubtedly pronounce that it is Apostolic." More plausible still! But, in fact, it is but dust flung into our eyes.

If the "Catholic faith" is to be thus limited to doctrines universally accepted, we shall jettison at once not only certain Pagan superstitions which are "undoubtedly pronounced to be Apostolic;" but also some of the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. And who is to decide for us what is the residuum of mingled truth and error which is to serve as a creed by which we shall mould our character and shape our course in view of the solemnities of our existence? The most honoured of the Fathers were men whose minds were impregnated by the superstitions of Pagan religion, or the subtleties of Pagan philosophy: are

we to assume that nineteen centuries of the Christian religion have so enfeebled or depraved the intellect of Christendom that we are less capable of understanding the Scriptures than they were?

They were "near the fountain" of Christianity, forsooth; yes, but they were nearer still to the cesspool of paganism. And inquiry will show that it is to the cesspool that we should attribute every perversion of the truth which today defaces what is called the Christian religion. The Christian turns to the Bible to hear in it the voice of his living Saviour and Master and Lord, who, by the Holy Spirit, sent down from heaven to that very end, "speaks" in and through that Word, "to the soul which closes not itself against it."

But the founder of this religious system is the dead Buddha of nineteen centuries ago, the pure waters of whose teaching are now dissipated in "the troubled estuary rolled backward and forward by the varying tide" of the opinions of the Fathers, and "rendered brackish by the continued contact with the bitter waters" of a corrupt and apostate Church. Let those who thus appeal to the Fathers hear the Fathers. No one among them is held in higher esteem than Chrysostom. The most famous of the Greek Fathers, he has been canonised by the Roman church; and both Greek and Roman Churches celebrate his festival.

And with abundant reason. For he lived a pure and foble life in an age when this much-vaunted "primitive Church" was characterised by shame-less profligacy and corruption. Here is Chrysostom's testimony to the Scriptures - "And why does he bid all Christians at that time to betake themselves to the Scriptures? Because at that time, when heresy hath got possession of those Churches, there can be no proof of true Christianity, nor any other refuge for Christians wishing to know the true faith but the Divine Scriptures.

For before it was shown in many ways which was the Church of Christ, and which heathenism; but now it is known in no way to those who wish to ascertain which is the true Church of Christ, but only through the Scriptures. Why? Because all those things which are properly Christ's in the truth, those heresies have also in their schism: Churches alike, the Holy Scripture alike, bishops alike, and the other orders of clergy, baptism alike, the eucharist alike, and everything else; nay, even Christ Himself.

Therefore, if any one wishes to ascertain which is the true Church of Christ, whence can he ascertain it, in the confusion arising from so great a similitude, but only by the Scriptures? . "Therefore the Lord, knowing that such a confusion of things would take place in the last days, commands on that account, that the Christians who are in Christianity, and desirous of availing themselves of the strength of the true faith, should betake themselves to nothing else but the Scriptures; otherwise, if they should look to other things they shall stumble and perish, not understanding which is the true Church."

These were the words of the most famous of the Greek Fathers: now let us hear the testimony of Augustine, the most famous of the Latin Fathers. He says - "I declare unto you that the Holy Scriptures which are called canonical, are the only books in the world to which I have learned to pay such honour and reverence, that I most firmly believe that none of their authors has committed any error therein. Other authors are read by me with the persuasion that however they may excel in holiness and learning, what they write is not true because they write it, but because they can prove it to be true either by Scripture or reason."

In "all things that pertain to life and godliness" the words of Holy Writ are so simple and clear that a little child can grasp their meaning. Thus the apostle could write to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." But who is to interpret the Fathers for us? Rival schools of Christian thought appeal to them in support ortheir opposing tenets; who, then, is to arbitrate between them? And by what standard? And why should we turn from what is plain and simple to

writings which are maze of mingled heresy and truth?

"Near the fountain!" These men talk as though the apostles left behind them a pure and united Church, and the Ante-Nicene Fathers had entered without a break upon the heritage. But what are the facts? "While the apostles wrote, the actual state of the visible tendencies of things showed too plainly what Church history would be." and the writer goes on to say - "I know not how any man, in closing the Epistles, could expect to find the subsequent history of the Church essentially different from what it is.

In those writings we seem, as it were, not to witness some passing storms which clear the air, but to feel the whole atmosphere charged with the elements of future tempest and death. Every moment the forces of evil show themselves more plainly. They are encountered, but not dissipated. . "The fact which I observe is not merely that these indications of the future are in the Epistles, but that they increase as we approach the close, and after the doctrines of the gospel have been fully wrought out, and the fulness of personal salvation and the ideal character of the Church have been placed in the clearest light, the shadows gather and deepen on the external history.

The last words of St. Paul in the second Epistle to Timothy, and those of St. Peter in his second Epistle, with the Epistles of St. John and St. Jude, breathe the language of a time in which. the tendencies of that history had distinctly shown themselves; and in this respect these writings form a prelude and a passage to the Apocalypse." In very truth those "last words" were wrung from men depressed by patent signs of general apostasy. The same apostle who had exulted in the fact that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus," lived to pen the sad lament, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in 'Asia be turned away from me."

And then, taking a still wider view of the condition of the Church, he indited the solemn forecast, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." And for more than a century before Ireneus - the earliest of the Patristic theologians - appeared upon the scene, the leaven had been working. That heresies should be the subject of the only treatise we possess from his pen, may indicate the state into which the Church had already passed. "Dogs," "evil workers," "the Concision," warned against even in apostolic times, increased in number and in influence, as the traditions of apostolic times lost their power in the Church.

Such men were ever at work - lowering the standard of Christian life, and corrupting the purity and simplicity of the Christian faith and the Christian ordinances. Error is a weed of rank and rapid growth. But it was not until more than a century after Ireneus had gone to his rest, when the last and fiercest of the persecutions had ended, and, with the advent of Constantine, the wolf of paganism openly assumed the sheep's clothing of the Christian religion," that the errors, which were in the very 'warp and woof of that religion, began to ripen and spread unchecked; and ere another century had passed, the standard even of outward morality in the professing Church sank to the level of that of the heathen world.'

The Church of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets"; the Church of Christendom is built upon the foundation of the Latin Fathers. What the Apostle Paul was to the one, Augustine of Hippo was to the other. Though inferior to Jerome in learning, he was practically the founder of the Latin Church. The personal greatness of the man - beyond question. His writings give proof of it. Throughout the Middle Ages their authority was supreme, and their influence is felt to the present hour.

And though till recently his Confessions were known only to the theologian and the student, the book now finds a place in thousands of English homes. But, as the inspired apostle wrote, "God accepteth no man's

person," so we may fearlessly bring the teaching of Augustine to the test of Scripture. Can any spiritually intelligent Christian read the Confessions without being struck by the ignorance it betokens of Christian doctrine? It reveals the experience of a great and pure and earnest soul reaching out after God in the midst of mists and darkness which the sunlight of Christianity would have dispelled.

Intense reverence for God, and desire to please Him - these are manifest in it throughout. But it all savours of what the apostle describes as the effort to be "made perfect in the flesh." Indeed it is startling to notice how little there is of Christ in it all, even in the theology of it. It is po

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