

position very confidently, and indeed staked his whole reputation upon its truth in the following words:—"Aut nihil ego video, aut certum hoc est, amplissimam illam, quam Apostoli Hierosolymis collegerant, Christianorum multitudinem in plures minores familias divisam fuisse, singulisque his familiis suos presbyteros, suos ministros, suos conventuum sacrorum locos fuisse." Yet these distinct congregations are still spoken of repeatedly as the church which was at Jerusalem; and this *church*, consisting of several congregations, is represented as being under the superintendence of one united body of apostles, and presbyters, or elders. In like manner, we cannot doubt, from what we are told of Paul's labours for three years in Ephesus, that there were several congregations in that city, while yet they are described in the Apocalypse as the church in Ephesus, or the Ephesian church (for there are two readings, supported by about an equal amount of critical authority);* and they are represented by Paul, in his address contained in the 20th chapter of the Acts, as a flock under the superintendence of a united body of men, whom he describes as at once presbyters and bishops.

On these grounds, I think there is sufficient evidence in Scripture, that the word church in the singular number is applied to something intermediate between a single congregation on the one hand, and the catholic or universal church on the other,—viz., to a number of congregations united together in external communion and government; and that, of course, such a union of congregations is lawful and warrantable, and that to whatever extent such a union or combination may lawfully go, according as circumstances or providence may admit or require it, the designation of a church, and all the general principles and rules applicable to a church as such, may be warrantably applied to the union or combination.

Sec. II.—Notes of the Church.

The subject of the notes or marks of the true church, which also occupies a prominent place in the controversy between the

* The reading in the textus receptus (Rev. ii. 1) is, τῆς Ἐφῆσων ἐκκλησίας, for which Griesbach substitutes, τῆς ἐν Ἐφῆσῳ ἐκκλησίας; and is followed in this by Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf. Tregelles alleges that, in Acts ix. 31, we should read ἐκκλη-

σία, and not ἐκκλησίαι, "the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria," (Account of the printed text of the Greek New Testament, p. 269); and this reading is adopted by Tischendorf and Lachmann, *in loc.*

Protestants and the Papists, has respect properly only to the visible church and its different branches or sections. It is not a subject of very great intrinsic importance, except in so far as it is necessary to refute the arguments which Papists found upon this topic in support of the claims of the Church of Rome.

That, of course, is the best and purest branch of the professing visible church, which, in its doctrine, government, worship, and discipline, most fully accords with the views upon all these points that are sanctioned by the word of God; and as the word of God plainly teaches that the principal function of the visible church, as an organized society, is to be a pillar and ground of the truth—*i.e.*, to support and hold up the truth of God before men—we cannot refuse the title of a true or real church of Christ to any society which is organized in professed subjection to His authority, and with a professed submission to His word, and which holds forth to men those great fundamental truths, on the knowledge and belief of which the salvation of sinners depends. These are evidently the true fundamental principles applicable to this matter, and there is no very great difficulty in the application of them. But as Papists dwell very much upon this subject of the notes or marks of the church, and draw from it many important practical conclusions, it may be proper briefly to advert to their leading views upon this point.

When Romanists put forth the claim on behalf of the Church of Rome to be the only true church, out of which there is no salvation; or to be the mother and mistress of all churches, to whom all the followers of Christ, all the members of His visible church, are bound to be in subjection,—they are called upon to produce and establish the grounds of this claim. Legitimate grounds for such a claim can be found only in the statements of Scripture; because, first, from the nature of the case, such a claim can rest upon no other foundation than the direct authority of God Himself; and, secondly, because the sacred Scriptures form the only common ground between the two parties in the discussion—the only common standard which both the advocates and the opposers of this claim admit, and therefore the only legitimate starting-point in an argument that can be honestly carried on between them. But Papists are not fond of attempting to establish this claim directly from the testimony of Scripture,—first, because they have a pretty distinct consciousness,

whatever they may pretend, that Scripture does not afford them any sufficient materials for doing so; and, secondly, because if, by entering upon such a discussion, it were practically conceded that an important investigation of the meaning of Scripture, conducted by men individually in the ordinary exercise of their faculties, could settle this important general question, there could be no good reason assigned why the same process should not be legitimately employed in determining all other questions at issue between the contending parties. They, therefore, in discussing this subject, usually prefer a different course,—that, viz., of trying to produce what they call motives of credibility,—*i.e.*, certain general considerations suggested by Scripture, certain general views indicated there as to the qualities or properties of the church of Christ, which, when applied to the various societies over the world claiming this character, establish, they allege, the peculiar claims of the Church of Rome, and exclude those of all other professedly Christian societies not comprehended in her communion, and subject to her jurisdiction. When they are expatiating upon this subject at large, and endeavouring to bring out in detail, for popular purposes, all the presumptions or probabilities in favour of the preferable claims of the Church of Rome, as compared with those of other professedly Christian societies, they are accustomed to give many notes or marks of the true church. Bellarmine, for instance, gives *fifteen*,—*viz.*, the name Catholic, usually applied to the Church of Rome, and often conceded even by its opponents; antiquity; uninterrupted duration; amplitude, or great numbers of adherents; the succession of bishops in the Roman Church from the apostles; agreement in doctrine with the ancient church; union of the members among themselves and with the head; sanctity of doctrine; efficacy of doctrine; holiness of life; the glory of miracles; the light of prophecy; the confession of adversaries; the unhappy end of the opponents of the church; and the temporal felicity she has enjoyed. But when they treat the matter more compendiously, or when they are obliged to attempt to reason more rigidly, because discussing the subject of the foundations and validity of this mode of proof in general, they usually content themselves with laying down *four* notes or marks of the true church, taken from the epithets given to the church in the Nicene or Constantinopolitan creed, viz., unity, sanctity, apostolicity, and catholicity.

The substance of the argument is this: the church of Christ is described in Scripture, and in the Creed, as one, holy, apostolic, and catholic: the Church of Rome is one, holy, apostolic, and catholic; and no other church or professedly Christian society can exhibit these notes or marks of the true church. We have not to do at present with the actual and detailed application of these notes or marks to the Church of Rome, or to other churches, but merely with their application to the church of Christ generally. We had occasion already to point out some of the ambiguities and sophistries involved in the common Popish representations and arguments about the indefectibility, the perpetual visibility, and the infallibility of the church; and we have something very similar to point out in regard to the topics now under consideration. Protestants have generally received the Nicene creed as sound and orthodox, and have no hesitation in professing their belief that the church of Christ is one, holy, apostolic, and catholic; but then they contend, first, that these notes or marks are not to be taken in the sense which the Papists attach to them, or with the application they make of them; and, secondly, that in the sense in which the Scripture sanctions the application of these notes or marks to the church of Christ, they afford no countenance whatever to the claims of the Church of Rome. These are two distinct positions, which in a *full* discussion of the subject it would be proper to treat separately, but which, in the very few remarks we have at present to make upon it, may be adverted to together.

Unity is undoubtedly ascribed in Scripture to the church of Christ, to His true servants; and hence it follows that all who are admitted to be His real disciples must profess and exhibit some qualities in which they agree, or are one; and also all societies admitted to belong to the church of Christ, or to be churches of Christ, must profess and exhibit some points of unity. Protestants, conceding this, have no difficulty in making out unity in many respects,—a large measure of oneness,—in all the individuals whom they admit to be Christians, and in all the societies which they admit to be churches. They are bound to point out, and they have no difficulty in doing so, a substantial oneness or identity among true Christians in the fundamental articles of their creed, and in the leading elements and features of their character; and in all societies which are really churches of Christ, or portions of

His visible catholic church, a substantial accordance or unity in doctrine and practice, in the profession of the fundamental doctrines which Christ has revealed and enjoined His church to proclaim, and in the performance of those duties or the administration of those ordinances which should characterize societies organized in His name, and in professed subjection to His authority. And here I may remark, by the way, that it is manifestly impossible to unravel the sophistries, and to answer the arguments, of Papists on the subject of the unity of the church, without admitting or assuming the existence of a distinction in point of intrinsic importance among the articles of revealed truth,—a distinction commonly expressed by saying that some are fundamental and others are not; and that, on this ground, Papists have generally denied this distinction, and Protestants have generally contended for it. With this distinction, and with the important truths based upon it which have just been stated, as applicable to Christians and to churches, there is no difficulty in showing that the *only* really relevant question in the application of the unity of the church as a note or mark of what the church is, or of what are churches, is this, Does the unity ascribed in Scripture to the church imply that there must be entire uniformity in all matters of belief and practice among all Christians, or that all societies claiming to be regarded as churches of Christ must be included in one external visible communion, and subject to one external visible government? It can be easily proved that there is no warrant in Scripture for alleging that the unity there predicated of the church of Christ necessarily implies this; and if so, then there is not a shadow of ground for the conclusion that the Church of Rome, or any one visible society, must be the *one* church of Christ, and that all other professedly Christian societies are beyond its pale.

We need not enlarge upon the other notes or marks of sanctity, apostolicity, and catholicity, as this brief notice of the unity is sufficient to indicate how the case really stands, and how the argument is to be conducted. It can be easily proved that the common Popish notions of sanctity, apostolicity, and catholicity, as properties and notes of the true church, are unwarranted by Scripture; and that, in so far as Scripture does represent these qualities as characteristic marks of the true church, they do not apply peculiarly and exclusively, if at all, to the Church of Rome.

Unity and catholicity in the Popish sense—*i.e.*, unity in outward communion, and uniformity in outward profession, ordinances, and arrangements, and wide diffusion at all times over the earth in the manifestation of *this* unity—cannot be proved from Scripture to be characteristic notes or marks of the true church, and can therefore afford no scriptural support to the claims of the Church of Rome; while sanctity and apostolicity—*i.e.*, holiness of heart and life, and conformity to the apostolic model—not only do not peculiarly characterize the Church of Rome, as distinguished from other churches, but may be made to afford conclusive arguments against her claims. The Church of Rome is, in all its features, flatly opposed to the representations given us in Scripture of the apostolic church; and no branch of the church has ever done so little, in proportion to its means and opportunities, to produce holiness, or done so much to corrupt the standard of morals, to eradicate a sense of moral responsibility, and to open the floodgates of all iniquity.

No professing church, however widely it may be diffused, and however closely its members may be united together in a common profession, and whatever pretensions, therefore, it may be able to put forth to an outward visible unity, or to catholicity, in a limited sense, can have any claim to be regarded as possessed of sanctity or apostolicity, unless its system of doctrine be in accordance with the word of God; and a church is apostolical just in proportion as in all its arrangements it is framed after the model, so far as the Scripture makes it known to us, of the churches which the apostles established.

The churches which have been most forward to assume the designation and the character of apostolical are just those which have departed furthest from what a faithful adherence to the practice of the apostles would have led them to adopt; and when particular churches attach primary importance, in forming an estimate of themselves and of other branches of the visible church, to anything external,—to points of government and order, to a historical visible succession, to outward ordinances and arrangements,—this only proves that they themselves have fallen into grievous error upon most important points affecting the very nature, functions, and objects of a church of Christ; and that therefore, in point of purity and apostolicity, they must rank far beneath those churches which, holding the substance of revealed Christian

truth, appreciate aright its paramount importance, and apply it to its intended purposes.

The corruption into which the visible church after the apostolic age so speedily and so extensively fell, and the desire to defend or to palliate all this, soon introduced very lax and erroneous views concerning the nature and objects of the church in general, concerning its constituent elements and qualities, and the standard by which it ought to be judged. The visible has in men's minds, to a large extent, swallowed up the invisible church, or thrown it into the background; and men have come, to a large extent, to judge practically of what the church of Christ should be, by what it too often, in its external aspects, actually is. It is certainly marvellous that any man having access to the Scriptures should believe that the Church of Rome bears any resemblance to the church of the New Testament; and it is not much less marvellous, considering the superior light and opportunities of the parties, that the members of the Church of England should be so forward to boast of their church, as they usually do, as pure and apostolical, the best constituted church in the world, etc., etc., when it is notorious that their own Reformers were so fully conscious that they had come far short of attaining to a right reformation, and when that church has always borne, and still bears, in its constitution and arrangements, so many palpable proofs of the operation, not of the New Testament standard, but of carnal policy and secular influences.

Let us seek to be more familiar with the scriptural doctrine, that the true church of Christ, in the highest and most proper sense of the word, consists only of those who have been chosen of God to eternal life, who are effectually called in due time to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are trained up to a meetness for heaven; and let all our views, impressions, and conduct in regard to the visible church, and its different branches, be regulated by *some* reference to this great invisible reality,—that thus we may be led to estimate the purity and efficiency of visible churches, mainly by a respect to the spiritual character and attainments of their individual members, and that we may ever have it as the great object of our prayers and labours, that the Lord would add daily unto the church of such as shall be saved, and would lead them to grow up *in all things* unto Him who is the Head.

Sec. III.—Promises to the Church.

Before speaking of the promises which Christ has made to His church, I may advert to one other point in the general doctrine of Scripture on the subject, as set forth in the 25th chapter of the Westminster Confession, which I have not yet explained. The views which I have attempted to explain are fitted, I think, to illustrate and confirm most of the positions contained in that chapter in regard to the church in general. But there is one which may deserve explanation, to which I have not formally adverted, though I adverted to some principles which are fitted to cast light upon it. It is this,—that unto this catholic visible church (previously described as consisting of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children), “Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world, and doth by His own presence and Spirit make them effectual thereunto.”

Now, the first part of this statement, that Christ has *given* the ministry, as well as the oracles and ordinances of God, *to* the church, does bear, and was intended to bear, upon an important topic, to which I formerly adverted when explaining the state of the question in one department of the argument carried on between the Reformers and the Church of Rome, and to which I then referred for the purpose of illustrating the importance of settling the proper definition or description of the church. Papists used to lay down this position,—Where there is not a valid ministry, there is not a true church; and the Reformers answered them by laying down this counter-position,—Wherever there is a true church, there is, or may be, a valid ministry; and to this position of the Reformers,* the declaration of the Confession, that Christ has given the ministry to the church, is substantially equivalent. The Popish position virtually proceeds upon the assumption that the church is for the sake of the ministry, and the Protestant one upon the assumption that the ministry is for the sake of the church. The Church of Rome makes the ministry the end, and the church the means; Protestants reverse this order, and make the ministry the means, and the

* “Claude's Defence of the Reformation,” P. IV. c. III.

church the end. Ministers are indeed the rulers of churches or congregations, invested, in conjunction with other ecclesiastical office-bearers, with a certain ministerial, not lordly, authority over them. But while this is true of actual ministers and congregations, it is not the less true that the ministry in the abstract may be said to occupy a position of subordination, and not of superiority, to the church, inasmuch as the formation of a church by calling men out of the world, and preparing them for heaven, was God's great design in sending His Son into the world, and in all His dealings with men; and as the institution of a ministry, and the raising up and qualifying of ministers, was just one of the means which He has been graciously pleased to employ for effecting that great end. And this is in substance the idea intended to be conveyed by the declaration in the Confession, that Christ has *given* the ministry to the church.

This doctrine is not in the least inconsistent with that of the divine institution of the ministry, or with that of the due rights and authority of ministers, as rulers, distinguished from the ordinary members of the church. But it suggests important considerations that ought not to be overlooked, and that are fitted to exert a wholesome practical influence, respecting the nature and design both of the ministry and of the church. The salvation of an elect people chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world—in other words, the planting and training of the true church—constitute God's great design in preserving this world, and in the whole providence which He exercises over it. There can be no higher or more exalted position than to be employed by God in contributing to this end. Still, the system of means which He may have been pleased to employ, must always be regarded as in some sense subordinate to the end to be effected; and a time will come when the ministry, as well as prophecy and tongues, shall cease, when the whole church shall be presented to God a glorious church, and when the functions of human teachers and human rulers shall terminate, while it will still continue true, that they who have turned many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

The bearing of this relative position of the ministry and the church—the ministry being for the sake of the church, and not the church for the sake of the ministry—upon the principles discussed between the Reformers and the Church of Rome, is

obvious enough. If this principle be true—and the Scripture plainly enough supports it—then these two inferences may be deduced from it: First, that the question, whether any particular company or society of professing Christians be or be not a true church, *should take precedence* of the question, whether or not they have a valid ministry? Secondly, that the Scripture not having explicitly asserted, or afforded any adequate ground for believing, that a valid ministry, or any specific feature in or about the ministry, is an essential mark of a true church, we are entitled, upon the ground of this general principle, positively to aver, that no inference drawn from the subject or character of the ministry can be of itself, and as a general rule, *conclusive* upon the character and standing of the church.

Upon these grounds, the Reformers contended that they ought to begin with considering whether Protestant societies were true churches of Christ, and that in discussing this point some other notes or marks must be fixed upon and applied, some other standard must be adopted, than the mere regularity or irregularity of their ministry; and taking a scriptural view of what was the great fundamental duty of men individually to whom the gospel was preached, viz., to receive the truth in the love of it, and also of what was the most important function of the church, or of believers or professed believers collectively, viz., to hold up and promote the truth or the way of salvation, they made the essential note or mark of a true church, as a visible body or society, to be the profession and maintenance of scriptural views of the great fundamental principles of Christian doctrine. And as it is the manifest duty of all who profess to believe in Christ, and to submit to His authority, to unite together, as they have the means and opportunity, in worshipping God; and as, moreover, the sacraments which Christ appointed are at once the badges or symbols of a Christian profession, and the chief external ordinances which He has prescribed, the administration of these sacraments, according to Christ's appointment, was very generally introduced by the Reformers into their description of the distinguishing characteristics of the true church or churches. And it is a curious proof of the sense then generally entertained over the Protestant world of the importance of these principles, and of the necessity of maintaining them in opposition to the Church of Rome, that even the Church of England, while ani-

mated by a somewhat more hierarchic spirit than any other of the churches of the Reformation (though it should not be forgotten that the Reformers of that church had much less of that spirit than most of their successors), gave the following account of the church in the nineteenth Article:—"The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful, *i.e.*, believing men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

It was then universally acknowledged, that Protestant principles did not admit of the introduction into the definition of the church, or into the description of what is essential to it, of anything more specific than this as to external ordinances and arrangements. Subjection to lawful pastors, and to the Pope, as Christ's vicar, form, as we have seen, a component part of the Popish definition of the church. But Protestants regarded not only the Pope, but even the lawful, *i.e.*, regular pastors, as not being an *essential* feature of the church, of such intrinsic and paramount importance as to form an indispensable part of the standard by which to settle at once and conclusively, in all circumstances, whether a particular society of professing Christians did or did not form a church of Christ. The Reformers did not admit that this principle was inconsistent with the doctrine of the divine institution of the Christian ministry, or with the obligation incumbent upon professing Christians to be in communion with a regular congregation under the superintendence of a pastor, and of a pastor, if possible, appointed in the ordinary, regular, prescribed way,—*i.e.*, by ordination conferred by those who were pastors before. But they held that, as the means are in some sense to be regarded as subordinate to the end, and as there may be occasionally, in particular circumstances, when perfect regularity in regard to outward arrangements is impracticable, or virtually so, a reference to the end rather than to the means, as the guiding and higher standard, it followed that these two practical conclusions might be deduced from it:—First, that the absence of a regular ministry, appointed in the ordinary prescribed way, or even the absence of a ministry altogether for a time, is not necessarily, and in all circumstances, a sufficient proof of itself that a society of professing Christians is not a church of Christ:—and secondly, that any company of faithful or believing men is entitled to a ministry, since Christ has given the ministry to

the church; and if they are so placed in providence that they cannot have a ministry in the ordinary, regular, prescribed way, are entitled to make a ministry for themselves, and that that ministry, though not a regular, is a valid one.

On these grounds, the Reformers in general contended that any body of Christians who had come, from reading or hearing the word of God, to be convinced of the sinfulness of remaining in the communion of the Church of Rome, were not only entitled but bound to leave it; that they were warranted to form themselves into a distinct society for the worship of God, and the enjoyment of His ordinances; and that if it was impracticable for them, in the circumstances in which they were in providence placed, to get a minister in the ordinary regular way—*i.e.*, one approved and set apart by persons already in the office of the ministry—they were entitled, since they were a *church*, and since Christ had given the ministry to the church, to appoint a minister for themselves, if there was any one among them possessed of the scriptural qualifications, to wait upon his ministry, and to receive the sacraments at his hands, without any apprehension of invalidity. This was the doctrine of the Reformers. I am persuaded that it is in accordance with the views of the church and the ministry, and of their relation to each other, given us in Scripture; and I believe it is implied in, and was intended in substance to be expressed by, the declaration of the Confession, that Christ has *given the ministry*, as well as the oracles and the ordinances, to the Church.

Papists usually deny altogether the distinction which the Reformers were accustomed to make between a regular ministry and a valid ministry; and maintain that no ministry is valid unless it be regular,—*i.e.*, that no man is in any instance, or in any circumstances, entitled to execute the functions of a pastor of a Christian flock, and to administer the ordinances which Christ has appointed for the edification of His church, unless he has been admitted to the ministry in the ordinary regular way. The Reformers maintained the distinction between a regular and a valid ministry, and opposed the Popish principle above stated; and they did so upon the ground which we have explained,—*viz.*, that the ministry was given to the church, and belonged to it, or was in some sense subordinate to it; and that, consequently, the mere matter of regularity, the observance of the ordinary binding rule,

with regard to a point of outward arrangement, must give way, if necessity required it, to the welfare and edification of the church,—to the importance of the church enjoying the right which Christ had given it of having a ministry.

They had also to contend with the Romanists, as we still have, upon the more specific question of what it is that constitutes a *regular ministry*, or what are the qualifications which generally, and in all ordinary circumstances, are necessary to warrant men to enter upon the function of the ministry. Upon *this* point, Romanists have always maintained—and in doing so they have been faithfully followed by High Church Prelatists—that there is no regular admission to the ministry, except what is conferred by episcopal ordination, and this, too, transmitted in regular unbroken succession from the ordination given by the apostles. The Reformers admitted that there are certain regulations indicated in Scripture, with regard to the admission of men to the ministry; that these regulations it was, as a general rule, sinful to neglect, and imperative to regard; and that nothing could, in any instance, warrant the neglect or violation of them, except the necessity, which might arise in certain circumstances, of having respect to the paramount object of the edification of the church. But the Reformers generally denied that, in order even to the *regularity* of a ministry, it was necessary that ordination should have been conveyed by episcopal hands, or should have been transmitted in unbroken succession from the ordinations made by the apostles. They could find nothing in Scripture that seemed to necessitate episcopal ordination, or to require the existence of the episcopal office; and they thought it amply sufficient if men were ordained as Timothy was, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. And with regard to the absolute necessity of an unbroken descent of ordination from the apostles,—a principle which is not to be confounded with that of the necessity of episcopal ordination, though they have commonly gone together, and which *might* be held by a Presbyterian, though I am not aware that any Presbyterian has ever been guilty of such folly,—they maintained that no sanction could be found for it in Scripture; while they also held that it was inconsistent with important scriptural principles, and with the whole scope and spirit of the New Testament arrangements, and was contradicted and disapproved by the whole history of the Christian Church.

I proceed now to make some observations upon the scriptural promises in regard to the church, and the bearing of these, according as they are interpreted, upon men's views of the leading features exhibited in the actual history of the church in subsequent ages. The promises of Christ to His church amount in substance to an assurance of His own constant presence with it, and of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth. Papists allege that these promises imply or secure, not only that the profession of Christianity would soon be widely extended in the world, but also that one widely extended visible society would continue always or uninterruptedly to proclaim the whole truth of God, without any mixture of error. They assert that this has been promised, and that it has been fully realized in the Church of Rome, or in the visible church in communion with the Papal See, and in subjection to the Pope. Protestants maintain that the promises of the constant presence of Christ and of the Spirit in the church do not necessarily bear such a meaning, or lead us to expect such a result; and that they cannot be proved, by any fair principles of interpretation, to mean more than this—that by Christ's presence, and the operation of the Spirit, His church should enjoy and effect all that He intended it to enjoy and effect; that all who were chosen by God to eternal life should be brought to a knowledge and belief of the truth as it is in Jesus, and be trained up to a meetness for heaven; and that, therefore, all who had really entered Christ's service might boldly devote themselves to the advancement of His cause, and to the discharge of all the duties which He might impose upon them, assured that they should suffer no real loss by faithfulness to Him, but would find all things made to work together for their good.

The promises certainly imply this; but as certainly they cannot be proved, in so far as they are clearly applicable to the church generally and permanently, and not merely to the apostles, and the special and infallible guidance which they enjoyed, to imply more than this. The promises of Christ's presence, and of the Spirit's operation in the church, must be viewed in connection with God's *intended* design, so far as we know it, in establishing and preserving a church upon earth. The promises of constant presence and guidance secure *that*, whatever it may be; but they do not of themselves give us any specific information as to what

this design is; nor can they be supposed to secure anything but what was really comprehended in that design. Could it be proved separately and independently from Scripture, that it was Christ's purpose and intention that there should always exist upon earth a widely extended church, or visible society, which should always maintain and proclaim the whole truth of God without mixture of error, then the promised presence of Christ and His Spirit might with propriety be regarded as the pledge and the means of effecting this result. But if no such design can be established by independent evidence, it is vain to expect to establish it by the mere promise of His constant presence and blessing. Christ, by His presence, and the operation of His Spirit, accomplishes, in and by His church, whatever it was His design to accomplish—whatever He has given His church and people reason to expect. Protestants, however, contend not only that Christ has not given us any reason to expect that a widely extended visible church would always be preserved free from any mixture of error, and that *therefore* the promises of His constant presence must not be supposed to secure this; but also, moreover, that He has given us in Scripture plain enough intimations that the visible church would soon, in point of fact, be widely and deeply corrupted; and if such intimations are really to be found in Scripture, which is surely very manifest, then we are bound to conclude that He did not mean us to believe that, by promising His presence and Spirit, He intended to prevent such a result. And if, upon a historical survey of the church, we find that error and corruption, such as these intimations in Scripture would lead us to expect, did in fact appear, then we are to regard this as a fulfilment of prophecy, and, as such, a proof of the divine mission of Christ, and as confirming, or rather establishing, the interpretation put upon the scriptural statements referred to. Protestants believe, as a matter of unquestionable historical certainty, that at a very early period error and corruption—*i.e.*, deviations from the scriptural standard in matters of doctrine, government, worship, and discipline—manifested themselves in the visible church gradually, but rapidly; that this corruption deepened and increased, till it issued at length in a grand apostasy—in a widely extended and well-digested system of heresy, idolatry, and tyranny, which involved in gross darkness nearly the whole of the visible church for almost a thousand years, until it was to some extent dispelled by the light of the Reforma-

tion. They believe that the soundness of this general view of the history of the church can be fully established by undoubted matters of fact, viewed in connection with the plain statements of Scripture. They see nothing in Christ's promises to His church that requires them to disbelieve or to doubt this; and, on the contrary, they find statements in Scripture which seem fitted and intended to lead men to expect some such result.

Sec. IV.—Different Theories of the History of the Church.

Papists, in accordance with their interpretation of the promises made to the church, give a totally different view of its actual history. They admit, indeed, that errors and corruptions soon appeared among professed Christians; but then they allege that these errors never infected the church, since she always rejected and condemned the errors, and expelled from her pale those who maintained them. They assert that the Catholic Church, in communion with the see of Rome, has always maintained the apostolic faith pure and uncorrupted, without any mixture of error; that she has never changed her faith or contradicted herself; that all the doctrines she now holds she has maintained stedfastly since the apostolic times, without any variation, although from time to time she has given more full and explicit definitions and explanations regarding them, in opposition to the various heresies that may have been propounded; that she has never at any time degenerated into superstition, idolatry, or tyranny; but has continued through all ages the pure, and meek, and faithful spouse of Christ, and has been constantly acknowledged in that character by all good Catholics, *i.e.*, by all professing Christians, *except* heretics and schismatics. This is the Popish theory of the history of the Church; and, strange as it may seem, there have been not a few Papists of undoubted learning and ability who have elaborately maintained—first, that thus it must have been, for Christ promised it, and His constant presence with His church secured it; and, secondly, that thus it has been, for the voice of history establishes it. Romish writers would probably have been well pleased had they been allowed to confine themselves to the former of these modes of probation, *viz.*, the *à priori* one, just as they like much better to try to prove that there should and must be a living, visible, infallible interpreter of God's will,

than to show that such an interpreter has been actually appointed, and has been always faithfully discharging his duties. But they have not shrunk even from the historical evidence, and have really attempted to establish historically the monstrous theory which has been described.

In regard to the *à priori* proof, Protestants contend, as we have explained, that there is no evidence in Scripture that Christ intended to preserve a widely extended, perpetually visible society upon earth, which should always be free from all error; and still less that He intended to confer this privilege upon the Church of Rome; and that, therefore, the promises of His presence and Spirit do not secure it; nay, that there are clear intimations in Scripture that the history of the visible church would exhibit a very different aspect from what this theory assigns to it,—and more particularly that the Church of Rome would fall into apostasy, and become a mass of corruption, a synagogue of Satan and mystery of iniquity. Protestants, besides, wish to have matters of fact investigated and ascertained by the ordinary evidence applicable to the nature of the case. The character and doctrine of the visible church, or of any of its branches at any particular period, is a matter of fact, to be ascertained by the application of the ordinary principles and materials of historical evidence; and when the character and doctrine of any church or individual has been ascertained in the ordinary way, by appropriate means and evidence applicable to matters of fact, they should be judged of, or estimated, by the standard of the word of God.

Not only can all the peculiarities of the Popish system be proved to be unsanctioned or opposed by the word of God, but many of them can be proved by undoubted historical evidence to have had a much later origin than the apostolic age, and to have been unknown in the primitive church. It is a very bold and daring course, when the advocates of the Church of Rome undertake to establish, by historical evidence, that theory and representation of the church's actual history, which their principles and claims require them to maintain. And yet many have tried it, and brought no small share of learning and ability to bear upon the attempt. The very hardihood of the attempt invests it with a certain measure of interest; and their whole theory of the church's history is so different from that which Protestants support—the whole materials of church history are presented in so

changed an aspect from that in which we have been accustomed to contemplate them, that it becomes an interesting, and, in some respects, a not unprofitable exercise, to give some degree of attention to a Popish history of the church. The great work on ecclesiastical history published soon after the Reformation, and commonly known by the name of the Magdeburgh Centuriators, was written, to a large extent, with the view of bringing the testimony of history to bear against the Church of Rome. The apostasy felt the necessity of giving a different view of the history of the church, and for this purpose the Annals of Cardinal Baronius were prepared. In this great work, the author labours to prove not only that all the doctrines of the Church of Rome have been constantly held by the whole Christian world, except heretics and schismatics, from the apostolic age, but also that all the rites and ceremonies which cumber and deform its worship can be traced back to the same venerable antiquity. Being a defender also of the personal infallibility of the Pope, which all Romanists do not contend for, Baronius was obliged to undertake the desperate task of trying to prove that no Pope had ever contradicted himself or any other Pope, and that no Pope had ever fallen into error or heresy. He frankly admits that some Popes, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries, were men of infamous personal character, and attained to the possession of the chair of Peter by the most disgraceful means; but of course, like every other defender of Papal infallibility, he was obliged to assert, and to try to prove, that not one of them had ever fallen into error or heresy.

The Church of Rome maintains doctrines and advances claims which, even were the word of God less clearly opposed to them all than it is, can be fully tested and overturned by the plain facts of history; and it is a fearful task which her defenders undertake, when they attempt to prove from history that the Bishops of Rome, from Peter downwards, have been, and have been recognised as, the vicars of Christ; have been both *de facto* and *de jure* the monarchs of the visible church; and have always exercised the function of teaching and ruling the church in entire accordance with the mind and will of their Master.

Some Roman Catholics have held principles which have somewhat modified the magnitude and difficulty of the task that devolves upon them in surveying the history of the church. They

have restricted the alleged infallibility to matters of doctrine, and have not thought it necessary to maintain that she has made no changes or innovations in rites and ceremonies, or in matters of discipline. They have asserted the right and power of the church to make changes in these points as she saw cause. They have thought it safer and more expedient to assert this general principle, than to undertake the task of tracing back the whole of the existing rites, ceremonies, and discipline of the Romish Church to the apostolic age. They thus manage to throw off their shoulders a large share of the burden under which poor Baronius groaned. Some also, especially the French writers, who defend what are called the Gallican liberties, deny the personal infallibility of the Pope, ascribing infallibility only to general councils, and of course escape from the necessity of proving that no Pope can contradict himself, or another Pope, or deviate from the standard of orthodoxy. Others, again, like the Jansenists, though not quite prepared to deny the Pope's infallibility in matters of faith, do not extend it to matters of fact, and are thus enabled to be so far honest as to admit, when compelled by satisfactory historical evidence, that Popes may have fallen into mistakes, or even, as no one supposed them to be impeccable, uttered falsehoods.

This theory of the church's history, as implying *at least* the constant preservation of the purity of the visible church in all matters of faith and doctrine, and the actual derivation of all her tenets from the apostolic age, is essentially involved in the principles and claims of the Church of Rome. She cannot abandon it, but must stand or fall with it. She is thus open to a fatal wound from the testimony of history, which she has no means of avoiding but by corrupting or perverting history. Protestants may, and do, derive important assistance in establishing their own principles, and in making out a case against the Church of Rome, from an investigation of the church's history; but they are not essentially dependent upon it, and no assault that can be fatal to their cause can come from that quarter. They do not need, *as Protestants*, or in virtue of the position they occupy as seceders from, and protesters against, the Romish apostasy, to adopt any particular theory of the church's history, and then to labour to silence or pervert the testimony of history, in order to support their theory, or to guard it against objections. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants; and when the

divine origin and authority of the Bible are conceded or proved, Protestants are quite able to deduce from it all the doctrines which they maintain, and to establish them in such a way that no assault from any other quarter, such as the testimony of history, could competently be brought to bear upon them. The Romish Church stands in a different position. She has put forth principles and claims which compel her to maintain a certain theory of the actual history of the church, and a disproof of this theory by an actual investigation of the church's history inflicts upon her whole system a deadly wound. Protestants have thus not the same stake as Papists have in an investigation of the history of the church, for with Papists it is a matter of life or death; and they have, in consequence, brought to bear upon it all the deceivableness of unrighteousness which the Scriptures lead us to expect in that system.

We have described above the course which has been commonly pursued by Popish controversialists in exhibiting the history of the church, and especially in tracing the history of doctrine; and which their well-known and avowed principles require them to pursue. In virtue of the principles they hold with respect to the perpetual visibility and infallibility of the church, they *must* maintain that she has taught the same doctrines without variation in every period of her history; and in virtue of the principle they hold about the authority of tradition, they are bound to maintain, and may be called upon to prove, that all the doctrines which the church now propounds, were delivered by Christ and His inspired apostles, though not at the time committed to writing. No satisfactory proof of an historical kind can be produced, that any of the doctrines of the Church of Rome which are rejected by Protestants, because not sanctioned by Scripture, were delivered orally to the church by Christ or His apostles. There are many of them with respect to which this allegation can be positively disproved, *i.e.*, with respect to which it can be proved that they were unknown to the primitive church, and therefore were not taught by its founders. This has been often shown by Protestant writers, but was never more fully and conclusively established than in the present day, when the history of doctrines has been very thoroughly investigated, especially by German writers.

The manifest impossibility of maintaining the old Popish ground has led some in our own day to have recourse to a new expedient, *viz.*, what is called the theory of *Development*. This theory has

been fully expounded in Dr Newman's Essay on that subject; and applied by him to the vindication of the additions which the Church of Rome has made to the Christianity of the New Testament. It is in substance this, that the doctrines taught by inspired men might be legitimately developed or drawn out in subsequent times into notions which were not contained in, or deducible from, the doctrines themselves, but merely stood related to them in some vague and distant connection. This theory, which is plainly infidel in its bearing and tendency, as virtually denying the supreme authority of an external objective revelation, is somewhat skilfully accommodated to modes of thinking largely prevalent in the present day, when there is a tendency to resolve everything, both in the material and in the moral world, into development; and to give great prominence to the subjective, or to what is found within man himself, as the source and test of what is true. At present we can only observe, that the adoption of this new theory implies an abandonment of the ground which was occupied by all former Popish controversialists, and which the well-known principles of their church required them to occupy. It amounts to a virtual acknowledgment that this ground is untenable. No doubt, the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, if once established, and fairly and fully applied, is quite adequate to cover and to vindicate anything. But the more judicious Popish controversialists are rather afraid of overburdening the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, by imposing upon it more than it is able to bear; and, indeed, they are not fond of resting anything upon it *alone*, without having something else in the way of proof or evidence to relieve and assist it. Some of the more rash and unscrupulous defenders of Popery have held that the infallible authority of the church includes a power of establishing and imposing new articles of faith, which they might perhaps, in accordance with the fashionable phraseology of the present day, call developments of what was taught by inspired men. But the more judicious defenders of Popery have shrunk from taking up this extreme ground; and, besides, the doctrine of the Council of Trent on the subject of tradition plainly commits them to the necessity of maintaining that all their doctrines are contained either in the written word or in the unwritten traditions, and, of course, entitles us to demand of them proof that all they teach is either supported by Scripture, or can be traced up through another channel to the

teaching of Christ or His apostles. It is a curious and characteristic specimen of Popish policy, that the Romish ecclesiastical authorities of this country, while labouring to take advantage of Dr Newman's theory of development, have not ventured very formally either to approve or to repudiate it; while their pretended unity is contradicted by the fact, that some of the leading Romish authorities in the United States have openly denounced it as heretical and dangerous.*

It is the more important to keep these considerations in remembrance in investigating the history of the church, because really the history of the church for fifteen hundred years is, to a large extent, just the history of Popery. The Apostle Paul assures us that, even in his time, the mystery of iniquity was already working; and in every succeeding century we find clearer and clearer traces of these seeds or elements, which, when fully developed, constitute the Popish system. Satan took six or seven hundred years to develop and bring to full maturity what has been justly described as his great masterpiece; and indeed some of the peculiarities of Popery were not devised till the middle ages, when the great body of the visible church was sunk in gross darkness, superstition, and idolatry. Even since the Reformation, the condition and efforts of the Papacy have exerted no small influence upon the general state of the professing church. In the present day, it is exerting more influence than it has done for a long period; and there is good ground to believe that that apostate and antichristian system will henceforth continue to hold a most prominent and influential place in the history of the visible church, even until the Lord shall consume it with the breath of His mouth, and destroy it with the brightness of His coming.

There is, indeed, something dark and mysterious in the survey of the history of the church of Christ, in its so soon losing its purity, and falling into error and corruption; and in this error and corruption gaining such an ascendancy, and virtually overspreading the visible church for nearly a thousand years.† And Papists take advantage of this circumstance, and appeal to men whether they can believe *that*, considering the promises of Christ's constant

* Review of Newman in *North British Review*, vol. v. Discussions on Church Principles, p. 35.—Edrs. | Let. i. *Bulwark*, vol. ii., pp. 159 and 216.
 † Isaac Taylor, 'Ancient Christianity,' vol. i., No. 4.