

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1784.

A LETTER to the ROMAN CATHOLICS of the City of WORCESTER, &c. Concluded.

EVERY person, who is but moderately conversant with the history of the church, must have remarked, that at some periods of time, several points of doctrine were defined as belonging to faith, which at others were debated as matters of opinion. The Millenarian system, or the opinion that after the renovation of the world, Christ will reign a thousand years with his saints upon earth, was maintained as an article of the catholic faith by almost every father, who lived immediately after the times of the apostles (e). This doctrine the Roman church deems heretical at present. The necessity, and divine institution of auricular confession, now principal points of Roman catholic faith, were discussed with great freedom by many ancient writers, and centuries were requisite to settle this practice in its present form. The learned Alcuin, who lived in the court of Charlemagne during the ninth century, tells us expressly (f), "that some said it was sufficient to confess our sins to God alone." In a very ancient and authentic copy of the Penitential of Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 690, which archbishop Usher says he transcribed in Sir Robert Cotton's library (g), we meet with these very remarkable words; "It is lawful, that confession be made to God alone, if it be requisite;" and again, "Learned men think differently upon this matter, because the doctors seem to have delivered various and almost opposite opinions upon it." The great canonist Gratian, who wrote the Glossa, or comment upon the famous Decretals, speaks very explicitly upon the matter in question—"some maintain, says he, that forgiveness of sins may be obtained without any confession made to the church, or a priest." He then cites St. Ambrose, Austin, and Chrysostom, as patronising this opinion. We have little reason, therefore to be surpris'd at what Maldonatus the Jesuit tells us (h); That all the canonists following their first interpreter maintain, that confession was introduced by ecclesiastical institution; which opinion, continues he, is now sufficiently declared to be heretical by the church. During the same deplorable era of superstition and ignorance, "an era," says Sigonius (i), and other Roman catholic historians, "surpassing the darkest and most profligate ages of antiquity, as well by the infamy of its princes, as the madness of the people;" when the slender stock of knowledge possessed by the clergy was employed in compiling the most contemptible legends, or involving the plain meaning of the scriptures in the clouds of allegory, and the jargon of the schools; when bishops sat as judges at councils, who were unable to write their own names (k); when the lamp of science was nearly extinguish'd in the western empire, and the extravagance of a tenet was its best recommendation to the credulous multitude; at this woeful period of the degradation of reason and prevalence of vice, the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist began first to be agitated. The term transubstantiation was yet unknown to the catholic church. An obscure bishop (l), who lived eleven hundred years after the time of the apostles, was the inventor of this mysterious word, which has proved for several centuries the test of orthodoxy among some christians, and the scandal to others. The doctrine conveyed by it was no article of faith prior to the council of Lateran held in 1215, as Scotus assures us (m). It was towards the beginning of the ninth century, that Patichasius Radbertus, first a monk then abbot of Corbie, published his treatise upon the corporal presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and as Bellarmine tells us, was the first who wrote seriously and copiously concerning it (n). This monk, however, informs us himself, that his doctrine was by no means universal or settled. In his letter to Frudegarius, speaking of the corporal presence, "You question me, says he, upon a subject, about which many are doubtful"—Nay, this is so very evident, that Rabanus Maurus, who is styled by Baronius the brightest luminary of Germany, about the year 847 wrote expressly against the novelty of this doctrine in a letter to Heribaldus, bishop of Auxerres: he tells him, that "some of late (meaning Patichasius and his disciples) not having a right notion of the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord, said that this is the body and blood of our Lord, which was born of the virgin Mary, and in which our Lord suffered upon the cross, and rose from

the dead; which error," continues he, "we have opposed with all our might." I could show you further with what zeal, and erudition this growing error was confuted by other famous men, who lived in that century, and especially by Ratramus, or Bertram, employed expressly by Charles the Bald to oppose it. His work is still extant, and proved to be genuine by the learned Mabillon.

Thus we see, that the doctrine of the carnal presence was no sooner openly maintained, than some of the most celebrated doctors of the time arose to combat it; without incurring any suspicion of heresy from their opponents. A convincing proof that, at the period I am speaking of, it was regarded merely as matter of opinion. And such, in fact, it continued to be for two hundred years; when so extravagant a century was passed upon those who denied it, by pope Nicholas and a council assembled at Rome, that exists, as the comment upon the canon law cautions us, "we interpret it in a sound sense, we shall fall into greater heresy, than that of Berengarius himself (o)."

What I have hitherto said, was meant only to convince you, that the Roman church regards some doctrines, at present, as articles of faith, which for many ages were debated as matters of opinion. Now from this fact once admitted, an argument arises against the system of infallibility, to which I could never discover a satisfactory answer. For it must be granted, these doctrines were delivered by Jesus Christ and his apostles as essential, or not essential. If the first be said, then it is evident, that the church has forfeited her claim to infallibility by omitting for many ages to teach doctrines as essential, which Christ and his apostles delivered as such. If they were not delivered as essential, what are we to think of that church's infallibility, which inforces doctrines as necessary and essential, which the author of christianity did not teach, nor the herself, for many centuries, conceived to be so? To such dilemmas are the advocates of this system reduced. In order to maintain an uniformity, and catholicity of opinion, they imagine it necessary to erect an infallible tribunal. But do they reflect that such an uniformity is entirely chimerical, and that every solemn decision of this tribunal overthrows the unity it was meant to establish? For how is it possible for a church to be one in point of doctrine, which believes to day as an article of her faith, what the yesterday conceived to be matter of opinion?

It follows, moreover, from admitting such a living authority, that the number of necessary tenets must increase, as decisions are multiplied. It will be in the power of bishops and councils to frame new articles of faith by deciding ultimately upon fresh matters of dispute, whether important, or not; whether countenanced by the scriptures, or otherwise. What was not a doctrinal point yesterday, may be so to day. Every age will give birth to new tenets, and thus instead of a uniformity of testimony, constant variety must for ever take place, to the no small confusion and prejudice of our belief. The preaching of Jesus and his apostles, so far from being the rule of faith to succeeding ages, will be regarded only as the imperfect draught of a religion, which looks for perfection from human decrees. For the church must possess the same authority for age to come, as she has enjoyed in those that are past; so that, if as opinions become fashionable, she be authorized to erect them into articles of faith, as has frequently been the case; your creed, perhaps, is still in its infancy, and the belief of succeeding ages swelled with the additions of some future pope Pius, may be as different from yours, as is that of the primitive christians and apostles. Under the specious pretext of recurring to a living judge, in order to fix the principles of our faith, these divines render it still more wavering and uncertain. They are perpetually introducing a succession of opinions into the system of religion, as unsettled as the fancies that produced them, as doubtful as the authority upon which they rest, as various as the imaginations of those who have embellished them, and as transient as time which gave them birth, and will, sooner or later, put a period to their existence.

After what has been said, it would be needless to lay before you my profession of faith. By relinquishing opinions, which I have striven in vain to reconcile to reason, or revelation, I trust, I cease not to be a christian, or a catholic: Both these appellations belong surely to the man, who believes, and professes, as I solemnly do, every point of christian faith, which at all times, and in all places has constituted the creed of all orthodox believers (p). This universal christian catholic faith is delivered compendiously in the apostles creed; whoever subscribes to this in its full extent, must be a member of the catholic church (q). The apostles, or their immediate successors, in drawing up no other profession of faith, discovered clearly what they intended should be the belief of their disciples. By adhering solely to this universal belief, which alone possesses the sanction of all times, all places, and all churches no man can be said to embrace a new religion, however he may discard some doctrines, which at different periods of time have been engrafted upon the old one; especially if he discover, after mature investigation, that these doctrines were unknown to the best ages of the church, were conceived originally in ignorance, fostered by superstition, supported by pious forgeries, adopted by worldly policy, propagated by artifice, and enforced by all the power that spiritual tyranny could exert. If you ask me, therefore, to what church I now belong, my answer is, to the christian catholic church. Of that society of christians I profess myself a member, who adopt the holy scripture for the sole standard of their belief: the protestant churches in general know no other rule: some shades of difference may subsist in their public liturgies, and speculative disquisitions; but among none of the principal branches of the reformed churches are the latter outbrudged as articles of faith, or the former found repugnant to reason or morality. Through the same divine Mediator they worship the same God; and from the sufferings and merits of the same Redeemer, they expect forgiveness of their sins and happiness for evermore. In this country, where the christian only is the established religion, where tests and subscriptions are unknown, where refined speculations are not likely to deform the simplicity or interrupt the harmony of the gospel, I look forward with rapture to that auspicious day, when protestants opening their eyes upon their mutual agreement in all the essentials of belief, will forget past animosities, and cease to regard each other as of different communions. Perhaps at that happy period, Roman catholics also may awake from their prejudices, and disregarding the manes of blind zeal or ignorance, may begin to think for themselves, throw off the galling yoke of old European prepossessions, and unite cordially in restoring primitive simplicity both in morals and belief. To indulge in these ideas, may, perhaps, be extravagant; but to a mind of sensibility, it must surely be delightful. My religion, therefore, is that of the bible: whatever that sacred book proposes as an object of my faith, or a rule of my conduct, was inspired by the unerring spirit of God, and for that reason I admit it with all the faculties of my soul.

Your religion is the doctrine of the council of Trent; mine the plain truths delivered in the scriptures. You shelter yourselves under the decisions of a tribunal, which you believe to be infallible: I rely solely upon the authority of God's word; which, as St. Chrysostom assures us, "expounds itself, and does not suffer the reader to err (r)." You think it necessary to recur to unwritten tradition; but I must demand with St. Cyprian, "whence have you that tradition? comes it from the authority of the Lord, and of the gospel, or from the epistles of the apostles? for God testifies that we are to do those things that are written &c; if it be commanded in the gospel, or contained in the epistles or acts of the apostles, then let us observe it as a divine and holy tradition (s)." You deem the scriptures deficient and obscure; I am satisfied with the things that are written; because all is written, "that the writers thought sufficient for their faith and morality (t)." I ask, moreover, with St. Hilary (u), "where is this deficiency, where is this obscurity? In the word of God," continues he, "all things are full and perfect, as coming from a full and perfect being." You require the sanction of the church to stamp the truth of each article of your creed; I am content to a quietude in that authority, to which alone St. Austin and Chrysostom refer us, in order to discover, which is the true church of

throws it. The catechism of the council of Trent has these remarkable words, with which few religious instructors seem to be acquainted; "It is therefore necessary to believe, that there is one, holy and catholic church; for we believe the three persons of the trinity, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that in them we place our faith; but now the form of speaking being altered, we profess to believe the holy church, but not to believe in it; that by this different mode of expression, God the maker of all things may be distinguished from creatures." I think this passage, if well considered, might contribute much to finish a controversy between us. It behooves every christian therefore to pay it some attention. We are taught by it from the apostles creed, which we both admit, to believe in God the Father, in God the Son, and in God the Holy Ghost. In this holy trinity we are taught to place our faith, but only to believe that there is one holy catholic church; and the reason alleged for this difference in our belief is most strong and unanswerable: for the whole body of the church consisting of mortal men, who are all creatures; if we should believe in the church, as we believe in the blessed trinity, we should not make a sufficient difference between God and his creatures. This is the plain and rational doctrine of your church's catechism, and if they, who have the care of your souls, do not distinctly instruct you in it, but suffer you to remain in an erroneous notion, that you are to believe in the holy catholic church, they certainly do not deal with you as candidly as they ought.

(r) Ham. 12. in Genesim.  
(s) Epist. 74.  
(t) S. Cyr. lib. 12. Joan.  
(u) Lib. 2. de trin.

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(e) See this particular clearly and learnedly demonstrated by Dr. Burnet in his very ingenious treatise de actu mortuorum et resurgentium, cap. 10. It was likewise the decided opinion of almost all the primitive fathers, that the souls of good men did not enjoy the beatific vision previous to the general resurrection. Dr. Stapleton, a Roman catholic divine, cites St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Oecumenius, Theophylact, Ambrose, Clement Romanus, and St. Bernard, as advocates for this doctrine (De Sens. Auct. Eccl. l. 1. cap. 2.) which, however, was condemned as heretical by the council of Florence.  
(f) Epist. 26.  
(g) See Usher's answer, &c. art. confession, pag. 107.  
(h) Disput. de Sacram. de Confess. cap. 2.  
(i) Lib. 6. de Regno Italia.  
(k) See Meno. Traité de diplom. tom. 2. p. 424. Par deux Benedicins.  
(l) Stephen bishop of Autun.  
(m) Bellarm. lib. 3. de Euchar. cap. 23.  
(n) Bellarm. de Scrip. Eccles.

September 2, 1784. bidder, on Saturday, if fair, at not the before at private sale in Anne-Arundel acres of land, the be remarkably good oats, &c. at this acres well manured, a very fine crop conveniently watered by wood-land sufficient now more than 100 convenient to six dis- to South river, and a plenty of fish, from Annapolis, six even to Baltimore. and the situation is fession will be given ary next; the title ll be made known HENRY HALL.  
September 23, 1784. e last will and testa e of Anne-Arundel ale, on Monday the fair, if not the next:  
Montgomery county, acres of good land, adjoining the lands of am Robertson, and 6 miles from the miles from Bladen and 30 from Balti- in the county for orn, and small g. are cleared an. under woods, with a great e of the plantation; tom land, that with into good mea- ed dwelling house himney, and a good a milled, a kitchen, out, stables, and with two out houses d would answer or d in garden, and a dwelling house; a eral other kinds e to view this place n it by applying near the premises. rd of the purchase and a long credit ving good bond and putable title will be n given on or be- next, by the sub- N, executrix, GUE, }-executors. AN, }  
D L D,  
of LAND, being tract called White- river, in Anne-A- of navigable water om Annapolis. The ro, corn, and small uiciency of wood e, several negro es, corn house, and r will be allowed to fall. For terms ap- HN PLUMMER.  
September 10, 1784. r-point, in Charl's oyed by the British end to petition the authorising me to where the old ones  
DHN C. JONES.  
August 26, 1784. petition the general fession, for a law to his house, through his own land to the n, to White-Rock- Mr. James William- a short way to the  
ARD SPENCER.  
next general assem- or compensation for, ey in justice shall  
HARFORD.  
Charles-Street.