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The Re-Union of Christendom

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The Re-Union of Christendom

A 32-page pamphlet with this title has been sent to us for notice. It is written by G. P. Lannert, a Roman Catholic of Indianapolis, Ind., and shows an honest, kindly spirit. The author hopes that "it may bring back a few wanderers to our Father's House, the one Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church." We presume all such wanderers would return immediately and gladly if they had the evidence that the Church of Rome is the Father's house of which the Savior spoke, or the one body and church of which Paul wrote. But just here Mr. Lannert has been very negligent. He abounds in assumptions and overflows with pious exhortation, but he fails entirely to exhibit the scriptural proof necessary to induce a thoughtful man to confide his soul's salvation to the care of the Roman priesthood. He writes pathetically of division and its evils, and refers to the fact that "in our own Indianapolis are to be found no less than twenty-one discordant societies claiming to be the Church of Christ." Then, after showing folly of thinking it makes no difference what people believe, he proceeds to argue, or rather assert, that they should believe what the Church of Rome teaches because she claims to be the only true church and infallible instructor of mankind in things religious.

Mr. Lannert cautions his readers to "avoid a vicious circle," and not to "base the Bible's authority on the Church's dictum that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and then compel the Church to derive her authority from the very set of books which she herself has declared to be the inspired word of God"; yet, strange to say, he himself has entered this "vicious circle", and continued in it to the close of his pamphlet. He insists that only his church can truthfully tell us what the Bible is, and show us how to interpret it correctly. He quotes numerous passages of Scripture, and assures us that they refer to the Roman Church because she claims that this is their meaning! Such, in brief, is the sum of our friend's logic. But let us look at a few portions of it more closely.

He says, on page 7, "Now in the Bible we discover

two undeniable traits of the Church: She is to be the visible society of Christ and His followers; she is to remain His intrepid and unshakable witness till time shall be no more." In proof of this statement he quotes Isa. 2: 2 and 11: 12; and refers to the 23rd chapter of Jeremiah, the 2d chapter of Daniel, and the 18th chapter of Matthew. Now it is very doubtful that all these passages point to the Gospel dispensation. Some of them very likely pertain to the Millennial age. But granting that they do refer to the church that Jesus promised to build upon "this rock", we have no reason to think that the Roman Hierarchy is this church or any part of it. We have in the apostolic writings a detailed description of the spiritual temple which Christ through the Holy Ghost erected; and when we compare the Papacy with this description we find, not an agreement, but a striking contrast. Let us briefly glance at some of the points of difference. •

1. The church which Christ built was established in Jerusalem on the Pentecost after his resurrection. The church which Mr. Lannert calls the Catholic church was founded long afterward in the city of Rome.

2. The church which Christ established rests upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, he himself being the chief corner-stone. The Roman Catholic Church is based upon a mere tradition that Peter lived in Rome and preached the Gospel there.

3. The church which Christ established has Christ himself for its head. The Church of Rome has the Pope, an uninspired man, for her head and mouth-piece.

4. The church which Jesus founded was composed of penitent believers that gladly received the Gospel and were baptized. The Church of Rome is composed chiefly of persons that were taken in their infancy, without faith or understanding, and sprinkled in the name of the Trinity.

5. The church which Christ established had for its creed the word of God delivered by inspired teachers and confirmed by open and astonishing miracles wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church of Rome has for her creed the doctrines of uninspired

men—the opinions of the Fathers, the decisions of Councils and the utterances of the Pope.

6. The church which Christ established had for its pastors (or bishops) married men who had families and ruled them well. The Church of Rome has for her pastors bachelors that are forbidden to marry and are ignorant of ruling a household.

7. The church which Christ founded had but one Mediator, the Lord Jesus himself, in whose name all prayers were offered, and through whom all blessings flowed. The Church of Rome has many mediators, including the “Virgin Mary” and numerous other dead saints.

Here are seven radical points of difference which might easily be multiplied to seven times seven, all showing that the church of the Living God and the church of Roman Papacy are two entirely separate and dissimilar institutions. And though our friend regards the latter as the “Mother Church” and “the Center to which all must tend,” yet Paul (an infallible teacher) assured the saints to whom he wrote that “the Jerusalem which is above . . . , is the mother of us all,” and showed them that they were “not come unto the mount that might be touched”—not to Sinai nor to the seven-hilled city of Rome—“but,” said he, “ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

The fatal error which misleads G. J. Lannert and all who think with him, whether they be Catholics or Protestants, is the groundless assumption that the apostles have successors, and that being dead they are no longer the sole guides and fountain of doctrine for those who would avail themselves of the grace of God through his Son Jesus. The Jews, as Christ told them, had Moses and the prophets; but, instead of hearing them, they listened to blind guides and false prophets, and made

the word of God of none effect and their own worship vain through their multiplied traditions. In the same way that the Jews had Moses and the prophets we have Christ and the apostles. The words which Jesus spoke to those whom he chose to be his witnesses are still the law for all who wish to be saved. "As my Father sent me, so send I you. . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose-soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained": "and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." No clergyman of modern times, no matter to what head he may pretend to trace his spiritual lineage, has any right whatever to appropriate to himself the commission and authority which Christ gave to his apostles. In the full assurance not only of faith but of actual knowledge, these chosen witnesses "went forth and preached everywhere," testifying (as one of their number asserts) of "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of life"; and as they thus testified the Lord worked with them, confirming their testimony by signs following.

Though these men are no longer with us in the flesh, they are with us in word and spirit, and whosoever receiveth them receiveth Christ and God. They are still the rulers, the divinely appointed shepherds, in the General Assembly and Church of the first born. They were to be the feeders of Christ's sheep to the end of time; and the food provided by them through the Holy Spirit in the first century is still with us, an exhaustless supply. The inspired men to whom the real gift of infallibility was given are the "prelates" whom we are to obey; not those who claim to succeed them, but whose word the Lord never confirms by signs following, nor gives to them the Spirit of revelation.

Mr. Lannert lays great stress upon what Christ said to Peter in Matt. 16: 17-19, Luke 22: 31, 32 and John 21: 15-17; but he misses widely the meaning of these passages. They have no reference whatever to apostolic succession or to the priesthood of the Roman branch of Christendom. Jesus did not promise to build

his church upon Peter. The Greek text forbids any such interpretation! Nor did He say directly that the gates of Hades should not prevail against the church which he would build. The pronoun "it" (autees) refers rather to rock (petra)—a figurative name for the fundamental truth which God had revealed unto Peter, and which this apostle was so prompt to confess. Upon this truth, immovable as a great rock, the Church of Christ was built, as Acts 2: 22-36 implies. The gates of Hades prevailed not against the rock of truth, for Jesus (by his resurrection on the third day) demonstrated it to be the truth by which men are to be saved. Peter indeed had the keys, but he used them by opening the door of the church, first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, and afterward the door into the everlasting kingdom, so that every person, whether Jew or Gentile, may have an abundant entrance therein. The keys have been used, and the door in each case is still wide open, and it will remain open to all until the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and the foolish virgins are shut out. True, Peter was to feed the sheep. He did feed them with "the sincere milk of the word." He still feeds them; for his words are spirit and life to all who know and obey them. But he had no supremacy over the other apostles. Paul withstood him face to face, and James took precedence at Jerusalem.

The Roman Catholic Church is not the oldest of the sects into which Christendom is divided. The Greek Church has a better claim to antiquity and pre-eminence. The earliest of the converts from paganism were either Greeks or people to whom Greek was vernacular. The seven churches that John addressed were of this character. The books of the New Testament were all written in Greek, and the earliest of the fathers used this tongue. Even the first converts of the church at Rome to which Paul wrote were chiefly Greeks, not Latins, if we are to judge of their nationality or race by their names. In fact, Rome plays a very subordinate part in early ecclesiastical history, and Constantinople and Greek theologians held sway long before and after popery was born. When the Roman branch of the apostasy separated entirely from the

Greek, it was an arrogant assumption on the part of the former to call herself the original or mother church, for the Greeks had the older and cleaner establishment and all there was of the so-called apostolic succession. Theirs was the mother tongue of inspiration, while the Latin language, doctrines, ritual and clergy were all of them novelties in the churches. But, as we have seen, neither Rome nor Constantinople is the mother that Paul acknowledges, "but Jerusalem which is above."

As we have said, Mr. Lannert writes in a commendable spirit and shows the evils of disunion very clearly. But his remedy for them is not the scriptural one. He would have all believers join the Church of Rome. Other sects offer a similar remedy. Each says, Join us, then we'll be one! But the Lord forbids us to join ourselves to idols, or to worship images of himself which men have carved. We are to be joined to Christ—to be one body with Him! We can do this by obeying the Gospel as the apostles preached it, and by living the Gospel as they taught it. As John says: They are of God: he that knoweth God heareth them; he that is not of God heareth them not. In this way, and in this way only, can we test the spirits, and determine to a certainty who is led by the Spirit of Truth, and who is deluded by the spirit of error.

This is the doctrinal test; and as long as people have the New Testament, and contrast Rome and Jerusalem, popes and apostles, they will seek the Divine center and repudiate the papacy. But there is another test by which all who come in Christ's name are to be tried. Jesus himself gives it in these words: "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Matt. 7: 16. The advocates of Rome may write and preach forever, but they will never convince the world that the priesthood that burned John Huss and Jerome of Prague, imprisoned Galileo, established the Inquisition, slaughtered the Waldenses, blest the Duke of Alva and the Spanish Armada, and sought to exterminate all heresy with fire and sword, is called of God or anointed by the Holy Spirit.—L. F. Bittle.