

the withdrawing herself from the slight acquaintance, which she once had with Mrs. Manley, on account of the licentiousness both of her writings and conduct. And indeed the libeller herself was so conscious of the injustice and enormity of her calumnies, that, upon a remonstrance to her upon that account, she promised to make the proper acknowledgments in person to Mrs. Cockburn for her offence; but failed of her engagement in that respect, from an excusable reluctance to see one, whom she had so highly injured.

The collection now exhibited to the world is so incontestable a proof of the superiority of our author's genius, as in a manner supercedes every thing, that can be said upon that head. But her abilities as a writer, and the merit of her works, will not have full justice done them, without a due attention to the peculiar circumstances, in which they were produced; her early youth, when she wrote some; her very advanced age, and ill state of health, when she drew up others; the uneasy situation of her fortune, during the whole course of her life; and an interval of near twenty years, in the vigor of it, spent in the cares of a family, without the least leisure for reading or contemplation: After which, with a mind so long diverted and encumbered, resuming her studies, she instantly recovered its intire powers, and in the hours of relaxation from her domestic employments pursued, to their utmost limits, some of the deepest inquiries, of which the human mind is capable.

A
DISCOURSE

Concerning a

Guide in Controversies,

I N

TWO LETTERS,

Written to

One of the Church of *Rome*.

First printed in 1707.

P R E F A C E.

THE ingenious author of these papers being not easily prevailed with to permit the publication of them, I am not at liberty to inform the reader any farther, than that they were writ by one, who had been many years of the church of *Rome*, but having been for some time dissatisfied with several doctrines and practices in that church, had resolv'd to examine, with great care, the grounds of that authority, on which they were received, by consulting the best books on that subject on both sides, and by advising with men of the best judgments of both communions: And that these papers were the result of those free and impartial enquiries, designed only to impart the Author's thoughts to a friend, without any intention of making them public.

But falling into the hands of some very good judges, as well divines as others, the publishing of them was very much desired, both for the strength and clearness of the reasoning, and for the shortness of them; many readers being encouraged to seek for information in pieces of this size, who have neither the mind nor the leisure to go through large volumes.

They are, I think, writ with that judgment, and withal with that plainness, that they may be at all times useful to those of our own communion, that want to be fortified against the bold pretences to

infallibility to the church of *Rome*; and will, I hope, help to open the eyes of such of the *Romish Communion*, as are persuaded, that those, who deny that infallibility, take away all certainty of the Christian religion, or of the authority of the Scriptures; the grounds of those pretences being the chief subject of these letters.

It might have been expected, that the answer, writ by one of the *Romish persuasion* to the first letter, should have been printed, with the reply; and indeed I wish that could have been done, for preventing all cavils and exceptions; but it seems it was return'd (after the reply was writ) upon the request of the gentleman, that brought it, before any copy was taken of it. But, however, there is the less need of it, since I am persuaded the full force of the arguments is plainly and fairly set down in the reply.

I need say no more concerning the author, or the performance. I pray God it may have the good effect, to excite all sorts of persons, of what persuasion soever, seriously and impartially to enquire into the grounds and reasons of their religion, as this author has done: for it is not only the most rational method for finding out truth, but what is indispensably required of us by revelation; where we are enjoined to *prove all things*, in order to the *holding fast that which is good*.

T W O
L E T T E R S

Concerning a
Guide in Controversies.

The First LETTER.

To Mr. B——t a *Romish Priest*.

S I R,

I Thank you for the favour of your books, which I return, having read that concerning the *Guide in Controversies* twice, with all the attention I am capable of, and with all the impartiality I could, under so strong a bias, as all naturally have for that side, which they have deliberately and publicly made their free choice. I was not indeed inclined to resolve against doubting, though told it is a *mortal sin*; for I am persuaded nothing can be so, that is out of our power, as not to doubt of a thing, which we see great reason to doubt of, surely is. However, that *Maxim* gives great prejudice against those, who hold it, as the best security of error, and the most effectual bar against the discovery of truth; for which a very different disposition is requisite, *viz.* A readiness to submit to the evidence of truth,

how opposite soever to all our present persuasions. And in this disposition I have endeavoured to keep myself on that important enquiry, Whether the proofs of an infallible guide are sufficiently full and clear to satisfy an unprejudiced mind; as I heartily wish to find them. In order to judge the better of my thoughts on this subject, give me leave, Sir, to represent to you freely, what I think is the sum of your author's arguments; what defect I observe in them; and what seems to me the only ground, on which the belief of an *infallible guide* can be establish'd. I begin the last, by laying down this position:

That there can be no reason to ascribe infallibility to any man, or assembly of men, but an express divine promise; and that those, to whom such a grant is made, can neither limit, or extend, transfer or dispose it, in any manner, or to any persons; but it must be fixed in those only, who are expressly separated and distinguished by that promise. This being laid down, which I believe will be granted me, we are next to consider with your author, what is the importance of those places in Scripture, in which that promise is said to be contained, and to whom they must be applied. "Our Saviour's promises, he says, (all or most of them) are made to the guides of the church, and therefore to the church as a guide^a;" a consequence, which shall be farther considered by and by. But here I must observe, That several of them seem evidently limited to the apostles, as those, in which are joined the promise of *guiding them into all truth*, and that of *showing them things to come*^b: From which I see no more reason to infer a succession of infallibility, than a succession of prophecy; but both seem equally to belong to that extraordinary inspiration, which was

^a Page 4.^b John xvi. 13.

necessary

necessary for the first promulgators of the *Gospel*. If it is thought necessary to extend those other promises farther, of our Saviour's being with them to the *end of the world*^c, and of the spirit's abiding with them *for ever*, (tho' these expressions are frequently used in Scripture, when they cannot be taken in their full extent, as no doubt you know; but) to whom soever they may be extended, they are far from importing Infallibility, as may be seen in several places, where they are used for those ordinary assistances, and protections, which God has promised to all his people; every good Christian may hope and pray that God will be with them for ever. As for that injunction, *Tell the church*^d, &c. I cannot but wonder to find it always urged on this subject, for I think nothing can be plainer, than that it does not at all belong to it, when the whole scope of the discourse is taken together from the 15th verse, *If thy brother trespass against thee*, &c. Our Saviour is plainly speaking of private differences among Christians, which he would have them first endeavour to make up between themselves; then to try the interposition of friends; and lastly, to refer the matter to the whole body; and if any one was not to be gained by such amicable methods, he might be looked on, or used, as a heathen, *i. e.* prosecuted in temporal courts. From which discourse if any authority of the church is to be inferred, it must be to decide civil controversies, and private quarrels. The only text, I think, that contains an express promise to the church is this, *On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*^e; which seems not necessarily to import more, than that no power should ever be able to *destroy* Christ's church; the word rendered *prevail*, signifying (as I am told) an entire victory.

^c Matt. xxviii. 20. John xiv. 16.^d Matt. xviii. 17.^e Matt. xvi. 18.

But supposing that text to mean, that the church should never fall into any error, (which sure is very darkly expressed in it) since this cannot be universally extended, as is owned by all, but that great numbers may and have erred; I am still to search for some direction, whom in any division of the church I may adhere to as a *guide* infallible; and for this Christ has certainly given us a rule, if your author's conclusion is true, that most of the promises being made to the *guides* of the church^f; therefore to the church as a *guide*; for without such a rule, this can be no rule to us, when those guides are divided among themselves.

And on this occasion, he says, ^g "It seems also evident, that Christians, in such dissenting of governors, may not safely follow, which they please, or judge to be in their doctrine the rightest; for so they judge of their judges. But that some rule there is, to whom in such case they are to adhere; it being as necessary for the same divine providence to leave some means, by which to know our guide, as to give us one." Thus he. And this indeed is evidently necessary, if the other part is true, That *Christians* may not judge for themselves in such *dissentions among governors*. But where is this rule to be found? This is what we are in search of; but of this the Scriptures are entirely silent, give not the least hint of any person, or number of persons, whom, in case of divisions, all Christians are obliged to follow: but your author tells us, "That this rule by tradition has been, and, in reason, can be no other, but this, that in judges ecclesiastical subordinate (whether persons or councils) dissenting, men ought to adhere to the superior; in judges equal dissenting, to adhere to the major, not to the minor part."^h

Allowing this to have been by tradition the only

^f Page 21.

^g Page 100.

^h Ibid.

rule,

rule, as I doubt not that it may in *reason* be the best, that any body of men can fix on for the maintaining of peace and order; yet if this is not a divine institution, what reason can assure me, that in all dissensions of the church, the superior in dignity or number must be in the right? which is far from being true of any other body of men. But that this rule is of divine institution, I find no appearance of a proof, and methinks that assertion of your author seems to suppose the contrary, *viz. That in reason there can be no other*. Could he have shewn us, that in fact this rule was given us by God, no body would have doubted the reasonableness of it; but by this he cannot mean, that God could not in reason have given us any other: For who can deny, that if he had been pleased to distinguish any determined succession of men, how few, or of what dignity soever, by a promise of infallibility, it would have been a very good rule for us to adhere to him or them, even against the whole world: What then can he mean, but that this is the only rule, that *human reason* can fix on; an argument, which can amount to no more than a fitness or necessity of submitting to superiors, or the majority of a council, for the security of order and union (which are indeed very valuable things, and not lightly to be thrown off:) But a submission to them can be no infallible security from error; and therefore we cannot be absolutely in all things obliged to such submission, without an express divine promise, that those pastors, who are superior in dignity, or the majority of those, who shall happen to be assembled in a council, shall never err. But to such a divine promise I find no pretence, nor to any direction from Christ or his apostles, whom to follow as a guide in case of divisions. The promises in Scripture are by no side carried farther than to collect from them, that the whole church, or all the guides of the church, shall never fall into error:

But

But since those, who shall not err, are not distinguished, to us, from those, who may, should we not conclude, contrary to your author, that therefore those promises to the guides of the church are not meant to the church as a guide? For methinks, his conclusion [That they are so meant,] is very well confuted by himself, where he says, "He that appoints us to follow a guide — and then leaves us no way (when our guide consists of many persons — and when two parties of them contradict one another) — to know which of them is to be our guide, it is all one, as if he left us no guide^k." From which this reasoning closely follows; but God has given us no direction how to know our guide; *ergo*, he has (or it is all one as if he had) given us no guide. Nor does your author here, or elsewhere, offer to shew, that God has given us any rule, by which to know this guide; but here from a concession of some *Protestants*, that there shall be always some pastors of the church unerring, he argues, *That these (unless allowed to be the superior or major part) can be of no use as a guide to the whole*; which no *Protestants* maintain them to be; all affirm, that there is no infallible guide but the Scripture. Yet, as if it were granted, that those unerring pastors were to be a known appointed guide, he concludes, that his must be the rule by which to know this guide; but gives us no better proof, that this is our rule, than in the other place, sends us to human reason and probabilities; for it is more likely, says he, "That a particular person should err than a synod; and a smaller synod than a more general; and so too of persons subordinate, that those elected and advanced to higher places of judicature, should be both persons of greater knowledge and merit; and, according to the necessity of their place, divinely more assisted^k." Not to urge, that this has been far

i Page 18.

k Page 19.

otherwise

otherwise in fact, (as it is too sure, that several of those advanced to the highest rank in the church have been very ill, and very ignorant men) let it be as *likely* as he pleases, how far does this fall short of that security, which we look for in a guide infallible, by an express divine promise?

But "why else (continues he) such a subordination and appeal from lower to higher courts, unless these be of the two the less liable to error, both from human and divine help?" To which I answer, That nobody denies, that the church might cast itself into such a model for very good ends, relating to order and discipline; but how infallibility can be inferred from thence, I do not see: For first, I cannot find, that those subordinations, upon which such appeals are founded, are so much as pretended to be of divine or apostolical institution (as that of inferior clergy to their bishop is;) but for those other, of bishops to their metropolitan, and of metropolitans to patriarchs, they seem distinctions merely flowing from the former disposition of the *Roman* empire, and the temporal dignity of cities; as new privileges were given to the bishop of *Constantinople*, upon that city's being made the seat of the empire. But secondly, if these subordinations were all of divine institution, and allowing the higher of the two the less liable to error, how does that, or the constant practice in the church, of appealing accordingly from lower to higher courts, any more prove the majority of a general council infallible (without an express promise for it) than the like constitution of other bodies proves the highest court of them to be infallible, or than it proves every metropolitan, or every bishop, to be so, because all under their respective jurisdictions are obliged to obey them? But your author had told us before, "That this being the traditive rule of obedience, which has been always observed in the church, if our Saviour's promises of assistance import only (as

" some

"some Protestants affirm) That there shall be always some clergy unerring, but how few, or of what dignity they may be is uncertain; then the people in following the superior and the major part (the traditive rule) will thus be tied sometimes to obey those of the clergy, to whom Christ denies such assistance, and to disobey those, who have it^m. Which is the sum of his argument in that page. But therefore (say all Protestants) the people are not tied to this rule of obedience in all cases: 'tis a human constitution; and whenever any of those, (tho' otherwise their lawful superiors) depart from their sole infallible rule, the Scriptures, the people are not obliged to follow them; for they must obey God rather than man. If he means, that the people are tied to this rule of obedience in all cases by divine authority, it is that, of which we want a proof: if not, his conclusion will amount to no more, than that such superiors requiring an universal and absolute submission to their decrees, will thus sometimes tie the people to submit to error; which his adversaries will easily grant him.

The only argument I find in your author for the divine authority of a general council, is this, "That the church governors, when ever assembled in council, do act by the self same authority (received from our Lord, and by their divine institution) by which they act singly, in their several charges:—What authority then, and whence they had it singly, they have united."—And so much I believe not only Dr. Hammond, whom he quotes, but all of the church of England will own: but is this authority absolute and unlimited, in matters of faith, or is it not? If it be, then every one will be obliged to obey their several bishops, how much soever they differ from one another: if it be not unlimited,

as sure it is not, since every single bishop may err (as is confess'd by all) and in such case the people cannot be bound to obey; then neither is it so, when they are united, for they act by the *self-same authority, when assembled, by which they act singly*. But how high soever the authority of bishops may be, this is not the institution we look for, nor will it help us in our search whom to follow, when they are divided among themselves. The divine authority we are enquiring for, is that of a primate over many inferior bishops, or of a majority of them over a lesser number, with a promise that such shall not err; and in case the greater number of inferior bishops should dissent from their superiors in dignity, on which side the infallibility should rest, or to whom the people must adhere. But of such a divine authority, promise, or direction, I do not find, that any proof is offered.

Nor does your author mention this last case at all, of a majority dissenting from their superiors, though this not only may, but has happened. And if it is not determined which of them, in such case, is the infallible guide, the people will be left uncertain whom to follow, or, according to their different opinions about it, may have a very different rule of faith.

And is it to be thought, that a living *infallible guide* was designed us, and yet, that neither our Saviour, or his apostles should say one word of any rule, how to know this guide in case of dissensions, nor give the least direction how that body should be constituted, which was to have so great a privilege as infallibility; either of what persons it should consist, or what number of votes, or what acceptance should be necessary to make its decrees obligatory? About all which so many obvious doubts may be raised, and these not the cavils of a captious enemy; for several councils are rejected even

even by the church of *Rome*; and how can we certainly know, that they had not a title to infallibility, and a right to be obeyed, or that those others may not as well be rejected, without some stated rules of what is sufficient to give a council the authority of a general one, since none of them have been strictly such.

But no direction being left us by Christ, or his apostles, about this so important a matter, is it not reasonable to conclude, that their writings are the only rule they designed us, by which we are to (*try the spirits*) examine all doctrines, and as they agree or not to that rule, accordingly to receive, or reject them; which if it resolve at last into every man's private judgment, is it not vain to urge absurdities or inconveniences from that? For without proving, that God has given us another *determined* guide, this is only arguing, that he should have done something, which he has not done.

But why is it thought so necessary for us to be more infallibly secured from *Error*, than from *Sin*? which seems more opposite to the purity of God, and more prejudicial to mankind; what absurdity is there in thinking, that God has left our understanding as free as our will? and if men had done so too, what inconvenience would have followed from it? Those divisions, that are now among Christians, seem not the necessary consequence of a diversity in opinions, but of mens having made the terms of communion stricter than God has made the terms of salvation. Otherwise all Christians, who agree in those important truths, which are essentials of the covenant of grace, might have been of one heart, and of one communion, notwithstanding their differences about other things; as we see the *Dominicans* and *Jesuits* are, though the matter in dispute between them seems of much greater consequence, than many of those things, for which churches are unhappily divided from one another.

From

From which may I not conclude, that those disorders (for the prevention of which, an infallible determiner of all controversies is urged as necessary) are so far from being the effects of mens judging for themselves, that they manifestly proceed from their not being left at liberty to do so, as the *Dominicans* and *Jesuits* are, in the contest between them; and that therefore if God has not required, that all controvertible matters should be determined, he has left us a more effectual way to peace and union, *viz.* By bearing with one another in such things; than he had done by appointing such an undetermined judge of them, as about whom the greatest controversy may be raised.

If it is urged, that thus many errors will get into the church, which is contrary to our Saviour's promises; I ask, how it can be proved more inconsistent with the promise, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, that some errors should be in it, or that the greatest part of it should err; than that many sins should so widely prevail in it, as we see they do? Or, how can it be said, that the gates of hell prevail against the church, whilst it retains all truths *necessary to salvation*? For though with them there should be a mixture even of dangerous errors, whilst faith in Christ, and repentance for the remission of sins, are maintained, they will prove as it were antidotes against the malignity of them. For if men sincerely endeavour to know the truth, and ask pardon for all their involuntary mistakes; what reason is there to doubt, that *David's* prayer will be accepted for such errors, as well as for the sins, which without our own fault we are ignorant of? (*Ob cleanse thou me from all my secret sins.*)

This, Sir, seems to me no irrational scheme of religion: but whatever objections may be urged against it, they can be of no force, if God has given

given us no other. If men will abuse their liberty of searching in the Scriptures whether these things are so, every one must account for himself at his own peril. But what greater safety can they have by submitting to the decrees of a council, though seeming to them *contrary* to the word of God, when they have no command from him for such a submission, than they have in following some few pastors, who, they think, adhere more closely to their confessed rule, the Scriptures?

Much rather, indeed most gladly would I submit to an infallible interpreter of God's appointing, if such a one I could find; but I must conclude with my first position, which is the ground I have all along proceeded on, That there can be no reason to ascribe infallibility to any man or assembly of men, but an *express divine promise*, &c. If, Sir, you can shew me either, that this position is false, or admitting it true, can prove, that our Saviour has given us any promise or direction where that infallibility, which is said to be in the diffusive body of the church, shall be found in case of divisions; it will extremely rejoice me to see it plainly done: but I have found nothing like it in your author. 'Tis true, I have not in this paper examined every particular in his book, or gone through it methodically, being loth to give you so tedious a trouble; nor was it needful to my purpose, which is not to answer him. But I have, to the best of my understanding, taken the strength of all his direct arguments for an infallible guide, and am much mistaken, if any of his arguments amount to more than a fitness, or such a necessity of submitting to superiors, as respects order; or, on the other hand, absurdities, or rather inconveniencies in mens being left to judge for themselves: both which I have considered in these *lines*. And as I am induced to this search by the same unprejudiced love
of

of truth; that brought me first to you, I hope you will receive and answer this with the same condescension and charity you then had for me, who am, and ever shall be, with respect,

S I R,

Your most humble Servant.

The Second Letter,

To Mr. H——, who had procured an Answer to the foregoing Letter from a Stranger to the Author.

S I R,

I Am sorry Mr. B——'s indisposition hindered him from answering my letter, and thank you for the pains you were at in getting another to do it. The whole force of the arguments, urged in the answer you brought me, which are enlarged on in several paragraphs, and frequently resumed, may be reduced to two propositions; by which my reply to them will be the less tedious, and the more clear.

The first, That my objections against a living infallible guide, equally overthrow the infallibility of Scripture itself: which is the subject of the sections marked 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

The second, "That Protestants (the church of England in particular) receiving not only the uncontroverted, but the controverted books of Scripture, on the infallible authority of the Vol. I. B "church;

“ church ; and the decisions of the four first general councils, as the decisions of the Holy Ghost : they must own, that there was a living infallible guide after the decease of the apostles. And if there was such a guide for five hundred years, there is no imaginable ground to affirm, that it was not to continue for ever ; nor any reason, whilst they own that the church is infallible in her decisions concerning Scripture, to deny, that she is so in other things.” Part of which is urged in the section marked 7 ; and the whole is variously insisted on in several other places.

Now to all, that is said on this last head, I need only give this short answer ; that it proceeds upon a wrong supposition, and therefore the argument built on it falls to the ground, having no foundation. But the gentleman observes, that I was aware of that inference, viz. *That there is as good reason to believe succeeding councils infallible as the four first* ; and therefore, he says, I urged, *that no council yet has been strictly a general one*. What this (which was said on a very different occasion, which he takes no notice of) could have been to the purpose of avoiding his inference, I cannot imagine ; but he may be assured I was not aware of an inference, which I knew he had no ground for. Protestants do not receive the Scriptures from the church as an infallible authority, nor the decisions of the four first councils, as the decisions of the Holy Ghost : they reverence those councils, for the sake of their doctrine, which they find deducible from the Scriptures ; but do not believe the doctrine, on the authority of the councils, according to what the church of England declares in her 21st Article, “ That general councils may and have erred in things pertaining to God ; and that things ordained by them as necessary to salvation, have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared, that they are taken from the Scriptures.” And

as for the Scriptures, they are believed to be written by inspired men, on the testimony of the church, not as a body extraordinarily assisted by the Holy Ghost, but as they are vast companies of men, who in a continued succession of many ages have handed them down to us, as books written by those whose names they bear ; it being morally impossible, that those, to whom they were at first delivered, could have received and believed them, if they had not known the great matters of fact contained and appealed to in them to be true ; which facts sufficiently proved their authors to be inspired : And as little is it possible, that their successors could have corrupted those books, which were read, copied, translated, and dispersed into so many hands, in all ages of Christianity.

As for the controverted books, neither are they received on the authority of any judgment or sentence passed on them, but on the same moral arguments, on which the councils judged them to be canonical ; as their being mentioned for such by the earliest Christian writers (which the book of Revelations in particular is) the number of hands, in which they were ; and the conformity of their doctrine with those books, which had never been questioned, but were constantly quoted and appealed to on both sides, in all the disputes, that happened among Christians about other things.

On these grounds Protestants think they are sufficiently, if not infallibly, certain of the infallible authority of the Scriptures.

And that they may thus be sufficiently certain, that they ought to submit to an authority as infallible, the gentleman must grant, whether he will have the Scriptures believed on the authority of the church as infallible, or the church on the authority of the Scriptures ; for one of them must be received on a moral certainty, unless he will argue in a circle, proving both by each other, which he knows

will prove neither. This then, I doubt not, he will grant me, that the grounds, on which Protestants believe the Scriptures, may give a sufficient certainty, that we ought to submit to an authority as infallible.

And now I suppose the *gentleman* will think he has me at great advantage, and that, to be consistent with myself, I must retract my position, *viz.* That there can be no reason to ascribe infallibility to any *man, or assembly of men*, but an express divine promise, &c. The question then is, whether the cases are alike; which leads me to examine his first proposition, *viz. That my objections against a living infallible guide, equally overthrow the authority of Scripture itself*: A proposition, which if he had made good, I should be extremely sorry for it, because there is this unhappiness in it, that instead of proving the authority of the church, it would only prove, that the authority of church and Scripture are equally uncertain; a sort of arguments, which *I wish* none would make use of, but those who *design* to overthrow Christianity itself; which I would by no means suppose to be the gentleman's aim, notwithstanding his hard insinuations of me. But let any one judge, whether his reasoning or mine *tends* most to that consequence.

In examining the arguments for a living *infallible guide* (a point denied by the greater number of Christians) I all along supposed the authority of the Scriptures as a common principle agreed on by them all; thinking that agreement a sufficient foundation for the Christian religion, whatever become of the point in dispute. On the other hand, the gentleman being to maintain that disputed point, the authority of the church, as an infallible guide, turns my objections against it, against the authority of the Scriptures; and then, instead of shewing the weakness of those objections, he only hopes I will grant they prove too much, but is so far from shewing

shewing that they do so, that all the rest of his discourse is founded on a supposition, that those arguments are good against the Scriptures, that their authority must be *dubious*, unless they are believed on the infallible authority of the church: And if so, will not the authority of the church (which is denied by the greater part of Christians) be at least as dubious as that of the Scriptures, far want of another infallible authority to support our belief of it? And so adieu both the church of *Rome's*, and the Christian rule of faith. Yet do I not uncharitably censure him of designing this consequence, obvious as it is; but there was no way to avoid it, but one of these two, either by shewing, that my arguments, as retorted by him, were not good against the Scriptures, but that we might have sufficient certainty of their authority, though the church, were not infallible; which had been too dangerous a concession (though from thence he had urged, that we might be equally certain of the church's infallibility on the same grounds) for this would have wholly taken off the force of his main argument, for our receiving all the decisions of the church as infallible, *viz.* because we must receive her decisions of Scripture as such. But, what is worse, if he could not have produced a tradition equally clear and universal, for a *living infallible guide*, as for the inspiration of Scripture, the authority of this guide would again have been referred to a trial by Scripture; and so we had been where we were, and all my arguments might still have been strong enough against such a guide, however weak (as indeed they are) against the Scriptures. If therefore he would not make this concession, that we may have a sufficient certainty of the divine authority of the Scriptures, without believing the church infallible, the only other means he had to avoid the consequence of taking away all certainty, both of church and Scripture, was to give a

plain reason, why the doctrine of an *infallible guide* was more capable of certainty, and of being conveyed through a course of many ages clearly and unalterably, than the books of Scripture; or to affirm, that in fact it had been so; a proposition, which he would have found very difficult to maintain. But on that supposition his whole discourse must be founded; for since he plainly denies, that we can be certain of the divine authority of the Scriptures, unless the church is infallible (accusing me of having made their authority dubious by attacking her *infallibility*) he must then suppose, that we may be more certain, by tradition of the divine authority of the church, than we can be of the Scriptures; unless, as I said, he will take away all certainty of either, and so overthrow Christianity itself.

This then is the right state of the question between us, *Whether the infallibility of the church, as now taught by the church of Rome, or the divine authority of the books of Scripture, has been conveyed to us by the most clear and universal tradition?* And, on the resolution of this, must stand or fall the truth of my position, and arguments against an infallible guide, or of his objection, *viz.* That they equally overthrow the authority of *Scripture*. For if the Scriptures have come down to us by so clear and uninterrupted a tradition, as is sufficient to give us a certainty of their authority, then my arguments cannot be turned against them: but if, on the other hand, the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, as a *guide*, was not capable of being, or has not been, conveyed to us, by such a tradition, as can give us a certainty, then there is all reason to require a plain proof of it from the written infallible word of God; and so my arguments will stand good against a living guide, though not against the Scriptures, unless it must follow, that if we cannot be certain of some one thing with-

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out a divine revelation, that therefore we cannot be certain of another, or of any thing without revelation; which, I suppose, the gentleman would not have me take for a good conclusion; and, I assure him, I did not take it for a principle.

But the ground, on which I went, was indeed that, in which, he says, the cavil lies, *viz.* *That Tradition is no express proof of the infallibility of the church, i. e. of that part, which stood to the successor of the chief of the apostles; or rather that we have no sufficient tradition of it; and therefore I expected, that after he had turned my arguments against Scripture, and, as I observed, supposed them good, so applied, he would have shewn them to be groundless cavils against a living guide, by producing a better, or, if that were too hard a task, as good a tradition, for the infallibility of that part of the church, which adheres to St. Peter's successor, as we have for the authority of the Scriptures.* But instead of that, he only urges the established subordinations in the church, the constant exercise of authority by church guides, and the submission of the faithful to them; all which I had obviated, by enquiring, how such subordinations (even supposing them of divine institution) and such exercise of authority accordingly, would any more prove the superior in number or dignity infallible, than the like constitution of other bodies proves them to be so: Of which he takes no notice, and only says, *now that all this should be granted of divine institution* (though by the way, I only supposed, by no means granted it) *this obligation of subordination and submission, laid upon all by God's express order; if it do not infer, that those, who conform to it, shall not be misled by it into error, I am to learn what can.* And if this is a good answer, I have learned what I did not know before, *viz.* *That all sovereign princes, nay, that all parents are infallible;* for there is an obligation of subordi-

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nation and submission to them, laid upon all children and subjects, by God's express order. But if this do not infer, that those, who conform to it, shall not be misled by it into error, yet am I not to learn what can: A plain promise from God, that such superiors shall be infallible in all their commands, would infallibly bear that inference; but till he is pleased to give us such a promise, they must (for ought I see) be contented, that we pay them absolute obedience in all things, that fall under their jurisdiction. But if they will go beyond that, by commanding any thing contrary to the word or will of God, in that we must not obey them; and consequently we must have a liberty of *judging for ourselves*, whether they do so or not. Now if this is true, with relation to our natural and civil governors (as I believe every body will allow that it is) why is not the same limitation as consistent with our obligation of obeying spiritual governors? No doubt, this liberty of judging for ourselves may be abused in all those relations: wicked children and rebels, as well as *Hereticks*, may make this a pretence for throwing off their duty; but that does not make the rule less true, or hinder those from being justified by it, who act sincerely in it.

But I seem to grant (he says) *that the arguments for infallible church authority prove, that it is fit, that it is necessary, there should be such*. From whence he forms this *syllogism*: *Christ settled in his church, whatever was fit and necessary for its preservation: but such is (as is granted) an infallible authority: ergo, Christ settled an infallible authority in his church*. I know not how the gentleman came so much to mistake my meaning, for I do not find, that my words give him any occasion for it. But if they had done so, in that one place, by some negligence or obscurity in the expression, methinks the principles, on which I argue all along, might have led him to examine,

examine, with a little more care, whether the words would not bear some other sense, less inconsistent with the rest of my letter. But indeed the place, taken by itself, would be very gross nonsense, if it were meant, as he understands it; just as much as if I had said, it is necessary, that there should be an infallible authority in the Church; but we cannot be secured from error by submitting to it, unless that infallible authority is infallible. Now if the gentleman will believe I did not intend this profound reasoning, he will find, that my words could have no other meaning, than, That those arguments taken from the practice of the church, and from the reasonableness of inferiors submitting to superiors, or the minor to the major part, prove only, that there should be some government in the Church, but not that those governors should be infallible. For how else could I say, that those arguments might prove a fitness or necessity of submitting to superiors, for the security of *order and union*; yet such submission could be no security against *error*: and from thence conclude, as I do, that therefore we cannot be absolutely, in all things, obliged to such submission, because, though *order and union* are very valuable things, *truth* must not be sacrificed to them. And thus, if it must be concluded, that Christ has established in his Church whatever I might think fit or necessary (not to its *preservation*, for to that I have not granted, or so much as supposed, that any authority is necessary, but) for the security of order and union; all that can follow from what I have said, will be, that Christ has established some government in the Church: But, as I observed, that will no more prove, that our spiritual governors are infallible, than that our natural or civil governors are so.

Well then, since such inferences as these, are not likely to satisfy one, who would build on a divine promise of an infallible guide, with a rule given by Christ, or his apostles, how to know this guide in

in case of divisions; of which, I had urged, that they said never a word; the gentleman answers, *That this is groundlessly said*; and asks, *By what rule I know, that Christ, or his Apostles, said never a word of it: is every thing they said writ down in Scripture?* To which I reply, No, certainly; for of this I have a very good rule to be assured, *viz.* The Scriptures telling me so. And if he could give me as good a rule, how to know *what* they said, which was not written, I would willingly submit to it. But methinks the same Evangelist, who assures us, *That Jesus did many things, which were not written*, when he adds, *but these are written that you may believe*^a; seems to imply, that succeeding ages could not have sufficient certainty to ground their belief on, if they had not been written. However, if the gentleman will not allow this inference, if he will think, that though the Evangelists profess to write, that we might believe, and that believing we might have life, yet that they *needed not* to have writ for that end, nor did write all that was necessary to it; but that this very necessary point, of a rule how to know our guide, was one of the things, which they omitted to write; yet I hope he will not in earnest expect an answer to his question, *How shall I know, that Christ or his Apostles said not a word of it?* Every one knows, that a negative sufficiently proves itself; at least it is the same to us, if it does not appear that a thing is, as if it were not. The question therefore is not, how I know, that they *did not* speak of such a rule; but how I can know that they *did*; and till that is proved, I may be allowed to suppose they did not.

And now, if the gentleman thinks fit to maintain, *That tradition is an expressive proof* (as his words are) *of the infallibility of that part, which adbere (in case of divisions) to the successor of the chief of the Apostles*;

^a John xx. ver. 31.

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bles; let him consider, that he must support their infallibility with the same moral arguments, on which Protestants believe the divine authority of the Scriptures; (though I might exact stronger from him, who supposes those not sufficient for our belief of Scriptures; but to one, who seeks the victory of truth alone, arguments equally strong will suffice) and I beg leave to give him a short view of the task, which such an undertaking would engage him in, that he may the more easily judge, whether it can be performed or not.

If then he would maintain, on moral grounds, the divine institution of all the subordinations in the church, and the infallibility of superiors, from *their exercising authority, with the submission of the faithful to their decisions*; he may be pleased to consider, whether he can affirm, that it is morally impossible, that such subordinations could ever have been established, if they had not been instituted by Christ, or his Apostles; or, that when they were established, it was impossible for the superiors to extend their authority to things, in which they had none; or that their inferiors should submit to their decisions, without believing them infallible. But if none of these things are morally impossible (which all the subordinations, that are in any human society, all the encroachments on the privileges of subjects, and all the exercise of authority in civil governments, that have ever been submitted to in the world, abundantly evince that they are not) then such exercise of authority, with the submission of inferiors, are not so good grounds for our believing the infallibility of superiors, or their divine institution, as we have for the authority of the Scriptures. For no instance can be produced to confute the assurance we have, from the nature of things, and of mankind, that the Scriptures could never have been received, as books written by inspired men, if the first Christians, to whom they were delivered,

had

had not known the great facts contained in them to be true; which facts proved, that their authors were divinely assisted; and farther, that it is morally impossible, that books of such importance, which were so early dispersed into all parts, and on which so many eyes were, in all corners of Christendom, could have been corrupted in any succeeding age; those books being read among all Christians, from the Apostles time, constantly appealed to in all their controversies, and most of them having never been questioned to be written by those, whose names they bear, but were owned as such, even by the enemies of the religion they contain. These are grounds, on which all mankind are agreed, that we may be sufficiently certain of the Author, and the faithful conveyance of a book; but they are such, as perhaps nothing, of any other nature whatsoever, is capable of. However, if the gentleman would apply them to a traditional doctrine of the infallibility of the church; if he will say, That 'tis equally impossible, that this doctrine could ever have been received, unless it had been delivered by the Apostles; or, that being delivered by them, it is morally impossible, that a doctrine of such importance could be corrupted, misunderstood, or misrepresented, in any succeeding age: let him observe, first, that there is nothing in this doctrine, that answers to those facts contained in the Scriptures, which serve so well to assure us of their divine authority, being of such a nature, as the first Christians could not be mistaken in, and which, by receiving these books, they attested to; an advantage, that no unwritten doctrine can pretend to, by which to prove itself of divine original. And next, let him consider, how the doctrines of the *Millennium*, and that of the necessity of the *Eucharist* for infants, came to be received as apostolical traditions, so early and so generally as they were: how those many traditions, by which the *Jews* made the word of God

God of none effect^b, were received among them as delivered by *Moses*: And lastly, how that most important doctrine, of the being of one God, truly delivered to our Fathers, was corrupted and lost, in the polytheism and idolatry of almost the whole world; tho', when men lived to see the third and fourth generation, there were far greater advantages than since, for conveying an unwritten doctrine securely.

If then these general propositions cannot be maintained, to support the doctrine of a living infallible guide; and he would venture the matter on this particular one, "That in fact we have as clear, un-interrupted, and universal a tradition of this doctrine, as we have of the authority of Scriptures:" he may be pleas'd to consider first, what evidence we can have of that, without those general propositions: that is, How we can be certain, that any thing has been conveyed to us, through many ages, clearly, and without any alteration, unless we can affirm, that it is morally impossible it should be otherwise. Next, whether the great number of Christians, who own no such tradition (as those of the *Greek Church*, and of the more southern and eastern parts, who yet do all give testimony to the Scriptures) will not be a great prejudice against such an assertion, not to say a plain confutation of it. And lastly, Whether the many different opinions about this infallible *Guide*, even among the assertors of it, as, Whether the *Pope* alone is infallible, or a *Council* without the *Pope*, or with him, or neither *Pope*, nor *Council*, but the *Church* diffusive; and whether this is by a continued conveyance of tradition from one age to another (according to Mr. *Serjeant* and his disciples) or by a perpetual assistance of the Holy Ghost, as is more generally taught: Whether, I say, these various opinions of

the infallible guide, are not proofs, That this doctrine has no more come down to us by any clear, or certain, than it has by an universal tradition.

And if on all these considerations it should appear, that we cannot have an equal certainty of the infallibility of the church, as of the Scriptures, by tradition; (as I doubt not to affirm, that there never was so clear, so uninterrupted a tradition for any thing, as that which conveys the Scriptures to us;) then it will follow, that my arguments cannot justly be turned against the Scriptures, though they are good against a living *infallible guide*; which is what I was to shew, and consequently that I had reason to require a plain proof of such a guide, from the written word of God.

But we are exhorted, in the last paragraph, *Not to forget what the Holy Ghost inspired St. Paul to record, to stand fast, and hold the traditions we have been taught, whether by word of mouth, or writings apostolical*; which text being often brought to prove, that the Scriptures are not our only rule of faith, I would not omit to consider it in particular, and it may not be improper here. St. Paul charges the *Thessalonians*, to hold what they had been taught, either by word, or his epistle^c, not by writings apostolical, which seems artfully substituted, that St. Paul may be thought to include all that was written by the Apostles: from which text I see not that any thing can be proved, but that St. Paul had taught the *Thessalonians* some things, which were not in his Epistle, as no doubt he taught them all the doctrine of Christ, all that is contained in the Gospels; which they were certainly as much obliged to hold, when they received it from the Apostle's mouth, as if it had been written. But perhaps it will be urged, that St. Paul, in this chapter, is speaking of traditions, which were never written, as of the hindrance of the coming of *Antichrist*; and

^c 2 Thess. ii. 15.

that

that therefore the exhortation in the text must not belong only to such traditions, as were afterwards written. To which I answer, That supposing this argument good, and that the *Thessalonians* were obliged to hold some traditions, which were never written, particularly that concerning *Antichrist*; yet if they have not performed their duty therein; if not only they, but the whole *Catholick Church* has suffered this tradition to be intirely lost, so that to no church in the world it can be said at this day—*Now you know what with-holdeth that he should be revealed, etc.* this can only shew, how much more faithfully traditions are kept, by writings, than by word of mouth; since we only know, that there was some hindrance of the coming of *Antichrist*, because so much is written; but what that hindrance was, we know not, because it was not written. And so of all the miracles, which our Saviour did, those few only, which are written, are preserved and believed; those infinitely more, which St. John tells us he did, that were not written, are intirely forgot; and therefore, tho' the first *Christians*, who saw and heard those things, might be obliged to hold them, yet we cannot be so, who have no possible means of knowing them. But since there was so great danger, as appears by the things mentioned in these texts, that what was trusted to oral tradition, should be absolutely lost; have we not great reason to conclude, that God in his providence took care, that all that was necessary to be believed, should be plainly written; and that among them, we shall find some direction to a living infallible guide (if such a guide was designed us) that we may believe, and that believing we may have life.

Nothing then remains, but to examine what the gentleman has said against the sense, in which I understand those texts of Scripture, which are usually urged

urged in this question. But, *What are we now to do?* Judging for myself, of the meaning of Scripture, is it seems an offence against it, or as he calls it, *ruling my rule*. I confess I did think the use of a rule to be, that those, to whom it is a rule, should judge by it, whether such things, as ought to agree with it, do so, or not; and I did not imagine, that it was a presumption, to pretend to understand our rule, so far as is necessary to that end; or that understanding a rule, is ruling the rule; which if it be, How can a rule be of any use to us? That is, indeed, How can it be a rule? But why is it, that private persons cannot understand such things, as seem plain in the Scriptures? Were those things understood by the people, when our Saviour or his Apostles spoke them? If they were, could not the Evangelists write the same things, in words as intelligible, or in the same words, in which they were spoke? If they could, what reason is there to doubt, that they would? or, to think the same things are less intelligible, when they are written, than when they were spoken? 'Tis true, the Scriptures have been misunderstood, or perverted, and that in matters of great importance: but this is no argument, that they are not plain in such things; for those, who have misinterpreted them, have not done it, by adhering to the plain and obvious sense of them; but, either by expounding plain texts, in a different sense from the most literal meaning of them, when there was nothing in the known nature of the thing, that required it; or, by determining obscure texts, to a certain sense, as agreed best with their prejudices. And perhaps there are none more in danger of being misled by these means, than those, who submit their judgments to a church, that professes to have another rule besides the Scriptures, by which they may rule this rule. However, all the mistakes about the meaning of Scripture only shew the great danger, of being too careless, too curious, or any way

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biased in studying them; for as they must be very liable to err, who will too curiously search into things not plainly revealed, or who establish articles of faith on obscure texts; so there is nothing so plain, that a mind strongly prejudiced may not pervert, or a negligent person misunderstand. My letter, I presume, does not need an infallible interpreter; though the gentleman, for want of a little care, has mistaken my meaning, in more places than I have mentioned.

But after all, whatever may be said against judging for ourselves, How is it avoidable, in the question we are upon? I am enquiring for a living *infallible guide*, and am told, that the *Scriptures* assure me, there is such a guide. I am very glad of it, and desire to see this in the Scriptures. When the texts are produced, I do not find, that they express any such matter. What then, says the gentleman, you must not judge for yourself, what the sense is of those texts. I then desire him to tell me, how I shall know, whether they mean, that the Church is an infallible guide or not, if I must not judge of their meaning. To which I know not what answer he can give me, but this, That I must understand them in the sense, that the Church understands them in. But I reply, I am searching in the Scriptures, whether the Church is an infallible interpreter of them or not. Must I then believe, that she is an infallible interpreter, because the Scriptures say so; and believe the Scriptures say so, because she is their infallible Interpreter? For my part, I know not how to get out of this circle, unless I may take the liberty of judging for myself. And indeed, to what purpose are any arguments brought either from Scripture or tradition, for an infallible guide; or how should we be convinced by them; if we must not judge for ourselves what force they are of? Let us then take a review of those texts of Scripture I had mentioned, with his objections against the sense, in which I understand them.

The first I remarked on was that of St. *John*^r, which is always applied to the *Church*, and in which there is a plain promise of infallibility, to those to whom it is spoke. But I had observed, that there is no more reason to extend one part of the promise, viz. that the *Spirit should lead them into all truth*, to the Successors of the apostles, than the other, that *He should shew them things to come*, which is not pretended to belong to them : and to this the gentleman did not think fit to give any answer.

On the promises in St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, of our Saviour's *being with them to the end of the world*, and the *Spirit's abiding with them for ever*^r, I had observed first, that such expressions are frequently used in the Scriptures, when they must be taken in a restrained sense, not to signify eternally, but perpetually, to the end of their lives, to whom they are spoken. To this he says nothing; but I added, that how far, or to whomsoever these words may be extended, a promise of *being with* any one, signified assistance and protection, but not infallibility; and the reason I gave for saying so, was, That that expression is used in several places of Scripture, for a promise of God's protection to his people. This, he says, *is a poor shift to evade the force of those terms*. Whereas I thought, that examining in what sense an expression, found in one text, is used in other places of Scripture, is so far from being a shift to evade, that it is the best shift we can make, to find out the importance of any disputed expression. But it seems, that what those terms signify in other places, is not the rule of their meaning here, unless I can prove, that they *do not* signify something else here, when CHRIST employs them to express his consolatory promises to his sorrowful church. This task of proving, that a thing is *not said*, or what it does *not mean*, the gentleman is frequently putting me upon : But I hope he will think

^r John xvi. 13

^r See Deut. xv. 17. Epist. to Philem.

me a little more reasonable, if I rather require of him to prove, that those terms *do* signify something else here; for till that is done, their meaning in other places will be a very good rule to judge by of their meaning here, tho' employed to express Christ's consolatory promises to his afflicted Church. For why, I pray, can nothing but a promise of infallibility comfort her? Are not God's promises of assistance and protection sufficiently consolatory to her? If he thinks so, I should be tempted to desire a proof from him, that they *are not*: but, I hope, he has higher thoughts of such divine favours, than to attempt that, or to need any proof from me that they are. If then a promise of God's assistance and protection may be a consolatory promise to his sorrowful Church; and that those expressions of God's *being with* any one, of his never leaving, or forsaking them, do in other places signify his providence in assisting and protecting them, but not infallibility (tho' they may signify here a more than *ordinary* providence; for I did not intend that word in so strict a sense, as he seems to take it) what reason is there to think, they have a different signification here, when *Christ* employs them to comfort his sorrowful Church? Is there not rather all reason to think they have not, unless, as I said, it be plainly proved, that they must signify something else here?

On that expression in St. *Matthew*^r, *Tell the Church*, he says, *I am too bold in affirming, that it is meant of private differences in civil matters; and that beathen and publican signify no more than a man sued at the King's-Bench*. As to that part, *Let him be to thee as a beathen, or a publican*, I was the less exact in expressing my thoughts of it, because my subject only required me to observe, what kind of matters our Saviour there enjoins them to refer to the Church. But when I said, that those, who re-

^r Matt. xviii. 17.

fused to submit their differences to the judgment of the Church, might be prosecuted in temporal courts, I did not mean, that heathen and publican signified *no more* than a man sued at the *King's-Bench*; but on the contrary, that the reason, why he might be so prosecuted, was, because he was to be looked on as a very ill, and incorrigible man, (such as the *Jews* thought the *Heatbens* and *Publicans* were) and no longer to be considered as a member of the Church.

But as to the matters, which our Saviour commands them to refer to the Church, whatever the gentleman thinks he *means*, I would appeal even to himself, whether our Saviour's words, *If thy brother trespass against thee*, are not usually spoken of injuries done by one man to another, either in his goods, person, or reputation: And if they are so, let any indifferent person judge, whether there is most boldness in affirming, as I do, that our Saviour meant what he said, and meant nothing else; or in supposing, as he does, that our Saviour did *not mean* what he *did say*. But perhaps it may be again required of me to prove, that the words here *do not* mean something else, than they used to signify in other places; a task I desire to be excused from. However, though it is more than necessary, I will offer at something like a proof, that our Saviour did intend what he did say, *i. e.* that private differences should be referred to the judgment of the Church, or that assembly of Christians, which the contending persons were members of. For why else does St. Paul so severely blame the *Corinthians*, for going to Law before the unjust, and not before the Saints. And § 6. *But brother goeth to Law with brother, and that before the unbelievers*. I suppose it will not be said, that it was about matters of Faith, that St. Paul reproves them for going before the unbelievers: And whether it was on the ac-

count of any infallible authority in the Church, that he would have them submit their differences to the judgment of the Saints, or only for fear of giving scandal to unbelievers, let the whole discourse determine, particularly observing the 5th verse, *Is it so, that there is not one wise man among you? No not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren?* And § 7. *Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* It seems then St. Paul would have them bring their causes before the Saints, (*Tell the Church*) not because they could not judge amiss, but because it was better to submit to the decision of any one, though least esteemed in the Church, as verse 4. or to *take wrong*, than to give scandal by their quarrels, to those that were *without*. And why our Saviour's words, which seem so plainly to express the same thing, must be understood in another sense, I see no reason but to serve an hypothesis.

I come now to the last text I had considered, which is the first taken notice of in the answer, *viz.* Christ's promise to his Church, *That the gates of Hell shall not prevail against her*. And here the gentleman desires it should be observed, how I cavil at the term *prevail*, which he says I like not, and assigns a reason why I don't like it, because, says he, "If it is allowed, that the Church shall not be prevailed upon by the powers of Hell, then it is clear error (a hellish power) shall not prevail against her, which is the same thing, as that she shall not fall into error." To this I answer, first, That I did not intend to cavil at the word, by saying, that in the original it signified an entire victory, but only to express what I understood by it. And next, that if I had done so, it would have been upon some better reason than to avoid the consequences of it; for I assure him, I have no

more laid it down for a principle, That the Church *is not infallible*, than I would have others do, that she *is* infallible. But I began my search with a full persuasion, that my eternal salvation depended on my judging with sincerity of the arguments on both sides, especially of those, which are urged from the Holy Scriptures. But whether the gentleman will believe this, or not, he might have seen by my reasoning on this text, towards the end of my letter, that I needed not to cavil at the word *prevail*, for fear of the consequence he draws from it; for it is there very plain, that I do not allow that consequence. So far am I from taking errors prevailing against the church to be the same thing with her falling into error, that I have there supposed, that *dangerous errors* may be in the Church, whilst she retains all truths *necessary to Salvation*; and then I enquire, how, whilst she retains all such truths (tho' with a mixture of many errors) the gates of Hell (supposing that to mean error) can be said to *prevail against her*. So that I could not cavil at the term, *prevail*, to avoid a consequence which I did not, nor do yet see; and if he had a mind to convince me of it, he should not have thought it sufficient barely to affirm, what I had desired a proof of, *viz.* That if ever any error should be received in the Church, the gates of Hell would prevail against her. 'Tis plain indeed, as he says in another place, *That if ever she should make shipwreck of her faith, she ceases to be a Church*; but it is not so plain, that every error is a shipwreck of the faith. The Church of *Pergamos* is told, that she *had not denied the Faith**, though there were a few things against her, the Doctrine of *Balaam*, and that of the *Nicolaitans*, which doubtless was a very erroneous one, since Christ says he *hates it*. The *Jesuits*, the *Dominicans*, and the *Franciscans*, will be

* Revel. ii. 13, 14, 15.

allowed,

allowed, I suppose, to have the Faith; and yet either the *Dominicans*, or the other two, must hold an error, since they hold things contrary to each other. And why the whole Church may not as well keep the Faith (and *so the gates of Hell not prevail against her*) though she should hold some errors, I see not. Were not the doctrines of the *Millennium*, and of the necessity of the *Eucharist* for infants, errors, which once were generally receiv'd in the Church? Had then the gates of Hell prevailed against her? If not, then the promise, that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church, is not the same, as that she shall not fall into error, notwithstanding error's being (as he tells us) a hellish power. And I desire the Gentleman to consider, whether by insisting on the word *Hell*, making it to signify error, as a hellish power, according to the importance of that word in *English*, he has not given me just occasion to cavil at that term? unless he thinks the meaning of the word in the original is not the rule of its meaning here; for no doubt he is not to learn, that the word translated *Hell* has not the same signification in the original, as the term *Hell* commonly stands for in our language. And if by *Hell*, should be understood the *grave*, and, by the gates to it, death or destruction, what would become of his *hellish power*? But let that phrase signify what powers he pleases (as it very likely includes every power, that would oppose the Church) the promise plainly is, that none of them should overcome, or destroy her; for what else is to prevail against her? Nor is this sense, I suppose, disallowed by him: the difference between us is rather in this, That he thinks the Church is destroyed, or that she ceases to be a Church, if she has any error in her; and that therefore that promise includes, that she shall not err. Whereas I do not see, but that the building may remain firm enough

on its foundation, and lose nothing essential to it, though *wood*, and *hay*, and *strubble*, should be superadded: and till it is proved, that every error destroys the being of the Church, that text will make nothing for her infallibility. Thus I have enlarged on my reasons for that sense, in which I understand those places of Scripture, that are chiefly urged in this question; and I dare appeal to *Roman Catholics* themselves, whether they would not have understood them in the same sense, if they had not first laid down for a principle, that they must believe them in the sense they are taught by their infallible Church. And whether that be a right disposition, for seeking the true meaning of those texts, from which we would learn, if she is infallible, or not, let any unprejudiced person judge. And now I think all, that is material, has been spoke to; for I have shewn, *First*, That his chief argument, why Protestants should own the Church infallible in all her decisions, is built on a wrong supposition, *viz.* that they believe her infallible in all her decisions concerning Scripture; which since they do not, that argument, which runs through the whole paper, is of no force. *Secondly*, I have shewn, That his great objection to my arguments against an infallible guide, *viz.* That they equally overthrow the infallibility of Scripture, neither is just, or, if it were, would be of any use toward establishing the authority of the Church. On the contrary, I have shewn, that by supposing (as he plainly does) that my arguments are good against the Scriptures, he has overthrown the infallible authority of the church; for he has not pretended to a greater evidence from tradition of the infallibility of the church, than we have of the divine authority of Scripture; and I have maintained, that we cannot have an equal evidence of it from tradition. So that, if my arguments are good against the Scriptures, they are certainly good against the infallibility

lity of the Church; and if they are not good against the Scriptures (as I have shewn they are not) then his objection is groundless; and either way my arguments will remain in their full force against a living infallible guide; this objection being so unlucky, as to do his cause no service, whether true or false. And thus the authority of the church being again reduced to a trial by Scripture, I have shewn, *Thirdly*, That the sense, in which I understand the text urged for her infallibility, is the most plain and obvious sense of them, according to the usual signification of the words (which is *St. Austin's* rule to understand them by, when there is nothing in that sense absurd, or impious, to force us to seek another) and no proof has been offered, that these texts ought to be understood in another sense. But I am put on the unreasonable task of proving in one place, that the words *do not*; and in another, am accused of boldness for affirming, that they do signify, what they used to stand for; and to the most important, which I had shewn must be limited to the Apostles, nothing at all is said. So that I am as far to seek as ever for a living infallible guide, finding no direction to such a guide in the Scriptures, nor any tradition sufficient to give a moral certainty of it.

And now (tho' it is foreign to my subject, yet being greatly to my purpose in entering on it) I would mention a consequence I draw from the little certainty I have found in the arguments for a living guide; which is, That finding it most rational, to take the Scriptures for our guide, there seems to me much greater safety in the communion of Protestants, than in that of the church of *Rome*, for this reason, That in all those practices, by which they differ in their way of worship, as *adoration of the host*, *prayer to saints*, *Worship of images*, *half-communion*, &c. every ordinary understanding may see,

fee, that these things are not plainly contained in the Scriptures; and that therefore they cannot be necessary, which the church of *Rome* allows they are not; whereas nothing less than an infallible interpreter can assure us, that they are not contrary to the *Scripture*, and consequently very dangerous.

A
D E F E N C E
O F
Mr. LOCKE'S ESSAY
O F
Human Understanding.

W H E R E I N

Its Principles, with reference to *Morality*, *Revealed Religion*, and the *Immortality of the Soul*, are considered and justified: In answer to some REMARKS on that Essay.

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