

RE-UNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

(A Series of Lectures delivered in St Joseph's Church, Temuka, by the Very Rev Father LE MENANT DES CHESNAYS, S.M.)

LECTURE XV.—ON PURGATORY.

"It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins" (II Macchab. xii, 46).

THE word "purgatory," from the Greek *pur*, which signifies "fire," and the Latin *purgo*, to cleanse, to purify, 'to expiate,' implies the idea of cleansing and purifying by fire. Purgatory, therefore, is, according to its etymology, a place or state of purification and expiation by fire. According to the Catholic teaching, it is a place or state of temporary expiation, where souls, leaving this world with sanctifying grace and in friendship with God, yet with the guilt of small sins or without having sufficiently satisfied the divine justice for the sins of their former life whose guilt and eternal punishment had been forgiven, finish their expiation, and get perfectly cleansed and purified in order to become fit to enter heaven and appear before the divine Majesty. Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, and the sceptics of the last century say that purgatory was a fiction, a pious fraud of the monks. The first attack against purgatory was made in the fifth century by Arius, who denied the efficacy of prayers for the dead, and was refuted by St Augustine (St Augustine, I, 2; De Haeres., c, liii), which evidently shows that until then never did any Christian entertain any doubt about the existence of purgatory or the efficacy of prayers for the dead. This fact alone is a strong presumptive argument in favour of the Catholic doctrine on this point. The next attack was not made until the twelfth century, by Peter de Bruis, an apostate monk, who renewed the error of Aetius, and was refuted by Peter of Oluny (Peter Cluniac Epist. ad Episc. Arrelatens). In the same and two following centuries the Albigenses, the Waldenses and the Hussites violently denounced the dogma of purgatory. Luther, at first, firmly believed in it. In his disputation at Leipsic in 1519, he publicly declared his conviction: "I firmly believe and I am not afraid to confess that I know that there is a purgatory; I am easily persuaded that the Scriptures mention it; I have no doubt about this matter, and I do not wish to favour heretics or the Bohemians." "*Ego credo fortiter, imo ausim dicere, scio purgatorium esse facile persuasorem in Scripturis de eo fieri mentionem; nolo mihi fieri suspicionem, quasi faveam haereticis aut Bohemis.*" He further added: "All that I know about purgatory is that the souls detained in it are assisted by our prayers and good works." "*Ego nil de purgatorio novi, nisi animas ibi patientes nostris operibus aut orationibus juvandas*" (Disput. Lipsicae. anno 1519 publice habita). From this public declaration it cannot be controverted: (1) That Luther most firmly believed in the existence of purgatory. "*Ego credo fortiter, imo ausim dicere, scio purgatorium esse.*" (2) He was persuaded that purgatory was mentioned in the Scriptures. "*Facile persuasorem in Scripturis de eo fieri mentionem.*" (3) He considered the contrary opinion as heretical. "*Noli mihi fieri suspicionem quasi faveam haereticis aut Bohemis.*" (4) He believed that the souls of purgatory could be helped by the prayers and good works of the faithful. "*Ego nil de purgatorio novi, nisi animas ibi pati, nostris operibus aut orationibus juvandas.*" Can anything be more clear, explicit or straightforward be desired. What are we to think of a man, who, a little after, at the Diet of Smalcald, declared quite the contrary, and affirmed boldly "that purgatory was only a mask of the devil." "*Purgatorium mera diaboli larva est*" (Ex Art. Convent. Smalcald). Is it not apparent that when Luther, at the Conference of Smalcald, called purgatory "a mask of the demon," "*mera diaboli larva,*" he said so not through conviction but to suit his new and favourable fiction of justification by faith alone; for if we are justified by faith only, there is no need of purification of any kind either in this world or the next. I leave you to decide if a man who through expediency thus contradicts himself is worthy of credit? If he be an honourable man? And what are we to think of the thousands and thousands who still stick to his opinion? With regard to purgatory, two things only have been defined by the Church, namely, (1) that there is a purgatory, and (2) that the souls in purgatory may be assisted by the suffrages of the living. "*Purgatorium esse, animasque ibi detentas fidelium suffragiis potissimum veri acceptabili altaris sacrificio juvari*" (Conc. Trident. Sess. xxv). The Church has never defined what is the quality, intensity, duration of the pains of purgatory. She has not defined where purgatory is situated, what amount of suffrages is sufficient to deliver a soul out of purgatory. The only way to get an approximate idea of those things is by the writings of the Fathers and eminent theologians, and the value of their opinion rests exclusively on the proofs they give to substantiate or defend it. Let us now fairly and impartially examine whether purgatory exists or whether it is a fiction, a pious fraud of the monks, as Voltaire pretended, or, again, a mask, a snare of the devil, as Luther would have it, or a gross superstition, as most separated Churches do still hold, or as modern rationalists think: Is it a pagan custom adopted by the

Church? a pious illusion invented to console the living, who are loth and reluctant to believe that they are separated altogether from their departed relations and friends, and can have no communication with them? Is it, in fine, a fond illusion without any solid proof to justify it? Let us see. Although it is historically certain that ancient nations believed in a place of temporary punishment after death, it does not logically follow that Christians borrowed their belief in a middle state from the pagans. The Jews had in horror and abomination all pagan customs, yet they firmly believed in a place of expiation in the next life because this belief had been handed down to them by an immemorial custom or tradition resting on primitive divine revelation. The dogma of purgatory was revealed by God from the beginning of the world. It was anterior to paganism, which only disfigured and transformed it by adding to it ridiculous fictions. The universal agreement of all nations about this dogma cannot be satisfactorily explained without a primitive divine revelation, which, in process of time became confused, and was shrouded in fictitious fables, through which, however, the fundamental original revelation may be clearly discerned by an observant eye. That we all love our departed relations and friends, and cannot easily be persuaded that we cannot hold any communication with them, is, also, a universal belief. The tears we shed over our dead friends, the pompous funeral, the prayers we offer for them, etc., are but the expression of that intimate, universal, irresistible sentiment; the question is: Who gave us that sentiment? Is it not God, the Author of our nature? As this sentiment existed at all times and in all places, its origin must be Divine, and from it we may infer that the bond of union between the living and the dead is not a fiction but a reality. This beautiful thought is borrowed from St Augustine in his book "On the care of the dead,"—"S. Aug. Liler De Cura pro Mortuis." This bond is an article of faith, and is contained in the Apostles' Creed, and formulated in these words:—"I believe the Communion of Saints." The souls in purgatory are holy, having died with sanctifying grace; they are in friendship with God, although not pure enough to appear before His Divine Majesty, and are included in the Communion of Saints; whence, we are to conclude that it was not the love for our deceased friends which made us invent purgatory, but it is the dogma of the Communion of Saints which intensified this universal sentiment, given us by God from the beginning, as we shall directly prove. It is historically certain that the belief in purgatory and in prayers for the dead is universal, both as to time and place. Let us give a few proofs. The Stoic philosophers believed in a state of expiation after death, which they called "Empyresin," or purification by fire. Plato, in his book on the soul, admits of the purifying fire of the next life, proportionate to the guilt of each, "*Ratione delictorum diversa ignis flamma comburendi conjiciuntur.*" The doctrine of transmigration of souls of Zoroaster is a kind of purgatory or purification before souls can be admitted to final bliss. The Israelites believe in prayers for the dead, which they call "El-Katma." The Mahomedans frequently visit the tombs of their dead relations and friends, and offer prayers for them, as may be seen in the Arabic version of the "Aikoran,"—"Mahometani defunctorum corpora aderunt ac pro ipsorum salute orant" (Maraccius in Aikoran Arabico Lib. III. C. xxx). The Romans, as appears from the VI Book of the Aeneid of Virgil had the same tradition (Aeneid V. 441). Homer, in his III Book of the Iliad declares it was likewise the belief of the Greeks in his time (Homer, Iliad iii). Who has not heard of the love of the patriarchs of old for their dead? The Jews offered a sacrifice for the dead four times a year. On that day, the High Priest, from a platform, read, out of a scroll of papyrus or parchment, the names of the dead, and invited the people to unite with him whilst he would be offering a sacrifice for the repose of their souls. Modern Jews have kept up the tradition of their ancestors and still pray for their dead. We read, in the Old Testament, that after a great battle Judas Macchabeus had an expiatory sacrifice offered for his fallen companions; whence the inspired penman concludes that: "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sin" (II. Macchab. XII.; xvi). But where were those dead for whom it was a holy and wholesome thought to pray? Not in heaven; if they had been there, they would not have been in need to be prayed for. Not in hell; had they been in hell, prayers for them would have been useless; therefore, they were in a place of temporary expiation, and this purifying place is what the Catholic Church calls purgatory. All writers on sacred Hermeneutics consider this passage of the II. Book of the Macchabees as perfectly authentic. (See Natal. Alex. Hist. Vet. Test. VI. a Dissertat. art. VIII. D. Calmet. Praefat. in II. Lir. Macchab.) It is found in all the ancient manuscripts and printed copies, and the Church has received the II. Books of the Macchabees among the Canonical Scriptures. St Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, speaks of the custom, which existed among the Jews, to offer purifying sacrifices for the dead, and he makes use of this custom to confirm the dogma of the existence of a future life (I. Cor. V., xxiv). Again, we may ask: what are those dead for whom we may profitably offer sacrifices? It cannot be the saints, nor the damned; it must, consequently, be the souls in purgatory.