

Leader, p. 33. Notes, p. 34. Topics, pp. 22-23. Complete Story, p. 11. The End of a Famous Newspaper, p. 13. The Montessori Method, p. 17. The Church in N.Z., p. 19. Notes of Travel (by J.K.), p. 25. Cardinal Gasquet, p. 49. Sunday Afternoon Readings, p. 51. Pope Pius XI, p. 57.

MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIII TO THE "N.Z. TABLET."

Pergant Directores et Scriptores New Zealand Tablet, Apostolica Benedictione confortati, Religionis et Justitiae causam promoveri per vias Veritatis et Pacis.

LEO XIII, P.M.

Die 4 Aprilis, 1900.

TRANSLATION.—Fortified by the Apostolic Blessing, let the Directors and Writers of the *New Zealand Tablet* continue to promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.

April 4, 1900.

LEO XIII., Pope.

The New Zealand Tablet

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1925.

RELIGION: HISTORICAL PHASES

BEFORE dealing with the Christian religion revealed by God and imposed on man, we must call attention to the fact, attested by so many historical documents, that there has always been on earth, from the beginning of man's history, a religion which was supernatural and revealed by God. It went through various stages of development in the course of the centuries, and its phases are called the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian religion. This week we shall devote ourselves to giving a clear idea of these great historical phases, treating them from a historical viewpoint, without going into, for the present, the question of their divinity.

Primitive or Patriarchal Religion.—Almighty God imposed on our first parents at the beginning of their existence a religion which contained doctrines revealed and supernatural. It included, for example, the existence of good and bad angels, and, after the fall, the hope of a Redeemer; it also contained certain precepts, such as the observation of the Sabbath, and the manner and nature of sacrifice. This religion was binding upon all men; until Christ came it was sufficient for the human race to enable it to attain its end, with the exception of the Jewish people who from the time of the revelation made to Moses were obliged to practise the Mosaic religion. Conscience and tradition were the safeguards of the Patriarchal religion. The Natural Law was inscribed on the consciences of men, and by tradition, passed from generation to generation; the knowledge of truths and precepts revealed by God was to be maintained. However, owing to vice and disregard of conscience the Natural Law became obscure in the hearts of men, while at the same time the tradition of revealed truth was altered and corrupted as centuries went by.

Then, God chose Abraham and his posterity to preserve religion amidst so much corruption. Through the patriarchs he confirmed previous revelations and added new truths and precepts. Thus it happens that the primitive religion is sometimes called patriarchal.

Mosaic Religion.—Man continued to rebel against God and to despise His laws. Vice and idolatry became common. The belief of the future Redeemer often lost its importance for sinful generations. In His mercy God chose Moses and the prophets who came after him to revive the knowledge of the Natural Law and to impose new and necessary precepts. Bible history tells us how the revelation was made on Mount Sinai in a most striking manner, and how the Ten Commandments were promulgated amid thunder and lightning, calculated to impress them on the hearts and minds of the people. The patriarchal religion was thus revived, amplified, and perfected for the Hebrew people. It contained the doctrines and precepts revealed through Moses and the prophets who succeeded him. It was designed to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, or promised Redeemer, and it was to last only until He came. It was not a perfect religion; for it was meant to be a shadow of the substance yet to come; a figure of the perfect fulfilment under Christ.

The Christian Religion.—In the fulness of time Christ was born, coming into the world to save mankind, and to establish a religion which would elevate them and make them fit for the dignity of being adopted children of God and heirs to His Kingdom. The religion founded by Christ is the Christian religion. It fulfils and perfects the Mosaic and Patriarchal religions, and embraces a complete collection of truths, precepts, counsels, and supernatural aids. As Christ died to save all mankind, so His religion is for all men and for all time unto the end of the world. All are bound to belong to it, and no man who refuses to embrace it, once he knows it, can be saved. The believers are called the members of the True Church, that is, "The whole congregation of faithful Christians who believing the same truths, receiving the same sacraments, professing the same faith, are united under one visible Head on earth, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Pope of Rome, who is successor of St. Peter."

It will readily be seen that all three phases are one and the same religion developed and perfected by God during the course of time. God is the author of them all; they all aim at the same supernatural end, the happiness of Heaven; the Redeemer—to come, or having come—is the centre of them all. The development is like that of the plant from the seed and of the full grown tree with its beautiful spreading foliage from the plant.

The account we have given is supported by history and by the traditions of nations. Apart here from a long reasoning, we may say that just as the Christian religion which bears the name of its Founder is divine, so, too, the voice of the ages and of the peoples proclaim the divine origin of the patriarchal and Mosaic religions also. Religion then has

a supernatural origin. And as all religions, even pagan, are derived by traditions, however corrupt they may be, from the primitive religion, they are all, vaguely and incoherently perhaps, a recognition of the existence of God. It is asserted by historians and travellers that there exists no nation so barbarous that it has not an idea of God and as a rule of a future life, together with notions of right and wrong. Undoubtedly this testimony of the whole human race is at once an argument against Atheists and a proof that Atheism is unnatural and inhuman.

DIVORCE IN THE FREE STATE

Dail Eireann is to be congratulated upon its decision to prevent divorce in the Free State. A Dublin message under date February 12 informs us that Mr. Cosgrove moved that the Standing Orders Committee be instructed to set up rules which would debar divorce *a vinculo matrimonii*. Speaking to his motion, Mr. Cosgrove said the majority of Southern Irishmen held that the marriage sacrament could not be dissolved, and that any attempt to legalise divorce would strike at the root of Irish social life. Professor Thrift opposed the motion on the ground that it was unfair to the Protestant minority, and that it would be a further barrier against re-union with Northern Ireland. The motion, however, was carried, and the message ends with the pathetic little comment that there is now no means by which persons in Southern Ireland can promote a Bill in the House of Lords for divorce. The objections of Professor Thrift are neither sound nor serious. It is not the function of a Government to provide facilities for breaking the law of God. No one would consider the Government justified in passing a Bill enabling people to break the Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." Then why bring forward measures enabling them to break any other law? All the Commandments come from the same God Who decrees that we shall obey them all. He did not give to anyone the power to say, "I will obey this one, but that one I shall disobey." Professor Thrift has yet to learn that Government, in its sphere of action, must uphold the imperishable law of God at all times, even at the risk of offending those who wish to be a law unto themselves. The question of injustice to the Protestant minority in the Free State cannot seriously be entertained. The law does not affect the whole of the Protestant minority, but only that part of it that wishes to be rid of its wives or husbands and to enter into new alliances. It is a libel on the Protestant population in the Free State to say that it desires facilities for divorce or would make use of them if they were instituted. In any case it would be just as logical for would-be divorcees to complain of the injustice of the Government in refusing to legalise divorce as for a burglar or a footpad to complain of the injustice of the Government in refusing to legalise theft and burglary. Professor Thrift, and those who think with him, evidently regard the Government as a servant of the people, an institution to pander to the whims, prejudices, and follies

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