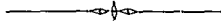


impressions produced by some aspects of his life and work. That he profoundly affected the Church of the Northern Province is certain, and, as we have said, it was impossible for any character as striking as his to preside over it so long without affecting it; that he left no special memorial behind him, on which a man might lay his hand and say, "This was a great Archbishop's work," is certain also. But, essentially as well as externally, he was a great Archbishop; he ruled, it must be owned, not merely reigned. When he died, still in harness, still busy, he left no one who did not think of him with respect, and many who cannot now think of him without affection and love.



#### ART. IV.—THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH.

"Hear the Church."

FEW persons who were present at the Church Congress at Folkestone can have been satisfied with the discussion on the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Church. A large portion of the audience, during the reading of the papers, appeared, indeed, greatly dissatisfied, saddened and perplexed. This was partly the result of the lack of definition: no one attempted to define what he meant by "the Church," and until we be agreed upon the meaning of the terms we use, we only beat the air in vague speech and empty discussion. We know what the canon of Scripture is. What and where is the canon of Church authority? This is no irreverent inquiry. The first essential on the part of those who put forward lofty claims on behalf of *the Church* is to define precisely the meaning of the word, and where the authoritative teaching of the Church is to be found, unless it is answered that we should all become possessed of the unintelligent unreasoning faith of the collier, which a Roman cardinal so approves. We are indebted to Dr. Salmon ("Infallibility of the Church") for the story. "A poor collier, when asked by a learned man what he believed, repeated the Creed, and when asked what more he believed answered, 'I believe what the Church believes.' 'And what does the Church believe?' 'The Church believes what I believe.' 'And what do the Church and you both believe?' 'The Church and I believe the same thing.'"

The second serious defect of the discussion was the absence of any special reference to the plain teaching of the Church of England upon the question at issue. It is the witness of the

Church of England to the supreme and sole authority of Holy Scripture in matters of faith, which we propose to bring forward.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a new, but a very ancient controversy, fought out and settled, as far as English Churchmen are concerned, three centuries ago. And what, we ask, is the voice of the Church of which we are members upon this subject, and where is it to be heard? We know no place, no book, excepting the articles, homilies and formularies of the Church of England. Here the very question of the relative authority of the Church and of the Bible, in articles of faith, is itself settled by the authority of the Church. Nor is it open to any Churchman to deride that voice because it is the voice of the sixteenth century, for *if the Church has a voice* that voice demands attention at one period as much as at another. The Bishop of London has recently reminded the clergy of the diocese that men who believe in the continuous life, or in the living voice of the Church, must not pick and choose the periods when they elect to listen to that voice. This were the assertion of private judgment with a vengeance. The authority of the Church in 1661 requires the same respectful attention as the authority of the Church in 1461, or 461, or any other period.

I. Let us call our witnesses: 1. The Articles of Religion, to which every clergyman at his ordination declares his unfeigned assent and consent. Hear the Sixth Article. "Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor can be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or necessary to salvation."

Hear the Eighth Article, concerning the creeds. By those who contend that the Church hath authority in articles of faith, it is often said, as if the statement were unanswerable, "You believe the creeds upon the authority of the Church. You do not find your Creed in the Bible, why do you repeat it?" Hear the answer of our Church in her Eighth Article: "The three creeds ought thoroughly to be received and believed." Why, because the Church teaches them? Not at all; "because they may be proved by most certain warrant of Holy Scripture." That is the reason we accept the creeds.

Hear the Twentieth Article. It affirms that "the Church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith." This we believe firmly, for unless by authority "some rules for public worship were made, decency and order could never exist in a Church."

There must also be authority to declare truth, to maintain

---

<sup>1</sup> For the witness of the "Primitive Church" to the same truth *vide* Dean Goode's "Divine Rule of Faith."

truth, and to reject from Communion such as are in grievous error. The Church must have this power. Of course the Church may err (see Art. xix.), but every Church must possess this authority.

But as this Article further affirms the "Church must not ordain anything contrary to God's Word written, nor explain one place of Scripture so as to contradict another."

"For example," to quote Bishop Harold Browne, "it would mean that forms of prayer, clerical vestments, and the like, are within the province of the Church to decide upon; but image worship or the adoration of the host, being contrary to the commandments of God, are beyond her power to sanction. It denies to the Church the power to initiate in matters of faith. The authority of the Church is ministerial, and its decisions must be guided by the written Word of God. In this respect it is not unlike the authority or influence of a parent. Thus the Twentieth Article bears witness to the fact that Holy Scripture is the sole rule of faith."

2. We next bring forward the catechism called Nowell's Catechism, published in 1570, "unanimously approved and allowed" by Convocation, and also by the 79th Canon.

"The Christian religion," it says, "is to be learned from no other source than from the Heavenly Word of God Himself, which He has delivered unto us in the Holy Scriptures." In this catechism I find the question: "Do you affirm that all things necessary to godliness and salvation are contained in God's Word written?" Answer: "Certainly, for it would be the part of intolerable ungodliness and madness to think that God had left an imperfect doctrine, or that man were able to make perfect what He had left imperfect."

3. Let us next listen to the Homilies, issued 1562. The very first Homily is called "a fruitful exhortation to the reading and knowledge of Holy Scripture." It is too long to quote; the teaching of it may be gathered from these sentences: "There is no truth nor doctrine necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation, but that is, or may be, drawn out of that fountain and well of truth. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testaments, and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imaginations, for our justification and salvation. In Holy Scripture is *fully* contained what we ought to do and what to eschew, what to believe, what to love. The great clerk and godly preacher, St. Chrysostom, saith, 'Whatsoever is required for the salvation of man is *fully* contained in the Scripture of God.'"

In the third Homily for Rogation Week we find this language: "Nowhere can we more certainly search for the

knowledge of this will of God but in the Holy Scriptures. We see what vanity the school doctrine is mixed with, for in this word they sought not the will of God, but rather the will of reason, the path of the Fathers, the practice of the Church. Let us, therefore, read and revolve the Holy Scripture. In the Holy Scripture find we Christ; in Christ find we God; and contrariwise St. Hierome saith, 'the ignorance of Scripture is the ignorance of Christ.'

On the other hand, there is no Homily on the authority of the Church, nor the remotest hint given that we are to seek her interpretation of God's Word written.

4. The Fourth Witness we summon is the Service for the Ordination of Priests, found not only in the second, but in the first Prayer-Book of Edward. "Be you persuaded," asks the bishop of the candidate for the priesthood, "that the Holy Scripture contains sufficiently all doctrine necessary for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ, and are you determined with the same Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation but that you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Holy Scriptures?" Answer: "I am so persuaded, and am so determined, by God's grace."

Thus the voice of the English Church, wherever that voice can be authoritatively heard, in her Articles, in her Canons, in her Homilies, in her Services, everywhere proclaims that the sole rule of a Christian's faith is to be found in Holy Scripture, and nowhere else.

It might be shown from the writings of the great English divines, like Jewel, Jeremy Taylor, Hooker, and even Laud, that the same truth is resolutely upheld. Listen to the language of Bishop Jewel, whom Hooker describes as "the worthiest divine that Christendom hath bred for some hundreds of years." "Oh, that in all the controversies," exclaims Jewel, "that lie between us and them they would remit the judgment to God's Word, so should we soon agree and come together, for like as the errors of a clock be revealed by the constant course of the sun, even so the errors of the Church are revealed by the everlasting and infallible Word of God." Again he says: "It is rash to believe without the warrant and direction of the Scriptures. It is neither devotion nor Catholic faith, but foolish rashness."

Archbishop Laud was not a man that many of us would care to follow as a guide, and he certainly took exalted views of the Church and Church authority. He would, no doubt, advocate a certain use of tradition—the acceptance of the interpretation given to Scripture by the general witness of the best writers

of the ancient Church. But even Laud will admit no infallible rule but the Scripture. "I admit no ordinary rule left in the Church of secure and infallible verity, and so of faith, but the Scripture."<sup>1</sup> The Church is only the servant of God, and has no credit nor authority but from it. Yet in the nineteenth century, and in the English Church, there are men who out-Laud Laud, who go beyond what even he would consent unto, who maintain that the Bible is not sufficient to rest our faith upon, that our faith "only stands firm on these two feet—first, the Church; second, the Bible."<sup>2</sup>

The contrary we see is the teaching of our Church—both feet must rest upon the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture.

II. Why, it may be asked, are men not content with the authority of Holy Scripture, and why do they nibble at this essentially corrupt and Romish doctrine concerning the authority of the Church in matters of faith?

(a) There are two principal reasons. First, the necessity of the position. If I have a fondness for certain notions, if I hold, or desire to hold, doctrines not warranted by Holy Scripture, I must seek my warrant elsewhere. It is felt that if you take away Church authority, such doctrines as *transubstantiation*, the *sacrificial character of the Eucharist* and *sacerdotal character of the priesthood* disappear—in short, the *sacerdotal system* goes; it falls at once to the ground; therefore when no proof can be found in Holy Scripture for these doctrines, the authority of the Church is introduced to silence objections. Is it considered a rash assumption that the New Testament Scriptures contain no warrant for the sacramental or sacerdotal system?

It is not our purpose to attempt to prove this position. It may suffice here to refer to Mr. Sadler's own words: "*The sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist most assuredly does not seem prominent in the Scriptures*;"<sup>3</sup> and to Mr. Gore's similar admission: "Ireneus and Clement do not speak of the Christian ministers as priests when Tertullian and Origen do, so that it is only towards the end of the second century that sacerdotal terms began to be regularly applied to the clergy."<sup>4</sup> I would also, in justification of this assertion, draw attention to what has often struck me as not a little remarkable, that every commentator upon the New Testament of any authority has been opposed to Sacerdotalism. Bishops Lightfoot, Ellicott, Westcott, Wordsworth (of Lincoln), Deans Alford and Vaughan,

<sup>1</sup> Laud's "Conference with the Jesuit Fisher."

<sup>2</sup> "The Church and the New Testament," Shaw.

<sup>3</sup> "Church Doctrine, Bible Truth."

<sup>4</sup> Rev. C. Gore's "Christian Ministry."

not to mention commentators of previous generations, like Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, and that prince of commentators, Bengel—what a cloud of witnesses these form against the cast-iron sacramental system! All with one voice join in the clear and celebrated statement of Bishop Lightfoot—“above all, the kingdom of Christ has no Sacerdotal system.”<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that no man can be deeply imbued with the spirit and language of the New Testament Scriptures, and especially St. Paul's Epistles, and pretend to find his authority for the Sacerdotal system in the written Word. Consequently the warrant for it must be sought elsewhere, namely, Church authority. This is one reason men are not satisfied with the authority of the written Word.

(b) Another reason is one with which, at least, we can sympathize. Men see the evils and perplexities consequent, as they think, on private judgment. They see the disastrous consequences arising from a reliance only upon private feelings and assurances, and from entirely dispensing with the witness of the Christian Church. They look at the multitudinous sects in Christendom, and they think they can see a remedy for these divisions and perplexities only in an appeal to some earthly authority. They crave for a visible unity and a visible authority in a great and glorious visible Church on earth, such a unity and such a Church which has never been promised them by their Lord. This is the initial error. The seamless robe is not, as they think, the emblem of the Church, but the wounded body of Christ upon the cross.

Christ was Divine, and He was wounded. His Body, the Church, is Divine, and remains to the end of the dispensation a wounded body. And as of old the Jews were perplexed at a suffering, wounded Christ, so many among us are perplexed at a suffering and wounded Church. But thus it must be. The Son of Man must needs suffer, the body of Christ must needs suffer. That body is “a partaker of Christ's suffering.” Nowhere does our Lord hold out any hope of a glorious united visible Church on earth; on the contrary, it is to be a Church consisting to the end of tares and wheat, good and bad; it is to be a wounded body. Nowhere does Christ suggest a unity enforced by any human authority. He knew that the true power in the region of thought is not authority, but influence. It is influence which is the reigning monarch, not the loud voice of human authority, but the gentle influence of the Holy Spirit, which Christ promised should lead His disciples into all truth. Belief produced by the mere force of authority would have no real value, and Christ neither suggests nor

---

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot's “Christian Ministry.”

teaches it. "The kingdom of Heaven," He said, "is like unto heaven."

By the advocates of "Church authority" it is often advanced, as if it were an unanswerable statement, that "the Church was before the Bible," and by inference that the authority of the Church must at least be co-equal with that of Holy Scripture.

Upon this ambiguous and misleading statement a few general remarks may be made.

(a) We presume it is intended not that the Church was before the Bible, which is clearly absurd, but that the Christian Church existed before the canons of the New Testament Scriptures were finally fixed, a very different thing, and which goes without saying. It would be as true and as sage a remark that the Church was before the Bible was *printed*; for long before the canon of Scripture was fixed, and it has, as Bishop Westcott says, "fixed gradually," there were writings and sayings of the Lord Jesus current among the first Christians. Even the first record in writing of the words and deeds of Christ is not the date of the Word.

As the Word printed is identical with the Word written, so the Word written is identical with the Word spoken. Was the Church before the *Word spoken*?

Baptism surely rests upon the Word of Christ; the Lord's Supper rests upon that Word; the Church rests upon that Word. "The Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. ii. 20). If this be so, how can the Church precede the Word?

(b) The apostles were the Church authority whilst they lived, when they died their words and writings, not their successors, became that authority in articles of faith; for then the Church had gained a permanent position, a fixed literature, and an unerring rule.

(c) It cannot be forgotten that the Apostles based all their teaching upon *the Scriptures of the Old Testament*. To the many who came into his lodging in Rome, St. Paul "expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts xxviii. 23). No doubt the Apostles preached Christ from their personal knowledge of Him. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," but they preached also from a book, and showed from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

(d) It is equally true that the Jewish Church was before the Old Testament Scriptures, and that those Scriptures were constituted after the same manner as the New Testament,

and possessed, though in a greater degree, the same character of incompleteness. The heads of the Jewish Church claimed Church authority and tradition, as distinct from Holy Scripture. That ancient claim was a parallel to the modern claim, and it was emphatically disallowed by Christ. "Ye make the Word of God of none effect by your *traditions*." To every thoughtful mind this must ever appear a very strong objection to modern claims for Church authority. For is not the Christian as likely to be misled by Church authority as the Jew?

What was the final result of the Jewish people being led by the authority of the Church rather than by the voice of conscience and the Word of God? They were *led astray*; they became finally the murderers of the Prince of Life. It is a sad, though instructive, thought that the Son of God was crucified by the "consensus of opinion" of the Jewish Church authorities. Who must not stand in fear before the lofty claims put forward for any human authority, as distinct from God's Word written?

III. Consider the consequence which flows from this doctrine of the necessity of submission to Church authority? Our Lord tells us plainly that the tendency of an unwritten and oral authority is to make void the written Word. The pure and indubitable Word of God is made to give way to fragments of human testimony which few can lay their hands upon or read for themselves. Men bend before an authority which rests upon scraps of sentences in primitive writers, familiar only to students, and upon which students themselves place different interpretations. Gradually the people are detached from God's Word and thrown helplessly and hopelessly into the hands of the teaching class. They are taught to look to the priest rather than to the Word of God for instruction. The conflict passes into a conflict, not between the Church, but between the priest and the Bible. "The Church" is the practical declaration of many a priest, "*c'est moi*." And thus the door is open to error and delusion of every kind and description.

Because we contend for the Bible as the sole rule of faith, we do not, we need not, we dare not, depreciate the Church of Jesus Christ—that great Divine Society which our Lord constituted in the world. That great multitude of men and women who have lived and died in Christ's faith and fear, and who by their lives and words have so often illuminated our darkness, and without whose Christ-reflected light we should be dark indeed. We do not depreciate the Church, because we reverence the Word. If we do not acknowledge her authority as a dictator to govern the will, we do not



despise her sacred influence, or suppose that each man for himself can excogitate his own religion out of the Bible—untaught, unassisted. We bless God for the long line of witnesses to all essential truth which the Christian Church supplies. Amid the misgivings of our minds and the fascinations of the world, we are sustained by the thought that we cling to the same Rock and trust the same Saviour—yes, and rely upon the same Word which “the glorious company of the apostles” and “the holy Church throughout all the world” have long before us clung to and trusted. The Bible and the Church are not opposed. “All truths kiss each other” is the remark of an old Puritan writer. The Bible and the Church are friends. Each is God’s gift for man; each has its own office and work. It is we who set them at variance when we confound their office. They are friends, if we will allow them to be so and confuse not their functions.

The relation of the Church to the Word written is the relation of John the Baptist to the Word Incarnate. “He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John i. 8).

The office of the Word is to give light; the office of the Church is to bear witness to that light. The Church “is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ” (Article xx.). In the language of Bishop Wordsworth, than whom no man had a deeper reverence for the ancient Church and her teaching, “The Church cannot give authority to Scripture. No, the authority of Scripture comes from God, and God only. The light is not from the candlestick, but from the candle; not from the Church, but from the Scriptures, which are the candles which Christ has lighted and set in the Church. But the Church bears testimony to Scripture, and we appeal to that testimony as true.” The Word of God alone is an impregnable rock, and “therefore, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and when the volume of this visible creation will be no more lighted, when all the fair characters now written in earth and sky upon the pages of the book of nature will be effaced and obliterated, and the heavens themselves will depart as a scroll, then the Word of God will remain unchanged. ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away’ (Matt. xxiv. 35).” “Blessed, therefore, is he that heareth and keepeth the sayings of that Book” (Rev. xxii. 7); “blessed indeed is he—blessed for evermore.”<sup>1</sup>

WALTER ABBOTT.

---

<sup>1</sup> On “Inspiration of Holy Scripture.”