

The Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

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THERE are few notes of the character of a Christian Church and of its real relation to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ more clear and unmistakable than the value which it attaches to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. In all the Churches this value is esteemed inestimable and beyond all reckoning. No true Church and no true Christian can depreciate either the one ministry or the other. All are practically agreed upon the necessity of both ministrations, as well as upon their inculcation by Christ Himself, their historic catholicity, and the power which, through the Holy Ghost, they have exercised in the vivification, the edification, and the nourishment of the faithful in all ages.

But while all Churches are agreed upon the priceless value of both the Word and the Sacraments of the Gospel, there is a quite vast divergence of opinion as to their relative value. Some Churches overestimate the Word in relation to the Sacraments; others overestimate the Sacraments in relation to the Word. Some underrate the ministry of preaching, others the ministry of the Sacraments. In some the sacramental ministry overtops the prophetic ministry; in others the prophetic overshadows the sacramental. In the Church of England, with which I am now chiefly concerned, neither ministry is overshadowed or overtopped by the other; both receive, in loyalty to Holy Scripture, their due and full recognition. At the same time, the authorized formularies of the Church of England leave no room for doubt to which of these two ministrations precedence is given. Quite distinctly, and without possibility of doubt, the Church of England places the ministry of the Word before that of the Sacraments. Wherever in the Prayer-Book the phrase "the ministry of the Word and Sacraments" is used, the Word always comes first, the Sacra-

ments second. Nowhere is this order reversed. When a man is ordained to the diaconate, a New Testament is delivered to him by the Bishop, saying: "Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and to preach the same if thou be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself." Part of the functions assigned to him is the assisting of the priest in Divine service, and especially when he ministereth the Holy Communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof, and, in the absence of the priest, to baptize infants. But the stress of the whole office for the Ordering of Deacons is laid on the ministry of the Word. Except in the instances just referred to, the ministry of the Sacraments is not mentioned, whereas that of the Word is again and again emphasized. No man, says the Preface, is to be admitted to the office of deacon unless he be "sufficiently instructed in Holy Scripture." He is to be replenished with the truth of Christ's doctrine. He is to give himself continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. One test of the worth of his ministry, as of that of St. Stephen, is the increase of the Word of God. He is solemnly interrogated as to his unfeigned faith in the Canonical Scriptures, and is pledged diligently to read the same unto the people, as well as to frame and fashion his life and that of his family (the possibility of his being married being postulated) according to the doctrine of Christ. His special commission is to read and preach the Gospel. In studying this office, either by itself as a separate document or in its historical relation to the unreformed offices preceding it, no one can fail to realize the relative weight attached by the reformed Church of England to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments respectively.

Similarly with the Ordering of Priests. The same proportion is here maintained as in the Ordering of Deacons. Priests are to be replenished with the truth of Christ's doctrine for the edification of His Church. In the Epistle chosen for the Ordinal the title "priest" does not occur, as, indeed, it occurs nowhere in the New Testament as a distinctive designation of Christ's ministers. But the ordinand priest is reminded in the

Epistle of the early titles of the ministers of Christ's Gospel. Some were apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. And the work of the ministry of all, whatever their title, was the building up of the Body of Christ in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. The dignity and excellency of the priest's office is declared especially to be to teach and to feed the Lord's family. And forasmuch as the doing of so weighty a work cannot be compassed except with doctrine and exhortation taken out of Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same, the ordinand priest is most earnestly admonished how studious he ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures. The means whereby he may wax riper and stronger in his ministry, he is told by the ordaining Bishop, is by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, and by continual prayer to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost. Not a word is said in this charge to the ordinands of either of the two Sacraments of the Gospel, the omission being due, as we shall presently see, not to any disparagement of these Sacraments, but to the Church's clear and definite determination to give precedence, both in order and value, to the ministry of the Word.

Next after the Bishop's solemn charge in the Ordinal comes the solemn questioning of the ordinands. Here also the Church of England follows the same line, still further emphasizing the ministry of the Word before proceeding to make any mention of the Sacraments. "Are you persuaded," asks the Bishop, "that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures, to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?" To which the solemn reply is rendered: "I am so persuaded, and have so determined by God's help." Again: "Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and

drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word? . . . Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same?" And again the like answer in the form of solemn adjuration and sacred oath. What could be more manifest than that the reading of Scripture, the study of Scripture, the teaching of Scripture, loyalty to Scripture, and obedience to Scripture, are the prime and principal obligation of every priest of the Church of England, according to the solemn promises made at his ordination? However important and worthful other functions of his office may be, all are second and subsidiary to this. In the Church of England prophetic duties are the first and most obligatory of the priest's vocation. No evidence could attest more definitely and more convincingly what the Church of England means by the term "priest." She never means by "priest" a sacerdotal officer, a hierarch, a sacrificing agent. In all her formularies the term is used either in contradistinction to that of deacon or bishop, or else as equivalent to presbyter—*i.e.*, elder or minister—whose paramount and permanent vocation is the proclamation of the Word. This Word is the key to the kingdom of heaven. By the key of this Word the kingdom of heaven is opened or closed. No other key can fit the lock of the heavenly gate. The Word on earth is the revelation of the Will in heaven; so that whatsoever this Word of God, this Holy Scripture, shall loose on earth is loosed in heaven, and whatsoever this Word on earth shall bind in heaven is also bound. Never according to the will and commandments of men, but always according to the will and revelation of God, do binding and loosing proceed.

Not until these great truths have been set forth unmistakably does the Ordinal make any mention of the Holy Sacraments. Thus in the Church of England the ministry of the Sacraments is conditioned by, and made dependent on, the ministry of the Word. The faithful dispenser of Christ's Sacraments must first be a faithful dispenser of Christ's Gospel. None but faithful dispensers of the Word can be faithful

dispensers of the Sacraments. Not, indeed, that the validity of the Sacraments depends either on the fidelity of the dispenser or on the lineage of his ordination. Such a supposition would make the Sacraments to be the Sacraments of men, or the Sacraments of a Church—poor things verily—whereas in truth they are Sacraments of the blessed God Himself, Divine ordinances, grand and glorious beyond all computation. But it is the Word behind and within the Sacraments which imparts to them their power and splendour. Take away the Word and what are the Sacraments? A house without foundation, a body without a soul, a well without water, a husk without a kernel, a sign without meaning, an instrument without force. Apart from Christ—the Incarnate Word revealed in the Written Word—the Sacraments are nothing. With Christ, in Christ, through Christ, they are great and strong. And Christ is infinite mercy, boundless love. He will not, therefore, suffer His Sacraments to be deprived of their efficacy or defrauded of their power by the unfaithfulness of their dispenser. So long as the recipient is faithful, Christ will sacramentally bless. The infidelity of the dispenser will surely recoil as a curse on himself, but will neither kill the Sacrament nor rob the faithful of its benediction. Where both dispenser and receiver are faithless a Sacrament is the condemnation of both. Where the dispenser is faithful and the receiver faithless the administration is worthy and acceptable to God, the reception unworthy and charged with doom. Where dispenser and receiver alike are faithful there is unsearchable blessing for both. But it is always the Christ Himself from whom the blessing flows upon the faith, whether of recipient or dispenser; and the Sacrament is the sacred pledge of that blessing, the Divinely appointed channel through which it descends. Thus it is the very height of the power of the Sacraments, the crown of their glory, that they should be attached dependently, yet vitally, to the Word of God. Far from being a weakness to the Sacraments that they are secondary to the Word, their incorporation with the Word is the source of their strength. Put the ministry of the

Sacraments first and that of the Word second, and both lose their meaning and forfeit their power. It is only when the Sacraments are built upon the Word, and the Word assigns their authority to the Sacraments, that the Sacraments become not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but also certain witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's goodwill towards us.

And as with the Sacraments, so also with the assurance of pardon. No priest can pardon sins committed against others ; for none can pardon an offence save those against whom the offence has been committed. A cannot blot out the sins against B, nor B the sins against A. This is true of all kinds and degrees of transgression. A crime against the State can only be pardoned by the State ; a trespass against a community, whether ecclesiastical or civil, can be remitted only by the community ; an injury to an individual can only be forgiven by the individual injured ; a sin against God, God alone can forgive. Sometimes an evil word or deed is a compound of evils, being at once a crime, an injury, and a sin. Then, in as far as it is a sin, God alone can forgive it ; in as far as it is a trespass or a crime, only the community ; in as far as it is individual injury, only the person injured. But in no case can an extraneous party, an outside person, forgive a wrong.

Often, indeed, the forgiveness is transmitted through a channel appointed for that purpose, as when the penalty for a crime is remitted through a Secretary of State, or the pardon of an injury conveyed through the agency of an intermediary friend. But whether effected mediately or immediately, the sole authority and power to forgive rests only with those against whom the wrong has been done. So is it with sin. God alone can forgive sins. But authority and power to convey and announce God's forgiveness are sometimes delegated to others. Thus Nathan, who was a prophet and not a priest, was authorized to proclaim God's pardon to contrite David ; thus also hath God given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the

absolution and remission of their sins. And, like Nathan, this they do in their capacity of prophets rather than priests. But it is God Himself, and God alone, who pardoneth and absolveth the truly penitent and unfeignedly believing sinner. All that God's ministers can do—yet this is much in the way of comfort and assurance—is to proclaim God's pardon and transmit His absolution.

But on what grounds, we ask, can God's ministers claim their grand prerogative to discharge this sacred function of proclaiming pardon, this blessed right of assuring peace to broken, contrite, believing hearts? Clearly not on the ground of their ordination alone. Of itself and by itself ordination cannot possibly confer such momentous powers, such glorious privileges. To contend for this would be to contend for an absurdity, which might easily degenerate—has, indeed, not seldom actually degenerated—into an infamy. Often in the Church's history ordained ecclesiastics have blessed those whom God hath not blessed and cursed those whom God hath not cursed. Ordained ecclesiastics blessed the Inquisitors and cursed their victims. Does anybody, not a bigot, suppose these blessings and curses were ratified in heaven? Ordained ecclesiastics decreed the decisions of the Council of Trent. According to these decrees a large part of Christendom, and that not the least intelligent or the least spiritual part, is still smitten with anathema. What man outside the Church of Rome deems these anathemas to be anything else but sounding brass or boltless ecclesiastical thunder? We know for certain that God has not confirmed these anathemas in heaven, inasmuch as He is constantly pouring down ever-increasing benedictions on the anathematized.

Or to take another instance: A young man may be ordained to the priesthood in the Church of England at twenty-four years of age. At such an age his knowledge, whether of the ways of God or the ways of men, is probably not extensive. He could easily be deceived by a false and emotional penitence, easily diverted into a cold frame of mind by a stammering and

reserved, albeit an entirely sincere, contrition. In the former case he looses the sin; in the latter he binds it, owing to his inaptitude for spiritual diagnosis. Who will say that such a priest's blundering is ratified in heaven? Such a contention would be an insult to heaven; as we know, it rightly is a butt of scorn on earth. Even rigorous sacerdotalists perceive this peril, and make confessors only of men of mature age and ripe experience. But if the power to loose and bind be a matter of ordination only, a virtue inherent in the priestly office, why this precaution? A priest is as much a priest at twenty-four years of age as at forty-two, and if his authority to forgive and remit is an unconditioned attribute of his ordination, it is just as valid in the callow, fledgeling priest as in the priest of full-grown knowledge and discerning wisdom.

The Church of England nowhere in her authentic formularies professes to confer such unconditioned powers on her priests. She does not interpret the sayings of her Lord after the manner of the scribes and Pharisees, who through their traditions made the Word of God of none effect. Her Lord is the Word of God, the Divine Logos, the Reason of God. To interpret His sayings irrationally is to sin against the Divine Reason. The Gospel is not a letter, but a spirit; not an edict, but a revelation. Christ said He was a Door, a Vine, that His body was bread, and that wine was His blood. There is no difficulty whatever in understanding what He Himself meant by these sayings. In themselves they are as bright and clear as the Light of the World could make them. There was no darkness, no doubt of any kind, in the minds of the first disciples of the Lord as to the heavenly revelations conveyed in these utterances. To them these sayings were as a lamp on a lamp-stand. It was the scribes and the Pharisees, the priests and rabbis, who put the lamp under a bed of obscurities, under a bushel of literalisms. In contempt they first asked the question, "Will this man give us His flesh to eat?" Centuries afterwards superstition caught up the literalist cry, and proclaimed, amid clouds of baseless metaphysic and delusive rhetoric, "We can

give this Man's flesh for men to eat," thus affording another illustration of the universal law that literalism in religion always drags superstition at its heels.

Similarly with the grand commission of the ministry of forgiveness. The literal interpretation of that commission may, as we have seen, lead men to conclusions revolting to reason and religion alike. How does this commission run? "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." Taken literally, what do these words come to? To this: That a priest is a giver or withholder of Divine forgiveness; that heaven is bound to bind what is bound on earth, and to loose what on earth is loosed. This literal sense is the complete reversal of both reason and revelation. It places the will of God at the disposition of men, the mercy of God at the control of the mercy of men. It turns the Lord's Prayer upside down, proclaiming that the will of heaven is to be governed by the will of earth, and that God is to forgive where and when man chooses. Even Balaam knew better than this. He acknowledged his incapacity to bless unless in accordance with the blessing of God, or to curse without God's consent. It is so still. No priest can bind where God hath loosed, or loose where God hath bound. God is the only binder, the only looser, the only forgiver, the only retainer, of the sins of men. All that the priest can do is to declare who they are whose sins God has revealed He will remit, and who they are whose sins He has determined to retain.

But how can the priest know the mind and will of God in respect of forgiveness? He has no other possible means of knowing these things except from Holy Scripture. The ways of God are not as man's ways, nor His mind as man's mind, nor His will as man's will. High as heaven is above earth, so high are the thoughts of God above the thoughts of man. It is only on the wings of revelation that man can soar to the heights of God's mercy: only by prayer in the Holy Ghost that he can learn the depths of heavenly truth. His priestly efficiency is, there-

fore, in direct proportion to his knowledge of Holy Scripture and his growth in spiritual discernment. The personal absolution of an ignorant, prayerless priest is a worthless absolution. He knows nothing of the will of God, nothing of the mercy of God ; whatever, therefore, he declares about forgiveness is in no wise to be depended upon : it has neither force nor value. The mere enlistment of a soldier does not fit him to direct a war, to win victories or avert defeats. So the ordination of a priest does not of itself give the heavenly wisdom essential to absolution. The effective ministry of personal pardon is conditioned by the minister's knowledge and experience of the Word of God.

The Church of England makes this fact clear throughout her formularies. Learning and godly conversation she exalts into the place of a principal aptitude for the ministry, and learning she defines to be such studies as help to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Absolution, she teaches, is conditioned by repentance according to the Holy Gospel, and remission by unfeigned faith in the same Gospel. Hence the supreme importance of the people learning the Holy Scriptures as well as the priests, that they may know both whether their penitence and faith, as well as his absolution and remission, are in harmony with the Gospel. If a sinner is disquieted in conscience and requires comfort or counsel, he is instructed by the Church of England to go to some discreet and learned minister of God's Word and open his grief, that by the ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution. But what if the minister be not discreet?—*i.e.*, not a man of spiritual discernment—what if he be not a learned minister of God's Word? Clearly the disquieted sinner can get no trustworthy counsel, no solid comfort, from such a man. He is a broken reed, an empty cistern. You might as well go to a doctor who knows nothing of medicine, nothing of surgery, nothing of the human frame, as to an unlearned and undiscerning priest who does not know his Bible and the heart of man. It is by the ministry of God's Word, proclaims the Church of England, that the benefit of absolution is conveyed and received. But the ministry of God's

Word, and therefore the benefit of absolution also, must be greatly affected by the minister's knowledge and skill in that Word, just as a doctor's prescription is affected by his skill in medicine. The more ignorant the minister, the less trustworthy his counsel ; the more learned and more godly the minister, the stronger and more sure his promise of absolution.

It is sometimes alleged that it is not the priest who absolves, but the Church behind the priest ; and therefore the validity of the absolution depends, not on the knowledge and illumination of the priest, but on the power and authority of the Church. Let us take this for granted, and what follows ? First, that even a Church cannot bind what God has not bound or loose what God has not loosed, else would that Church be stronger and more powerful than God. Secondly, seeing that a Church can only bind and loose in accordance with the will of God ; seeing also that Churches, like individuals, are dependent for their knowledge of that will upon revelation, and that Scripture is the clearest and fullest of all revelations, then it must needs be that those Churches are the best authorities for absolution whose doctrine and discipline are in closest accord with Scripture, and that no Church that does not teach and minister agreeably to the supreme authority of Scripture has any claim to spiritual authority at all. Thirdly, seeing that God the Holy Ghost is the Inspirer of Scriptural revelation, seeing also that God cannot contradict Himself, any Church doctrine or discipline not in harmony with Scripture cannot be a doctrine or discipline from the Holy Ghost. Fourthly, seeing that the test of doctrine and discipline for all Churches alike is their accord and concord with Holy Scripture, it is the manifest duty of all true Churches to demand from their clergy a good knowledge of Holy Scripture as a preliminary to their ordination, together with the solemn pledge that throughout their whole life they will make the ever-growing, ever-deepening knowledge of Holy Scripture their chief and permanent concern. If, then, only Scriptural Churches are trustworthy Churches, it clearly follows that only Scriptural ministers can teach the mind of trustworthy Churches. Ignorant

ministers may easily, without knowing it, teach contrary to the mind of their Church and the mind of God both in reference to absolution and other things; and, therefore, the Church's duty to the minister, as well as the minister's duty to the Church, requires for the sanity and effectiveness of his ministry a profound and spiritual knowledge of the Scriptures. Scriptural ministers are as needful to the exercise of the authority of Scriptural Churches as the Word of God is necessary to the validity of that authority. In reference to absolution, therefore, the matter stands thus: Whether the authority for the absolution be deemed the individual priest or the collective Church, it is indispensable in both cases alike that the authority behind both should be God Himself. And as it is only by the searching of the Scriptures that we can know whether an absolution has God behind it or not, the searching of the Scriptures is a paramount obligation for both absolvers and absolved.

(To be continued.)



Higher Criticism in its Relation to Orthodox Belief.

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THE questions which have been brought forward in recent years in connection with the scientific treatment of religious problems are such as frequently occasion perplexity to many who are most earnest in their desire to "square" accurate knowledge with loyalty to the fundamentals of the faith, the reason of such perplexity no doubt being that critical methods are very commonly believed to stand for vagueness and indefiniteness in the statement of Christian truth. And yet there is, perhaps, no more interesting and hopeful phase of present-day thought than that which can be traced to an intelligent appreciation of the light which has been thrown on the Scriptures of both Testaments by modern historical research—namely, the recognition of the fact that new discoveries in