

## Orders and Reunion.

### II.

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WE must now turn to consider the principle of corporate life, as declared in the Apostolic writings; and in this respect we find the attitude to be very similar to that which they taught with regard to intellectual truth. They regard the life of the Christian Church as consisting in a combination of freedom and disciplined order. Each individual is free to choose the sphere in which he shall exercise his gifts, and to regulate his own mode of access to God. Each congregation is to be its own master in matters of detail. And yet there must be rules to which all individuals and all congregations that wish to remain in the Church must conform. Varieties of system were allowed, but the tendency to self-assertion and usurpation was kept under strict control. No sanction was given to the idea that anybody might preside at public worship, who felt disposed to do so, without some sort of Church recognition or commission. No encouragement was given to individual congregations to regulate their own affairs entirely without regard to the practice of other congregations. In their lifetime the Apostles took great care to prevent individual or congregational liberty from degenerating into individualism or congregationalism. After their generation the same object was provided for by stereotyping the system of Church commission into the threefold ministry, and by stereotyping the system of Church organization into the co-ordination of federally united dioceses. It still remains to be proved that any better system has been evolved to supersede these. The system of Papal autocracy has proved prejudicial to liberty; the system of Congregational autonomy has proved prejudicial to discipline. Other systems, such as the Wesleyan and the Presbyterian systems, are, so far as I know, less open to either of these

charges ; but they have only attained this immunity by modeling themselves on the lines of the historic system, which the Anglican communion has retained. And it is worth while asking whether the historic system does not possess—at least, in virtue of its seniority over these later systems—a claim to allegiance, when it preserves the combination of elements which formed the groundwork of the Apostolic Church's corporate life.

The Apostolic conception contained, however, a third element, which must not be forgotten—I mean the Sacramental element. The society was prior to the individual, and the individual derived his grace through his membership in the society. He began the life of grace, the life in Christ, when he entered by baptism into the sphere of God's new covenant ; he lived the life of grace by virtue of communion with the Mediator of that new covenant. The Sacramental theory is the very basis of the whole Apostolic conception of a corporate Church life. Baptism as the symbol and means of birth into that corporate life in Christ, the Eucharist as the symbol and means of the continuation of that corporate relation in Christ between the various members of that Body—these were the indispensable requisites which the Apostles never flinched in exacting from all who desired to be members of the Church. And it is in its Sacramental theory and practice that I find the greatest asset of the English Church. It has retained the idea of Baptismal regeneration and the idea of congregational Communion ; it has not narrowed the Baptismal Sacrament by making it a reward of merit rather than a means of grace ; it has not degraded the Eucharist into a magical transaction, nor rationalized it into a mere memorial function. No doubt there have been, and are, among us tendencies at work in both of these directions ; but these tendencies are not true to the essence of Anglican Sacramentarianism any more than they are true to the essence of Apostolic doctrine on the subject. And so long as we are faithful to our own and the Apostolic theory, so long can we show a bold front in face of the perversions of other theories.

You must by now have anticipated the thesis as to the ministry to which I have been tending. It is this—that the validity of any ministerial system is to be tested by its value for the preservation of these three Apostolic principles of Church life which I have discussed. The grace of Orders, like every other grace of God, comes to the individual through the Church ; and the ordained minister is the representative of the Church. The ministry exists for the purpose of perpetuating the Church's life ; and it is thus Sacramental in its nature—an outward sign and means of the inward life of the Church. It is valid in so far as it represents a true Church life ; it is invalid in so far as it does not do so. The essential point is the preservation of the general principles of Church life, and of a duly appointed and duly qualified ministry to represent a Church life that is based on these principles. The preservation of an historic form of ministry is a matter of importance, not so much for its own sake as for the token which it gives of the Church's intention to preserve the general principles of the historic Church which find a satisfactory expression in that form.

Thus, if we judged ideally, we might say that at the present time there are no valid Orders anywhere in Christendom ; because there is no real corporate unity or corporate Church life in the Christendom of our age. The ministries of each section of Christendom represent only their several sections ; and, even if each section were national, yet Christianity would not cease to be sectional, unless there were some real basis of unity between the various national sections. And sectional Christianity is not Catholic nor Apostolic. But in such matters it is an error to proceed by the method of counting heads. That is to substitute the *volonté de tous* for the *volonté générale* ; it is a fallacious method in political theory, and it is no more commendable in the sphere of ecclesiastical politics. The question that we have to consider is, Which section at the present time best preserves the Apostolic principles of Church life under modern conditions ? The difficulty of harmonizing these old principles with our new circumstances is acknowledged ; it is proved, if

by nothing else, by the varieties of systems through which various denominations try to effect the harmony. And the existence of this difficulty should make us more cautious than we often are in pronouncing condemnation upon all systems save that to which we are accustomed. But I am convinced that the theory is utterly perverse which declares that all consideration of the results of a system, with regard to the maintenance of Apostolic principles of truth and corporate Church life, is to be subordinated to a consideration of the particular form of the ministry. That is to place the ministry in a position of greater importance than the Church. And this is a complete reversal of the true and Apostolic order.

I have tried to give some indication of the way in which I would seek to justify the English Church's system by its results in the preservation of fundamental Apostolic principles ; and I may now attempt some general statement of the position which, in my judgment, we should adopt in defining our own attitude, both positively in itself and negatively as regards other bodies. In the first place, I feel that there must be no faltering in the conviction with which we declare that we will not give up our present system of ministry. Why should we? It is not only because it is episcopal, or because it is in accordance with the system of the second century, that we must adhere to it ; the Holy Spirit might quite well have inspired, and may yet inspire, some development which would be a supersession of the episcopal system, as He inspired the development of that system itself. Still less must we claim that our ministerial system is superficially most consistent with that of the Apostolic age ; for that statement is open to serious question on grounds of simple historical fact. But the reason why we cling to the system with attachment is because we believe the life of our Church to be most faithful to Apostolic principles ; and, this being so, we see no reason why we should renounce the ministerial system, under which we have been continued in that fidelity. We see in this circumstance an evidence that the Holy Spirit has ordained the system and has not yet ordained its

successor. The intention of our Church is to preserve and perpetuate the vital principles of the Apostolic Church ; and of this intention we see the outward sign and symbol, and, judging by results, we may say the efficacious sign, in the preservation of our historic ministry. The Papal system may be more overtly orderly ; but it gains that advantage at the expense of an incalculable loss of freedom and truth. The Nonconformist system may be more superficially democratic ; but it suffers for this in a loosening of the bonds of wise discipline and a mutilation of the structure of Christian truth. No doubt our system is not perfect ; the old hierarchic ideas and the old false sacerdotalism are not yet extinct. There is a great deal yet to be done in some directions by accommodating our system to the spirit of the age, in other directions by tempering that spirit by a revival of order and discipline in practice. But everywhere we see signs that the system is looking out for the path of wise adaptation. Episcopacy means something very different now from what it meant a hundred years ago ; the aristocratic exclusiveness of the priestly order is being broken down in every direction by the reassertion of the priesthood of the whole Body ; we are tending more and more to emphasize the representative character of the priesthood, as the ministry of men who are *servi servorum Dei*, and with that tendency the false pretensions to sacerdotal tyranny are disappearing. There are also signs that we are beginning more generally to recognize that a remedy must be found for clerical disobedience and lay indiscipline. And such symptoms as these justify the belief that we are not so hidebound by our system as to be incapable of setting our house in order ; and to do this is our chief duty, on every score. We are accused on one hand of schism, on the other of Romanizing tendencies. These are but the bogies of popular polemics. But they may, at least, serve to warn us to be on our guard against any excessive self-satisfaction ; and, no less, against any sectarianism which would exalt forms above principles, or, on the other hand, against any compromise with the truth which would accept what is in principle wrong and

untrue because it has the sanction of ancient prestige. And so long as we guard against these fatal errors, we can afford to neglect the accusations of controversialists whose only stock-in-trade is the repetition of catchwords, and whose strength is in inverse proportion to their noisiness.

And, in the second place, when we come to consider our relations to other Christian denominations, one or two cautions must be borne in mind. We shall be making a grievous mistake if we hastily unchurch others and adjudge them entirely wrong merely because their official systems differ from ours. We must realize that the blame for all, or nearly all, schisms can be distributed to both sides. We must also realize that principles are of more value than forms. Thus, if we consider the case of the Papacy, it appears to me historically untrue to deny that in its time it was a natural, and necessary, and God-directed development. But we maintain that it has outlived its necessity, and that it is rapidly outliving its usefulness. We repudiate it, not at all because it was a new development from primitive theory—that is of no moment—but because it has become palpably ineffective, or rather a palpable obstacle in the preservation of the true elements of Apostolic Church life. If the Vatican were to drop the claim of Papal infallibility and to recognize Anglican Orders, even so we should not be satisfied, so long as it sacrifices, or tries to sacrifice, freedom to discipline, truth to medievalism, Scripture to tradition, and Sacramental grace to magic. The Papacy is at present prehistoric in its theories, and demoralizing in its attitude to truth; and such defects cannot be condoned for the sake of an agreement as to forms.

As to the Nonconformist systems, the position is not very dissimilar. I believe that, at the time when they arose, these systems were, like the Papacy, a natural and necessary development—an experiment that had to be tried. Whether the development was a real one, whether the experiment has permanently succeeded, as certainly it succeeded for a time, is a question which can only be answered by the verdict of history.

I believe that this answer is still in process of being given, and it is incautious to try to anticipate it too confidently. But I cannot help confessing to an uneasy feeling that the signs of the times seem to point to the ultimate giving of an unfavourable verdict. It cannot, I must think, be entirely an accident that Nonconformity is in so many cases substituting, for the declaration of spiritual doctrine and the edifying of faith upon the basis of doctrinal truth, a propagation of social and political theories or an elaborate insistence upon isolated ethical virtues, such as alcoholic temperance ; it cannot be an accident that the bonds of systematic belief seem to sit so lightly upon many Nonconformist bodies, that in some of those bodies disciplined cohesion seems neither attainable nor wanted, and that membership in them seems to be allowed so often to connote no particular duties of belief or of participation in Sacramental grace. I do not know how far the theoretic policy of all Nonconformist bodies has definitely surrendered to the giant of undenominationalism, but there can be no question that in practice they are deep in the shadow of that intellectual monstrosity. And the results are too obviously apparent in the ease with which attendants at Nonconformist places of worship change, without apparent discomfort, from a place which bears the name of one sect to that which bears the name of another sect, very widely different in historical theory from the former. It is a pure abuse of language to call such a phenomenon a token of unity. It is an evidence of merely negative uniformity. All say much the same thing, but this situation is attained only through the fact that none of them says anything in particular. The extraordinary circumstance is that such an unscientific theory yet produces such wonderful fruits of piety and philanthropy. But I feel very strongly that its fruits can never be more than individual, and Christianity is not an individualist gospel. Nor, I must repeat, is Christianity only a rule of conduct ; it is also a system of truth and a theory of life. It is not enough to "do the will" of God ; we must also desire to "know of the doctrine." And a system which spends all its

energies on conversion, and has little apparatus for edification, which has little further to teach its adherents than the consciousness of an ethical ideal and the desire for righteousness, however great may be its immediate effects upon them, is in grave danger of being unable to inspire them with lasting and growing spiritual vitality. It provides "milk for babes," but it has no "meat to give to strong men." It keeps its babes in a state of tutelage; and I fear very much that the logical nemesis of creedless, or almost creedless, Christianity is to be seen in the ethical societies, which inculcate morality with a deliberate absence of reference to any religious sanction, which make philanthropy take the place of "faith that worketh by love," which abolish the first table of the Decalogue, and substitute the love of mankind as a life-motive for the dual love of God and of our neighbour.

I began by alluding to the problem of Christian Reunion, and I fear that nothing that I have since said has done anything towards suggesting a workable scheme of Reunion. So presumptuous a programme was very far from my intention; but of one fact I am certain—namely, that in trying to induce Non-conformists to accept our system of Orders as a condition of Reunion we should be very cautious in the arguments that we use. If we take up the ground that they must virtually confess all the ministrations, from which they have derived spiritual benefit for years, to have been null and invalid, we are making Reunion impossible, and we are flying in the face of facts. The Nonconformist ministries have been too obviously blessed to be thus betrayed by those who have received through them such great blessings. I think we shall be better advised if we eschew such arguments, and place our hope in the doctrine of general intention, arguing that if they accept our Orders as a condition of Reunion they do so only as a symbol of the sincerity of their intention to revert to the true principles of Apostolic Church life, which their own system has in practice proved incapable of safeguarding. The problem of Reunion with Rome, though there is more agreement between us as to forms, appears to me



to be no less difficult as soon as we come to deal with principles. Rome itself is at present in the melting-pot, and we do not know what will be the result of its present internal conflict of tendencies. But here, again, I feel that before any Reunion between us can be possible, both sides will have to come to an agreement as to what are the true principles of Church life, and to unite on a basis of common desire to safeguard these. They will have to admit our intention, and we shall have to be convinced of theirs, before any real union can be achieved ; and I fear that such an agreement will not be reached until a great deal of water has flowed under the bridges. The official system of Rome at present may resemble ours in external points, but I can scarcely conceive that any internal difference of spirit and principle could be greater than that which at present exists between us. Meanwhile, we had better realize that the whole cause of Reunion is only jeopardized by hasty and ill-considered efforts to force a concordat, for which all sides are as yet quite unready, by well-meant offers of minor or seemingly minor compromises to Nonconformists, or by equally well-meant attempts to reduce all the differences between ourselves and Rome to a vanishing-point. Our energies at present will be better engaged in preparing the way by thoroughly considering and digesting the principles of our own position. This is not so easy a thing to do as would be imagined from the utterances of various speakers and writers, who appear to fancy that the more clear-cut a theory is, the more likely it is to be true. The position of the English Church is peculiarly, one might say irritatingly, difficult to grasp or explain, because it endeavours to hold in a due balance the complementary principles of order and freedom, of corporate authority and individual liberty, of Scriptural evidence and Church tradition ; and the balance is always tending to be raised or depressed on one side or the other. But any statement is narrowly one-sided and unjust to the true Catholic comprehensiveness of the English Church which does not recognize and allow equally for both sides ; and the only merit that I would claim for this brief and most

imperfect essay is that I have made an honest attempt to hold the balance evenly, and to state the theory of the English Church without throwing prejudice or partisanship into either scale in order to give it preponderance over the other.



## Some Chapters in the History of the Early English Church.

BY THE REV. ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D.

### VIII.—THE PENITENTIAL SYSTEM AND PENITENTIALS.

THERE has been a good deal of difference of opinion as to whether the penitential system which was introduced by the Roman and Scottish missions did much good. It certainly did a good deal of harm, and if we confine our attention to the Penitential Books, or Penitentials, as they are commonly called, we may say that the harm far exceeded the good, whether we regard their effect on the clergy who used them, or the laity who were treated in accordance with the regulations laid down in them.

The penitential system as a whole was an attempt to lay upon the rough, selfish world something of the monastic discipline which had come to be regarded as the ideal life; and of course some modifications had to be made in the discipline when it was applied to lay persons living in the world. In two respects at least it did good. It taught and enforced the wholesome doctrine that sin was a pollution to the sinner, and that wrongdoing was an injury, not only to the persons wronged, but also to the wrongdoer himself. No doubt this had been taught, not only in the first ages of the Christian Church, but before the birth of Christianity, and by both Jews and Gentiles. But the penitential system drove this idea home, and emphasized the fact that personal purity and rectitude were things to be desired for a man's own well-being, as well as for the safety of