

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE JOHANNINE COMMISSION.

By THE REV. W. H. RIGG, D.D., Vicar of Beverley Minster,
East Yorks.

AT the Lambeth Conference of 1930 the question of the union of the Anglicans of South India with the United South Indian Church will come up for consideration. Its importance for our Church is so great that Bishop Gore very truly considers that it constitutes a "crisis or judgment for Anglicanism."¹ One of the rocks on which the proposals may suffer shipwreck is, that in the interim period, when not all the Ministers shall have received episcopal ordination, the principle of the apostolic succession will have been violated.

In face of this possibility Bishop Gore goes so far as to say, "At least we must ask of hitherto non-episcopal Protestants that it has been the constant belief of Catholics that the threefold ministry is the only valid ministry of the Church, which has descended in orderly and legitimate succession from the Apostles, and that its recovery, where it has been lost, is the necessary condition of union."² Dr. Gore is of course speaking for a particular group within the Anglican communion, not for the Anglican Church as a whole. It is possible, however, that those who think with him may control the ecclesiastical situation, so that it is incumbent upon those of us who do not feel able to take such a rigid attitude towards our separated Brethren to re-examine our views of the Christian Ministry, and to challenge, if need be, his view of the Anglican Settlement, which is that "the principle of the succession in the ministry from the Apostles is as essential a part of the Divine plan as the Creed or the Sacraments, and is in fact rooted both in the historical tradition of the Church and the New Testament itself."³ In this article it is not proposed to write against Dr. Gore's position as a whole, but rather to consider one of the great texts of the New Testament, the interpretation of which must determine to a very considerable extent our conception of the Christian Ministry.

ST. JOHN XX. 21-3.

Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you : as the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them ; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. (R.V.)

These words were addressed by the Risen Lord to His disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day. Some there are, like Dr. Cadoux in his learned work on Catholicism and Christianity, who

¹ Cf. *The Church Overseas*, July 1929. *The Proposal of Union in the South Indian Church*, p. 195.

² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

would not allow that they were spoken by our Lord at all. He rejects them on three grounds. (1) They rest solely on the testimony of the Fourth Gospel. (2) They are post-resurrection words ; and the post-resurrection period was from an early date utilized as a convenient blank to which the pious imagination could refer all sorts of later rulings for which the Lord's express sanction was desired. (3) They harmonize far better with the mind of the Church in A.D. 100 than with the best-attested other teaching of Jesus.¹

To those who accept these reasons it is of course quite unnecessary to consider the Johannine Commission. According to them it is the product of the Christian Church or consciousness, and, however early it may have arisen, it loses its value as an authentic utterance of the Incarnate Saviour. We believe that there are Anglo-Catholics who are dubious about the Apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, and even hesitate to ascribe the Gospel to an eyewitness. They would adopt, we imagine, a position somewhat similar to that of the late Baron von Hügel, but valuable and helpful as was that great writer, it was just on the very question of religious authority and its relationship to the mind of Christ, that we found it most difficult to understand him, not to speak of following him.

We, on the other hand, place very great value on the testimony of the Fourth Gospel. We are convinced that it was written by one of the Lord's own immediate followers. The latest commentator on St. John's Gospel, Archbishop Bernard, does not hesitate to attach the highest value to the sayings of Jesus as handed down to us in the Fourth Gospel. Further, the reserve shown by the Evangelist in his accounts of the appearances of the Risen Lord leaves with us a deep impression that, both as a witness and an interpreter, he may be implicitly trusted, and the interpretation we place upon this great Commission will, we hope, be found to harmonize with the rest of the teaching of Jesus.

The first question we must endeavour to answer is, to whom were the words addressed ?

The late Bishop Westcott denied that they were addressed exclusively to the Apostles. He has had many followers in our own country. On the other hand Bishop Gore² and others, amongst them the late Dr. Bernard, would maintain that the words were addressed to the Apostles alone.³

If St. Luke's account of the first Easter is combined with that of the Fourth Gospel, we seem forced to conclude that there were others present besides the Apostles. After the Lord had made Himself known to the two disciples at the breaking of bread at Emmaus He vanished from their sight, forthwith they rose up and

¹ *Catholicism and Christianity* (London : George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1928), pp. 413, 414.

² Cf. *The Church and the Ministry*, 3rd ed., p. 229.

³ Cf. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1928), Vol. ii, pp. 676, 677.

returned to Jerusalem, "and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them" (St. Luke xxiv. 33).¹ Dr. Bernard's comment on this is that we must not assume "that John in his report of the same incident implies either (a) that others besides the Apostles were present when Jesus began to speak, or (b) that His commission was not addressed exclusively to the Apostles even if others were there."² In reply to (a) the Evangelist was, as Dr. Bernard allows, most probably acquainted with St. Luke's Gospel as well as with St. Mark's, and unless there is evidence to the contrary it is natural to assume that if others besides the Apostles were present in the upper room they were present when Jesus began to speak, especially as the doors were shut for fear of the Jews. With regard to (b) St. Thomas was not present, and of course Matthias had not yet been elected to fill the vacant place of Judas Iscariot, so that it was anyhow to a truncated body of the Apostolate that the Commission must have been given, even assuming that it was addressed to the Apostles, and the Apostles alone. But supposing that the recipients of the Commission were confined to the inner circle of Christ's disciples, why, we ask, should it not be given to them *as representing the whole Church*? It is a striking feature of the Fourth Gospel that "the Twelve" (cf. vi. 67, 70, 71, xx. 24) are never addressed as Apostles but always as "disciples." Excluding chapter xxi., which is an Appendix to the Gospel, the word *μαθητής* or *μαθηταί* occurs very nearly seventy times, but with the exception of St. John xiii. 16, where it is used in a general way, the word *ἀπόστολος* never occurs at all. After the defection of many disciples on account of the hardness of the Lord's teaching (vi. 60) it comes generally to be used of those belonging to the inner circle of the twelve disciples. Yet the singular noun is applied to Joseph of Arimathæa (xix. 38), who was not one of the twelve, and in xx. 30 the disciples appear to include all those who were eyewitnesses of the signs of Jesus.

Even more important is it to notice who the disciples were. It is not sufficient to say that those who were present in the Upper Room that first Easter evening and received the Commission were confined to the twelve. They were men who were regarded by our Lord as unreservedly belonging to Him. Of them the Saviour said, "Ye are clean," and the added qualification, "But ye are not all clean," was no longer applicable on the evening of the first Easter Day, since Judas Iscariot had gone to his own place. The recipients of the great Commission were likened unto the branches abiding in the Vine, they were abiding in Christ and Christ in them. These disciples were men known to Christ as those who would keep His words, men chosen by Him out of the world, and entirely distinct from it (xv. 19; xvii. 16). It may be true to say that these ten men represented the Catholic Church, but more so still that they represented that Church as she was meant to be according to the mind of Christ, who, seeing the end

¹ Possibly amongst these women should be included, cf. Acts i. 13, 14.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. ii, p. 676.

from the beginning, saw in them already what they were capable of becoming. Thus the successors of the Apostles who received the Easter Day Commission must also be men abiding in Christ, keeping His words, in the world yet not of it. Strangely enough, in books on the origins of the Christian Ministry this side of the question has not received the attention it deserves, and yet it is the most essential side of the Christian Ministry. If such terms as valid or invalid are to apply to Holy Orders, and we may be very doubtful as to their application in this connexion, it is in this direction that we should look rather than in any other.

Let us now consider the nature of the Commission itself. The Lord Himself says, "Peace be unto you" (xx. 21). This is no ordinary salutation. It is distinct from that in which the Saviour had said the same words. On that occasion it was the peace of reassurance (xx. 19). It is His peace which He now bestows on them, a peace the world cannot give, and which is inseparably bound up with Himself, His own peace (xiv. 27). Then the Risen Lord continues, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (xx. 21). Two different words are used for the double mission conveyed in this verse. The mission of the Father entrusted to the Son, and the mission of the Son to the disciples. In the first the perfect tense of ἀποστέλλω is used, in the second the present tense of πέμπω. We may give the usual meaning of the Johannine perfect, permanence and completion. Christ has completely finished the work He has been given to do (xvii. 4). That purpose for which He had been sent on earth He had perfectly accomplished. From another point of view, when He was glorified it had only just begun. Behind His disciples He was ever working, His mission would continue, He would be ever coming to them, ever sending them. Perhaps that is the reason why two different words are used for "sending." Dr. Bernard objects to a distinction being made between the words as over-subtle. We are doubtful whether it is possible to provide an exact and exclusive definition of the words, yet coming as they do so closely together it is difficult to avoid feeling that some difference must have been intended. Might we suggest that they emphasize the immediateness of the Son's mission? To Him the Father gives the Spirit not by measure (iii. 34), whereas it is through Christ the disciples are sent by the Father, and being but men they must ever be limited in their capacity to receive the Spirit, and in their power of witnessing to His grace. Thus is their mission incomplete in contrast to the completeness of the Only Son.

"And when He had said this He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." A symbolical action which is highly suggestive accompanies the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the Fourth Gospel opens with words reminding us of the book of Genesis, the first Creation being placed side by side with the New Creation which came with the advent of the Word made flesh, so here at the close of the Gospel it is in symbol recorded that man, formed of the dust of the ground, needs the

breath of the Spirit of God in order to become spiritually alive (Gen. ii. 7; Is. xlii. 5; Wisd. xv. 11). The New Life was given by Christ's bestowal of the Spirit, who is the breath of the Church's life (cf. Ezek. xxxvii. 9 ff.), the quickener of her activities, the inspiration of her message.

"Receive ye the Holy Spirit." For our purpose the word "receive" is most important. Both Bishop Westcott and Archbishop Bernard are most emphatic that the word chosen for "receive" does not imply the merely passive receiving of a gift, but also a responsive effort on the part of him to whom it is offered. If an examination is made of the occasions upon which the word "receive" is used in the Fourth Gospel, their conclusions are amply justified, and this we submit must govern our interpretation of the power to remit and to retain sins. It is only in so far as a man has appropriated the gift of the Holy Spirit, and received Him into his own life, that we may dare to speak of his having authority to declare or withhold God's pardon. The giving of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon belief in Christ (vii. 39): "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive." The words "believed on Him," *πιστεύσαντες εἰς αὐτόν*, convey more than mere believing in certain statements about our Lord, namely, reliance upon Him, full self-committal to Him. Many on earth were in contact with Christ, but did not receive Him, only those who "believed on His name" were regarded as receiving Him, and to them, and them alone, did He give the authority to become children of God (i. 12). They are distinct from the world. Those very men to whom the Commission was given, Our Lord had previously prayed for to His Father that He would give them another Paraclete that He might abide with them for ever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, not possessing the power of spiritual discernment (xiv. 16, 17). As Dr. Bernard says in commenting on this passage, "It would not have been said to the 'world,' *λάβετε πνεῦμα ἄγιον* (xx. 22). That gift could be received only by spiritually minded men."¹ This being so, what happens in the case of those who, having received the Johannine Commission, so far as the outward words and form are considered, yet are not spiritually minded men? No answer is left to us but to say that whatever may be the case in the eyes of the Church on earth they have received no authority whatsoever from God.

We must now consider the substance of the Commission. "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." This promise must not be taken by itself, but should be judged in the light of the other promises given in this very Gospel. Familiar as some of them are, they bid us rise to such heights of faith and confidence that we who are called to be the ministers and stewards of the mysteries of God can but feel how utterly unworthy and inadequate we are for what God has called us to be and to do. "Ye did not

¹ Ibid., vol. ii, p. 546.

choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide : that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He may give it you " (xv. 16). " Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto the Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it " (xiv. 12-14). " And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in My name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name : ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be fulfilled " (xvi. 23, 24). These great promises are conditional. In so far as the disciple is in union with Christ, and his will is His will, it may be said that he prays the prayers of Christ, Christ prays in him.¹ " If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you " (xv. 7 ; cf. 1 St. John v. 14, 15). In his first epistle St. John says : " Whosoever is born of God sinneth not " (1 St. John v. 18 ; cf. iii. 9 ; 2 St. John 9), and " whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not " (1 St. John iii. 6). The oneness of the believer with Christ is hereby indicated. The more he abides in Christ the less he sins, though under present conditions, he must ever be confessing his sins (1 St. John i. 8-10), his sin is ever before him, but the Christian disciple, as he surrenders himself more and more to his Master, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. x. 5), can re-echo the words of St. Paul : " I live ; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me " (Gal. ii. 20). By virtue of this oneness with Christ, and in the power of the Divine Spirit, he may remit sins or he may retain them. When the Lord said to the man sick of the palsy, " Son, thy sins are forgiven " (St. Mark ii. 5), certain of the Scribes objected that Christ was exercising a prerogative belonging to God alone. This is the view of the Old Testament (cf. Exod. xxxiv., 6 ff. ; Is. xliii., 25 ff. ; xlv. 22), and even the Messiah, so the Rabbis taught, did not possess the power of forgiving sins.² Our Lord claimed this power inasmuch as the Father had given Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man (St. John v. 27), and in His own case He did nothing of Himself. " As I hear, I judge : and My judgment is righteous : because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me " (v. 30). Being the perfect organ of the Father, He could mediate forgiveness to every contrite sinner who came seeking for pardon. He possessed that perfect insight which did not judge according to the appearance but judged righteous judgment (vii. 24) and could say to the impotent man, " Behold,

¹ Cf. Rom. viii. 26, 27. Martin Luther, Tersteegen, Johann Arndt are conscious when they pray that prayer is a gift of God. He is praying within them. Their experience coincides with St. Paul and St. Augustine. Cf. Heiler, *Das Gebet* (München : E. Reinhardt, 1923), pp. 224-8.

² Cf. Strack und Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Band I, " Das Evangelium des Matthäus," p. 495.

thou art made whole : sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee " (v. 14).

It was this gift of insight which the Lord possessed through the perfect correspondence of His life to the Father's will and purpose, and His complete sympathy with fallen mankind, which He bestowed upon His disciples that first Easter Day, though they and their successors must often have sadly confessed that it was marred by lack of faith, by sin and want of love on their part. The unworthiness of the minister does hinder his insight into the true state of the man who comes to him to unburden the secrets of his soul, and thereby he may be prevented from knowing whether he should assure him of, or withhold from him, the Divine forgiveness.

It is important to observe how this Commission was exercised in the Apostolic age. Whenever the disciples rose to preach they knew that they had not to trust to their own eloquence and ability but spoke in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. ii. 4). After St. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost his hearers were pricked to the heart, and in answer to their question, " What shall we do ? " he replied, " Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost " (Acts ii. 38). They, then, that gladly received the message were baptized, doubtless there were others who did not accept it. Those who repented and accepted Christ as a result of the Apostles' teaching, their sins were remitted ; those who did not accept the offer of salvation, their sins were retained, they remained in their sin. St. Paul's experience was the same. He writes to the Corinthians that " the word of the Cross is to them that are perishing foolishness ; but unto us which are being saved it is the power of God " (1 Cor. i. 18). " For we are a sweet savour of Christ unto God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing ; to the one a savour from death unto death ; to the other a savour from life unto life " (2 Cor. ii. 15, 16).

Whenever a man hears the Gospel preached by a genuine disciple of Christ, if he has not already given himself to Christ, he comes to the parting of the ways: either he is being brought to the Saviour, and thus are his sins being remitted (cf. Acts x. 42, 43), or he may harden his heart, and thus are his sins retained, and the most terrible part of it is, the more he resists the appeal of Christ, the harder his heart becomes, and the more fixed is the retention of his sins. He, indeed, becomes tied and bound by the chain of his sins. His last state is worse than the first.

The apostles and disciples, instructed by the Holy Spirit, exercised this power of remitting or retaining sins. St. Peter retained the sin of Ananias and Sapphira when he saw that they had lied to the Holy Ghost, and kept back part of the price of the land (Acts v. 3, 9). St. Paul also informed the Corinthians that when they were gathered together, he being absent in body but present with them in spirit, they were, in the name of the Lord Jesus and with His power, to hand over to Satan a notorious evil-

liver with a view to the salvation of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. v. 1-5). But these incidents do not prove that this power was confined to the apostles as distinct from the Christian community, but rather the reverse, since St. Paul censures the Corinthians for not having taken action (cf. verse 2). They should have had enough insight to have taken it upon themselves to excommunicate the grievous offender without the necessity for the apostle's intervention.¹

We have an instance of the remittance of sins in the second Epistle to the Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor. ii. 1-11). It is almost certain that he is not the person referred to in 1 Cor. v. 1-5. Dr. Gore in commenting on this passage says, "St. Paul exhorts the congregation to receive back their penitent brother; and again taking the initiative upon himself, speaks of himself as forgiving 'in the person of Christ' the sin he had before 'retained.'"² But the Apostle is pleading with them, and when he beseeches them to forgive the offender he adds by way of parenthesis (verse 10): "If I have forgiven anything." He has indeed had cause to exercise the virtue of forgiveness, as the offender had done him an injury (cf. vii. 12); he had "in some outrageous and public manner defied the Apostle's authority."³ Of all men St. Paul had cause to withhold forgiveness, but no, he had taken the whole matter to the Lord, and "in His presence" (better than "in the

¹ Dr. Gore, in *The Church and the Ministry*, op. cit., p. 237, note 1, says: "St. Paul seems to imply that the Corinthian Church, endowed as it was with the gift of 'government', could have removed the evil doer out of their midst by the disciplinary authority belonging to the community; cf. ver. 13." "But," he adds, "probably only the Apostle could inflict the physical punishment; see Alford, in loc." This does not seem to us to be the case. Those who fall away from Christ or are cut off from Him, *ipso facto*, belong to the kingdom of darkness over which Satan rules (cf. St. John xii. 31; xvi. 11). More important for our purpose is it to note that the discipline exercised by the Church must have been modelled after the Jewish Synagogue. It is possible that in our Lord's lifetime two kinds of exclusion from the congregation took place, either without or with the infliction of the anathema (cf. Schürer, *Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (E.T.), Div. ii. Vol. ii, p. 61). In the New Testament the lighter form, that is to say temporary exclusion from the congregation, as practised by the Christian Church in 2 Thess. iii. 14, and presupposed in 2 Cor. ii. 6 ff., may be referred to in St. Luke vi. 22; St. John ix. 22; xii. 42; xvi. 2. The severer form (cf. Ezra x. 8) is not found in the New Testament, but the anathema is mentioned (cf. Acts xxiii. 12, 14; Rom. ix. 3), and St. Paul says of him who loves not the Lord, "Let him be anathema" (1 Cor. xvi. 22; cf. Gal. i. 8, 9). Johannes Weiss considers that the handing over to Satan is nothing else but the anathema, that is, the severer form of excommunication (cf. *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925, 10. Auflage, pp. 130, 131). One of the great differences between Jewish and Christian procedure consisted in the fact that in the former the powers of excommunication were administered by means of appointed officials, whereas in the latter they were in the hands of the Christian community as a whole (so Schürer and J. Weiss).

² Op. cit., p. 237.

³ Cf. *International Critical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, by Dr. A. Plummer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), p. 225.

person of Christ ") knew that Christ had forgiven him. The Apostle had exercised the gift of discernment. He had remitted the man's sin, but even so he desired the Church to forgive also and to act with him.

One more instance must be given. In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul writes that he has delivered unto Satan Hymnæus and Alexander that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. i. 20). Dr. Lock thinks that the action of the whole community is not excluded: there would be no need to repeat all the details to Timothy.¹ Be that as it may, St. Paul is writing to a leader of the Christian Church who by his very position would be expected to take the initiative, and should there be some who had turned aside and deserted the faith (cf. 1 Tim. i. 6), Timothy, St. Paul's own son in the faith, must not hesitate to take action. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. iv. 14). The real medium for the reception of the gift bestowed upon Timothy was the word of God proceeding from the mouth of the Christian prophets on St. Paul, himself a prophet (cf. 2 Tim. i. 6; Acts xi. 27; xiii. 1; xxi. 10; 1 Cor. xii. 28, 29; xiv. 29; Eph. ii. 20; iii. 5; iv. 11), in comparison with which the laying on of hands takes quite a subordinate place.²

May we now state the conclusions to which we are led by the evidence of the New Testament? The Johannine Commission is not an official gift bestowed upon an order of men, but it is a prophetic gift given by the Risen Lord to His disciples and through them to His whole Church. This gift can only be exercised by men abiding in Christ and dependent upon His Holy Spirit. We have seen that in the proclamation of the Gospel by men called of God and living in the power of the Holy Spirit sins will be retained, sins will be remitted.

We have also recognized that the Christian community can, in dependence upon the same Spirit, either exclude from or restore to the Christian fellowship those who belong to them, confident that their action, in so far as it is in accordance with the Divine will, will be ratified in heaven.

There remains the case of the individual who wishes to confess his sins, as one Prayer Book expresses it, "to a learned and discreet Minister of the word." Are we to deny him this privilege? Certainly not, provided it is made clear that when a man makes use of private confession it is of a voluntary character, and is, in itself, of no more value than a true confession of sin made to Christ alone and not in the presence of a third person. If, however, it is urged, How are we to know whether our own penitence is sincere or not? and therefore it is safer to resort to a Minister, we reply that because a man has been episcopally ordained, that does not

¹ Cf. International Critical Commentary. The Pastoral Epistles, 1924. p. 20.

² Cf. J. Behm, *Die Handauflegung im Urchristentum* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1911), p. 49.

of necessity imply that he is a person properly qualified to judge concerning a man's penitence. This difficulty of judging our own penitence implies that what is required of an ordained Minister of the Gospel is that he should possess the gift of discernment, and this he can only claim by virtue of his dependence upon Christ and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit. This gift he cannot receive merely officially, it must be personal as well. Many years ago the late Bishop Chavasse, when Principal of Wycliffe Hall, told some of us in his study that he had heard confessions the recital of which made his blood run cold. Men turned to him for help because they were convinced that he was an ambassador on behalf of Christ; both by his life and conversation God was speaking through him (2 Cor. v. 20). Were he to tell them that their penitence was insincere they would have searchings of heart and no rest until they had heard from his lips "The Lord hath put away thy Sin."¹

It is this prophetic side of the Johannine Commission which we have emphasised, and although for the purpose of regularising it, for God is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. xiv. 33), Episcopacy is the best method of administration and of preserving the unity of the Christian Church, unless the Church as a whole and her leaders in particular are depending on and being filled with the Holy Spirit that Commission is not being exercised. If our contention is a sound one, seeing that the Johannine Commission has been so abundantly manifested in the Churches of Southern India, much as we revere Bishop Gore we believe that the policy he advocates will be disastrous to our Church and to our common Christianity.

¹ The Minister of God's word must satisfy himself as far as possible that the penitent intends to make restitution (where necessary) and to lead a new life.

The first Walter Seton Memorial Lecture was delivered at University College, London, by Mr. Harold E. Goad, O.B.E., M.A., Director of the British Institute at Florence.

Among Dr. Seton's many interests was a devotion to Franciscan studies. He was Honorary Secretary during the last five years of his life, of the English Society of Franciscan studies. It was appropriate therefore, that Mr. Goad should choose as the subject of the First Memorial Lecture, *The Fame of St. Francis of Assisi*. He gives an account of the varied characters throughout history who have been attracted by Francis, and an estimate of the source and extent of his influence on them. Special attention is drawn to the work of Sabatier, to whom is largely due the interest taken by Protestants in the Life of St. Francis. The Lecture is both a fitting memorial to Dr. Seton and a valuable summary of the place in history of the great Saint of Umbria. (University of London Press, Ltd. 2s. net.)