

“The Holy Spirit and the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments”

BY THE RT. REV. LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

THE subject for this year's Conference was chosen soon after the publication of the pamphlet “Confirmation To-day”, which is the schedule attached to the Interim Reports of the Joint Committees on Confirmation appointed by the two Convocations. As this schedule has been commended to the consideration of the Church by the Synod of York, your Committee thought that some information and guidance might usefully be given to Evangelical Churchmen to help them in forming a judgment upon it.

And as I ventured to make some drastic criticism of the theological introduction, and to point out that the practical alternatives proposed in the Schedule could only be discussed satisfactorily in the light of the fundamental doctrines involved, I was asked to draw up the syllabus and to preside at the Conference. I am feeling the burden of this responsibility, and in particular for two reasons. First, because of the implied criticism of the work of the Joint Committees, and especially of my brother Bishops on those Committees, with whom I enjoy a great and growing fellowship. And secondly, because of the tremendous danger of handling unworthily so great a theme.

Although the Schedule had come into my hands only the day before, I felt compelled at the York Convocation last October to indicate briefly three important deficiencies in the theological introduction. Fuller study of the document has confirmed my first impression of the deep concern felt by the writers about the present situation and of the thorough investigation which they have made of various practical suggestions for reform: but it has also increased my surprise and disappointment that the signatories have apparently agreed unanimously, though perhaps in some cases unwittingly, to a doctrinal statement which implies acceptance of the full Tractarian interpretation of the Church, of Apostolic Succession, of Baptismal Regeneration and of the Eucharistic Sacrifice—an interpretation which cannot logically be reconciled with the plain meaning of the 39 Articles, and which cannot be proved by certain warrant of Holy Scripture.

The result is that, while they deplore the fact that “too much stress has been laid in the past on Baptism and Confirmation as things to be ‘done’”, they do nothing to correct, and alas! much to corroborate the wrong teaching which is so largely responsible for that popular attitude, namely, the *ex opere operato*, or automatic, theory of sacramental grace. In support of my contention, let me give a few figures. I know that statistics need careful sifting, but they have an approximate value, as the Schedule shows. When introducing the Interim Report in the Northern Convocation, the Bishop of Hull stated that Canon Quick's standard work on the Christian Sacraments made no reference to the Holy Spirit—an almost

incredible revelation ! But I wonder if the Bishop of Hull and his colleagues realise that in their doctrinal introduction while they repeat the words "Baptism" or "baptize" more than fifty times, they use "faith" and "believe" three times altogether, of which only two refer to personal faith : whereas in the New Testament "Baptism" and "baptize" are found about sixty times (excluding the thirty five references to John the Baptist), while "faith" and "believe" occur just on 500 times. Surely there is a proportion here that needs to be readjusted in the Final Report.

But I do not propose to pursue a detailed criticism of the Schedule. It will be more profitable to try to present a positive and constructive statement derived from the teaching of the New Testament, as an introduction to the different aspects of Confirmation which are to be discussed to-morrow.

So I begin with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit : for all our thinking about the Church, the Ministry and the Sacraments must start here. The Acts of the Apostles, which records the first beginnings and the early growth of the Christian Church, opens with the story of Pentecost, and that book has been aptly called "The Acts of the Holy Ghost". Similarly St. Paul, in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, prefaces his description of the Christian Ministry as the gift of the ascended Christ by emphasising the unity of the Godhead—"one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Now the theological statement in the Schedule rightly opens with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but it makes the mistake of not starting far enough back. There is indeed the one Spirit, Who indwells and inspires the one body : but our thought of His work must always be related to that of the one Lord and the one God and Father of all.

So first and foremost *the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God*, the Father, the Creator of all. From this there follow three important conclusions.

1. He is the Spirit of the living God, Who dwelleth not in temples made with hands. The Spirit of God cannot be cabined and confined within our little ecclesiastical edifices. He is sovereign and free, not tied to His own ordinances, much less to men's petty systems. He is as the strong, fresh wind of heaven. "The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit." "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

2. He is the Spirit of God the Creator, Who made and loves the world—and not only the Church. Is not the growing rift so sadly discernible to-day between the Church and the world due, at least in part, to the neglect of this fundamental truth of our creed, that God is the Maker and Ruler of the universe ? If it is the case that "no man can call Jesus Lord but in the Holy Ghost", then His Spirit still strives with man, and still convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

3. God's image in man, though distorted by sin, is not obliterated. If it were, Christ would not have made the appeals, which He constantly did make, to men's conscience and reason and goodness of heart. It is God Who endowed man with these gifts, and made him a conscious moral being, capable of spontaneous response to God's love and of

fellowship with Him. God does not violate man's personality nor his will to choose. There is no regimentation with God, no mass-production. Therefore His Spirit forces no man's allegiance. His influence upon us is always personal,—quickening and strengthening our conscience, heart and will,—and never magical or mechanical.

Then in the second place, *the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ*. Which means that He is both the Spirit that was manifested in the incarnate life of our Lord and the Spirit Whom the ascended Christ bestowed on His Church. "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you"—in the power of the Spirit. The New Testament makes it clear that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church entirely rests upon the finished work of Christ. And that was the work of man's redemption. The Son of God became Man, to make men sons of God. We can enter into this new spiritual relationship, because the Son first entered into natural relationship with us, in order to redeem us by His death and resurrection. And it was only when Jesus was thus glorified that the Spirit's work could begin (St. John vii. 39).

One of the profoundest illustrations of this truth is given by St. John, in the discourse to Nicodemus on the New Birth. There our Lord insists that it is a spiritual experience: three times He repeats the words "born of the Spirit", combining it in one instance with the words "of water", of which we shall see the special significance later. But Nicodemus is puzzled: he still asks, How can these things be? The answer to his question is given in verses 14-16. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." How can a man be born again? By faith in Christ and Him crucified. And the miracle of saving faith is the work of the Spirit. With this agrees the teaching of the Prologue in chapter i., verses 12 and 13. "As many as received Him (the Word) to them gave He the power, the authority, to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born . . . of God." And notice that in both passages the scope of Christ's redemption is universal: the door is flung wide open. "As many as received"—"Whosoever believeth" This is because Christ died for all, "for the sins of the whole world." As the summary of the creed in the Catechism puts it—"God the Son . . . redeemed me and all mankind." And it is this universal redemption that is attested by the Church in Baptism and offered in Christ's name as an unmerited and unearned gift to every little child.

The Holy Spirit is always to be worshipped with the Father and the Son. He reveals and applies the divine work both in creation and in redemption. He Who "spake by the prophets" is also the "giver of life" to the Church; in both cases He brings home the Word of God to the consciences and hearts of men. The Spirit of revelation and of truth is the same as the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba, Father".

With this necessary introduction, we come now to the special aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the subject of this paper, "The Ministry of the Word and Sacraments." The title

implies two things. First, that the Christian Ministry is essentially one of the Word and the Sacraments in that order, which is consistently the order of the Prayer Book and the Articles. And secondly, that this Ministry is intimately associated with and dependent on the Holy Spirit. I will take the second corollary first.

In the Christian creed belief in the Holy Ghost involves and includes belief in the Church, in the Sacraments and in the future life. These are not just added as supplementary articles of belief, classed together for convenience. I believe in the Church because I believe in the reality and activity of the Spirit of God. And because the nature of that activity is such as is plainly stated in the New Testament, I cannot accept the Tractarian view of the Church, of Apostolic Succession and of Baptismal Regeneration.

The Church in which I believe does not coincide with the total number of persons who have received Christian baptism. If it did I should have to unchurch all members of the Salvation Army and of the Society of Friends. The Church which I confess as one, holy Catholic and Apostolic is essentially the "blessed company of all faithful people," the fellowship of all who are united in living union with Christ by faith, His mystical body which is being created by the Spirit in all generations. But to say this is not to deny or neglect the visible Church. Our Lord founded a visible society, and His disciples, while not of the world, were to be in the world, to worship together, to witness together and to work together. One of the faults of the Schedule "Confirmation to-day" is that it confuses the visible Church with the mystical body of Christ. Its authors would do well to remember the words of Hooker. "For lack of diligent observing the difference, first between the Church of God mystical and visible, then between the visible sound and corrupted, sometimes more sometimes less, the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed." (Ecclesiastical Polity, Book 3, Chapter i. 9).

It is a distinction which has been widely observed in Christian theology. St. Augustine, in his treatise on Baptism, wrote that "many who seem to be outside are inside, and many who seem to be inside are outside." To take a recent instance, the Report on Doctrine in the Church of England contains this sentence on page 105, "The Church is for Christians, an object not only of sight, but of spiritual discernment or insight. It emerges in history, but it is essentially a Fellowship, constituted by a relation between God and Man, which in the last resort is discerned and apprehended by faith." And this recognition of the outward and visible on the one hand, and of the inward and spiritual on the other, both in their distinctiveness and in their mutual inter-dependence, is well expressed by J. H. Oldham in "The Church and its function in society" (page 115) where he writes, "The Church has an actual existence in history, and is real only in its actual historical embodiments. But we cannot attribute to these mixed bodies the characteristics of the true Church of Christ, or expect from them in their corporate capacity the action which can rightly be demanded from those who have committed themselves wholeheartedly to Christian discipleship. . . . Within the Church as an organised society the true Church has to be continually re-created, and to find new embodiment in the faith and obedience and devotion

of those who have responded to the voice of Christ."

I have dwelt at some length on the subject of the Church, because shallow or wrong thinking here inevitably leads to misconceptions regarding the nature of the Ministry and of the Sacraments. For if the formal rite of Baptism constitutes me a member of the mystical body of Christ regardless of my personal attitude to God or response to His Gospel of love, then I am justified in thinking that Order is more important than Faith, and that the due observance of the Sacraments takes precedence over the preaching of the Word. To put it briefly, the sacerdotal system stands or falls with the formal, external theory of the Church.

But when the New Testament shows me that the grace of God is not confined to regular visible channels, that "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem" shall men worship the Father, but in spirit and in reality, that a man is not justified before God by works but by faith in Christ Jesus, and that the thing that matters is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision but a new spiritual creation, then I know that, while men may look on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh on the heart; and that it is not the strict religious man who relies on his regular fasting and prayer and almsgiving, but the humble soul who casts himself upon God's mercy, that finds acceptance with Him.

This New Testament emphasis on the inward and spiritual—which must nevertheless express itself in the outward and material—explains the primary importance of the ministry of the Word, and in the light of that gives its true meaning to the ministry of the Sacraments. And at this point we return to the other implication of our title, that the order Word and Sacrament, which is the regular order in our formularies, is the order of priority.

If it is the attitude of the heart that matters most in God's sight, then that which influences the heart of man towards the right attitude is supremely important. The Holy Spirit Himself is the chief Agent here.

"For every virtue we possess, and every victory won,

And every thought of holiness are His alone."

But the question arises, How does the Holy Spirit influence the spirit of man? Directly or indirectly? The New Testament replies that it is in both ways. "The wind bloweth where it listeth" may equally well be translated, "The Spirit breathes where He will." And no man may measure or limit that influence. But, as our Lord proceeds to show in the same discourse, it is through the personal response in faith to the redeeming love of God revealed in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ that men receive the new life, which is eternal. Hence the vital necessity of proclaiming that redeeming love, of presenting the Gospel to every man's mind and conscience in a way that is so intelligible, so relevant to his condition and so inspired that he may receive it as the Word of God and live.

This is the method which Christ chose when He began His ministry by preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. This was the method that He gave to His disciples when He appointed twelve "that they might be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach." And it was the method that the apostles followed. Starting from the text which St. Peter used on the day of Pentecost, "Whosoever shall

call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," St. Paul asks, "How shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on Him of Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" And he sums up his argument with this conclusion, "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans x. 13, 14, 17).

The primary task, therefore, of the Christian Minister is to be a prophet or herald of the Gospel. And to fulfil that task he needs to be filled with the Spirit, like his Master. For it is a task that demands all his powers, and more. St. Paul leaves no room for doubt about this when he describes to the elders of Ephesus what it meant to fulfil the ministry which he had received from the Lord Jesus "to testify the gospel of the grace of God," how he had gone about among them preaching the Kingdom, and "teaching them publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." And he adds, "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."

If such is the Ministry of the Word, what of the Ministry of the Sacraments? It is clear that in the New Testament they have a vital place in the life of the Apostolic Church, complementary to that of the Word.

1. In the first place, they are essentially *sacraments of the Gospel* presenting the same message in dramatic form to all the senses, what St. Augustine calls *verba visibilia*, a message that is not only heard but seen. So Baptism proclaims that there is cleansing and new life in Christ, and that we may not enter the Kingdom of God without these. While the Holy Communion presents Christ as the Bread of Life, broken for us and giving His life that we may live through Him.

2. Secondly, they are *sacraments of the Church*, emphasising the corporate nature of Christianity, that we are not merely individual believers, but members one of another. Hence Baptism represents incorporation into the Christian society, and Holy Communion fosters our fellowship within it.

3. Thirdly, the sacraments are the necessary outward expression of inward faith and love. They represent the principle stated by St. Paul in the same chapter from which I have already quoted, that "with the heart man believeth unto justification, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans x. 10). Baptism in the Apostolic Church was the great occasion for public confession of faith, and this was undoubtedly one of the chief reasons for their insistence upon it as the proper sequel of faith. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." This explains, to my mind, why it was to Nicodemus that our Lord emphasised the necessity of being "born of water." Though Nicodemus probably interpreted the words as referring to John's baptism, the principle would be the same. It was not enough to be a secret disciple: he must come out into the open and make public confession.

But perhaps I have already trespassed on the ground to be covered to-morrow morning. This much, however, was necessary in order to indicate the essential conjunction of the Word and sacraments in the Christian Ministry. There are many instances of baptism recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In every instance, except one, baptism

follows the preaching and believing of the Word. And the one exception is the case of Saul of Tarsus, who had himself seen the risen Lord and heard His word.

Consequently, it is nothing short of a travesty of Apostolic truth to predicate of Baptism alone what the New Testament states about Baptism as the sequel to faith in response to the Gospel message. If any separation in thought is to be made between believing and being baptised, then there are plenty of passages in the New Testament which attribute both spiritual regeneration and the gift of the Spirit to the hearing and receiving of the Gospel. St. Peter, St. Paul, and probably St. James, write of the Word as the instrument of the new birth. And when St. Paul puts his great challenge to the Galatian church, he bases it on their experience, "This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. iii. 2) that is, by believing the Gospel message.

But the repeated use which St. Paul made of the rich symbolism of Christian baptism, as representing the spiritual death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness, is quite sufficient to show that he made no such separation. And neither must we. It is a false antithesis—dishonouring two great words—when a clergyman claims to be "an Evangelical in the pulpit and a Catholic at the altar." For as Canon J. K. Mozley has said, "If the sacraments are not evangelical, they are nothing."

Christ has called us to one Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. And "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."