

*A STEP IN ADVANCE ON THE QUESTION OF
EARLY CHURCH ORGANIZATION.*

Two recent publications suggest to me the desirability of again looking at the question of the organization assumed by the Early Church, in order to see where—if at all—ground has been gained. While the discussion on this subject was still going on in the pages of *THE EXPOSITOR*, there appeared a little book, by Dr. Hatch,¹ which partly supplemented and partly popularized the results of his Bampton Lectures. It was explained in the preface that this work was designed less for scholars than for the general reader: it was put forward as a sort of outline sketch, or rough draft, for a more elaborate work which the author was preparing, and which was intended to contain the evidence for the views which it embodied. A writer who was jealous for his own literary reputation might perhaps have avoided such an order of proceeding, but in the interests of historical study, I think that we have much reason to be grateful to Dr. Hatch for adopting it. The student too often finds himself in the position of not being able to see the wood for the trees; he is lost in the multitude of details; he gropes his way among facts which he cannot be said to understand, because he fails to see the organic connexion between them; there is nothing to rouse his interest and intelligence; the ardour of study evaporates under the depressing weight of unmanageable materials. Under such circumstances, no service can be greater than when a broad and vigorous hand traces out the leading principles which underlie the ill-digested mass, and reduces

¹ *The Growth of Christian Institutions.* London, 1887.

it to order; opens up the avenues which lead from part to part, connecting things near with things remote, and throws over the whole the various play of light and shade. To have some generalizations, some guiding principles, is the great thing; it does not follow that they are at once to be received as something final and unquestionable. It is well that the student should be encouraged to test and criticise as he reads. So it is that little by little the generalizations are brought into harmony with the facts, and that permanent advances in knowledge are made.

It seems to me then that a volume like *The Growth of Christian Institutions* was in any case a gift to be welcomed, and especially coming, as it does, from a writer who possesses an exceptional skill in the broad and lucid handling of complicated details. The power in question was conspicuous in the *Bampton Lectures* for 1880, and it is equally conspicuous in the little volume by which the lectures have been succeeded. It cannot fail to be stimulating and light-giving. The larger work which we are promised may be years before it is ready, but in the meantime these "hints to the wise" are sure not to be thrown away. Already they have begun to bear fruit, and fruit which is not less valuable because it takes the form mainly of challenge and criticism. The July number of the *Church Quarterly Review* contains an article on "Ancient and Modern Church Organization," which is chiefly devoted to Dr. Hatch's essay. It is excellently written, with the fullest courtesy and consideration, though from the standpoint of a declared opponent, with very competent knowledge, and with abundant power of clear and incisive statement. For these reasons, and because it seems to me that the writer has succeeded in happily formulating more than one point on which it should not be difficult to arrive at an understanding, I am tempted to make his article the subject of a few remarks. I am the more tempted to do

this, because it seems to me to cover just the period in regard to which discussion is likely to be profitable. In looking back over the series of papers which appeared in *THE EXPOSITOR* last year, the conclusion is impressed upon me that in regard to the *origines*, strictly so called, of Christian organization—the first period, which might be considered to end at about the year 150—we shall do well to wait a while before we pronounce. The question of Church organization cannot here be isolated from a number of other questions on which scholars are not agreed, and on which they are not likely to be agreed in the near future. I felt this especially in reading Dr. Harnack's paper, which was in many respects the weightiest of all the contributions to the series. Its methodical procedure and searching analysis of the documentary evidence furnished a model, which I hope that we shall try to imitate. But it proceeded from a number of assumptions in regard to the literature of this early period, and more especially in regard to the Books of the New Testament, for which we in England are not yet prepared. With all deference to our German friends, and with full recognition of their labours on these points, we should like to work out the problems for ourselves; and we should like to do so in a way which compels us to ask for time.

I think, therefore, that in regard to those portions of the inquiry which fall within this period, we shall do well to pause for the present, and let the hypotheses which we have before us digest in our minds in connexion with the whole body of the literature to which they belong. But for the next period—the period from the middle of the second century to the Council of Nicæa—I think that we are nearer to arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. I am encouraged in this belief by the clear issues which the writer in the *Church Quarterly* has raised in the review of which I have spoken. He challenges Dr. Hatch's conclu-

sions under four main heads. (1) He questions the view that in the Church of the first age—the ante-Nicene Church, we may say—there might be two bishops of one see. (2) He contends that episcopacy was from the first not congregational, but diocesan. (3) He will not allow that the early communities were independent of each other. (4) I gather that, though he does not seem to press the point, he is still of opinion that the rudiments at least may be found, before the fourth century, of national Churches.

Now on all these points I incline to think that Dr. Hatch is nearer to the truth than his critic, and I propose to state very briefly my reasons for thinking so. It is particularly easy to state these reasons, because they do not turn upon any conflict of opinion as to fact, but only upon a single consideration of a more general kind. With the reviewer's statement of the facts I am nearly always content. It seems to me that he has not only stated his facts correctly, but that he has made to them additions of considerable value. The evidence that he has drawn from Professor W. M. Ramsay's travels in Phrygia is entirely to the point; so too are the data which he has collected in regard to the Church of Cappadocia, and his analysis of the list of African bishops. In these instances he has contributed new material to the common stock already available, and he has done so in a thoroughly interesting and instructive manner. The exception that I am disposed to take is not to his facts, but to his way of approaching them, and to the inferences which he draws from them. Perhaps I shall make this clear if I take an illustration from another field. It seems to me, then, that the procedure of the reviewer is like that of those textual critics who approach the study of the New Testament from the point of view of the *Textus Receptus*, as if that had a prescriptive right in its favour, and every deviation from it must be made good by proof as strict as that which would pass in

the law-courts. Such a method seems to me to be inappropriate to a historical inquiry of this kind.

I find myself arriving at different results simply through approaching them from the other end. The reviewer does not exactly forget, but he dismisses from himself, as if it did not affect his reasoning, the truism that ecclesiastical institutions, like all others, must have had a beginning. They did not spring into full maturity all at once. To connect their origin with their subsequent history we see that there were certain stages which they must almost inevitably pass through. And we naturally watch the evidence, as it rises before us, to see which of those stages it indicates as existing at the time to which it refers. The reviewer argues from the finished product backwards, but does not concern himself with the process of growth. Dr. Hatch, on the other hand, as I understand him, is concerned mainly with that process; he watches the formative influences at work, and the first thing that he looks for is the evidence in the symptoms it affords that such and such a stage has been reached. There can be no question which of these methods is the more scientific. But the object of the reviewer is apologetic rather than scientific. In his eagerness to defend a certain form of Church constitution, he seems to me to suspect attacks against it where they are not intended. I hope to return to this point before I have done, and I shall be glad if I can succeed in allaying his uneasiness on this score. But I must first follow him through the issues which he has raised, and show how I think that he has missed the mark in regard to them. They all serve to illustrate the difference of which I have just been speaking, between the same facts regarded as steps in a process of growth, and regarded as quasi-legal proofs of the existence or non-existence of some particular feature of organization.

I. The first question that meets us is that as to the

possibility of two bishops existing simultaneously in one see. Of course from our modern point of view such a thing is impossible. But do we do right in projecting these modern associations backwards into the first age of the Church? Surely there must have been a time when no such rule existed, and it cannot have been otherwise than gradually formed. Most of us believe that there was a time when the same person might be called indifferently *πρεσβύτερος* or *ἐπίσκοπος*. But if so, there would be as many *ἐπίσκοποι* in a Church as there were *πρεσβύτεροι*. And though this state of things soon gave place to the monarchical episcopate, a further process would be necessary to determine the extent of the bishop's jurisdiction. In a small or average-sized city there would naturally be only a single bishop, though we cannot even assert so much as that at all positively. The case would be simple where all the Christians could meet in a single congregation; but what of those places where there were several scattered congregations? Such congregations would be formed in the first instance quite innocently, and without any idea of violating Church order. The order for them to violate was not yet constituted. It is very probable that in the Ignatian Letters we see the beginnings of such order. The writer is urgent upon those whom he addresses to rally round the bishop; but the bare fact of his urgency on this point shows that it was not something that could be taken for granted. We do not know how Ignatius himself would have dealt with the case of the larger cities, like Rome or Alexandria. The reviewer in the *Church Quarterly* refers to the supposition that there may in some cases have been different bishops for the Jewish and the Gentile sections of these larger communities. It is well known that the hypothesis of such simultaneous episcopates has been suggested by the difficulty of otherwise accounting for the early lists of bishops, especially at Rome. I am by no

means sure that this hypothesis is devoid of probability. In favour of it is the fact with which we are familiar from the sixth chapter of the Acts, that the Jews were in the habit of forming synagogues for members of the same class or nationality; we read that there were at Jerusalem separate synagogues for Jews who belonged to the class of Libertini and natives of Cyrene and Alexandria, on the one hand, and for natives of Asia and Cilicia, on the other.¹ In like manner we know that there was a synagogue at Rome specially called "the synagogue of the Hebrews."² That being the case, we should not be surprised if a similar arrangement had been adopted at first in the Christian communities, and gradually given up as the Gentile converts outnumbered and absorbed the Jewish. At least we have no reason to think that there was any rule against a double episcopate to stand in the way. If the gradual separation of the bishop from the presbyters was one result of experience, we may very well believe that the limitation to a single bishop was a further result of the same experience, marking a distinct stage in the history of the office.

All this is so natural and so probable *a priori*, that we do not do wrong to approach the later evidence with it present to our minds as a hypothesis. What then do we learn from that evidence? Does it support the hypothesis or does it not? There are three crucial instances: the instance of Hippolytus, the instance of Novatian (with which we may group that of Meletius), and the 8th Canon of Nicæa. We shall not, I think, be far wrong, if we take these three instances as marking so many stages in the history of the rule disallowing the presence of two bishops in one see. In the case of Hippolytus that rule is still unformed; in the case of Novatian it is forming; in the Nicene Canon it is

¹ Meyer thinks that five distinct synagogues are indicated; Wendt only two. The Greek seems to favour the latter supposition.

² *Corp. Inscr. Græc.*, 9909; Schürer, *Neutest. Zeitgesch.*, ii. 517, ed. 2.

definitely formed and, though not yet hardened in practice, it has obtained a permanent place in Church law.

I am glad to see that the writer in the *Church Quarterly* accepts the results of the luminous investigations of Dr. Döllinger about Hippolytus. These investigations have put an end to the mystery which enveloped that prominent but indistinct personality. Hippolytus was a bishop; but even Eusebius did not know of what see he was bishop. Pope Gelasius, at the end of the fifth century, made him bishop of Bostra in Arabia. Somewhat later, in the middle of the seventh century, a tradition arose that he was bishop of Portus, at the mouth of the Tiber. The Bostra story needs no refutation now that we possess the *Philosophumena*, and Portus had no bishop before the year 313. The truth was that Hippolytus was a second, or secessionist, bishop of Rome. He appears to have separated from Callistus, the occupant of the Roman see in the years 217–222, on grounds partly personal and partly doctrinal, and to have formed a rival congregation, of which he was elected bishop. In this separatist position he remained throughout the episcopates of Urbanus (222–230) and Pontianus (230–235). The two bishops were together banished to Sardinia by the civil power in 235. This seems to have led to a reconciliation, as a result of which both resigned office; the two parties united in the election of Anteros (235–236), and the schism was healed.¹ The banishment to the mines of Sardinia proved a sentence of death to both the now reconciled rivals. They both died within a year, their bodies were conveyed together to Rome, and they were both interred on the same day. The writer in the *Church Quarterly* recognises the truth of this version, though he goes rather too far in saying that Hippolytus did not recognise Callistus as bishop.² Dr. Döllinger has shown

¹ Döllinger: *Hippolytus and Callistus*, p. 67 f. E. T.

² *Church Quarterly*, p. 316.

reason for thinking that Hippolytus did at first recognise Callistus,¹ and that the breach occurred as the result of subsequent controversy.

But the remarkable thing about it all was the extraordinary quietness with which so serious a secession was received. We might have expected that it would make a stir throughout the Christian world; but it did nothing of the kind. We will not say exactly that it was hushed up, but at least no one seems to have been disposed to draw attention to it. The causes appear to have been twofold. On the one hand, Hippolytus was a writer of whom the whole Church was proud. Since the death of Irenæus he was by far the most learned man in the West; there was a genuine respect for him which even his secession might in some measure enhance, as he was the advocate of the stricter, and as many would think, the loftier view. On this ground there would be a general wish to shelter his reputation, and to make use of his powerful aid in the controversies with heresy. And on the other hand the act of secession did not offend against the Christian conscience as it would have done at a later day. It was beginning to dawn upon the Christian consciousness that there ought not to be two bishops in one place, but it was as yet only dawning; it had not yet become an acknowledged rule and law of the Church.

A further step was taken in the controversy with Novatian. This controversy repeated in many respects what had happened little more than thirty years before in the case of Hippolytus. But here there is this distinction, that the election of Cornelius, which took place in 251, from the first was not recognised by the party of Novatian. The state of the case seems to be this. Cyprian himself proceeds with caution as soon as he hears of the election of Cornelius and of the opposition raised by Novatian.

¹ *Hippolytus and Callistus*, p. 93.

He sends Caldonius and Fortunatus to Rome, with instructions to make inquiry into the exact state of the facts. When once their report is received, his own course seems to be quite clear; he enunciates in unequivocal terms the very principle which we are discussing: when a bishop has once been appointed and approved by the testimony and judgment of his colleagues and the laity, no second bishop can be set up (*intellegant episcopo semel facto et collegarum ac plebis testimonio et iudicio comprobato alium constitui nullo modo posse*).¹ The question touched Cyprian on the point where he was strongest; no other ruler of the Church had thought so much or so long on the theory of the episcopate; his own mind was made up, and he was prompt to act upon the principle which he laid down. But he needed to bring that principle home to the conscience of the Church. It was by no means so clear to every one as it was to him. Novatian himself had played a prominent part in the affairs of the Church of Rome; he enjoyed a reputation for unblemished orthodoxy; like Hippolytus he belonged to the Puritan party, and was scandalised at the laxity of Cornelius; but he evidently was not shocked, as Cyprian was, at the idea of a dual episcopate. He objects to Cornelius, not that he was not rightly ordained, but that he *ought not* to have been ordained; his charges were those of personal unfitness, which, according to Cyprian, were made too late. They might, if entertained by the body of the Church, have been a bar to the ordination of Cornelius, but they could not make that ordination invalid. Cyprian's view was that which the Church at large has adopted; and this action of his no doubt contributed largely to its adoption; but it could not count on universal acceptance at that time. Not only did Novatian himself entirely ignore it, but he found no difficulty in obtaining a following. Both in Rome and in other parts

¹ *Ep.* 44 (41), 3.

of the Christian world Novatianist Churches arose by the side of the Catholic, with bishops and a fully organized ministry of their own.

A further proof that Cyprian was in advance of his age on this point, and that the general Christian conscience, though disposed to follow him, did not do so with equal decision, is to be seen in the tenderness with which the Novatianist schism, and the Meletian after it, under somewhat similar circumstances, were treated. The question of the Novatianists was one of those with which the Council of Nicæa had to deal, and it did so in the 8th Canon. The terms of readmission offered to the Novatianists were liberal in the extreme. Where the Novatianists were in undisputed possession, and there was no Catholic bishop or congregation by the side of theirs, the Novatianist bishop and clergy might keep their full rank and privileges; but where there was a Catholic bishop he must act as such, though he might, if he pleased, leave his Novatianist brother in the enjoyment of his title; if he did not consent to this, the Novatianist was to sink to the position of a *chorepiscopus*, or presbyter. Contrast for a moment this treatment with that accorded to heretics! The fault of Novatian and his followers was like that of those who do wrong for the first time, and before they have been clearly warned of the consequences. At the time when the schism began the mind of the Church upon the subject was forming; at Nicæa it was formed. The end of the 8th Canon contains a distinct formulation of the principle by which the Church was thenceforth to be guided; it explains that the measures above-mentioned were to be taken, '*that there may not be two bishops in one city.*'¹

II. The next point in dispute is as to the constitution of the primitive communities: were they congregational, or

¹ We need not go into the parallel case of the Meletians, which was dealt with in a very similar manner. See Socrates, *II. E.*, 1, 9.

were they diocesan in anything like our modern sense? Dr. Hatch maintains the former view; the *Church Quarterly* maintains the latter. I have already expressed my sense of the value of the facts which the reviewer adduces in support of his position. They are valuable in themselves and as helping us to define and give precision to our ideas, but I am afraid that they do not seem to me to have a very direct bearing upon the point to be proved. An obvious way of engaging with this position would be to march round its flank. Let me ask the reviewer to consider how the propagation of Christianity first began. It began through the forming of little groups of converts at the great stations along the Roman roads which St. Paul, and after his example probably other Apostles, took as the route of their missionary journeys. These groups of converts would meet at first in a single house, then they would throw out off-shoots, and two or three such centres of meeting would spring up in the same city. But the early Church was essentially urban. St. Paul and his lieutenants wisely concentrated their strength on the points where they could produce the greatest effect. For many a long day the dwellers in the villages were "pagans." But even if they had not been it would not have made much difference. The "country" of the ancients was a different thing from ours; it was not sprinkled all over with villas and homesteads; the rule was, at least over large tracts of the empire,¹ for the labourers to live in the cities or small townships and to go out to their work every morning. It would therefore be no hardship to them to worship in the city; in any case they would come to the city long before the city would go out to them. The complete Christianizing of country as well as town was a slow progress; it had not gone on far when the State itself became Christian. What then do

¹ Where this description does not apply, *chorepiscopi* seem to have been appointed.

we see? We see communities with a well-defined centre, but with no definition of their circumference. Until the Churches extended so far as to touch one another, the circumference did not need any defining. It is an anachronism to think of a province as mapped out into districts and those districts into parishes, like an English diocese. There is no evidence of any such method in the first missionary efforts. What division there was, seems to have been of a different kind: St. Paul was to go to Gentiles, St. Peter to Jews; but antecedently there was nothing to prevent two distinct centres, one Gentile and one Jewish, arising in the same city. If we are to give a name to these primitive communities with their bishops, "congregational" will describe them better than "diocesan."

III. What was the relation of these communities to each other? Were they welded together into a compact organization? Were they federated? Ultimately no doubt they were; but this too was a matter of time. In the last quarter of the second century, the pressing questions of Montanism and the Paschal Controversy caused "synods" or "conferences" to be held. But it would be a mistake to regard these tentative efforts of the Church to find for itself corporate expression as stereotyped upon the later lines. It seems to me that Dr. Hatch has stated the case exceedingly well. "At first such conferences were held irregularly. There was no stated time or occasion for them. There was no fixed president. There was no limitation of the area from which their members were drawn."¹ I cannot see anything in this description that is not strictly in accordance with the facts. And when Dr. Hatch goes further, and instances the Council of Ancyra as showing that this state of things lasted on into the fourth century, I cannot dissent. The impulse to the federation of the Churches arose out of the need for concerted action; but

¹ *Growth of Ch. Inst.*, p. 121.

I doubt very much if history records a case in which the necessity for combination determined from the first the form which such combination should take, and in which nothing was gained from subsequent experience. If there was one man to whom more than another the carrying out of the federation of the Churches was due, that man was Cyprian. The league of bishops was the engine which he used for reducing to order the refractory members of his own flock; and to the same league of bishops he appealed in his controversy with Stephen.¹ A council like that which Cyprian convened to deal with the question of re-baptism, with its eighty-seven bishops from Africa, Numidia, and Mauretania, was a truly representative assembly. The ground was already prepared when the alliance of Christianity with the State, on the accession of Constantine, led to the systematic organization of the Church on the basis of the civil divisions of the Empire. The holding of provincial synods twice a year is regulated by the 5th Canon of Nicæa. This was supplemented by the 2nd Canon of Constantinople. It does not indeed appear that these Canons were by any means always observed; by the time of the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, the prescribed two meetings a year had fallen into disuse and had to be re-enacted; but theoretically, full provision was made for the regular administration of the affairs of the Church.

IV. On the fourth and last point I do not understand that the reviewer himself lays any stress. It is of course in vain to look for any traces of national Churches during the ante-Nicene period. There could not be national Churches before there were nations, or while the civilized and Christian world was all embraced in the same imperial system. I agree with the reviewer that the early pre-eminence of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch is due rather

¹ See this well brought out in O. Ritschl, *Cyprian von Karthago*, Göttingen, 1885.

to civil than ecclesiastical influence, but this does not carry us far on the way towards national Churches. These were really a product of the West, and date from the invasion and settlement of the barbarians.

And now that I have gone as far as this in combating his conclusions, I feel that I must make my peace—or at least try to make my peace—with the *Church Quarterly* reviewer. I fear that he will think me unkind in arguing so persistently against what are clearly with him articles of faith, or at least pledges of his loyalty to the Church to which he belongs. I too am a member, and I hope not a disloyal one, of the same Church. But I cannot think that any question of loyalty is at stake in the questions which we have been discussing. I see no reason why they should not be treated strictly on their own merits apart from any ulterior issues.

If we are to bring in such considerations, I can only say that the inquiries which have of late been made into the early history of the Christian ministry seem to me to result in an Eirenicon between the Churches. The dove returns with an olive-branch in its mouth. The inquiries in question do, I think, stand in the way of aggressive partisanship, but I do not see how they can shake a position deliberately taken up. Our confessional differences are indeed reflected in primitive Christianity, but not as mutually exclusive. They represent not conflicting and irreconcilable conceptions of the original constitution of the Church, but only successive stages in the growth of that constitution. The Church passed through a congregational stage, and (if we exclude the activity of the Apostles as something exceptional) it also passed through a presbyterian stage. If any one wishes to single out these stages and to model the society to which he belongs upon them, he is zealous for a pure and primitive polity; he

clings to the Bible and what he finds in the Bible; he will not allow himself to wander far from that ideal which he thinks that Christ and His Apostles have left him. Can we condemn him for this? Shall we not rather say, *εὐδοκίμειτω καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ?*

Nor yet need that prevent us from thinking that we have a "more excellent way" of our own. We do not think it right to limit the promises and their working to a single generation. The whole Christian world was in a state of movement which did not cease with the death of the last Apostle. The impulse once given to it was too strong to spend its force so soon. I cannot myself think that fifty years, or even a hundred years more or less in the date at which an institution became fixed, makes so vital a difference in its character. The cold eye of science may look at these things, and point out the causes that were in operation. Those causes were the fruit of human experience, groping its way towards the means best adapted to its end, the preservation and due transmission of the Word. Even science will probably decide that there has been a "survival of the fittest," that under the conditions of those times a better constitution could not easily have been devised. Though I could not entirely agree with him, I was glad to find Prof. Rendel Harris, in his interesting contribution to our former discussion, say a good word for the Montanists. But does he seriously think that a Montanistic Church would have brought down Christianity to our own day, as the Church of Cyprian, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine has brought it down? To do so, he must exercise a stronger flight of the imagination than I am capable of. I would guard myself against being supposed to imply that what is good once is necessarily good always; but I know nothing in the history of the Church which belies the conclusion, that both the great and conscious decisions and the imperceptible accretion of changes

have been for the best relatively to the conditions out of which they took their rise. The scientific investigator will see in this "survival of the fittest," —not "fittest" in the abstract but fittest under given circumstances—or the "instinct of self-preservation." But from the point of view of religion we may look behind the chain of secondary causes, by no means ignoring them or attenuating their force, but seeking to get at their higher significance, and in that higher significance we may see revealed the finger of God.

W. SANDAY.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the above was in type an elaborate work has appeared, *The Church and the Ministry*, by Rev. C. Gore. This too deals specially with the early stages of the history, and is sure to demand careful consideration.

THE MELCHIZEDEK OR HEAVENLY HIGH
PRIESTHOOD OF OUR LORD.

PART II.

FROM the Person of our Heavenly High Priest, our Priest after the order of Melchizedek, we turn to His priestly work. It "fulfils" the priestly work of the older covenant in each of its three particulars, Offering, Intercession, and Benediction.

I. *Offering.* We have already seen that the priesthood of our Lord began with the moment spoken of in His own words, "And I, if I be lifted on high out of the earth, will draw all men unto Myself" (John xii. 32), and that that moment is fixed by the immediately following language of the Evangelist, "But this He said, signifying by what manner of death He should die" (ver. 33). In other words,