

THE MINISTRY AND SACRAMENTS OF THE
NATIONAL CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

THE DOCTRINE AND VALIDITY
OF THE
MINISTRY AND SACRAMENTS OF THE
NATIONAL CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

(The Baird Lecture for 1903)

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P R E F A C E.

SOME explanation is due to those who may object that what is really a defence of Presbyterianism should apparently be limited to a vindication of the National Church of Scotland. It was with no such intention that the title of these Lectures was adopted, but because the Lecturer did not feel entitled to speak on behalf of all varieties of Presbyterianism throughout the world. At the same time, it is evident that what has been written respecting the Church of Scotland must apply equally to all those Churches which have sprung from her, and which continue to maintain her historic order and her standards.

I beg gratefully to acknowledge my indebtedness to various friends for kind help, especially to the Very Rev. Dr Leishman, the Rev. Dr Sprott, the Rev. H. J. Wotherspoon, M.A., the Rev. Principal Lindsay, D.D., and to the Right Hon. J. A. Campbell, M.P., LL.D.

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GLASGOW, *May* 1903.

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INTRODUCTION.

AN exposition of the doctrinal and historical position of the Church of Scotland in reference to the question of the Church, Ministry, and Sacraments, is certainly not uncalled for at the present time. The matters involved are wide and far-reaching. Implicitly they touch on controversies which are being waged beyond Scotland, and which affect, in some of their aspects, the Anglican Church more than the Scottish. The earlier Tractarian movement, and what is now popularly termed "Ritualism," mark the commencement and the zenith of opinions, claims, and customs which have divided the Anglican Church into bitter factions. We do not, however, intend to allude to such movements except in so far as they may illustrate or touch on the questions which fall to be dealt with in this special discussion.

We have directly to do with Episcopalians chiefly in reference to their exclusive claims for the divine authority and validity of the three orders of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon, and their consequent refusal to recognise the Church of Scotland, or any Presbyterian Church, as a true branch of the Church Catholic. We are aware that the authoritative standards of the Anglican Church do not directly pronounce either for or against the validity of the ministry of our Scottish Church, and certainly the "Bidding Prayer" indicates recognition rather than denial of that validity. But, with many notable exceptions, and in spite of the trend of recent Anglican scholarship, there is little doubt that the general consensus of opinion among Episcopalians, emphatically so among High Churchmen, is strongly adverse to our claims. We could not perhaps find these extreme views expressed in briefer form than in the following sentence from Haddan's 'Apostolic Succession': "Without bishops no presbyters; without bishops and presbyters no legitimate certainty of sacraments; without sacraments no certain union with the mystical body of Christ — namely, His Church; without this no certain union with Christ; and without that union no salvation."¹ It is with this attempt to unchurch Presbyterians by denying the validity of their ministry and sacraments that we have now most concern; and if, assuming the point of view that they themselves take, we can reach solid and well-sustained beliefs respecting the

¹ Quoted by Professor M'Giffert in 'American Journal of Theology,' July 1902.

apostolic character of our Church and ministry, and the Scriptural character of its doctrine of the sacraments, we shall be in a position to estimate aright the value of the claims assumed by those who appropriate to themselves, and withhold from us, the title of "Catholic."

There are various tendencies in Scotland which also seem to call for some definite teaching.

1. There is the assertion of what, for lack of a better description, we must call the "High Church" Episcopal claims already alluded to, sometimes taking shape in a proselytism at our own doors more or less pronounced. That proselytism assumes various forms. Sometimes it is by public teaching in the pulpit or on the platform or in the press, but more frequently by private influence. We certainly do not allude to the vulgar inducement of supposed social position, which seems to attract certain of the baser sort: for the social ban which has been so frequently enforced against Nonconformists in England—which all good English Churchmen regret—cannot, happily, be employed in Scotland, where there is a historic National Church reformed directly from Romanism. What Nonconformity there may be here exists not from our declining to accept Episcopacy, but because Episcopacy has refused to conform to the earlier and national type which the Reformed Church assumed in Scotland in the sixteenth century. The continuity of the National Church through the presbyterate, as we shall show, is as unbroken as that of Episcopacy through the episcopate. There have

been periods of interruption without breach of continuity, as in England during the Commonwealth, and in Scotland during the persecutions under the Restoration. The term Nonconformity applies to Scottish Episcopacy very much in the same sense as it applies to certain branches of Presbyterianism in England which would fain displace the National Church there. The continuity of the ministry in Scotland has been through Romanism to Presbyterianism. Episcopacy was largely forced upon Scotland, and was never really national. We abhor the carrying of ecclesiastical differences into social life, and the *reductio ad absurdum* is surely reached when by crossing the Border one finds the relation of the so-called Churchman and Nonconformist at once reversed. But the recognition of social distinctions founded upon ecclesiastical differences is one which the judicious advocates of Episcopacy, who regard the question in dispute as of distinctly religious importance, disown as illegitimate and regrettable. We agree with them, and reckon these social motives as a negligible quantity in the discussion of the serious question at issue.

In speaking of proselytism we rather refer to the earnest and continual propagation of Episcopal claims that are of a character as intolerant towards Presbyterians as similar claims urged by Romanists against Anglicans. If the grounds on which either of these are urged were true, we would excuse the earnestness: it is only when they are discovered to be at least exceedingly doubtful that they appear unchristian. One hears of this

propaganda being carried on in the intercourse of daily life, sometimes by the younger and less experienced clergy, but more frequently by a certain type of laity, male and female, who drop into the ears of our people assertions picked out of the numerous books, booklets, and pamphlets issued by the sacerdotal party, which, without a hint of there being any other side to the question, unchurch every other Church which retains not the three orders of ministry. Such persistent asseveration, delivered with an assurance which admits of no doubt, becomes perplexing to simple souls insufficiently instructed,—some of whom are thereby led captive, and frequently, as in the case of most perverts, become themselves narrower and more intolerant than their proselytisers. The contemptuous assumption of exclusive divine right, and the unhesitating manner in which even the most spiritual, saintly, and devoted members of other Churches, whose lives are manifestly sealed with the seal of God, are handed over to what are termed His “uncovenanted mercies,” cannot but shock the Christian conscience of the reflective, while they fill those who have taken the trouble to study the questions at issue with astonishment at the recklessness of the statements on which such dogmatism rests.

We know that the position into which these fundamental beliefs have forced many a man of keen natural sympathy is felt as a real trial. Such persons painfully recognise the separation which these doctrines have compelled, and mourn the

gulf which they cause between them and those whom they personally esteem. They long for some method whereby they can heartily, and without loss of principle, enjoy full communion with the great and good men who at present appear to them to be without the Catholic Church. One finds the same trial experienced by good Romanists with reference to the devout of all Churches external to their own; and we are sure that while there may be a priestly arrogance displayed by some which may provoke resentment, yet the actual tone of mind which prevails among the truly religious men who have conscientiously accepted what are usually termed High Church Episcopal views is one not of pride, but of enforced, and to them painful, duty. They would, if they freely could, receive all good Christians into full fellowship.

Who that reads the life of such a truly apostolic man as the late Bishop Wordsworth of St Andrews, can fail to notice the intensity with which he longed for unity, and how gladly he would have accepted any *via media*, consistent with what he deemed the divinely instituted order of ministry, by which he could have embraced within one fold, and without sacrifice of principle on their part, the many Presbyterians around him whom he so justly appreciated and loved. We must treat with all possible respect even the prejudices of such men, while we urge the ground on which we uphold the validity of our own order and sacraments, and our claim to membership in the one Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Lord Jesus.

2. There is another tendency which renders a fuller realisation of the doctrine of the Church, Ministry, and Sacraments of practical importance.

The drift of what is popularly called "Evangelicalism" has been towards an exaggerated individualism. Far be it from us to underestimate the services rendered by the Evangelical party to the spiritual life of our country. It has under God been distinctively the chief vitalising force in the religious life of Scotland for several generations. We cannot be too grateful for the testimony it has so earnestly borne to the fundamental truths of the Gospel—the divine glory of the Incarnate Lord, His atonement, resurrection, and ascension—and for the emphasis with which the converting and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost has been set forth. But there have been various defects in Evangelicalism. If it has, in common with High Churchism, been often too indifferent to the new light which science and criticism have thrown upon many traditional beliefs, it has also shown a tendency to abide exclusively in the region of personal feeling and experience, and to minimise the importance of the external in relation to the spiritual, manifestly so in its inadequate recognition of the Church, with its ministry and sacraments, as a divine institution, and the relationships thereby created in respect to all its baptised members. The prominence given to the "saving of one's own soul," in the sense of gaining such experiences and feelings as may afford assurance of being safe when one dies, has led to a subjective and individualistic conception of religion which, in spite

of the spirituality and essential truth of many of its views, has been one-sided and faulty. Out of this individualism arises the lightness of mind with which the scandal of our ecclesiastical divisions is regarded, so that it is rather as being a waste of energy and money, or as a needless overlapping of agencies, that these divisions are regretted, and not as being of the nature of sin; nay, they are sometimes even vaunted because of the stimulus which competition gives to enterprise. Out of such loose ideas of the nature of the Church there springs another phase of exaggerated individualism or thoughtless pietistic selfishness, through which many, considering only their personal tastes, are ready to join any coterie or "Gospel Meeting" connected with any Church or no Church at all, if they can get good "for their own souls." Church and sacraments become of no account.

And there are other evils springing from the same defective views manifested in the establishment of all sorts of associations and societies for the evangelisation of the people, and professing, as a noble characteristic, that they are "undenominational," or, in other words, not connected with the Church in any form. Yet the promoters of such organisations are usually themselves respected members of some Church, and have no intention of casting any slight on the ministry and sacraments. In seeking to reach the masses, they probably at first intend to lead those they influence into the membership of Christ's Church, but practically, if not theoretically, it is very imperfectly attempted. There are many

societies of this nature for gathering in the lapsed by means of "meetings" and "addresses" which seldom lead the men and women who attend them beyond the "meetings." It is a system made up chiefly of "meetings" and "addresses," and too often ends only in more "meetings" and "addresses." We cannot but admire the zeal, self-sacrifice, and devotion of the good and loving men and women who thus labour in the cause of Christ, but none the less do we regret the defective character of the system, and its failure to realise the divinely appointed functions of the Church, with its ministry and sacraments, for the edification of Christian life.

3. There is another class to which further reflection on what the Standards of the Church of Scotland teach regarding the Church, Ministry, and Sacraments may be of use. These persons are discovered among members of our own Church who assume the position of being its most orthodox supporters, while they frequently denounce as Romanism or Ritualism the very doctrines which our Standards enforce. We do not allude to mere agitators, but to the sentiments expressed by good people who are filled with sincere anxiety lest the Church they love should be departing from its ancient doctrine and practice. It would be well if such persons would but study what the doctrine and ancient practice of the Church really are, for they often confound the habits or views which grew up, partly through the influence of the English Independents in the days of Cromwell, and partly

through that of Eighteenth Century "Moderates," with what the Church of Scotland really teaches, and what in its earlier periods it devoutly practised. Thus it is that one hears views denounced as rank heresy which are the very views expressed in our Standards. The Reformers, of whom these people profess to be followers, instead of acknowledging their support, would probably have denounced them as propagators of error. Many of our people, therefore, require to learn what the teaching of our Church really is in order that their convictions may rest on some better foundation than customs and prejudices, the growth of a later time, which are frequently urged as characteristic of our historic faith and worship.

4. Lastly, there is the spirit of Rationalism which denies, or at least fails to assert, the supernatural life and the divine powers with which the Church, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost, has been endowed. The ethics of the Christian ideal, the beauty of the life and example of Christ, the glory of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and the grandeur of self-sacrifice, are eloquently expounded, but the supernatural facts of the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and His life now as head over all things to the Church, the personality and offices of the Holy Ghost, and the functions of the Church as the body of Christ, if not avowedly denied, are too frequently ignored.

For these among other reasons it seems not inappropriate to direct attention to the doctrine of

the Church, Ministry, and Sacraments, as held by the Church of Scotland.

It may be well at the outset to state the spirit in which we wish to deal with the questions at issue between ourselves and those of the Episcopal Church who challenge our claims. It would be a misrepresentation of our sentiments if we were to convey the impression that we are opposed to the Church of England or her offshoots, or that we entertain any disrespect for the episcopal office. There is no branch of the Reformed Church which is more distinguished for learning, high tone, and noble devotion to duty; and the long line of prelates who have shed lustre on the Church in which they bore office has been a rich gift from God to the Church Universal. If the question was whether, for the practical ends of government, Episcopacy did or did not possess advantages which commended it in some respects over Presbytery, much might be said in its favour. On such grounds as securing the efficiency and dignity of the ministry many would acknowledge the special advantages which government by bishops presents. Except for the interference of civil law, it secures an "executive," which Presbyterianism greatly lacks. In like manner we heartily acknowledge the value of the Prayer Book, that magnificent heritage of holy thought and stately diction, which has been as a ministering angel to the devotional life of generation after generation of our fellow-countrymen.

We are thankful also, in dealing with the special subject in hand, to recognise the large extent in

which the Anglican Standards are identical with our own.

It is well that in setting forth these preliminary observations we should indicate the line of evidence we intend to follow. We shall make Holy Scripture the supreme rule to which every question must be referred. We are strongly convinced that when the authority of the Fathers is relegated to the secondary position it deserves, the evidence relied on by High Churchmen is largely discounted. When the question is respecting what Christ and His apostles did or did not institute, it is evident that the further we go from them, the more certain it is that we shall be found dealing with a changed condition of life, and that the views set forth are probably affected by contemporaneous circumstances, and that local, political, or social influences are likely to have acted as ocean currents, insensibly diverting the advance from the original direction. Unless Newman's doctrine of "Development" is accepted—which is not likely—the greatest caution should be exercised in receiving patristic views and traditions, lest we read back into the New Testament beliefs that were an after-growth, indicating rather how far the Church had wandered from the apostles than affording a safe guide as to what the apostles actually taught. And when we recollect the Judaic reaction which began and was denounced even in the lifetime of the apostles, we are bound to guard against the effect of similar movements.

Our principle is, that the further we go from the

apostles the authority becomes proportionately less reliable. We refuse to place ourselves unreservedly on the inclined plane which slopes down from the sure Word of God through traditions and councils till we are landed in the full-blown "development" of the papal claims, with all the novel dogmas and exclusive arrogance of Romanism. The Papacy seems to us to be the rebuke, as it is the outcome, of an exaggerated deference to traditions reaching through the medieval period, and of the tendency to bring Scripture to be judged by the Fathers rather than the Fathers to be judged by Scripture. We have much to learn from the Fathers, especially the sub-apostolic Fathers, as to what was believed in their day regarding the teaching and institutions of Christ's apostles. The documents and customs and beliefs which existed subsequent to the apostolic period do more than assist us, as the letters of Pliny do, to re-create a picture of primitive Church life; but the critical period for our purposes is chiefly within the New Testament and the literature reaching to the early years of the second century. The claim, for example, for the Episcopate as essentially distinct from and higher than the Presbyterate, can never be established if the links are wanting which connect the claim with the apostles themselves. A continuity which can be traced, say, to the end of the second century, may indicate great antiquity; but if it begins there and not with the apostles, it lacks apostolic authority. Scripture and the immediate sub-apostolic age must therefore give us the most

reliable interpretation respecting the form which apostolic institutions actually assumed under apostolic authority.¹

¹ We are fully alive to the reply which some High Churchmen may make to this principle. With them it is not Scripture which is the authority for the Church, but the Church which is the authority for Scripture. The books of the New Testament, they say, are vouched for by the Church. We are dependent on the Church for the canon, and accordingly the Church holds a co-ordinate authority with Scripture. But these positions cannot well be sustained. It is true that we discover from patristic literature evidence of dates at which the books of the New Testament were quoted as authentic, and have, accordingly, elements on which the critical judgment may work. The genuineness and integrity of the books of the New Testament rest on other grounds than the decrees of such councils as that of Carthage. The modern critic acts as the Fathers did for centuries, weighing proofs and judging from internal as well as external evidence. "It should be observed," writes Dr Stanton, "that the authority which the writings of the New Testament possessed was not based, as we in our days might be inclined to imagine, on a judgment of the Church, either formal or implied, as to their surpassing moral and spiritual power, their inspiration" (Hastings' 'Dictionary of the Bible,' iii. 539). "The pre-Eusebian age was almost as familiar as we with the higher criticism in *both* its forms, *historical* as well as *literary*" ('Hibbert Journal,' April 1903, p. 519).