

First of all, we consider the New Testament quite sufficient to originate a complete Chu ch. Should a copy of this blessed book come among a people hitherto unacquainted with Christian Churches, and by God's blessing be received by them as from God, they would find in it, and acting on its instructions could organise, a completely equipped Scriptural Church. They learn from it to believe in Jesus, to meet together to edify one another, to choose out from among them men of honest and good report for the better management of common interests, or finding some of their number gifted to edify the rest, to select and set them over them in the Lord, in cases of difficulty to consult the brethren, and to administer through their recognised officers baptism and the Lord's Supper, decently and in order. The same book would instruct them how to perpetuate and extend the Church, precisely as Timothy and Titus in point of fact labored, and as Churches are labouring in many parts of the world at this moment. Ministers so chosen and set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands are New Testament ministers while they teach New Testament doctrines.

This principle disposes of the theory of apostolical succession, according to which only those on whom have been imposed the hands of men coming in direct and unbroken succession from the Apostles are to be regarded as true ministers, and fitting channels for sacramental grace. Had the Church held fast the truth on all other points, this "fond imagination" might have done little harm; but as it has been, it becomes productive of serious mischief. It is nowhere recognised or hinted at in Scripture. If the heavenly fire could run down to the latest ages only through such a medium, it is incredible that the Church should not have had instructions on the subject. Blessed be God, we are not dependent on any such intangible, invisible cable, buried amid the mire and dirt of the dark ages—ages at once of apostasy and turbulence, when "there was sorrow on the sea, and it could not be quiet."

It follows from this sufficiency of the New Testament to originate a Church—or, if you do not see the sequence, it may be maintained as an independent principle—that the Church has a perfect right from Christ to perform all Church functions. In one sense she is a voluntary society; in another she is authoritatively constituted under Christ, her head, and dependent on Him. An illustration may bring this out more prominently than a statement. When an unhappy criminal in the Corinthian Church brought disgrace on the Christian name, the apostle gave instructions for his removal from the communion of the Church. No permission was sought from any power outside the Church. No king, or magistrate, or ruler of any kind is consulted. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" is as sufficient authority as the name of the Queen is for dispensing justice at the Four Courts. Our highest civil and legal authorities have no more than written instructions from the Sovereign, and the Church of Christ has the same from the Lord and Head.

Now, if this could be done in Corinth in the first, the second, the third century, or at this day, if such a Church flourished there (as unhappily there does not), why not in Edinburgh, or Dublin, or New York?

This principle, rightly understood, not only sanctions the Church's independent action in all matters of discipline, but it disposes of some practical questions of interest and difficulty.

None of us, for example, being loyal subjects, would acknowledge the authority of a foreign sovereign within these realms. We would not defer to Louis Napoleon, or (whatever respect we had for his person or government) to the President of the United States. When we go into their dominions, we are bound to respect their authority and obey their laws. If they offered us civil honours or benefit, we should be satisfied that our own Sovereign approved before receiving it. So it is in the affairs of Christ's kingdom. We own no authority in it but His. We are jealous of dishonouring Him by the appearance