

THE DIVINE ORIGIN AND UNBROKEN TRANSMISSION OF MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY.

A Sermon Preached in St. Andrew's Church, Jackson, Miss., February 8th, 1853.

BY RT. REV. WILLIAM M. GREEN, D. D.

Continued.

The Church, thus viewed, is a living organism, framed and dwelt in by Christ, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Into this body, so constituted "that there should be no schism" in it, are we all brought by Baptism of water and of the spirit; "for by one spirit are we all baptized in one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free and having been all made to drink into one spirit." That Christ lives in this divine organism is manifest from the fact, that it is His body, and that He is its life—This conclusion is also evident from the following passage taken together: "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Thus living in the parts, He of necessity lives in the whole, causing it to be, on account of His presence therein, "the fulness of God." Hence the indestructibility of its elements. The divine element cannot fail, neither can the human, because it is upheld by the divine. For this reason, it shall continue to the end of time. No power, created, can destroy the Church; even "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." But the human element of the Church is composed of clergy and laity. These therefore cannot fail till time end. According to the Saviour's words—"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world"—the work of baptizing and teaching the nations, ceases not till the day of doom, and this unceasing work necessarily implies that those appointed and commissioned of God to perform it, continue in uninterrupted succession: the continuity of the effect proves the continuity of the cause, even had these conclusive words never been uttered, "Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world." But those words were directed to the Apostles; the promise is made to them; and therefore, *they* are to continue to the end of the world. Our Lord, it is plain, cannot be always with that which does not always exist. He said to the Apostles, "Lo, I am with you *always*, even to the end of the world;" and therefore, if they should cease to exist prior to that time, His promise would fail, a thing clearly impossible. Now the original Apostles cannot exist to teach and baptize the nations till the consummation of things, otherwise than in their successors; and hence it is that the Apostolical succession is guaranteed by Christ's words, and made an abiding fact of our holy religion. His Apostles were undeniably a part of that living organism, the Church, and He assures us that they shall always continue a part of it, to carry on the work of christianizing the world, and that He shall always be with them in their labors. Thus viewed the Apostolical succession grows out of the very nature of the Church as a living body, seeing that the succession of the elements of this body is uninterrupted. Christ, too, has made it a condition of the work to be done, and the work to be done ceases only with time itself. Then again, to make surety doubly sure, His promise and presence imparts their own certainty and permanence:

On this important subject Bishop Green has the following weighty remarks:—

"We have now arrived at the stage of our subject, when it may reasonably be expected that something shall be said as to the means by which the Church has preserved her corporate powers; or in other words, has kept unimpaired the Divine authority first granted in the words of the text.

"That the promise "Lo, I am with you *always* even to the end of the world" was given to the eleven Apostles in their *individual capacity*, will hardly be contended, as it is well known that their lives were not extended beyond the ordinary period of life, and therefore as individuals they could, in no sense be said to continue to the end of the world,

—That gracious assurance then must have been given them in their *official character*; for in no other sense can it be found to have been fulfilled beyond the age in which it was delivered. To meet the exigencies of the Church during their short lives, the labours of the Apostles, together with those of the Disciples, were all sufficient. But what was the Church to do? or who was she to keep up, after the sword of the persecutor had drunk their blood? Was the commission to preach, to baptize, and to govern the Church to expire with their short lives? Had succeeding generations no need of the helps to faith and obedience vouchsafed to those who had the additional privilege of seeing the Lord with their own eyes? Was the work of proclaiming his gospel, and of converting and baptizing the nations to be buried with them in their graves? No. The commission given them was a sacred trust, or deposit which they were to use as long as they lived, and which they were carefully to transmit through faithful hands to the generation that succeeded them. And thus from age to age was this Divine commission to pass unbroken till time should be no longer.

"And as we have seen that the Saviour's promise could not have been made to the Apostles merely in their individual character, so will it equally appear that it had no reference to the miraculous powers which were given them. These were extraordinary favours and privileges necessary to the first propagation of the Church in an unbelieving world, and not intended to continue after she had passed from her state of infancy. Accordingly, we learn from undisputed records that they passed away with the century which gave them birth.

"The application of this promise then can be found only in the *Divine office or commission* which the Apostles had received from their Master to extend, to teach, and to govern his Church. We may, therefore, understand him as saying to them, "Having now committed to your authority to edify and to govern my Church in my name, I command you to commit the same to faithful men, as need may require; and for your comfort, I promise that to the very end of the world, I will, by my Almighty power, preserve that authority from being lost or broken; and I will, by my Spirit, make it effectual to the end for which it is committed unto you.

"Accordingly, we learn from the "Acts of the Apostles," that immediately after our Lord's ascension into Heaven, Matthias was chosen to fill the place from which Judas had fallen. We find also Paul and Barnabas and Epaphroditus subsequently added to the number of Apostles or chief governors of the Church. From the Epistles of St. Paul, we learn that both Timothy and Titus were commissioned to the like office by the laying on of his hands.—And the pages of the early history of the Church show beyond dispute, that the greatest care was always taken to transmit through the order of Bishops, which had, in all needful authority, succeeded that of Apostles, that identical commission which was given in the words of our text. When I speak of Bishops as succeeding in the place of the first Apostles of our Lord, I pray to be understood. In the Apostles there may be said to have resided three gifts of grace; 1st that of personal holiness; 2d, that of miraculous power; 3d, that of ministerial authority. Now the first of these, personal holiness, could by no possibility be transmitted to another, because it is a thing that begins and ends in the individual himself, and is incapable of being alienated or bequeathed. As to their miraculous powers, no pretensions is made to any thing of the kind, nor should it be thought of for one moment. It is only in their right and power, under their Great Head, to govern and perpetuate the Church, and in the superior care and labour to which they are called, and in their liability to suffer for her sake: it is in these things, and these only that the Bishops of the Christian Church have in all subsequent time, even to the present day, humbly but firmly claimed to be the successors of the Apostles.

"And who will dispute their claim, when all Scripture example and all Church history combine to establish it. Neither your patience, brethren, nor my strength would admit of the long train of evidence or "cloud of witnesses" which could be here called in to establish this claim. Let it suffice to say

it in the fear of God, that no important fact of ancient or modern history is so capable of proof—I had almost said of demonstration—as that of the unbroken transmission of ministerial authority from the Apostles days to our own. This is what we mean by the "Apostolical Succession;" a thing though much talked of, and much derided, but seldom seriously considered, and therefore but little understood—which may be new to the ears of some that hear me, and painful to others, but which, nevertheless, is one of God's own truths; a truth that was never questioned during the first fifteen hundred years of the Church's existence: and which, even now, in this age of division and manorship and self-will, is acknowledged and practised by nearly nineteen-twentieths of the Christian world.

To be continued.

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