

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE SYNOD,
BY VENERABLE JOHN McLEAN, D.D., D.C.L.,
ARCHDEACON OF MANITOBA.

"Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders, with the whole Church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas."—Acts xv. 22.

These words are part of the account given us in Holy Scripture of the First Council or Synod held in the Christian Church. The occasion of its meeting was to receive a deputation from the Church at Antioch, relative to the question—whether the Christian converts were obliged to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. The members of the deputation appear to have been instructed to appeal to the Apostles and Elders or Presbyters; but when the council met at Jerusalem under the presidency of the apostle St. James, it was composed not merely of Apostles and Presbyters, but also of the brethren or lay members of the Church. This appears, not only from the words of our text, "Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders with the whole Church," but also from the language of the letter sent by the Council to Antioch. In verse 23 we read: "And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The Apostles and Elders and Brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria and Cilicia." In verse 25 they say: "It seemed good unto us being assembled with one accord," and in verse 28, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us."

There is here a clear and repeated reference to three distinct orders in the Council—Apostles, Elders or Presbyters, and Brethren or Laity, and also to a concurrent vote of all the orders in the decision arrived at.

This Council is the pattern of the Synods of the Church of England throughout the Colonies in the present day.

The position occupied by the Apostles in the government of the Church was delegated to the order of Bishops who succeeded them in that part of their office, so that in our Synods, the Bishops, Clergy and Laity occupy the same relative position that the Apostles, Elders and Brethren did in the first Council of Jerusalem.

It is an essential part of the Constitution of all Synods of the Church of England that no resolution shall become law against the will of any of the three orders thus constituted. This arrangement is often referred to in popular language as a veto possessed by the Bishop—a way of expressing it which is very apt to lead to misconception—the true statement being that each

of the three orders requires to give its consent—so that practically each order has a veto on the decision of the other two.

Perhaps the minds of some may revert to the rule which obtains in the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, where in the Diocesan Convention, which corresponds to our Diocesan Synod, the opinion of the Bishop may be over-ruled by a majority of the other two orders of Clergy and Laity.

There are, however, two considerations which I would venture to submit to your judgment as tending materially to lessen the influence of this variation from our principle by even so large and successful a body as the Church in the United States.

The first is that the Constitution of that Church was framed at a time when the people looked with great disfavor on anything that reminded them of the Established Church of England. They had just emerged from a struggle with the English Crown. They had just adopted republicanism as their form of government in civil affairs—and the government by Bishops in the Church seemed in their eyes to partake largely of the monarchical principle which they had rejected in the State.

In addition to this the members of the Church in North America, up to the time of the revolution, had no opportunity of experiencing the benefit of Episcopal functions exercised by Bishops resident in the country. The authorities of the Church in England had committed the mistake of attempting to govern the American clergy by authority exercised from the other side of the Atlantic—and when after the revolution, Bishops were at length consecrated there was a feeling of hostility to the exercise of that authority in the government of the Church which is one of the most distinctive marks of the Episcopal office.

But the second consideration which I would submit to your judgment seems to me to be of still more marked significance. The American Church has recognised, not merely the necessity of Diocesan Conventions, but also that of a General Convention to take the supervision of the general affairs of the Church, which corresponds to the Provincial Synods of the Church of England in the Colonies, and these Provincial Synods are really as needful for the organization and government of the Church as the Diocesan Synods themselves.

The constitution of this General Convention shows a very marked return to the example of the English Church.

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