

# The Church Guardian

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## CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER.

- DEC. 7th—2nd Sunday in Advent.  
" 14th—3rd Sunday in Advent. [Notice of  
Ember Days. Ember Coll. daily.]  
" 17th—  
" 19th—  
" 20th—  
" 21st—4th Sunday in Advent. St. Thomas,  
A. & M. [Notice of Christmas, St.  
Stephen and St. John]  
" 25th—CHRISTMAS DAY. Athan. Creed.  
" 26th—St. Stephen, First Martyr.  
" 27th—St. John, Ap. & Evangelist.  
" 29th—1st Sunday after Christmas. [No-  
tice of Circumcision.]

## THE HOLY SCRIPTURES AS THE BASIS OF CHURCH UNITY.

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As I am to write of the Holy Scriptures as the Basis of Church Unity, it would seem proper to preface what I have to say by a brief consideration of the problems and difficulties to be met, bearing always in mind the existing evils and the end to be accomplished.

Leaving out of account for the present the Oriental Church, including as it does nearly one third of the professing Christians of the world, we have around us three distinct bodies or classes of persons to be considered.

1. We have those who adhere to and advocate the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome as essential to Church Unity; they hold that our Lord made St. Peter the prince of the Apostles, and gave him not only presidency, but authority also over the others, and through them over the whole Church of believers in Him; that St. Peter became Bishop of Rome and transmitted to his successors through all time the presidency and the supremacy which he had exercised. And recently his adherents have declared that he is infallible whenever he speaks authoritatively and in his official capacity; so that no one can have any reasonable hope of final salvation who does not accept and follow his decrees.

2. Then we have what are called ultra-Protestants, who hold that when our Lord spoke of building His Church [Matt. xvi. 18] He did not refer to any visible organized body of those that should believe in Him, but rather to an invisible number, known only to Himself; that He caused His Gospel to be preached, and finally to be committed to writing, leaving the believers to organize themselves into Churches, as many and as various in form and discipline as they might think most expedient and conducive to the welfare and final salvation of men. They do not regard "the Historic Episcopate" or any other form of a ministry that has any visible or factual connection with the Apostles, or the ministry our Lord ordained and sent to preach His Gospel, as at all necessary.

3. Then in the third place we have a class of Christians who claim to have "the Historic Episcopate" with an actual and a factual line of descent from the Apostles. They hold that the Church spoken of by our Lord [Matt. xvi. 18; xviii. 17] and often referred to in the Acts and Epistles [Acts iii. 47; 1 Tim. iii. 15] was a visible and organized body.

In fact, this view is inevitably implied, if indeed it is not expressly stated in the Declaration of our House of Bishops [General Convention, 1886, p. 80]: "We do hereby affirm that the Christian Unity now so earnestly desired . . . can be restored only by a return of all Christian Communions to the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence; which principles we believe to be the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and His Apostles to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender by those who have been ordained to be its stewards and trustees for the common and equal benefit of all men."

But the views of the Holy Scriptures entertained by them (which is the subject now more especially before us) differ quite as much among these bodies or classes of Christians we have named, as they themselves do in regard to the Church which our Lord founded. And in fact this diversity of views in regard to the Scriptures is, if not fundamental, yet essential to the diversity of their views in regard to the Church itself.

The advocates of the Papal claims hold that besides what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, there are traditions outside of their teachings, and especially such as have received the approval and sanction of the Pope, that are as essential and as necessary to salvation as the things that are contained in the Scriptures themselves.

Then the extreme Protestants hold on the other hand that the Bible alone is the guide for Christian believers,—that each one is to take it, study it, and interpret it for himself as best he can, under the influence of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. They scarcely hold to any "Church authority" in the proper sense of the word. They do indeed hold to and see the necessity of Church regulations, such as each pastor or congregation may make as a matter of expediency and as conducive to edification.

Then finally we have those holding a somewhat middle ground,—like that of the Protestant Episcopalians, who, as it will be remembered, proposed the four conditions of union, one of which we are considering. They hold and expressly declare (Art. VI) that "the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation." But they also hold that there are many things spoken of or alluded to in the Holy Scriptures which are essential, in some one form or another, to any Church organization to the preaching of the Gospel, and to the administration of the Sacraments, which are not expressly stated in the Scriptures. And they hold that the safest and most proper guide to a right understanding and observance

of these things is what may be called tradition; that is, the records that have come down to us outside of the Scriptures,—such as notes of usages, canons and opinions of early Fathers.

If we turn our attention to the Old Testament Scriptures we find that although, as it now appears, there may have been portions of the earlier books in existence before the time of Moses, yet that the books, from first to last, from Genesis to Malachi, with the possible exception of the Book of Job, were written in the Jewish Church, by members of the Church, and after its organization by Moses in the wilderness, and after the priests and Levites had been set apart not only for the administration of the worship in the Tabernacle, but also to be the instructors and guides of the people in matters that pertain to their Faith and religion as well as in regard to their duties as men and citizens; and that all these books, with, as before said, the possible exception of Job, were written for their instruction and guidance in their responsible and arduous duties as priests and ministers.

If now we turn our attention to the New Testament, we find very much the same result. We find that our Lord declared, some time before He died, His intention to build His Church on the confession of His Divine Nature which St. Peter had just made. He soon after, as it appears from St. Matthew's record, gave to His Apostles extensive power, not only of legislation, but of discipline as well, subordinate of course to any instruction He had given them or might thereafter give them [Matt. xvi. and xviii. 15-21]. Then in Acts [i. 47] we find the Church spoken of as already existing and established, so that "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved,"—or were being saved.

The Apostles went forth and preached the Gospel as they were commanded; and it was not until some twenty years at least after their mission that any part of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament as we now have them were written.

Our Lord, so far as we have any record of the words He uttered never gave them any charge to write anything. They were to preach and proclaim by word of mouth the Gospel, make disciples of the people among all the nations or races of people on the earth, baptizing and thus bringing into the Church those that should believe the Gospel as they were to preach and to teach it; and the promise was, "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

But the earliest attempt to reduce the Gospel to writing, that the Church of the believers might have the benefit of reading it for themselves, did not occur for some twenty years or more after the Gospel had been preached, and Churches—that is, local Churches, as branches of the one Church which our Lord founded and which St. Paul declares to be the pillar and ground, stay or support, "of the truth" [1 Tim. iii. 15]—had been established in nearly all parts of the earth.

It is commonly supposed that the very first to be written of the books we now have in our Canon, or collection of Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, was the first of St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, about A. D. 52, nineteen years after the Crucifixion. The Gospels as we now have them were not written until somewhat later. It is sometimes claimed, indeed, that St. Matthew wrote, for the converts from Judaism who lived in Palestine, a Gospel in the Hebrew language, or what was called Hebrew at the time. But we have not that Gospel as he wrote it, if ever he wrote one; and what we have is of a later date, say about A. D. 80. And the other Gospels were written later on, until perhaps that of St. John sometime in the last decade of the first century, perhaps A. D. 92.

I think we have satisfactory evidence that there was at a much earlier date than even the