

## THE DIVINE ORIGIN AND UNBROKEN TRANSMISSION OF MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY.

A Sermon Preached in St. Andrew's Church Jackson, Miss., February 8th, 1852.

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

A general awakening on the subject of religion, is a characteristic of our times. Men are every where scrutinizing the grounds of their belief, lest peradventure, they should have built on shifting sand instead of solid rock. That God has founded a Church, and so founded it that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it,"—that "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." That he might present it to himself a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be "holy and without blemish,—that the Church, thus washed with water, or, in other words, made up of baptized persons is His body—that "He is the HEAD of the body, the Church,"—that the Church "is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all," and in consequence of this indwelling fullness "the pillar and ground of the truth," is manifest to every one diligently reading and reflecting on the oracles of God. From its very nature, it cannot be a mere human organization or society. For then it could have but human claims and human sanctions. "If you or I," observes Bishop Green in the admirable sermon under review, "were to establish a society for our own benefit, and that of our neighbours, however well it might be adapted to the end in view, we could claim for it no authority or binding force beyond what our own will and acts could give it. Neither this neighbour nor that would be morally and penally bound to enter it or to remain in longer than he pleased. Nay I will go farther and say, "If an angel from heaven—if the highest Archangel were, by his own commanded act to organize such a society, and imperatively require me to enter it, I would question his demand. Not, so \* \* \* with that Church or Heaven-appointed society, "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself the chief corner stone." Its claims are just as they are obligatory, and too solemn to be set aside by any consideration of mere convenience, interest or expediency. It contains within it the power of God "the salvation of men."

The remarks are just. If the Church were of human institution, it would be a creature of man, and like all such works of man, subject to change decay, and dissolution. But man did not, and could not, found the Church. If the Church in one of her elements, be, as St. Paul asserts, "the fullness of God "how could man found that fullness? If she be, as is expressly affirmed, "the body of Christ," how could man create that body? The Church as blood-bought, rock-founded, God-inhabited, cleansed and sanctified by the redeemer "with the washing of water by the word," has an origin, has powers, and sanctions far other than human. She appears before us—human and divine.

Where is this institution? What its powers characters, authority? These are questions which force themselves on the attention of intelligent men, and will not be put by; questions before the legitimate answer to which man-made societies tremble and grow pale; questions they would avoid, (but the attempt is vain,) as matters of little moment. They take the name of their founder some mere uninspired man, and are, as it were, but of yesterday.

In regard to these all-absorbing questions, information is eagerly sought by many candid and earnest minds who felt the insecurity of their present position and long for something more adapted to their spiritual wants. From such Bishop Green's sermon will receive a hearty welcome. Plain, sensible, and conclusive, it opens for them the right path of investigation. He has chosen for his text these last and striking words of our blessed Lord:

"And Jesus came and speak unto them saying, All power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with

you always even unto the end of the world."—Matthew xxviii. 18, 19, 20th.

After an elaborate discussion of "the circumstances which attended and preceded the occasion of the text, he finds that two great truths unquestionably follow: "First that the Church is a positive institution of God, intended for the benefit of all and binding in its requirements upon all; and secondly, that it is a corporate body, or a divinely constituted society, which like every other society, has its appropriate officers, a common seal and full power to perpetuate itself to the end of time." Both these propositions he still farther proceeds to sustain and illustrate.

"By a positive institution, I mean something which God himself has commanded to be done,—which has no intrinsic excellency or virtue in itself independent of his command,—which no man may dispense with either in whole or in part,—and which, under possible circumstances, all are bound to receive or abide by. And are not these the leading traits or distinguishing features of the Church of Christ? Was it not as we have just seen, established by the fiat of Him who made all worlds?" Was it not his own mouth that delivered the great commission, "Go ye and disciple all nations?" Was it not this his own power that he bestowed upon his few and faint-hearted Apostles? And was it not his own grace that he imparted to the ordinances they were commanded to administer? What authority had the eleven to establish and govern the Church beyond that which they had received from Him? And who would venture to usurp their authority? What virtue was there in the simple rite of baptism to bring the penitent soul into filial relationship with God, except what his own appointment had given it? None. Who then, brethren, dare make light of this appointment, or withhold himself from its observance, when Almighty God himself has so plainly enjoined it?

"That this Positive Institution of God is intended for the benefit of all, is apparent from the very words of the commission, "Go ye and teach all nations." And from these very words also flows the obligation of all, of every kindred and people and tongue, to observe it. For if the Apostles and their successors were commanded to receive "all nations" into the Church by the sacrament of baptism then is it the unavoidable, indispensable duty of all to be baptized at their hands, where such baptism can be obtained.

"And that the Church of Christ is justly entitled to be styled a divinely corporate body, or regularly constituted Society, who is there present that will deny? The usual incidents or requirements in every well organized Society or Corporation, of civilized lands, are these:—1st, That they shall institute by lawful authority; 2nd, That they shall be distinguished by a common seal; 3rd, That they shall possess officers of every degree; and 4th, That they shall have the power of perpetuating themselves to the very end of their charter.

"Now in all these things the Church justly claims to be a corporate body, a regular visible society, not a mere "aggregation of individuals, with each standing alone before his God." By what authority did the Apostles first enter upon their mission, if not by his who said with his own lips, "Go ye, and teach all nations?" And what was the seal or impress which they were commanded to stamp upon all their works? Was it not water, applied in the name of Father Son and Holy Ghost? And has not the Church from its first organization possessed officers of various degrees, from the lowly Deacon who serves tables up to the Apostle or Bishop who ordains, and presides over the inferior orders? And once more, who, I may ask, will question that the Church possessed the power of perpetuating her existence from age to age; or doubt that she was thus intended to endure in the face of that blessed assurance given to her chief officers in the very hour of her birth, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world?" If the Church

was instituted, as all will admit, for the purpose of bringing sinners back to God, and of building up believers unto faith, then is it reasonable to believe that its Divine Charter will never be repealed as long as sinners or saints are to be found on the earth; or the earth itself is withheld from the fires of the last day.

(To be continued)

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THE Subscriber begs to inform the Clergy that that useful little Tract entitled "L'OPINION BAPTISTE ARGUMENTS REVIEWED," by the Rev. Jas. T. Lewis, B. A., which appeared a short time since in successive numbers of the *Canadian Churchman*, has been re-printed and is for Sale at the Church Depository.

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