

THE FOURFOLD WITNESS OF THE CHURCH.

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The great American people are just now looking anxiously around for the Church—a Church which shall combine the fullness of Christian Truth with fixed and settled order. Where shall they find such a Church, preserving ancient traditions unchanged, and yet in harmony with the light and culture of modern times? It is quite evident that amid the Babel of multitudinous Protestant sects, contradicting each other flatly in essential truths, no one stands forth to claim a just preeminence. Nor can this result be accomplished by a platform "federation of sects"; for this would leave Christianity without any vital principle worth contending for. The American Church of the next and future centuries must be—either the Roman Church or our own. Again I ask, which shall it be?

Every Christian body appeals to the Bible as a witness to the truth of its tenets. But as these tenets flatly contradict one another, it is manifest that the Bible alone cannot be such a witness, or else the Bible is valueless. Besides, God is not so chary of His revelation to man as to leave Himself with only one witness; for even in human affairs "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

Very wisely then did our House of Bishops at Chicago in 1886 declare, that the Church has a "sacred deposit" of essential truth committed to her by God, and that this Divine "deposit" to be preserved and handed down unimpaired to posterity consists of exactly four (4) things, viz.:

1. The Holy Bible. 2. The Holy Creed. 3. The Sacred Sacraments. 4. The Sacred Ministry.

All of these are of Divine origin and of equal authority. They constitute the Fourfold Witness of the true Church of Christ, and at their mouth "every word is established"; for they cannot contradict each other.

Let us then briefly examine our own claims, as contrasted with those of others near us, to a favorable verdict on the part of these Four Witnesses of the Church.

1. The Holy Bible is in a certain way accepted by all Christians. But the Roman Church elevates its own Traditions to an equal authority with the inspired Scriptures, places the so-called "Apocryphal" books on a level with the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament, and practically removes the volume from the hands of most of its laity. The Protestant sects on the other hand give the most contradictory (and often absurd) meanings to the words of the Bible. In their hands it becomes a *nose of wax*, which they can twist in any direction they please. And, moreover, there is arising among them a spirit of subserviency to German rationalism, which would degrade the Word of God to a level with human productions, and reduce its inspiration to a mere pious and poetical elevation of thought.

The Church of England, however, and our own, in the XXth Article of Religion distinctly declares the true doctrine; that "the Church is a Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ," that "it is not lawful to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither to expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another," and that "it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed

for necessity of Salvation." The testimony is complete. As the Church is the true and all-sufficient witness to the Divine authority of "God's Word written"; so the Bible becomes in turn, not the Witness (for that would be reasoning in a vicious circle), but one of the Four Witnesses to the truth and authority of the Church.

2. The Creed of the Church is more ancient even than the written books of the New Testament, and has come down in its essentials to us from the earliest times. It is contained in the acts of the undisputed General Councils, which we fully and heartily accept; and is briefly summed up for our acts of worship in forms called the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed. The Roman Church accepts these; but (alas!) she has added to them within the last four centuries, as of equal authority, (but against the protest of all other Christians,) the Articles of Pope Pius IV. the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M., with the last and worst dogma of Papal Infallibility, which places all future creeds at the disposal of each individual Pope! The Protestant sects are all "at sea" on the subject of their creeds. Some, like the Lutherans, accept the Apostles' and Nicene, others the Apostles' only, others have creeds and confessions of their own manufacture, some have no creed at all. Most of them deny one or more essential articles of the true creed, e. g., "One Baptism for the Remission of sins."

Our own position, however, is too well known to be doubted or disputed. It is summed up in Article VIII.: "The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." Our first two Witnesses therefore agree most fully with one another, and with the position consistently maintained by the Anglican Church.

3. Our third great Witness is the Sacraments of the Gospel. The word "Sacrament" is not found in the Bible, nor was the number of the sacraments ever exactly fixed or settled in the Church prior to the thirteenth century; as defined at the Bonn Conference. But from the most ancient times two (2) great rites have loomed up in the Church, as pre-eminent above all others, viz.: Holy Baptism, and the Holy Eucharist. These are "generally (*generiter*) necessary to Salvation," they have "an outward and visible sign of an inward grace given unto us," and they were ordained by Christ Himself. They stand preferred above all other Sacraments and rites as a Divine Witness to the Holy Catholic Church, and are an essential part of its work. Let us see how they are received.

(a) Holy Baptism. Between ourselves and the Roman Church there is no difference on this point. All branches of the Holy Catholic Church are fully agreed with regard to the doctrine and nature of Holy Baptism; though the East and West are divided as to the mode of its administration, which is a non-essential point. But when we look at the Protestant sects, what a jargon of confusion salutes us! Some admit infants to Baptism, others stoutly deny their right. Some insist on immersion as essential, others sprinkling, others still admit any mode. The Lutherans fully believe and teach Baptismal Regeneration and the Campbellites profess belief in it. But nearly all the sects deny this essential, scriptural truth, confound regeneration with conversion, reduce Baptism to an empty rite and ceremony, a mere dedication of little ones to something or other—I know not what!

It hardly need be said that the Anglican Church in her doctrine of Holy Baptism is in full harmony with the Holy Bible and with all other branches of the true Church.

(b) But when we come to the other Dominical Sacrament there is even greater confusion. The Roman Church refuses one-half of it to her

laity; and explains her doctrine of the nature of the Real Presence by a philosophical figment based upon the exploded philosophy of the pagan Aristotle. The Protestant sects in losing the true Ministry have lost with it the true Sacrament, which can only be conferred by a true Priesthood. The Lutherans indeed teach and believe in a Real Presence, which they explain by a theory of *Ubiquity*, which borders dangerously on the very confines of heresy. Yet for all this they have not the Sacrament: and most of the sects hold and teach, the Zwinglian doctrine, which makes their unconsecrated bread and wine (or some other fluid) a bare memorial that their Lord has died.

The doctrine of our Church, as set forth in our admirable Liturgy and Catechism, combines, as in other matters, "Evangelic Truth with Apostolic Order."

With regard to the *minor* Sacraments of the Church, the Roman Church exalts them to an undue equality with the two great Dominical Sacraments; while the sects utterly ignore them.

4. The Sacred Ministry of the Church, styled in our "Declaration" *The Historic Episcopate*. It was by this Ministry that the inspired books of the New Testament were written; and their successors in office have preserved them for the use of the Church. In their Councils the true canon of Scripture has been determined. The Roman Church appears to have preserved its succession unbroken. But above its Bishops it has placed in latter days a "supreme" and "infallible" Ruler, to whose will all Orders of the Ministry are entirely subject. This is not the Order of the Church taught in Holy Scripture, or accepted by the whole Church for the first thousand years of its existence. Going to the other extreme, the Protestant sects have rejected the Apostolic Ministry of the Church. The Church of Sweden and the Moravian Church have preserved their Episcopate; disputed by some, though I think without sufficient ground. But all other Protestant bodies have set up for themselves self-appointed ministers, whose (lay) Baptism is indeed valid, when rightly performed, but whose other acts lack the sanction of lawful authority accepted by the Church.

The Anglican Church justly claims a true and lawful Episcopate. The greatest theologian of the century, Dr. Ignatius von Dollinger, said of it at the Bonn Conference (Sept. 15th, 1874): "I have no manner of doubt as to the validity of the Episcopal succession in the English Church." And he immediately added these remarkable words: "Circumstances occurred in the Western Church before the Reformation calculated to raise far more serious doubts as to the unbroken succession and the validity of many ordinations" [*i.e.*, Roman] "than anything which has been alleged against English Orders." And the Orientals who were present expressed their satisfaction with his conclusion.

We see then how *impregnable* are the claims of the Anglican Church, of which by God's grace we are members, to be the true and lawful Bride of Christ. Her "Historic Episcopate" is the Sacred Ministry of the Church; for the Priesthood and Diaconate, while essential to the *well being* of the Church, are not essential to its *being*; for the Bishops could make Priests and Deacons at any time, but all the Priests and Deacons in the world could never make a Bishop. The Priesthood and Diaconate are delegated to faithful men by the Apostolate and Episcopate, who received them from Christ Himself, and hold them as "a sacred deposit."

The Sacred Ministry of the Church is given by God to man, not offered by man to God. To conceive of any "historic episcopate" other than the Apostolic Succession would cause a "Niobe dissolved in tears" to burst into peals of "inextinguishable laughter." The very thought is too absurd for utterance. Yet the term is well chosen to guard against any