

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR AUGUST.

- Aug. 5th—10th Sunday after Trinity.
" 6th—Transfiguration of our Lord.
" 9th—11th Sunday after Trinity.
" 16th—12th Sunday after Trinity.
" 23rd—13th Sunday after Trinity.
[Notice of St. Bartholomew]
" 24th—St. Bartholomew. Ap. & M.
[Athanasian Creed]
" 30th—14th Sunday after Trinity.

"WITNESSES UNTO ME."

We give our readers the main portion of the Sermon preached by Bishop Thompson of Mississippi at the consecration of Bishop Sessums in Christ Church, New Orleans, taken from the *Southern Guardian*.

SERMON.

'And ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria; and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.' Acts, i. 8.

In the General Convention of 1886 the House of Bishops, in the Pastoral Letter, and afterward in a more formal address to all Christians, set forth what it claims to be the basis of unity. There are four points, according to these declarations of the Episcopate, and only four, essential to the organic unity of Christendom, namely these: The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Nicene Creed, the two Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate.

In the Lambeth Synod, or Pan-Anglican Council so called, of 1888, two years afterward, these four points were again set forth as the basis of unity among Christians, all of which the Churches in Communion with the See of Canterbury declare, through their bishops, to be essential and foundation things in the Church of God.

And this declaration has been met, as was to be expected, by misapprehension in many quarters.

Particularly it has been said that while the first three points are important, and perhaps essential, and might be agreed to by a great body of Christian people, yet the last, the requirement of the Episcopate, is arbitrary, unreasonable, indeed essentially sectarian, and instead of being a badge of unity, is itself a cause of division.

For it is misunderstood, by these people, to

be merely an arbitrary method of ordination, one method among a number all equally to be chosen for setting apart a ministry among Christian people, and that to make for it any special claim, to insist upon the Episcopate as of any special authority or importance is to found a sect and set up a division.

And men *without* the Church, and still more unhappily, men *within* it now and then, quite intelligent and even distinguished in their own specialties, but who have made no study in this direction, and perhaps do not think it worth while to make any, will venture to proclaim the blankness of their knowledge on this subject by very readily informing you that the notion of a descent of ordainers, from the Apostles down, is absurd, and must be so, because, as far as one can see, they do not understand it and cannot believe it! It is of no consequence to tell them that for 1500 years all Christendom acted upon the theory that there was such a descent, and that a ministry which was not in that line was held to be *no ministry at all*; that no man could be taken or received anywhere among Christians for a Bishop who was not, beyond any rational doubt, *in this line*; that in whatsoever men differed in doctrine, they never differed on this, that Donatists, Novations, Arians, Monophysites, heretics of all kinds, united in the demand for Bishops of undoubted Apostolic descent as *essential*—I say it is of no use to point to all this, for the good people have no sense of the need of any such descent, do not care to inquire about it, and, therefore, inform us all it cannot be proved because *they* cannot prove it, and do not know anything about it.

Nor is it of any use to tell them that the *overwhelming majority* of Christian people still stand in this respect in the old ways, and insist on the old descent; that the links of the Apostolic Succession are all unbroken, and scholars of the most ample learning, and students of the elder days and of the records of an historic Christianity smile with pity upon the swift assertiveness of the unrestrained and unenlightened temerity of those who deny.

No man will assert that a man could be, for an hour, taken and received as a Bishop in the Church to day unless he had been thereunto set apart and ordained by the laying on of the hands of other Bishops.

And no man whose historical opinion is worth uttering would assert that, in any age of Christendom of which we have any history, a man could be taken and received as a Bishop unless he had been so set apart and ordained. For the sentiment and a conviction which renders such a thing impossible now were dominant and controlling in every age of the Church of which we have knowledge.

It is quite possible that there is not a man in this Church who could 'prove' on the instant, and indeed not one in a score after considerable study, that any Bishop present has no break in his descent for even the last hundred years. But what matter? A Bishop's genealogy is not asked for at every turn. It need not be. The fact that he is publicly, notoriously, known to be a Bishop, and taken and acknowledged as such, in a Church which holds Apostolic succession essential to his being a Bishop at all, is evidence overwhelming that his descent is legitimate, and that all canonical and orderly things were done in his case.

That the judge is on the bench trying cases, accepted and received as a judge, is all the evidence you ask of his legal commission. He could not be there at all unless all things lawful existed in his appointment.

And so it was always. It is merely trifling with words, if a man knows, and evidence of incompetency to express an opinion if he does not know, to say, 'You cannot prove that from any modern Bishop up to the Apostles there is a continued succession of ordainers.' You might as well tell me I cannot prove that the

oak tree on the lawn has an unbroken descent from some oak of 2,000 years ago!

I do not need to prove a self-evident fact in organic society. The oak of to-day proves the oak of twenty centuries ago. The Bishop of to-day proves the Bishop of eighteen centuries ago.

They knew oaks then from bramble bushes as well as we do. They knew Bishops just as well as we do, perhaps better, and they knew too that Bishops come from Bishops as oaks come from oaks. There is no other way known to man to get either oaks or Bishops. The ground has been gone over so many times and so carefully, and exhaustively, and by such thorough scholarship, that one may rest in peace.

There is not a single great Church historian from the Magedburg Centuriators to Mosheim and Neander, who does not admit that when the struggling Christianity of the earliest day breaks into the light it is *Episcopal*, has Bishops, claims an Apostolic succession, insists that every Bishop shall be able to connect himself with some Apostle.

There are indeed on the part of such writers as Neander, Mosheim and others, very strange theories to account for this fact, very amazing webs spun out of their inner consciousness to bridge the gulf of their own creating, but every man of them admits the fact that as soon as we get history the Church is Episcopal.

I can understand how a man can say the matter is of no consequence in any case. An Apostolic ministry is no better than any other. We can start one to-day just as good as that of the second century or the first, right here in our town. We are as pious and a great deal wiser than the Apostles, and a Church started by three old women and two old men in a log cabin in the mountains of Tennessee is just as good as the Church in the upper room in Jerusalem. I say I can understand that position and even have some regard for it, as a sort of independent Americanism that insists on making its own ministries, and even its own Bibles, and perhaps its own Messiah, but I fail to comprehend the position or meaning of the man who denies the Christian past, and the historical records of eighteen centuries in his eagerness to prove that the Apostolic and Nicene Churches were no more dignified in their origin than an American sect.

It is conceivable that our Lord might not have organized a church at all, that He might have left His ideas and influences to clothe themselves as they would. That is, it is conceivable if our Lord was *not* our Lord at all, but merely a great teacher and enlightener. Plato did not found a church, Emanuel Swedenborg did not found a church.

But our Lord was more than a Teacher, *He was the Son of God*. He brought down the divine into the human. He came to set up a Kingdom of God upon earth, to interpenetrate what our shallow speech calls the natural with what our equally shallow speech calls the supernatural. That is, I should say, to reveal that the universe is God's and all parts of it, visible and invisible, are equally His own.

Consequently His birth was what we call supernatural. His life was the same. His words and works were divine. His death was equally lifted out of the plane of human experiences, and His resurrection and ascension were inevitable, more than logical, necessary results from His coming into the world at all.

The introduction of Jesus, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, into this world and into common human life was an era in the world's history which, backward and forward, illuminated human life and revealed its meaning and purpose.

Now the crowning act of that life was the resurrection. That event put the seal to all the rest. The Lord chose it as such seal. The Apostles preached it as such seal. The fact of