

The Grace of Orders.

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Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father), Galatians 1:1.

St. Paul was the most gracious of men, and his letters were a model of courtesy. But one can feel the heat underlying the Galatian epistle, and it appears once and again in jets of keen feeling. It is evident that the apostle was very indignant with his Galatian friends, and he used great frankness of speech. Perhaps the chief reason for his heat was the apostasy of the Galatians from the gospel of Jesus Christ and their insane infatuation with the ritual of the law. But after that there came this other reason, that they had insulted their spiritual father, and had denied his authority as a minister of Jesus Christ. When he came to them at first they received him as an angel of God, and he showed unto them the way of life everlasting, convincing both their reason and their conscience. Then they had no doubt that he had preached the gospel, and then they had no doubt that he was a duly qualified servant of his Master.

By and by certain ecclesiastics from Jerusalem seem to have visited the Galatian church, and when ecclesiastics go out on

A ROVING COMMISSION

there is always danger. There are ecclesiastics and ecclesiastics; and there are certain men who give themselves to the service of the church's business and to the arrangement of her affairs—most difficult and delicate duty, for which a man gets but a poor reward, and which is not very inviting to an enthusiastic spirit; and to such men you and I are very deeply indebted, and such men ought to have always our support and approbation. Other ecclesiastics are saturated with the spirit of formalism and of priestcraft, and whenever they hold a meeting, or whenever they begin to stir there is going to be trouble for honest folk. They came to the Galatian church, and it is almost incredible, but they persuaded the young converts that they believed after too sanguine a fashion in the grace of God and the liberty of the gospel; and then they settled down upon St. Paul, who was the victim of ecclesiastics all the days of his apostleship, as the people who walk in his spirit are the victims of ecclesiastics today. They insinuated to the Galatians and brought forward plausible arguments of the kind with which we are acquainted, that St. Paul had not himself been one of the original apostles, nor had he received his ordination from the original apostles. And what then? Why, he was not an apostle at all; he had run when he had not been ordered, and he had presumed to take an office that he had not rightly received. In fact, to put it plainly, he was a schismatic, and he was not in proper order.

The Galatians,

VOLATILE AS CELTS

are sometimes apt to be, and very much from home in a perfect state of independence; for Celts dearly love to be ruled, either by a chief or by a minister, and do not feel perfectly comfortable going alone—the Galatians were much tickled by this argument. And the end of the matter was—it is almost incredible again—the end of the matter was that they set as a church, and investigated into the orders of the apostle Paul. Was there ever such an intellectual futility? Was there ever such insolence of ingratitude?—that this little handful of ignorant Christians up there in Galatia should proceed to inquire whether the apostle Paul was a properly ordained minister, without whom they had never heard of Christ, and who brought them to the knowledge of the Lord! This is theory raised to its empire; this is the most pragmatical debate you will find in the whole of church history. St. Paul did not go round the bush, but he called them in a straightforward fashion fools, and I am bound to say he never was in closer touch with reality. When we understand the circumstances in which that great man, lifted above all petty questions himself, and moving among the great truths, sat down ashamed as well as indignant to write that letter, then you and I are also indignant; but we can get great relief when he calls the Galatians by their proper name.

Is it, however, perfectly wise, and

IS IT PERFECTLY CHARITABLE,

for you and me, at the close of this century, to place the Galatians alone in our condemnation, and, if you like to say, our ridicule? Have we advanced so absolutely beyond the range of them in the Christian church today, and are we always lifted above mechanical ideas of the church, and above hair splitting argument? Is it not the case that many ministers of Jesus Christ today, men of great learning and most irreproachable piety, would not feel perfectly justified in discharging their sacred duties next Sunday unless they were assured that they had been ordained by a person qualified after a certain fashion to ordain them, and he by some man behind him, and so on through a line of which Pope Alexander Borgia is a necessary part? Is it not the case also that many fellow Christians, devoted servants of the Lord, and fulfilling his commandments in daily life, would not be edified in receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

unless they were certain they received it from a man ordained after this broad fashion? And could you not find, what I have found in life, the case of a person who was brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ by a certain preacher, and owed to that preacher under God the salvation of his soul, and lived by and by to deny that that preacher had ever been properly ordained, and in the end to conclude that in regard to this preacher's own salvation he could only look to the uncovenanted mercies of God?—that is to say, the covenanted mercies of God would go to an official, but the uncovenanted mercies were all that remained for a prophet.

St Paul

GOES TO THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

when he deals with the question, and I am very thankful that when St. Paul deals with this question he does not fall into the weakness into which many of us are tempted in the present day. St. Paul does not say he will endeavor to obtain from St. Peter and St. James some recognition; and does not go on to say that, while he fully admits their orders to be perfect and irreproachable, he trusts that in some fashion, if not the same, he also has something which might be called orders. If St. Paul had done that, and if he had gone to St. Peter to get what might be called a provisional confirmation of his orders then I do not think we should have felt St. Paul to have been the man he was, and I doubt very much indeed whether upon those conditions he had ever been an apostle. He had to do with St. Peter later, but it was not to ask him to give orders to him. There are times when one is indignant, first as a Christian and then as an Englishman, against the attitude which is taken up by people who are bitten with this mania about correct orders. When I see an important section of a church which is associated so closely with the history of England, and which some of us so respect for her great traditions, for her beautiful worship, for her learning, and for her devotion; when I see a section of that church going and

STANDING AT THE BACK DOOR OF THE VATICAN,

and there pleading for some recognition, however guarded and however humble, that the Pope regards them as true clergymen of Jesus Christ, I say again I am indignant; as a Christian, for what position is this for them to occupy as ministers of Jesus Christ? and as an Englishman, for do they not know that in order to be free of the bondage of Rome our fathers laid down their lives, and the freedom we have gained was bought at a great price? To see men go again and again, and ever to the back door, and to stand pleading there, and then to be sent away with open contempt, to return again tomorrow, is something beside which the Galatian foolishness is less than nothing. Is it not the case also that other people are too anxious about the recognition of their ministerial position, and clutch too greedily at a sentence dropped here or a sentence dropped there that can be construed to mean that though a man be not a Roman priest nor an Anglican, he can yet be a minister? Is it not the case that there is far too little self-respect amongst people in regard to this matter, and far too little courage in taking up the only other position as opposed to the Roman which can be taken up by the ministers of Jesus Christ? Paul was quite distinct and clear; he said, I do not deny that St. Peter and St. James are apostles, but I also insist I am as much an apostle; they can give me nothing that I cannot give to them; I am independent of them, and I stand on the basis of my relation to Jesus Christ, as fully ordained an apostle as any one of them, though I have been independent of them, and my ministry is parallel with theirs. Who called me? Not Peter, but Christ. Who gave me my work to do? Not Peter, but Christ. Who ordained and established me in my office? Not Peter, but Christ.

The truth is, friends, that we ought to think clearly about this matter. There are

TWO THINGS WE OUGHT TO REMEMBER.

One is this, that it is a perfectly becoming thing for a body of Christian people to have some such suitable form and function by which a man equipped and qualified for the ministry is set apart for that purpose; that is right. But I ask: Does that particular function make that man worthy, or does it not? If he was worthy before, it can add nothing to him; if he was not worthy before, it cannot make him worthy; it is the recognition of a fact. The apostles recognized Paul though that of course did not matter greatly to him; they recognized him because already he was an apostle. And then there is another thing to remember which is very important. We do not deny the grace of orders. Why, if we believe that no man can do his daily work, buying and selling, ploughing and toiling, without grace from God, can you and I deny that if a man be called of God to the very gracious work, the sowing of the seed of everlasting life, and to fill the lamp of God's tabernacle, that he has and certainly must have received special grace? We hold the grace of orders in the fullest sense, that for the work of the ministry in all its parts a man must be endued with grace from Jesus Christ; but we hold it comes through no man's hands, neither priest, nor bishop, nor pope, but direct to that man from Jesus Christ. When it comes to him, and the church sees that he has such grace, then does she, according to her form, every church

having her ordaining, recognize the fact; but if there were never any laying on of any hands, he is equally a minister of Jesus Christ, and if he were ordained by all the hands of all the popes that ever lived, and had not grace of orders from Christ, then were he not ordained, then were he not a minister of Jesus Christ. That I take it to be our position to which we ought constantly to adhere. We ought to deny no man's orders who is a true minister of Christ. There is many a priest who has received the grace of orders, but he didn't get them where he supposed, and many an evangelist who has grace of orders, although the church will not always recognize it. What we have to do is to stand close by the fact, as St. Paul did—called "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." Whenever we do this, and whenever we come close to facts, and recognize that a man is Christ's minister whom Christ has called, why then a whole mist of superstition passes away—superstition about orders and superstition about sacraments—and then we come back again to the simplicity of the gospel and the simplicity of Christian society as Jesus constituted it.

Of course, on this point, there is a question very fair to ask. If one holds a grace of orders as right as this, which would apply to a man ordained with all the ceremonies of the most elaborate kind, and apply equally to a town missionary in London, is there no danger of irregularity and no danger of confusion? Suppose a man fancies he is called of Christ. There are people who will fancy anything. Take the case of a heady and self-conceited man, suppose he choose to run when he was not sent, and then to say, "Well, I know that I am called, and I know I have grace, although none of you can see that I was called, and none of you can see any grace in me." What then? Well, again we go to fact. I may say in passing it is a very desirable thing for the organized Christian church to have means of dealing with gentlemen who are filled with wind and self-conceit, and there is no better means of dealing with them than to send them to study at a college and make them pass an examination afterwards. That has nothing to do with the grace of orders, but it has a great deal to do with saving the church from windbags, it is pruning the tree; and you good people in the pews, who do not know much about examiners (who are never a popular class of people), and perhaps don't know much about systems of theological education, have no conception from how many foolish and self-conceited preachers such systems of college examinations have saved you. But then

THE ULTIMATE TEST

comes here. That is the training of the men. By the way, St. Paul himself, having received grace of orders, was sent to learn the truth in solitude, and carefully trained before he began his apostleship. There is no collision whatever between the two parts, namely, the thorough training and the spiritual grace, they go together, and as a rule the men most thoroughly trained are likely to have the most grace. But when the decision comes, it comes here. Paul appealed to what? Not simply to his experience, because who can judge another man's experience? If I say that I have visions, and if I say that I am full of wisdom, you may not be able to deny it for politeness' sake. But there is no evidence. Paul appealed to the work he did, and the man he was. I am not an apostle?—have I not preached the gospel of Jesus Christ so that you people were converted and brought to God? I am not an apostle?—did not I do deal with you that I led you out of bondage into liberty and taught you how to live a godly life? I made many converts by the Cross; I made saints by the grace of God; and have I not grace myself? More than that, have not I labored? Who has labored more? Have not I suffered? Who has suffered more? And then, in a fine passage, at the end of that letter, he says: Say no more to me, foolish Galatians, leave me alone; I have another answer, an answer that ought to go to your hearts and silence you forever; I carry about in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Was he to strip off his garment and show how he had suffered for Christ? None did more, none suffered more. Was not this an apostle of Jesus Christ?

So a man

MUST STAND NOT BEFORE COURTS,

handing papers sealed to show that at such and such a time and by such and such person he was ordained, but stand before the judgment seat of man and the judgment seat of God on the same basis as the apostle, though far below him in attainment, by the work which he has done, by the life which he has lived, by the sacrifice which he has made for his Lord.

There was a time in the Church of Rome when there was a great revival, and the head of that revival, a priest in name, was really a prophet—for some priests have been prophets—Molinus; he came and he asked the Pope to give them a privilege. Let pious people, he said, receive the body and blood of Christ without confession; that is all we ask, nothing more. The Pope was willing, so were some ecclesiastics willing, but the instincts of the priests awoke in the ablest and most dangerous ecclesiastical order the world has ever seen, the Jesuit order. Then he knew it in a moment. What! come to