

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, NO. I.

That at this time of day there should be anything new to be said on the subject of Christian Ministry, and that any one should, by appealing to the New Testament alone, lay open such a statement on this theme as must, if true, tend to disturb the composure of every sect, would appear to many too strange for credence; yet the very fact, that numerous religious divisions in Christendom have established many varieties of ministry, and that all of them appeal to the Scriptures for the validity of their ministerial arrangements, is a *prima facie* argument for a new examination of the question, as it is quite obvious that only one of the sects can, by possibility, have discovered the truth.

At the same time, it is far more probable that all should have erred than that only one should be right. Every one who has not taken for granted the perfect and unimpeachable conditions of the "denomination" in which he happens to be enrolled, must acknowledge the force of this argument. And when the history of Protestant divisions is duly weighed; when their origin and the circumstances that led to their formation are calmly considered; when it is remembered that not one of them can put in a claim to a divine birth (for we know the pedigrees of them all, and can most accurately describe their earthly lineage), then must the argument be much strengthened, so that we need scarcely fear stating, that *it is in the highest degree improbable that any known sect should have come to indubitable conclusions on the article of Christian Ministry.*

In the great Reformation this momentous question was never fairly examined, or rather we may say it was slurred over as too delicate and dangerous to handle. Luther indeed saw very clearly the master-truths of the spiritual priesthood of all believers – liberty of ministry for all the saints, the total abrogation of all *official* priesthood in Christianity, and the vanity and absurdity of "ordination." He had

nothing more to learn on these points; but then, as in many other instances, he did not think it necessary or politic to press his views, or to insist on them as a part of the Reformation. It is well known that he tolerated many absurdities in worship and ceremonies, probably because he despaired of weaning the people from them; and thus he tolerated ordination [R1129 : page 6] though he made a joke of it in his letters, and unmercifully *quizzed* his brother reformers who had some grand doings at their* "ordinations."

*The imposition of hands in ordination was a perplexing question to the Protestants; thus, for some time, the whole senate of Geneva, consisting of many laymen, used, by imposition of hands, to ordain the ministers. Calvin and Farel objected to this practice. The Kirk of Scotland, a branch of Calvin's church, in the year 1560, renounced ordination by imposition of hands, as a "superstition:" eighteen years later, they restored it!

The Protestant party, headed by Melanchthon, were so little solicitous to place "ministry" on Scriptural foundation, that they rather showed a disposition to yield to all the papal decrees concerning the Priesthood. In the confession of Augsburg, the Protestants thus warily expressed themselves in the 14th article: – "Concerning the ecclesiastical order, they [the Protestants] teach that no one ought to teach publicly in the church, or to administer the sacraments, unless he be duly called." To this the papal party replied: –

"When in their fourteenth article they confess that no one ought to administer the word and the sacraments in the church unless he be *duly called*, it ought to be clearly understood that he only is duly called who is called according to the form of the canon law, and the ecclesiastical sanctions and decrees, which, up to this time, have everywhere been observed in the Christian world; not called according to the vocation of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:20), or a tumultuous election of the people, or any other irregular intrusion: for no one taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."

The Protestants, in their "Apology of the Confession," thus notice this stricture: – "Our fourteenth article, in which we say that the administration of the sacraments and of the word should be allowed to no one unless he be duly called, they accept, if only we make use of canonical ordination. On this subject we have frequently testified in the diet of Augsburg, that we, with the greatest willingness, desire to preserve the ecclesiastical polity, even the degrees of priesthood that have been made in the church by human authority; for we know that ecclesiastical discipline, as set forth by the ancient canons, was established by the fathers for a good and useful purpose; but the [papal] bishops compel our priests either to renounce and condemn the doctrine which we have confessed, or else kill them, innocent as they are, with new and unheard-of cruelties. For this cause our priests are prevented from acknowledging the bishops."

Here, then, we see the perilous position of "ministry" during the Reformation; and we can therefore well understand how, in such circumstances, there was little likelihood that the question should be investigated, as it deserves to be, with a professed and unhesitating submission to the Word of God.

But this is not all, for "ministry" must needs be produced in *some* form by the Protestants, and that form must of necessity be accommodated to the worldly position which the Protestant religion assumed at first, and has retained ever since. For it is to be remembered that the Reformers never acknowledged the heavenly calling of the saints; never confessed that the church had her polity *only* in heavenly places; never hesitated to draw the sword in "defence of their civil and religious liberties;" never declined from power and authority in the world, but rather, under the auspices of princes and magistrates, sought to establish the Gospel as a handmaid of Government, and, as if a second Joshua were their leader, to drive the enemy out of the land, that they might take possession of the fertile Canaan, long defiled with papal abominations.

The world, then, being the portion of the Protestant religion, its ministry required a substantial and consolidated formation, suited for its earthly calling and its contentious life; and that it soon obtained on the Continent, and in England and Scotland, according to the arrangements of the different predominant sections of the reformed faith. Hence we everywhere find that Protestant ministry is based on the old maxims and principles of the antecedent creed. These maxims and principles may indeed be modified, and reduced in intensity, but as the papal system had brought to perfection the mystery of amalgamating the church and the world, the new possessors of power, whose object it was to be proficient in the same mystery, could not do otherwise than study the successful methods of their predecessor.

But in this forbidden science, the Protestants seem to forget that the old masters can always obtain an easy victory over all co-rivals; for in the matter of ministry, wherever it is of human institution, Popery has the means of surpassing all antagonists, and of confounding all opponents. It is owing to the superior claims of the papal priesthood to the obedience of man, on *earthly* principles, that Popery is now once more disturbing the repose of Protestants, and threatening some great crisis in ecclesiastical history.

In "ministry," as a human institution, Popery possesses incomparable advantages; for who does not see that even the ordinations of the dissenters come from Rome through the Church of England, and that the idea of requiring a clerical body to convey the power of "administering the sacraments" (an idea fully recognized by Protestants), is easily to be traced to the decrees of the canonists?

The Church of England smiles with disdain on the imitation of clerisy by the dissenters, and haughtily denies the validity of their ordinations; but the Church of Rome, enthroned in the magnificent deceptions of many ages, and unrivaled in the perfection of every earthly principle, classes the Anglican prelate with the dissenting minister, sees no difference between the preacher of the conventicle

and the archbishop of Canterbury, and in the comprehensive category of "heretic," erases all Protestant ministers of every grade out of the clerical order. And, indeed, if it be a question between the comparative merits of any particular clerisy, if the *genus* "clergyman" be once admitted in Christianity, who would not naturally prefer the type of the whole family to any of the imperfect and mongrel varieties which could be put in competition with it?

When once, therefore, an inquirer is directed to rest on human ministry, and when he comes to discover that the priestly college, the priestly education, holy orders, the distinction of clergy from laity, the clerical character, title, and costume, the clerical right to preach and administer the sacraments, and the clerical prerogative of conveying that right, are to be had at the fountain-head at Rome – that from Rome all these things were derived, and that at Rome they all flourish in native splendor, inimitable in any other communion – he must naturally incline to go direct to the fountain-head for that which he had been falsely taught is a part of Christianity. Neither can we doubt that Popery is triumphing now through this obvious process of thought; for I profess not to understand how, admitting the clerical character and prerogatives obtainable by clerical ordination, it is possible to rest content with the imperfect and borrowed orders of the Church of England. "If there is a link out of [R1129 : page 7] the chain, it seems to matter very little whether it is wanting at one end or the other," the Anglican priest remarks, in commenting on the "orders" of the dissenters, forgetting that he is himself a dissenter from the mother church, and that it belongs to that church alone to use such a reproof, which is applicable to every Protestant that tampers with "the apostolical succession."

As, then, preaching justification by faith without works, that is, asserting that he who does not work, but instead of working believes in that God who justifies *ungodly* persons, is the only method of meeting Rome in her doctrinal power, so the assertion of liberty of ministry for all believers is the only method of meeting Rome's

pretensions to *clerical* pre-eminence, a pretension before which all must succumb who in any way acknowledge the clerical order. There is no medium, no resting-place for a candid inquirer between the two extremes – the ministry of the Spirit as revealed in the Word of God, or human ministry as exhibited by the ancient Church of Rome. Either take liberty of ministry for all the saints, from the supernal and free Jerusalem, "the mother of us all;" or, rejecting this, then accept the clerical order from Rome, the mother of all clerisy, and the mistress of all ecclesiastical bondsmen.

Let not these remarks, however, be interpreted as belonging to the controversy between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. That controversy enters not, I trust, into any part of this inquiry, which, as it professes to be an examination of the Scriptures, for the purpose of vindicating certain Scriptural truths of deep value to the Church of God, can only incidentally touch on the divisions of professing Christendom. In vain will we seek for either Papist or Protestant in the New Testament, or for their churches under any name, or any representation.

In God's Word we find only two antagonistic sects: that of the world and that of grace; known also by the names of the children of the devil and the children of God; of the sons of darkness and the sons of light; the body of Christ and the children of wrath. But wherever we find the principles of this world admitted into any system of professing Christianity, there we find a portion of that which is technically called "Popery;" and which is nothing but the fulness of this world's principles, and the entire satisfaction of all the desires of the carnal mind in its notions about religion. Now, with the Church of England and the dissenters, there is much of the elements of this world: much that proves that their citizenship is not, and that they do not wish it to be, in heavenly places. They are **[R1130 : page 7]** marshaled under opposing banners for an earthly portion; they both teach that politics should be "cultivated religiously;" and they both give the whole weight of their influence to the political parties of the day; nay, to such

an extent is this rivalry carried on, that their very places of worship are rearing as if they were fortresses and castles for a civil war. "It seems to be the present policy of the Church of England to build us down and build us out," says one of the antagonists; "but we must catch the building spirit of the age; we must **build, build, build**. This should be our cry, MORE PLACES OF WORSHIP. It may be well enough to form protective societies for the defence of our civil rights; but our best defence, under God, is in our numbers; numbers carry weight and influence. We cannot multiply our persons, unless we multiply our places. We must not wait for congregations to be gathered before we build; we must build to gather."

In the meanwhile, on these very principles, the common enemy of all the Protestant sects is advancing with a rapidity that alarms them all; and he who, ages ago, had the whole earthly portion, for parts of which others are now contending, is reviving his claim and taking active measures to recover it.

"I claim to retain the favor of the state," says the church; "I claim an equality in all rights of earthly citizenship," says the dissenter; but the imperial priest of the seven hills cries out, "I claim dominion over all the works of God's hands; all things are put under my feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea; for of me it is written, 'Behold, I have set thee over nations, and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.'"

**So applied by the canonists, and so quoted by Pope Boniface VIII., Extrav. C. "unam sanctum."*

It is not then for Protestants that we write but for the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," who desire to be acquainted with the will of God, whatever may be the consequences. One consequence, indeed, is certain, that if these things be true, then does Christianity stand before the world acquitted of the charges

brought against it by its restless enemies, who, viewing it only in its clerical form, condemn it, both for what it has done, and for what it has failed to do.

When Gibbon lays it down as an axiom, "that the Christian Church entrusted *the service of the altar* to a perpetual succession of consecrated ministers; and that bishops alone possessed the power of spiritual generation" (*Decline and Fall*, chap. xx.) he asserts that which all his Christian antagonists have allowed to pass unnoticed and uncontradicted; but grant him only this hypothesis, and who then shall be able to gainsay his history, which indeed has hitherto been more railed at than confuted? Gibbon has incidentally written a history of *clerical* Christianity in tracing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and *that form* of Christianity it has never been proved that he has misrepresented; but if we deny that clerisy is an authentic part of Christianity, and if we establish this position by a close inquiry into the Scriptures, then we ascertain that neither he nor any other infidel has ever yet been able even to find the true Church, which has fled into the wilderness far out of their reach, where, being reputed dead, and having her "life hid with Christ in God," she has found for herself "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." They that know this life will not evade any truth of the Word of God, whatever may be its tendency; for they know full well that most of the truths of Christ are attended with His cross, and to the world must ever appear unconvincing and unamiable; but, as their citizenship is in heaven, so will they not, as others do, be looking to this earth as a place of power, influence and honor for the Church, but rather remembering the great question, "When the Son of man cometh, will he find faith upon the earth?" they will anticipate suffering times, and days of painful testimony, "until the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" and so, suffering with him, that with him they may also reign, their present position will be unhesitating obedience, though the daily desire of their hearts will be, "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

It should be understood that the word "denomination," which will occasionally appear in following our Inquiry Concerning Christian Ministry, [in subsequent issues of the TOWER,] is used for the sake of peace, and to avoid the appearance of criminatory language; for if, in detecting error, crimination is inevitable, it is better that it should be by facts than by pointed expressions, and by proofs than by contentious phrases. Nevertheless "denomination" is only a veil for that harsher word "sect," though even that is a softened translation of the original.

That word is heresy (airesis). "As concerning this sect [i.e. heresy] we know that it is everywhere spoken against." (Acts 28:22.) So Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5. In all these instances heresy is translated sect. But in 1 Cor. 11:19 we read, "There must be also heresies amongst you," or if we choose, sects, or denominations, "for one saith, I am of Paul, and another of Apollos." (1 Cor. 3:4.) Then again, Gal. 5:20. "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies" – or sects or denominations.

"Denomination" is a specious word invented by Shame to conceal the nakedness of the fall of Christendom: that which erring and bewildered Christians call *denomination* is in the Scriptures SCHISM, for so it is in the word, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing, that there be no *schisms* [see the Greek] among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10 and 12:25); for in the Scriptures believers are represented not only as being one body and one spirit, but as having a perfect unity of mind and judgment; so that whatever we may now hear concerning "denominations" (that is, sects and schisms), and however these divisions may now be applauded and admired, and how much it may have become a fashionable virtue to speak well of them all; yet this is

certain, that if there be any truth in the Word of God, every sect is a sin, and every division a proof of disobedience.

"THERE IS ONE BODY," *is* a truth in the Word of God. (Eph. 4:4.) The faith once delivered to the saints was mainly to establish this fact, the whole of the New Testament tends to confirm it, and visible Christianity utterly fails to represent the true Christian faith where this fact is not both in practice and in theory fully acknowledged. I can, at present, only allude to this subject in passing, for it is of itself a theme for a wide and serious inquiry, but so much is here said on it, lest any believer, rightly instructed in the word of truth, should be offended with the usage of a word, which was originally intended to hide sin. To speak of "various denominations" is, after all, but saying that there are various schisms, for Christ and his Church have but one name (1 Cor. 12:12), one body (Eph. 5:29,30), and one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17); and therefore to give Christ the name of Roman Catholic, Churchman, Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, Wesleyan, or any other sectarian name, and to admire this many-headed portent as "his body," the Church, is as intolerable as to call our Lord by the names of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, or to look for the body of his disciples among the sects of Athenian philosophy. It is one thing to love all God's children though entangled in sects, and another to avoid the meshes of their captivity. The oneness of thought, mind and action, required of the Church of God, may be seen in the following texts: – John 13:34,35; 17:23; Acts 4:32; 20:29,30; Rom. 12:16; 15:5,6; 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:25; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 1:9; Eph. 4:14; Phil. 2:2,3; 3:16,17; 1 Thes. 5:13; 2 Thes. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:3-6; 6:3,20; 2 Tim. 4:3,4; 2 John 9.

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