

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

In the use of the word "priest" in the Prayer-Book, it may be as well to mention, though it can scarcely be needful to do so, that when the word is applied to the clergy it signifies "Presbyter." In his "Church Dictionary," Dr. Hook so explains it: "Priest is another form of Prester; and Prester the contraction of Presbyter, or 'elder,' by which name they are known in the New Testament.¹ In this and in no other sense is the name priest applied to the Christian ministry between the two covers of our Book of Common Prayer.

In conclusion, we thankfully return to our starting-point, leaving human inventions and speculations for the sure and infallible teaching of God's own word, and fixing our mind on the Great High Priest and on that holy priesthood which He Himself instituted and ordained. "To whom coming as to a Living Stone, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood; to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

So as believers in Jesus, we claim our privilege to join in that hymn of joyful praise and reverent adoration—"To Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood; and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father: to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

R. L. ALLNUTT.



ART. V.—APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

Miserum est aliorum incubere famæ
Ne collapsa ruant subductis tecta columnis.

JUVENAL: *Sat.*

'Tis poor relying on another's fame,
For, take the pillars but away, and all
The superstructure must in ruin fall.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION in a ministry is made by some the crucial test of a true or false Church, and the possessor alone capable of conferring a saving grace in the administration of the Sacraments.

Were we to ask any ordinary person what is meant by, and

¹ "Before proceeding further, some definition of terms is necessary. On no subject has more serious error arisen from the confusion of language. The word 'priest' has two different senses. In the one it is a synonym for presbyter, or elder, and designates the minister who presides over and instructs a Christian congregation: in the other it is equivalent to the Latin sacerdos, the Greek *ιερεὺς*, or the Hebrew *כהן*, the offerer of sacrifices, who also performs other mediatorial offices between God and man. How the confusion between these two meanings has affected the history and theology of the Church it will be instructive to consider in the sequel."—Bishop Lightfoot, "Dissertation on the Christian Ministry," p. 184.

included in, the expression "Apostolic succession," the probability is that we should get a very vague and unsatisfactory answer. Nor do I think that we should be better satisfied were we to consult those who make the claim in their own person. I would put the following questions to such persons last referred to :

1. Do you make the claim as professing the same *doctrines* as were taught by the Apostles ?

2. Do you rely on an uninterrupted and unbroken succession from the Apostles from man to man, sealed by a certain formulary or ceremony ?

3. Do you restrict that succession to such only who have been duly ordained "priest" by a duly consecrated bishop ?

4. In the latter case, do you consider *form*—say, for instance, "Receive thou the Holy Ghost," etc., "and the laying on of hands" of the Bishop, essentials in transmitting Apostolic succession ?

5. If this be asserted, do you place the same virtue in a Bishop's touch as in the breath of Christ which He breathed on His disciples ?

6. Having asserted the claim, I would ask, What are the characteristics of that "succession" ? What virtues, powers, privileges, conferred by our Lord on His disciples, are transmitted through this succession, and proof that they are vested in the present claimants ?

If Apostolic *doctrine* be the sole test, then such of the laity, male or female, who hold, profess, and teach Apostolic *doctrine*, have in them the true Apostolic succession. Our Lord's commission to His disciples, and to "the seventy" (all laymen ; indeed, the "twelve" were only missionary labourers in the Lord's vineyard) was to go unto all nations, baptizing, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them" (Matt. xxviii. 20) ; and in that condition He promised His presence. Accordingly, we read (Acts ii. 42) that "They continued steadfast in *Apostolic doctrine* and fellowship, and in breaking bread and prayer." If, on the other hand, either of the other requirements, such as an unbroken personal succession, and form of words and laying on of hands by a bishop, are required as essentials, then of necessity the laity and all Nonconforming ministers are excluded. But if *doctrine* be conceded, the question so far is concluded ; but it is not so, if we accept the statement of the late Dr. Littledale, who may be accepted as a fair representative of the Ritualistic "priest." In his tract "The Christian Priesthood," one of a series, the doctor tells us that in order to exercise the sacerdotal functions of his "priestly office," he claims for himself and the "Anglican priesthood" a personal

Apostolic succession. The Anglican priest, he maintains, "must be a real minister of God's Church," "he must have a regular commission, and be sent by the laying on of hands of those who have received the commission in regular succession from the Apostles." And why not also of "the seventy"? And he further maintains that no one can act in any of the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon, "who has not been regularly ordained by a bishop," in regular succession from the Apostles.

It will, nevertheless, be conceded that a profession of *Apostolic doctrine* is an essential element in the claim to Apostolic succession. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians (i. 8, 9), "Though we or an angel preach any other Gospel than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The mission of the Apostles was to preach the Gospel of Christ, which, according to Ignatius, a writer of the first century, the Apostles, "for the sake of greater certainty, deemed necessary to attest by committing to writing."¹ Oras Irenæus, a Christian bishop of the second century, said, "This (Gospel) the Apostles preached, but afterwards, by the will of God, delivered to us in the Scriptures as the foundation and pillar of our faith." So essential did that ancient writer consider the teaching of *true doctrine*, that he directed all "to obey those presbyters who had the Divine gift of *faith*;" and, on the other hand, to "forsake all wicked ministers," and to learn from such as have the *Divine* "gift of faith."² Tertullian, a Christian writer of the second century, clearly estimated the usefulness of a *personal* succession where the true faith was wanting:

But if the heretics feign or fabricate such a succession this will not help them, for their *doctrine* itself, compared with the doctrine of the Apostles, will, by its own diversity and contrariety, pronounce against them. To this form of trial will appeal be made by those churches henceforward daily establishing, which, though they have neither any of the Apostles nor apostolic men for their founders, yet all agreeing in the same faith *are, from their consanguinity of doctrine*, to be esteemed not the less apostolical than the former.³

Gregory Nazianzen, Bishop of Constantinople, a Greek (A.D. 378), who, like Ignatius and Irenæus, is claimed to be a canonized saint of the Roman Church, tells us that:

Succession of piety ought to be esteemed the true succession, for he who maintains *the same doctrine of faith* is partner in the same chair; but he who defends a contrary doctrine ought, though in the chair of St. Mark, to be esteemed an adversary to it. This man, indeed, may have a *nominal succession*, but the other has the very thing itself: the succession in deed and in truth.⁴

¹ Apud Eusebius, Hist., Lib. iii., cap. 36.

² *Ibid.*, Lib. iv., V. 43, 45.

³ Tert. De Præscrip. Hær., c. xxxii., Tom. ii., pp. 40, 41; Hertæ. Magel., 1770.

⁴ In "Athanas. Opera," Tom. ii., appendix, edit. Paris, 1627.

And, again, Ambrose, the venerable Bishop of Milan, of the fourth century, also claimed as a saint, was no less explicit. He said: "Faith is the foundation of the Church, yet it was not said of the flesh of Peter, but of his *faith*, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it."¹ Again, "Non habent Petri hereditatem qui Petri *fidem* non habent." "They have not the *succession* of Peter that lack the *faith* of Peter."² And the illustrious Augustine, the African bishop, said: "We who are Christians do not believe in Peter, but in what Peter taught."³

Thus, then, it would appear, by the testimony of these "Fathers of the Church," that *Apostolic doctrine* is essential; and that without it the claim to a personal Apostolic succession is of no avail.

It is, however, asserted that an Apostolic succession of faith is not sufficient, since there are other essentials necessary to constitute the claim to a true and legitimate Apostolical succession: such as an unbroken and uninterrupted *personal* succession from the Apostles from man to man, sealed by a certain formulary or ceremony, restricted to such only who have been duly ordained "priest" by a duly consecrated bishop, and—as asserted by the Roman Church—by a *form* so precise that any, even a trifling, variation from that prescribed would nullify the ordination; the order of priesthood being deemed a sacrament by the Roman Church, and, indeed, by some in the Anglican Church. In the ritualistic organ, the *Church News*, for July 7, 1869, we read:

It is a declared duty of all who pray for the peace of Jerusalem to do their utmost to show that the English Church, of which they are members, is really one with the Church of Rome *in faith, orders and sacraments*.

A precise *form* is laid down to be adopted; any deviation from that *form* would, as observed, nullify the sacrament and vitiate the "succession." And be it remembered that for a series of years such a succession can only be claimed through Roman ordinations; and if that ordination was invalid from the year 1438 (as will be proved in the sequence) then the Anglican succession was forfeited.

C. H. COLLETTE.

(To be continued).

¹ "De Incar. Dom. Sacram.," lib. i., c. v., p. 711; edit., 1690.

² "De Pœnet.," tom. i., p. 159, Basel apud Frob.; and tom. vi., col. 391, H.; Paris, 1661.

³ "De Civit. Dei.," xviii., 54.