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

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

Transmission of Orders in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

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THERE are no doubt many, in the Churches both of England and Scotland, who regard the idea of a ministerial succession from the age of the Apostles as a baseless figment, but these may well be reminded that Episcopacy and Presbyterianism are equally based on that theory, which is, indeed, the very *raison d'être* of their respective systems, and one on which they are obliged to fall back if they would justify either their existence as distinct ecclesiastical organizations or their implied protest against sectarianism. There are others who, although they attach no particular *doctrinal* significance to an Apostolical Succession, are nevertheless prepared to admit it as a fact; and there seems no reason to doubt that the claim to a regular succession of ministry transmitted by the imposition of hands which the Church has so constantly made is, in reality, a valid one; for, even if the difficulty of tracing it through each and all of its steps be admitted, there is still, in the unvarying practice of centuries, sufficient evidence to establish it as, at least, a moral certainty. The rite of the laying-on of hands, practised in every age, conveys the idea of continuity, and of the general intention on the part of those Churches which have, since the Reformation, retained it there can be no reasonable doubt. Therefore, once it is granted that the orders of ministry were validly handed on by the bishops of the Church Catholic from the time when it became customary for the *episcopos* to be the sole minister of the rite of ordination, there need be—can be—little difficulty in admitting that the Scottish Church was actually in possession of a duly ordained ministry when it was determined that the Presbyteral form of government should, after the lapse of many centuries, be revived. Nor is the question of the right to confer orders the insurmountable difficulty which it is fre-

quently made to appear, for we are obliged to confess that it is at least an open question whether the power of orders is rightly limited to the Episcopate, and whether the ordination of presbyters by presbyters may not be canonically as valid as the consecration of bishops by bishops.

An impartial consideration of the manner in which many important questions have been dealt with in the past seems to bring into view a feature of their controversial treatment which stands out from the surface with undue prominence—namely, the apparently overmastering desire to justify preconceived opinions, whether expressed in ecclesiastical formularies or in the tenets of "schools," and this, often enough, lest failure to do so might be taken as indicative of a weakening in regard to long and fondly cherished convictions. But to "reverently use and esteem" a system of Church government on account of its inherent merits and advantages is one thing, while to insist on it as an indispensable "note" of Catholicity is quite another; and it is hardly too much to say that those who regard Episcopacy as of *exclusively* divine institution convey the impression that, in their reading of Church History, they have begun, not at the first century, but at the second, without pausing to consider whether the condition of things then observable in Church life is an exact reproduction of what is seen in the New Testament, or is the result of growth and development. To this unfortunate tendency is due, in great measure, the common error of regarding Scottish Presbyterianism very much as one of the many forms of "dissent," and of overlooking the fact that, based as it is on ancient and traditional principles, it has as little in common as the Church of England herself with the medley of independent and heterogeneous sects which neither claim continuity from Apostolic sources nor even regard it as in any way essential, appearing to hold that the institution of orders of ministry or the provision of defined channels of grace did not come within the scope of our Lord's purpose, but are due rather to the growth of hierarchical pretensions.

It will naturally be objected that the "First Book of Discipline,"

published in 1560, in the first heat of revolt against what was regarded as a wholly corrupt ecclesiastical system, speaks of the imposition of hands as unnecessary,[1] and repudiates the "former clergy" as "usurped ministers," declaring "the new preachers to be the only persons that have the power to administer the Holy Sacraments"; but if violent and revolutionary language on the part of some of the extreme section of the Scottish Reformers is to be taken as proof of a deliberate intention to make a wholesale break with the traditions of the past, the argument may be applied with equal force to the Reformation in England.[2] "We err egregiously," says Dr. Norman Macleod,

[1] "It is true, of course," writes Professor James Cooper, of Glasgow, "that the writers of the 'First Book of Discipline' (ascribed generally to John Knox, but by others to Alexander Gordon, Bishop of Galloway) judged the laying-on of hands unnecessary; but it must be remembered (1) that even they—though doubting about this as 'one of the ceremonies of ordination,' a doubt which Cranmer at one time shared—never doubted that ordination was necessary; (2) that the 'First Book of Discipline' was never law either in Church or State; (3) that there is no evidence that the recommendation to omit the laying-on of hands was generally acted upon; (4) that there is the unexceptionable evidence of Erskine of Dun—a reformer less noisy but hardly less influential than Knox himself—that the laying-on of hands was an Apostolical rite observed in the Church of Scotland; (5) that in 1566 it was formally accepted by our Church in the Helvetic Confession; Andrew Melville and our earlier Puritans laid great stress upon it and insisted on it in the 'Second Book of Discipline'; and Bishop Patrick Forbes, replying in 1614 to the Roman Catholic impugners of Scottish ordinations in the period from 1560 to 1610, said they were impudent to deny that our ministers had a valid 'ordinarie calling.'" (See a letter on "The Present Position of Presbyterianism in Scotland" in the *Church Times* of July 28, 1911.)

[2] *E.g.*, Cranmer, referring to the Roman clergy, says: "The very Antichrists (the subtlest enemies that Christ hath) by their fine inventions and crafty scholastic divinity deluded many simple souls and brought them to horrible idolatry," etc. "It is a wonderful thing to see what shifts and cautels the popish antichrists devise to colour and cloke their wicked errors." ("A Defense of the True and Catholic Doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ," Parker Society's edition, pp. 228, 229, 348 *et seq.*) Again, in "The Resolutions of several Bishops and Divines, of some Questions concerning the Sacraments," Cranmer expresses opinions which are not one whit less revolutionary than those attributed to Knox, *e.g.*: "The ministers of God's word under his Majesty be the Bishops, Parsons, Vicars, and other such priests as be appointed by His Highness to that ministration. . . . In the admission of these officers be divers comely ceremonies and solemnities used, which be not of necessity, but only for a good order and seemly fashion; for if such offices and ministrations were committed without such solemnity, they were nevertheless truly committed. And there is no more promise of God that grace is given in the committing of the ecclesiastical office, than it is in the committing of the civil office." "The Bishops

"if we suppose that what the Reformers of the sixteenth century designed was to set up a 'new Church' having no root in the historical past."[1] As it was, however, the Council refused to ratify the Book, and within a few years the setting up of the bastard Episcopacy known as the "Tulchan" convinced the Reformers of the need of a "decent and comely order," so that, under the genius of Andrew Melville,[2] the true father of Presbyterianism, the "Second Book of Discipline" ordered the rite of the imposition of hands, and, in terms clear and unmistakable, declared the "Power of the Keys" to be the direct commission from Christ Himself to "them unto whom the spiritual government of the Church by lawful calling is committed," which is held by them as "successors of the Apostles."

A *tu quoque* may not be the most logical line of argument, but it may nevertheless be effective, and the fact that the Church of England, by the consecrations of 1610, recognized that no breach in the Scottish succession had actually taken place, reminds those English Churchmen who would unchurch the Kirk of Scotland that it is on grounds precisely similar that they themselves are unchurched by Rome. Whatever hypothesis we may be inclined to accept, thought out in the light of history, it is undeniable that the possibilities of weakness in the chain of succession are numberless, and it has even been contended that

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and Priests were at one time, and were no two things, but both one Office in the beginnings of Christ's Religion." "A Bishop may make a Priest by the Scripture, and so may Princes and Governors also, and that by the authority of God committed unto them, and the People also by their election." "In the New Testament he that is appointed to be a Bishop, or a Priest, needeth no Consecration by the Scripture, for election, or appointing thereto is sufficient." (Answers to Questions 9-12, Stillingfleet's MS. See Bishop Burnet's "History of the Reformation," Collection of Records.)

[1] Guild text-book on "Church, Ministry, and Sacraments," p. 18.

[2] It is a mistake to suppose that Knox was a violent opponent of episcopacy; he even recommended it in a modified form. And it must not be forgotten that after he had obtained his release from the French galleys, where he had been a prisoner in irons for nineteen months on account of his supposed complicity in the murder of Cardinal Beaton, he exercised for a time the functions of his ministry as chaplain to Edward VI., and had a hand in the revision of the Prayer Book of 1549. Offered high preferment in the Church of England, he enumerated his reasons for declining it, but amongst them there is no hint of objection to the episcopal form of Church government.

but for the laying-on of the hands of "the Presbytery," which takes place even in episcopal ordinations, the due succession of orders could not have been maintained; and further, that—because, according to the old saying, "the whole world is Presbyterian on a consecration day"—it would be more accurate to compare the ministerial succession to the meshes of a net rather than to links in a chain of which, if one is lost, all is lost.[1] Be this as it may, had the preservation of continuity depended solely on an episcopate vested in, and exercised by, but a few, the case against Presbyterians had been stronger; as it was, however, where the "chain" of Episcopacy might, under the peculiar circumstances, have failed, the "net" of the Presbyterial Order, spread over the whole face of Scotland, was able, in spite of the possibility of a few broken meshes, to enclose and retain the draught. Slavery to hypothesis is apt to bring endless difficulties in its train, and it is possible to prove too much.[2] "The very fact," says Principal Storey, "that no theory of Apostolic succession hampered the free action of the Reformers makes it all the more noticeable that that succession was not broken, and that now (though the passage was more rapid and stormy) as the Celtic Church had been amalgamated with the Romanist, so the Romanist was in part absorbed into, in part superseded by, the Reformed."[3]

[1] See an article in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, April, 1909, by the Rev. Archibald Fleming, D.D., of St. Columba's Scottish Church, London.

[2] One hesitates to adduce the testimony of so manifestly biassed a witness as Lord Macaulay, nevertheless the numerous objections which he urges are too serious to be ignored. See his essay on "Gladstone on Church and State."

[3] R. H. Storey, D.D., "The Continuity of the Church of Scotland,' quoted by Dr. McAdam Muir in his Guild text-book, p. 33.