

CONFIRMATION :

ADDRESSED TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS.

THE times demand that we test every thing by the unerring standard of the Scripture of truth. To this antiquity itself must be brought. Many customs, rites, and ceremonies have been received by Christians without questioning their authority at all; just as the traditions of the Pharisees were by the majority of Jews in the time of our Lord. To those among them who were taught by God to believe on Jesus as Christ and Lord, redemption was not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but also from their "vain conversation, received by tradition from their fathers." It was this that brought them into liberty. If man has invented religious rites, we may safely say that the effect of them must be to obscure God's order. It was so with the Pharisees' traditions. Now the great order of God is the worship of himself in liberty of spirit; and the great ordinance of God through which this is accomplished, is Christ. We have received, not by tradition, but from the Lord himself and his holy apostles, two most blessed institutions,—baptism and the Lord's supper, pregnant with significance,—the one tending in its simplicity to show the believer that he has died and is risen in Christ, and the other to bring before his soul all the blessings of the new covenant into which he is introduced by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; yea, to lead his soul to feed before God on the living bread which came down from heaven. These are blessed and unailing privileges to the household of faith. They

shew our nearness to God, and our fellowship with him in all the preciousness of Christ. It is indeed marvellous that sinners redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, should be able to feast together and to rejoice before him. But the very fact of these institutions being of such blessed significance to the believer, causes the danger to be greater of allowing any rite or ceremony of human devising to be *imposed* on us. The question is not the innocence of such a rite in itself, or its ancient usage, but that its imposition necessarily throws the soul at a distance from God. And the consequence is, that men become habituated to a system of ordinances, which soon usurps the place of living faith in the Lord.

Now the question as to Confirmation is simply this—Was it instituted by Christ or by his apostles in his name, or was it instituted very early in the Church by human authority? The false Church of Rome (from whence the present Protestant practice was substantially derived) ranks Confirmation as a divinely appointed Sacrament, and as such requires its reception by all the faithful, on the authority of the “word of God,” intending by that expression Scripture and tradition.* In the catechism of the Council of Trent, the authorized manual of Romish faith and practice, the institution itself is discussed as to its nature and intent, and the authority specified on which it is presented as a Sacrament to Catholic faith and observance, and this is stated to be two-fold—Scripture, and ancient Catholic usage. Now as the latter of these grounds is the common basis upon which ultimately rest all the human rites and traditional observances which mark and characterize the apostasy of Rome from the first simplicity of Christ; it will be needless here to state at length the arguments drawn from the early Fathers for its support. The main drift of the entire section on Confirmation is most manifestly to secure and fortify the grand distinctive dogma of successional apostolic power and authority as vested in the office of Bishop. Accordingly the only direct reference to Scripture is made with the double view of vindicating the prac-

* Preface to Catechism of the Council of Trent.

tice itself by scriptural authority, and at the same time claiming for the episcopal office a blind and implicit veneration, as possessing and exercising powers exclusively apostolic in their nature—"that Bishops alone are the ordinary ministers of the Sacrament, is the doctrine of Scripture. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, that when Samaria had received the Gospel, Peter and John were sent to them, and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, "for he was not yet come upon any of them, but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Here we find that he who administered baptism, having only obtained the degree of deacon, had no power to administer Confirmation; its administration was reserved to a more elevated order of the ministry, that is, to the apostles alone." Cat. Coun. of Trent. Eng. Trans. Page 199.

I do not speak here of the intention of the Sacrament as viewed by the Romanists, nor of the matter or the manner of the exhibition of the rite; the reader of the Catechism just quoted will presently discern in both the working of that spirit of error which making the baptismal water the spring of spiritual life in regeneration, completes the delusion by conferring through Confirmation "full growth and perfect spiritual strength" to a poor darkened soul that perhaps never even has heard the joyful sound of the Gospel of God's grace in *truth*.

The compilers of the English Liturgy have repudiated Confirmation as a Sacrament, but retained it as a rite of apostolic usage and authority; and it is said to be, "laying on of hands upon those that are baptized and come to years of discretion." Nothing can be more meagre than the order of Confirmation: the rule adopted by the compilers was clearly to retain all they could of antiquity which was not glaringly inconsistent with Scripture. In doing this they have fallen into the strange inconsistency from which the Romanist is free—a deacon may baptize—or priest administer the Lord's Supper, the two Sacraments alone owned as generally necessary to salvation, and ordained by Christ himself: but the Bishop alone can confirm. And for doing this the same ground is assumed as that by the Romanist. The Bishop is directed to use this form of prayer: "*We*

make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants, upon whom (after the example of thy holy apostles) we have now laid our hands, to certify them (by this sign) of thy favour and gracious goodness towards them."

The example of the apostles claimed to be followed is this : " Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*" Again, the Apostle Paul finds certain disciples at Ephesus—" he said unto them, have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, unto what then were ye baptized? and they said, unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And *when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.*"

In both these instances the laying on of the apostles' hands was accompanied *by the sensible gift of the Holy Ghost*. In the first instance we are told that " when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money." As to those on whom Paul laid his hands, the Holy Ghost came on them and they spake with tongues. The laying on the hands of the Bishop after the example of the apostles, is said in the English Liturgy to be a sign of God's favour and gracious goodness : it is clear that Simon as eye-witness did not think it so ; nor will any instance of the laying on the apostles' hands bear such an interpretation.

We do indeed find the apostles and others confirming the disciples, but not by laying on of hands. And such would

at all times be most blessed service. It was a proof of real shepherdly care, prompted by love to the sheep of Christ, and not a ceremony heartlessly performed and received with ignorant admiration. We find Paul and Barnabas returned again to Lystra, &c. *confirming* the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Acts xiv. 22. So again: And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren *with many words, and confirmed* them. Acts xv. 32. Paul with Silas went through Syria and Cilicia, *confirming* the Churches (41). So again: he (Paul) departed and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening (confirming) all the disciples. Acts xviii. 23. The apostles, by the ministry of the truth of Christ to their souls, assured the disciples of God's gracious favour and goodness—the Bishop by laying his hands on the head.

The solemn truth declared in Scriptures is, that every institution not expressly enjoined by God himself and dispensationally addressed as such to his people, not only is vain, but an actual hindrance to the truth. The obsolete ritual of Judaism, and the ignorant observances of heathens, are classed together by the Spirit of God as alike inconsistent with, and fatal to the proper liberty of a Christian as redeemed out of the world through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Carnal ordinances are suited to carnal men; but if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, not in the flesh but in the Spirit: no rite therefore can be of a *neutral* character; it is either of Christ, and so leading the soul into stricter communion with him in heaven, or it is of man and simply worthless.

It will be fair to turn to one of the most accredited human authorities for the rite of Confirmation; and let any Christian read Hooker's apology for it, and he will be convinced of its entire destitution of *scriptural authority*. On many points when he has Scripture with him, he is mighty indeed, but on this, the Fathers and irony are his stay. The only scriptural authority claimed, is the example of Peter and John, Acts viii. already referred to; and the "laying on of hands," Heb. vi. 2—a slender foundation indeed for im-

posing this rite. But let Hooker himself speak: "Now whereas the successors of the apostles had but only for a time such power as by prayer and imposition of hands to bestow the Holy Ghost: the reason why Confirmation, nevertheless by prayer and laying on of hands hath always hitherto continued, is for other very special benefits which the Church thereby enjoyeth. *The Fathers everywhere* impute unto it that gift of grace of the Holy Ghost, not which maketh us first Christian men, but when we are made such, assisteth us in all virtue, armeth us against temptation and sin. For after baptism administered, there followeth (says Tertulliam) imposition of hands with invocation and invitation of the Holy Ghost, which willingly cometh down from the Father to rest upon the purified and blessed bodies, as it were acknowledging the waters of Baptism a fit seat" "As much is signified by Eusebius Emissenus, saying, the Holy Ghost which descendeth with saving influence upon the waters of baptism, doth there give that fulness which sufficeth for innocency, and afterwards exhibiteth in Confirmation an augmentation of further grace" * * * "which ancient custom of the Church, St. Cyprian groundeth upon the example of Peter and John, in the 8th chap. of Acts, before alleged. The faithful in Samaria (saith he) had already obtained baptism; only that which was wanting, Peter and John supplied by prayer and imposition of hands, to the end the Holy Ghost might be poured upon them. Which also is done among ourselves, when they which be already baptized are brought to the Prelates of the Church, to obtain by prayer and imposition of hands the Holy Ghost." * * * "St. Jerome hereunto maketh answer, that the cause of this observation is not any absolute impossibility of receiving the Holy Ghost by the sacrament of Baptism, unless a Bishop add after it the imposition of hands, but *rather a certain congruity and fitness to honour Prelacy with such pre-eminences.*"

Let these quotations suffice: the only scriptural authority claimed for Confirmation is the example of Peter and John in Acts viii., and the words "laying on of hands" Heb. vi. 2. The claim set up by the Fathers is very lofty, even that of conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost, as it was conferred at

Pentecost. But would any soul taught of God take as authority for doctrine a man who could say "that the Holy Ghost descendeth with saving influence upon the waters of baptism." All this very well comports with the notion that Christianity is another system of ordinances, but to the soul which knows what precious faith is as the gift of God, wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost, and living on the object which God presents to it, his own blessed Son, and his finished work, such statements are only humbling proofs of the utter darkness in which the mind of man is as to the things of God, and its habitual tendency to turn from the purity of doctrine delivered by the apostles unto fables.

Surely it is sufficient to present these statements to Christian parents who have the welfare of the soul of their children at heart, to show them that the rite of Confirmation cannot be innocent if it be not scriptural. It is a general axiom: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." We are responsible to God; and to own that as having his authority which has it not, is sin. If you can praise God for having given grace to your child to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, what are you doing by bringing your child to this rite, but virtually saying that Christ's work is not complete,—that something supplementary is needed. It is indeed your bounden duty and happy privilege to strengthen the soul of your child in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; to exhort him with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord: but this widely differs from directing the mind to the performance of a heartless ceremony.

But if your child is not converted, are you not as much as lieth in you blinding the already darkened mind of your child by practically instructing it to look to what another does for it or to it instead of to Christ. You do not, you cannot believe that grace is conferred by the laying on of the hands of the Bishop; and therefore you are deluding your poor child. It is all very well for those who have found the ready means of making a whole population Christian by a system of ordinances, but to you who know what conversion of heart to God is by the power of the Holy Ghost leading you to Christ, Confirmation must appear a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but

rather repugnant to the word of God" (Art. 22nd of the Church of England).

There is one observation with regard to the service itself which it would not be well to omit. The assumption before God in the most solemn act of prayer is, that those brought to be confirmed not only have heard the Gospel of the grace of God, but that they have believed it to the saving of their souls. The prayer put into the mouth of the Bishop commences thus: "*Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins.*" In the largest charity is this truth? Is there one out of ten of those brought to be confirmed who know what it is to be born of God, or what forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ is? If they hear the Gospel, is not forgiveness of sins preached to them as that which they know not, and the necessity also of being born of God as a blessing which they need? If man could devise means to blind souls and lead them into the ditch, it must be by teaching them that there is forgiveness of sins without personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely if you have been led by the Holy Ghost yourselves to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to know the value of his precious blood, you would not take part in a service so dishonouring to his work, and thus make the marvellous blessings of God's grace common to all—whether they have been taught of God to believe on his Son or not.

A sermon by Rev. H. Melvill has been recently published, in which the nature and effects of the rite of Confirmation, as contemplated in the liturgical services of the Church of England, are explained and vindicated; and which therefore coming as it does from the pen of one of the most popular preachers of the Establishment at the present day, may well be noticed here in illustration of the foregoing remarks.*

* The Sermon here mentioned contains much truth to which the writer of these remarks gladly bears his testimony, more especially to what is there stated respecting the unchanging fulness and weight of what are called elemental truths; and the remarks on teaching the pure word of God to children. How painful is it to read in juxtaposition with such truths, doctrines practically destructive of the truth itself.

The institution itself is described not as being a Sacrament, but as a means of blessing. It is not expressly referred to any Scripture original, although certain scriptural analogies are quoted as appearing to sanction indirectly the practice. Its real claim on the recognition and observance of those addressed, is made explicitly to rest upon the primitive and continuous usage of the Church. It is to the ancient records of the Church accordingly together with the Bible, that Mr. M. directs his audience, as to the faithful test of religious opinion.

Now it is precisely in this that the real spring of mischief lies. The moment I regard any human writing as an authoritative comment upon the word of God, my personal communion with the word of God ceases; the comment becomes invariably the real standard and practical directory to the soul, while the Scripture is chiefly valuable as the original and divinely inspired source from whence human tradition has professedly flowed. It is true that Mr. M. in a later page speaks of the Bible, and the Bible only as that which can make men wise unto salvation; but it is the Bible ecclesiastically read, and consequently the blessed law of God's liberty in Christ Jesus made to appear through such a medium the abettor and confirmer of rites and burdensome observances and traditions of men, from which Christ died to set us free.

The practical ground on which Mr. M. exhorts the youthful part of his congregation to submit to the rite, is the fitness of the rite itself to their present circumstances, as having been already constituted by infant baptism members of the family of God, and being now just opening that era of their lives which will bring them in contact with the world in some of its most trying and alluring forms. They are addressed therefore as regenerate, as having received the Holy Spirit, as having moreover incurred the irrevocable responsibility of a solemn vow, through their sponsors, to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly: the impossibility of escaping from this solemn obligation is strongly pressed; and they are there directed to the prospective rite of Confirmation as a means whereby they may humbly hope to receive

from the hands of the Bishop as the authorized dispenser of the Holy Spirit, such an increase of his influences as may render them better fitted to discharge with faithfulness the covenanted undertaking of their baptismal vow, now afresh ratified and solemnly appropriated in Confirmation.

There is a sad, a most sorrowful consistency in all this: a foundation laid in ordinance, may indeed be meetly builded up of the same material.—But where is the peace? where is the security? where is the assured continuance of hope that maketh not ashamed? Did the Spirit professedly given to the regenerate child move its lips to cry Abba Father? Where, in any part of the New Testament, do we read of a baptismal vow? Salvation is, in point of fact, here based upon the conditional faithfulness of a baptized and confirmed individual, to the terms of his own voluntary undertaking! Whatever may be taught concerning the fundamental truths of redemption at other times, so long as those blessed truths are made secondary to ordinances, they must, as far as human means are concerned, effectually be deprived of their present and essential effects. If there is one point of truth more sternly guarded by the Holy Ghost than another, it is the blessed truth of the absolute and immediate sufficiency of simple faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, independent of all rite or ordinance or observance whatever. Let Christian parents read and ponder the Epistle to Galatians, the 10th chap. of Romans, and especially as to Baptism as the real appointment of the Lord, Col. ii. 8—15.

What makes the word of the Gospel a message of joy to me as a sinner is, that it declares to me in my sin and consequent helplessness the pure and unconditional *grace* of God in his Son—"God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Again, "while we were without strength Christ died for the ungodly." My joy, then, as taught of God, is to rest in this love, to see myself simply as lost, and incapable of all effort to please God; but to see in the precious blood of the Lamb that which, while it is the witness of the exceeding sinfulness of my sin which could be reached only by such a sacrifice, is yet the perpetual witness to me that my sins and iniquities are no more remembered, because Jesus has by the

will and by the grace of God suffered, the just instead of the unjust. On his work then I rest, and am safe: I undertake no condition; I bind myself by no vow; I rest on him who has undertaken *for* me; and I *receive* as my steadfast anchor of hope the promise and the oath of *God* who cannot lie, and who has already translated me as a fit member through his *grace* into the kingdom of his dear Son.

May the Lord who has given you peace through this faith, keep you, christian parents, from grieving His holy Spirit, and from perilling your children's souls by turning their steps towards the lifeless vanities of shadowy ordinances, instead of training them to discern the bread of life in the broken body of the Lamb of God.

APPENDIX.

It may be well to add in these days when so many are turning back to ordinances, what their real character is. First we have the definition of a Sacrament.—A Sacrament “possesses by *divine institution the power of signifying sanctity and justice* (holiness and righteousness we should say) *and of imparting both to the receiver.*” Then as to Confirmation it is said, “Not only does this Sacrament confirm, it also increases divine grace in the soul: “The Holy Ghost, says Melchiades, who descends with salutary influence on the waters of baptism, imparts the plentitude of grace to innocence: in Confirmation, the same Holy Ghost gives an increase of divine grace, and not only an increase, but an increase after a wonderful manner. This extraordinary efficacy of Confirmation, the Scriptures beautifully express by a metaphor: stay you in the city, *says our Lord, speaking of this Sacrament*, until you be indued with power from on high.”*

Hence they use chrism in Confirmation, the matter of the

* Cat. Coun. Trent.

Sacrament, as they say ; that is ointment composed of oil and balsam, and solemnly consecrated by episcopal benediction.

Hence the form of Confirmation—"I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."*

In the English Liturgy much of the ceremonial is laid aside, but the fatal error of pretension in the Bishop to bestow grace is retained ; and if the ground on which Confirmation is imposed be maintained, what can hinder a return of ordinances ?

* Cat. Coun. Trent.