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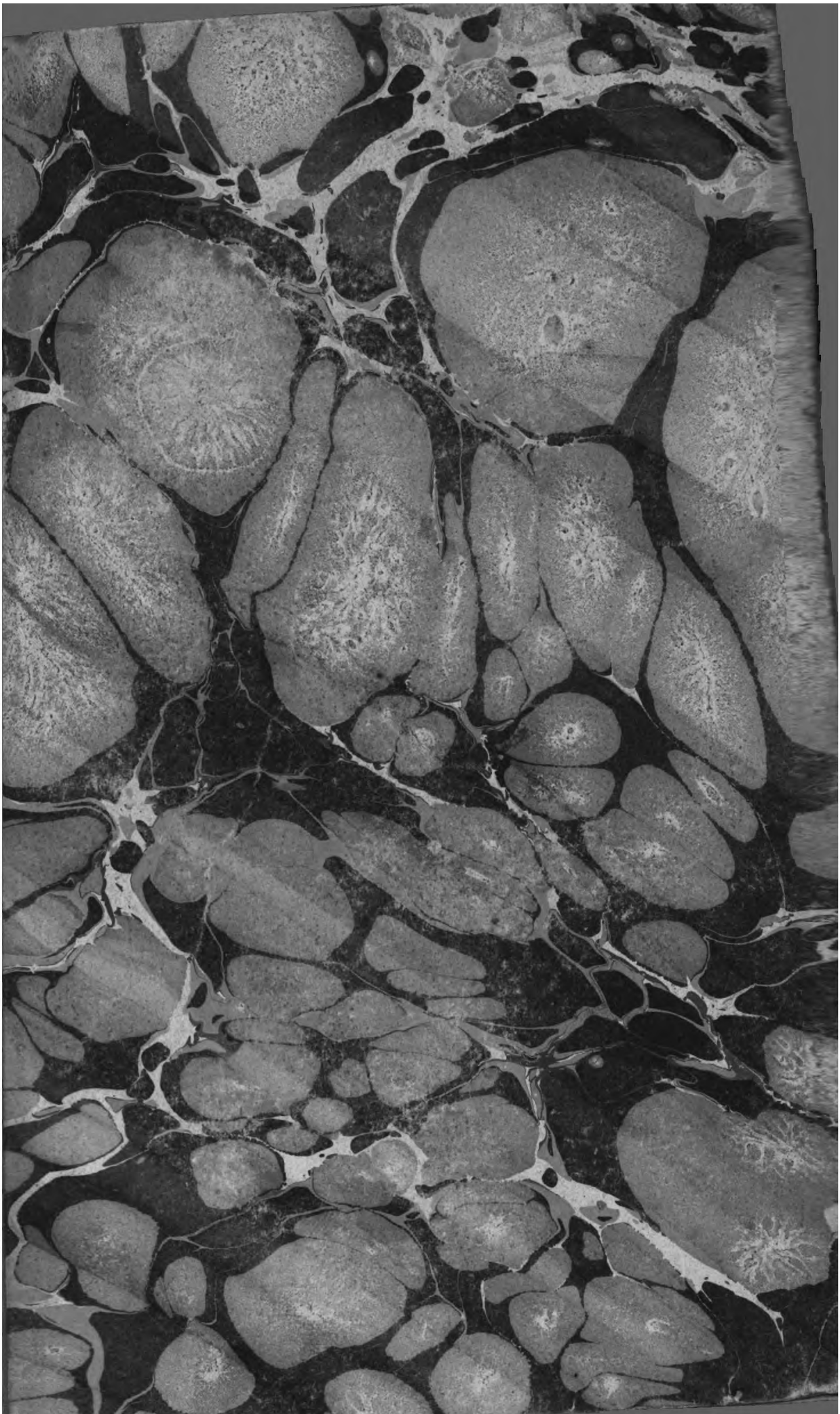
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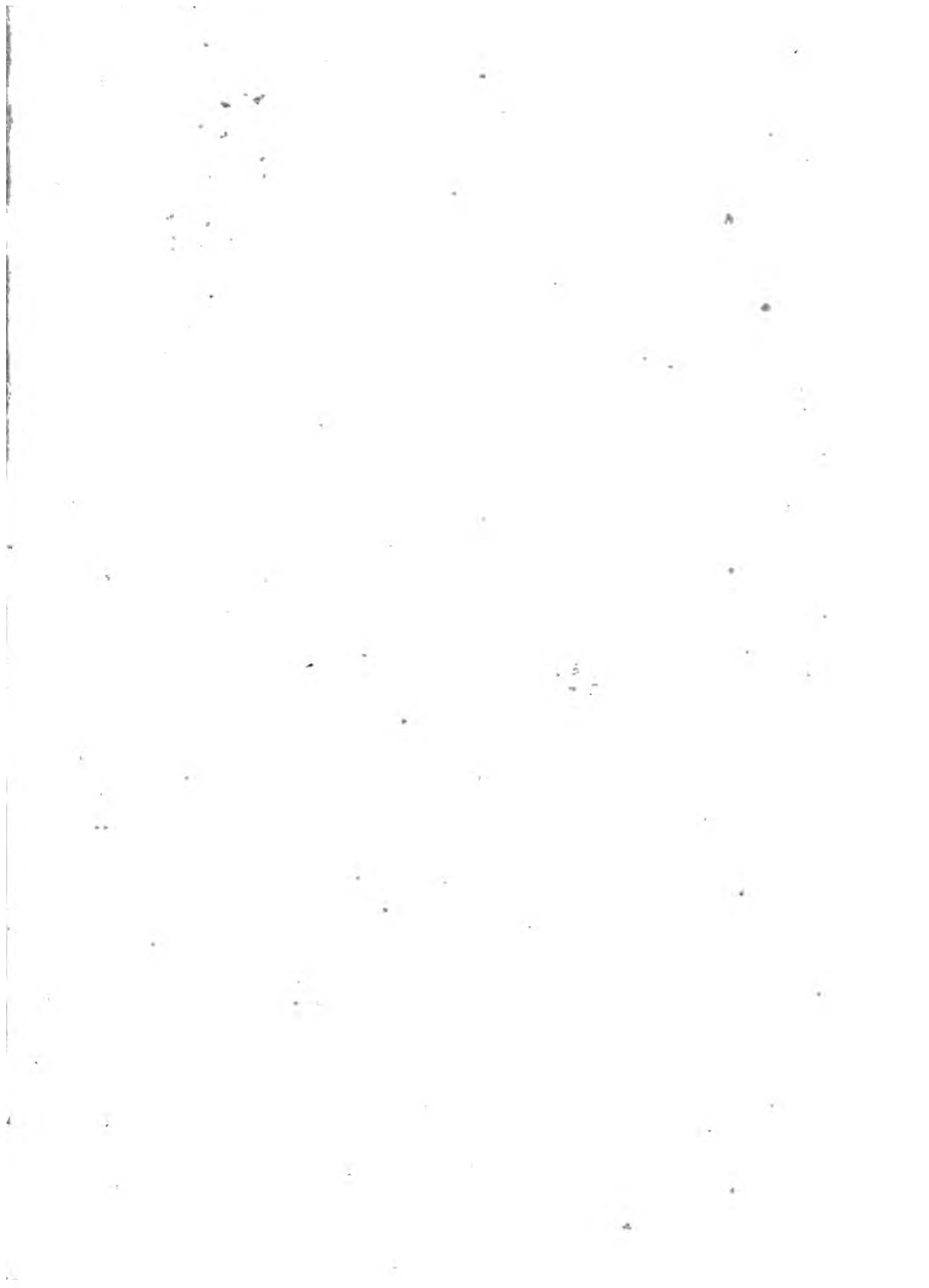


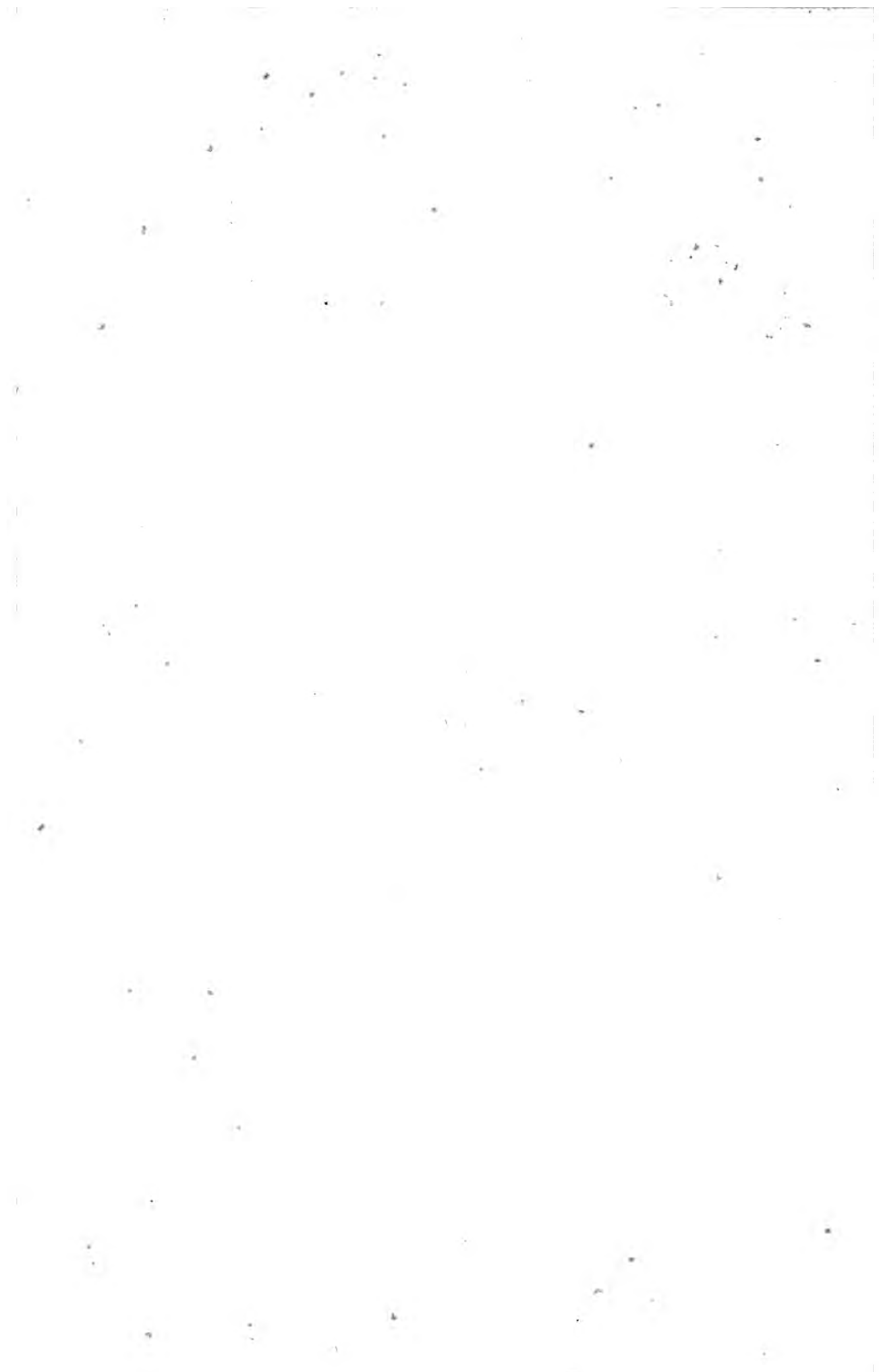




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THE POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD  
IN ABSOLUTION,

AND

A FEW REMARKS ON CONFESSION;

WITH

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

QUOTATIONS FROM THE MOST EMINENT ENGLISH DIVINES.

BY

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VICAR OF GAZELEY WITH KENTFORD, SUFFOLK.

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*INSCRIBED,*

*WITH MANY PRAYERS FOR THEIR ETERNAL WELFARE,*

;

*TO THE PARISHIONERS OF GAZELEY AND KENTFORD.*



## PREFACE.

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EARLY in the present year a neighbouring Clergyman brought against the writer of the following pages the charge of having preached Popish doctrines and blasphemy in a sermon at the re-opening of Lawshall Church. The charge was made in an anonymous letter in a local newspaper under the signature of "Monitor," and was soon transferred into several London journals which are considered to be the organs of a certain party in the Church and of the Dissenters. Feeling that a newspaper is not the proper place for discussing any doctrine of our most Holy Faith, instead of continuing the correspondence, I announced my intention to publish a pamphlet, for the double purpose of defending myself against "Monitor's" attacks, and of re-assuring the minds of many whom the controversy had disturbed. I have confined myself to the discussion of one only of the points to which objection was made; simply, because my remarks on Absolution have run to so great a length. I am, however, fully prepared to prove the other points in the same manner as I have proved the doctrine of Absolution, if ever circumstances should seem to demand it.

The publication has been delayed from a desire to leave unsearched the works of no one English Divine who has written on Absolution. Every quotation has been copied by my own hand, and (I believe) fairly and impartially. Had time allowed, the list of quotations in the Appendix

could have been considerably enlarged. As regards the quotation from Becon, I am quite aware that he defines "the absolution of the priest" to be "the preaching of free remission of our sins in Christ's name;" but I think his words very valuable from the testimony they bear to the doctrine that when the Priest speaks the word of forgiveness, *at that time* the penitent's sins are forgiven by God. He connects God's act with the act of the Priest.

The First Chapter contains the Scriptural Proof of the doctrine of Absolution. I have confirmed the interpretation placed on certain texts by an appeal to the Early Fathers. I have shewn that in so doing I have followed the sound principles of the Church of England.

"Much absurd prejudice has been entertained," (says Mr. Stanley Faber in a Note in "The Primitive Doctrine of Justification,") "and many very foolish things have been said, touching an appeal to the early Fathers; partly, on the ground that such an appeal is an appeal from the authority of Scripture to the authority of men; and partly, on the ground that various absurdities and even erroneous doctrines may be detected in the works of these writers.

"I. With respect to the first allegation, nothing can be more childishly inconsistent. They who make it, under the specious claim of honouring the Bible, do really nothing more than appeal from *the human authority of the Fathers, to their own individual equally human authority*. For since it is quite clear that the Bible cannot be used as a Rule of Faith until it be interpreted, they who profess to honour its autocracy by despising the interpretations of the Fathers most unaccountably seem not to perceive, . . . that (while they profess to appeal to *the Bible alone*) they *really* appeal only to *their own private interpretations*, rather than to *the interpretations of the Early Church*: and how it can be said by any modern that an appeal to the interpretations of the Fathers

is an appeal *from* the authority of the Bible *to* mere human authority, while an appeal to this same modern's *own* interpretations is NOT an appeal *from* the authority of the Bible *to* mere human authority, surpasses my own power of comprehension. In truth, I see not how such an assertion can for a moment be sustained, unless the modern in question be prepared, with a grave face, to maintain that *his* interpretation of the Bible is NOT a human interpretation.

“ II. So, again, with respect to the second allegation ; it is founded entirely upon that odd sort of misapprehension which logicians call *ignoratio elenchi*.

“ Let it be granted that the writings of the Fathers contain sundry fooleries ; . . . or even that they contain some ugly specimens of false doctrine ; . . . what then ? I venture to ask. Do these circumstances at all diminish the authoritative value of those interpretations of Scripture which the Fathers give us as the sense of the Catholic Church in regard to really Catholic doctrines ? When from age to age, without any variation, the Fathers deliver (as the sense of the whole Church) an interpretation of certain texts which exhibits them as declaring the doctrine of the Trinity, or the doctrine of Christ's Godhead, or the doctrine of the Atonement, and the like ; when, from the very beginning, in perpetual harmony, they professedly speak not merely their own private sentiments, but the sentiments of the Church at large, the QUOD SEMPER, QUOD UBIQUE, QUOD AB OMNIBUS, . . . I really, however mortifying such an opinion may be to modern self-conceit, cannot help thinking that the authority of *their* interpretation considerably transcends the authority of any mere *private* interpretation, even of the enlightened nineteenth century.

“ It may be urged that the Anglican Church herself exhorts, *Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to THE STINKING PUDDLES OF MEN'S TRADITIONS, devised by men's imagination, for our justification and salvation.*



“No doubt she does, and very properly to? But what then? What has this to do with the *present* topic? She only guards us against the unauthoritative and unscriptural traditions of the Church of Rome, which contradict, and overlay, and make void the Gospel; not against the universally harmonizing and sound expositions of Scripture, which we find in the ‘old antient authors’ (as our Church quaintly speaks), under the aspect of the standard and unvarying doctrine of the Church Catholic from the very beginning. Truly, if the Church, by the name of *the stinking puddles of men’s traditions*, warned us against THESE, . . . . she would directly contradict both her own injunctions and her own consistent practice.

“She determinately wished, as Casaubon speaks, to acknowledge alone that Doctrinal System which, welling out from the fountain of Holy Scripture, *has been derived, down to the present time, through the consent of the Antient Church, as through a channel.* And accordingly, on this precise ground, the same eminent person pronounces *her* scheme of reformation to be the soundest of *all* the schemes that were severally adopted by the Reformers. It received from him that honourable and glorious character, BECAUSE, within her hallowed walls, along with the devout study of essential truth, flourished also the diligent study of Antiquity. *Whenever, under the vain upstart plea of INSULATED and INDEPENDENT and UNINFORMED private judgment, the Church of England shall depart from the complexity of her own recognised mode of theologising, ICHABOD will be written in characters of fire upon her recreant forehead.* She will have quitted the path of Cranmer and our wise Reformers, and she will be on the high-road to every evil imagination. Like a ship without a rudder, she will be carried about by each wind of doctrine, whatever may be the fashionable humour of the day: and the obvious reason is, because (in such a supposed case) she has forsaken the stedfastness of testimony, the *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, and has trusted to her own

vain and unauthorized hallucinations. Perhaps it might be useful to enquire whether the plague has not already gone forth among us; . . . but I forbear, and (with real feelings of Christian anxiety, when I behold the facility with which strange doctrines are disseminated and received among us,) leave the consideration of these matters to those whom they may concern. Suffice it to say, that this spirit of arrogant self-sufficiency and inflated self-dependence, in the work of Scriptural interpretation, is the very spirit of high-vaulting Socinianism. The pretence is, *an honouring of the Bible*; the reality is, *an overweening estimate of ourselves* <sup>a</sup>."

The Second Chapter contains answers to certain objections which in the course of the controversy were made either in the printed correspondence or orally to the writer.

In the Third is the proof that the Doctrine of Absolution, as proved from Holy Scripture in the First, is contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and in other Authoritative Documents of the Church of England.

In the Fourth are a few remarks on Confession, as taught and practised in the English Church.

It will be seen that I have continually adopted the language of the great Divines of our Church, and have incorporated large extracts from their writings into my own arguments. This is done from a feeling that many who might question a statement made simply in my own weak words, will attach weight to the language of Beveridge, and Andrewes, and Hooker, and Barrow, and others; and that some will be led to suspect the soundness of views which are at variance with the concurrent testimony of antiquity, and of the most attached and learned Divines of the English Church.

I have written with devoted attachment to the English

<sup>a</sup> The Primitive Doctrine of Justification, pp. 46—53.

Church, for whose interests I have been ever ready to spend my best energies, and in whose communion I hope to live and die. I have written in the belief that the power vested in the Priesthood to receive confession and absolve the penitent is a point of vital importance; of life or death: and that if the Church of England gives up this, she will lose one essential feature of the True Church of Christ. And I have written with the prayer of S. Augustine in my memory and on my lips, that in interpreting Scripture I may neither deceive others nor be deceived myself.

I trust that I have fully vindicated my character and teaching, and proved one statement to which objection was taken to be the doctrine of the Church of England. If I have misstated historical facts or misquoted documents, it can be easily proved against me. But if I am correct, and I am most fully persuaded that I am, I do not think that my teaching on Confession and Absolution will be found out of harmony with the plain and literal interpretation of the Book of Common Prayer. I have not sought to evade the force of any single expression; I feel, with the honest Nonconformists of Charles the Second's time<sup>b</sup>, "that there must be not *consent* only, but *assent* too; and that, not only *to all in general*, but *to everything in particular contained in and prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer*;" and that "words could scarce be devised by the wit of man more full and more significant." I do not wish to be captious; nor can my opponents object to be measured by the same measure that they mete to me. And I would ask, How is it consistent with this *assent* to all and everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, for English Priests to say (as so many have said to me) that they *never have "moved" a sick man to confess*, and *never have used and*

<sup>b</sup> Calamy's Life of Baxter, p. 508.

*never will use* the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick? Surely no better witness could be borne to my honesty, and to the honesty of those with whom I think and act!

I must ask my opponent to combat the views which I avow, and not to attribute to me opinions which I do not hold, but pertinaciously disavow. Those who read my pages, even superficially, will see how utterly at variance with fact is "Monitor's" representation of my views: "The merits of Christ are committed as a treasury to the Church (as they speak), which her ministers are empowered to distribute *to whom they will.*" I repudiate utterly the opinion which he here imputes to me. I challenge him to produce even one sentence of mine in which such an opinion is stated or implied. I have examined the writings of almost all the English Divines, ancient and modern, and can find no such statement made even by those who have written the strongest things on the subject of Absolution and Confession.

Let me beg the kind judgment of able theologians, on the ground that I have not presumptuously come forward to volunteer an opinion, but have written simply in self-defence. If the charges against me had not had so wide a circulation, I should have confined my reply to my own neighbourhood. I do not claim to have put forth even one new argument; and those who are well versed in the many controversies concerning Confession and Absolution will be able to trace many of my remarks to their original source. My wish has been simply to condense all that has been written aforetime. Least of all do I desire my pages to be considered as aspiring to the title of a Treatise on Absolution, or to anything beyond a modest attempt to set forth honestly the opinions which I conceive it my duty to hold and teach as a Priest of the English Church. If I have proved the honesty of my position, and the accordance of my views with the dogmatic teaching of the Church of England, I

have succeeded in my aim. God grant that my feeble efforts may not damage the cause I advocate, or encourage those to gainsay who would have quailed before an abler disputant! I would have been silent, if duty had not forced me to speak; but I remembered the grave counsel of S. Jerome, "In suspicione hæreseos se nolle quenquam fore patientem."

God pardon all that is amiss in my writings, and hinder it from injuring His Holy Faith! If my attempt to speak the truth boldly and yet in love shall even in a small degree serve His Church, to Him alone be the glory!

*Give peace in our time, O Lord.*



# THE PRIEST'S POWER IN ABSOLUTION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### I.

WE are taught in the Holy Scriptures to look upon health, life, and all the blessings of this world as the gift of God, and of God alone. God has revealed Himself in those same Scriptures as pleased to send His gifts to us His creatures, sometimes straight from Himself, at other times through some agent or instrument, and to make even inanimate things the means of conveying blessings to men. In the Old Testament, for example, we read of the waters of Jordan<sup>a</sup> bringing healing to Naaman, and of the bones of Elisha<sup>b</sup> restoring to life a corpse that by accident came in contact with them. In the New Testament, we have the record of the pool of Bethesda<sup>c</sup> made by God, through His angel, the channel of cures; of virtue going out of Christ through the hem of His garment<sup>d</sup> and healing the woman with the issue of blood; of handkerchiefs and aprons from the body of S. Paul<sup>e</sup> healing the sick; and of even the shadow of S. Peter<sup>f</sup> being instrumental to effect cures. In all these cases we are certain that the blessing came from God, who alone has *absolute power* to heal and restore life. And yet we find God pleased to convey His blessings

<sup>a</sup> 2 Kings v. 14.

<sup>b</sup> Ib. xiii. 21.

<sup>c</sup> S. John v. 4.

<sup>d</sup> S. Luke viii. 44.

<sup>e</sup> Acts xix. 12.

<sup>f</sup> Ib. v. 15.

through the waters of a pool, the hem of Christ's garment, the handkerchiefs and towels from an Apostle's body, and even the shadow of an apostle.

And from the very earliest ages it has been God's ordinary method to convey His blessings and judgments *through the hands of men*. In Genesis xx. it is written that, though God knew the integrity of Abimelech's heart, He would not remove from him the curse until Abraham had prayed for him: "He is a prophet; he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live. . . . So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech." We have Abimelech's cure made dependent on Abraham's prayers; and Abraham and his prayers made the instrument of drawing down and consigning the blessing from God to Abimelech; and the reason of this given in the words, "because he is a prophet." In Job xlii. 8, when Eliphaz and his companions were repenting of their sin before God, God said, "My servant Job shall pray for you; for him I will accept;" and gave the pardon when Job prayed, and so made Job the instrument of obtaining and conveying that pardon from Himself. Again, in those words, "Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom, *for* Moses had laid his hands on him<sup>g</sup>," the divine gift is most distinctly connected with the laying on of the human hands, as the means through which it was bestowed. And once more: "The priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near; for them hath the Lord thy God chosen to minister to Him, and to bless in the Name of the Lord<sup>h</sup>." "Speak unto Aaron and his sons, saying, On this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee and keep thee. . . . And they shall put My Name

<sup>g</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 9.

<sup>h</sup> Ib. xxi. 5.

upon the children of Israel ; and *I will bless them*<sup>i</sup>.” Surely, if words have any meaning, we must gather from these that God intended to use His priests’ blessing as the means of consigning His own blessing, and through the priest’s word to bestow the grace which the word signified.

In like manner, in the New Testament we read of the Apostles being empowered to consign from God to man the blessing of healing and life ; of “sick folks and them that were vexed with unclean spirits, healed every one by the hands of the apostles<sup>k</sup> ;” of Dorcas raised to life by S. Peter<sup>l</sup>, and of Eutychus being restored by S. Paul<sup>m</sup>. The Apostles certainly *had* this power, as it is written, “*By the hands of the apostles* were many signs and wonders wrought among the people<sup>n</sup>.” At the same time care is taken to make it clear that God alone is the Author and Giver of the blessings, and that He used the Apostles’ words and acts as the instruments through which He gave them : “*The Lord granted* signs and wonders to be done *by their hands*<sup>o</sup>.”

Now the Scriptures represent this power as given by Jesus as the Son of Man. Bishop Pearson<sup>p</sup> shews that our Lord had right and power in Himself to work miracles from this fact, that He was able to make it over to whom He pleased, and actually did give it to His disciples ; “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy<sup>q</sup> :” to His Apostles ; “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead,

<sup>i</sup> Num. vi. 22.

<sup>k</sup> Acts v. 16.

<sup>l</sup> Ib. ix. 39.

<sup>m</sup> Ib. xx. 10.

<sup>n</sup> Ib. v. 12.

<sup>o</sup> Ib. xiv. 3.

<sup>p</sup> On the Creed, vol. i. p. 109.

<sup>q</sup> S. Luke x. 19.

cast out devils ; freely ye have received, freely give<sup>r</sup> :” to the first believers ; “ These signs shall follow them that believe ; in My Name they shall cast out devils ; . . . they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” “ He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do<sup>s</sup>.” And so we find the power ascribed to Christ and His Name whenever a miracle is worked by an Apostle’s word and act. See, for instance, how in the healing of Æneas by S. Peter<sup>t</sup>, Christ is set forth as the Author, the Apostle’s words as the channel of the blessing : “ Peter saith unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole ; arise and make thy bed ;” and he arose immediately. Here, while the Apostle attributes all to our Lord,—“ Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,”—the cure is represented as given *immediately* on the utterance of the Apostle’s words, clearly for the purpose of connecting the cure with the words, and marking the words out as the instrument through which the cure was given, so that if the words had not been spoken the cure had been withheld. And this is even more clearly evidenced to us by the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. In the words, “ Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee ; in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk<sup>u</sup>,” S. Peter distinctly lays claim to a power to heal the cripple in the Name of Christ, authoritatively exercises that power, and works the cure. At the same time he is anxious and careful to remove all doubts as to the nature of the power : “ Why look ye so

<sup>r</sup> S. Matt. x. 8.

<sup>t</sup> Acts ix. 34.

<sup>s</sup> S. Mark xvi. 17 ; S. John  
xiv. 12.

<sup>u</sup> Ib. iii. 6—12.

earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus . . . . and His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong whom ye see and know." Here, again, we have the intervention of men made necessary to convey the blessing from God; but the power asserted to be God's, who for His own wise purposes has made men fellow-workers with Himself in the salvation of the world.

We have at present considered a power which was not peculiar to the Apostles, but granted to them in common with other believers in the Name of Christ. It is, however, to be noticed, that the Apostles had a power peculiar to them as stewards of the mysteries of God, and beyond the power granted to the deacons and laity,—the power of handing over to others the grace to work miracles and of giving the Holy Ghost. "When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. Then *laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.* But when Simon saw that *through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given,* he offered them money, saying, Give me this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that *the gift of God* may be purchased with money<sup>x</sup>." The inspired writer distinctly affirms the Holy Ghost to have been given

<sup>x</sup> Acts viii. 20.



through laying on of the Apostles' hands. S. Peter plainly calls the power of giving to other men the Holy Ghost, the gift of God. So, then, we see God using His own ordained Ministry to bestow His gifts, and endowing them with power for that end. It was only through the laying on of the Apostles' hands that the Holy Ghost was given. Though *miraculous powers* were *exercised* by *deacons* and other disciples, it does not appear (as Hooker remarks) that *they* had power "to *derive* or *communicate* them to other men." Yet His Apostolic Ministry, though men, had by His gift the power to bestow the Holy Ghost.

I have brought forward these examples for the consideration of those who are staggered at the thought of God's gifts being conveyed through the hands of men. I have shewn from the Bible that Christians in general had the power to work healing and restore to life, — a power which can belong to God alone *absolutely*, and yet was delegated by Him to men. I have shewn from the Old Testament that God healed Abimelech *only* through His prophet Abraham's ministry; that God gave Joshua the spirit of wisdom through the laying on of His chosen servant Moses' hands; and that, through His priests' blessing, God gave His own blessing. I have shewn from the New Testament that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, and miraculous powers. God *has* used men as the instruments of His gifts, and has bestowed on men power to do things in His Name, for Him. Why should He not act thus now? Is it contrary to reason that He should? Is there anything in Holy Scripture to lead us to suppose that He does not? "As the Apostle

argues in another case, If the ministration of condemnation did bless, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit exceed in blessing<sup>y</sup>?" If God once had a ministry able to convey the Holy Ghost to men, where is the improbability that His Ministry now has power to consign His gifts? If God in Holy Scripture has shewn the intervention of men to be necessary to dispense His blessings, surely we need a new revelation to convince us that He has changed His plan! If once we are reasonably convinced that Christians in general had power from God to work miracles in the Name of Christ, and that the Apostles had, by virtue of their office, power to give the Holy Ghost, we shall have no difficulty in believing that men, duly called and sent to the office and work of the Ministry, may, according to Christ's institution, hand over to men the unsearchable riches of His grace. The learned and judicious Archbishop Potter remarks:—

“This will have no weight with any reasonable man, against the censures of the Church, or any other ordinance of the Gospel, that they make the intervention of men necessary to our salvation; since it has always been God's ordinary method to dispense His blessings and judgments by the hands of men.”

## II.

BEARING in mind these thoughts, we will proceed to examine into certain of the charges and commissions given by Christ to His Apostles, after His resurrection and before His ascension into heaven.

S. Matthew relates<sup>z</sup> that “the eleven disciples went

<sup>y</sup> George Herbert: A Priest to the Temple, chap. xxxvi.

<sup>z</sup> S. Matt. xxviii. 18.

away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them; and Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." It is clear that our Lord is here speaking of Himself as *the Son of Man*. To Him, as God, equal with the Father as touching His Godhead, all power belonged from eternity, and therefore could not be said to be *given*. But it is certain from these words that there was some kind of power given to Him, as S. Peter tells us that He was "*made Lord and Christ*." And in order to set this point forth clearly and accurately, I will quote the words of the learned Bishop Pearson<sup>a</sup>:—

"As we have observed two natures united in Christ's person, so we must consider two kinds of dominion belonging respectively to those natures; one inherent in His divinity, the other *bestowed* upon His humanity; one, as He is the Lord and Maker of all things, the other as He is *made Lord* of all things . . . . A dominion thus imparted, given, derived, or bestowed, cannot be that which belongeth unto God as God, founded in the divine nature, because whatsoever is such is absolute and independent. Wherefore this lordship thus imparted or acquired appertaineth to the human nature, and belongeth to our Saviour as the Son of Man. The right of judicature is part of this power, and Christ Himself hath told us that the Father 'hath *given* Him *authority* to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man;' and by virtue of this delegated authority, 'the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and reward every man according to his works.' Part of the same dominion is the power of forgiving sins, as pardoning, no less than punishment, is a branch of the supreme magistracy: and Christ did therefore say to the sick of the palsy, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' that we might 'know that the *Son of Man* hath *power* on earth to forgive sins.' Another branch of that

<sup>a</sup> On the Creed, vol. i. p. 188.

power is the alteration of the law, there being the same authority required to abrogate or alter which is to make a law ; and Christ asserted Himself to be ‘ greater than the temple,’ shewing that ‘ *the Son of Man* was *Lord* even of the Sabbath-day.’ This dominion, thus given to Christ in His human nature, was a direct and plenary power over all things, but was not actually given Him at once, but part while He lived on earth, part after His death and resurrection.”

By virtue of this power, given to Him as the Son of Man, our Lord proceeds to delegate power to His Apostles. “ Go ye *therefore*,” because I have the power to send you, “ and teach,” or make disciples of, “ all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Retaining to Himself the power and sovereignty *in heaven*, as He sits for ever on His Father’s throne, “ Head over all things to the Church,” He commissions the Apostles to exercise power *in earth*, to be His representatives, to occupy for Him, to speak in His stead, to act in His Name. As if He had said<sup>b</sup>, “ I command you, and empower you, to enlarge, settle, and govern My Church, to administer My Sacraments, to persuade men to embrace My doctrine, to submit to My discipline, to obey My laws, and to accept My salvation.”

But our blessed Lord added words which explain the nature of this commission : “ Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” They shew us, first, that the commission was not to close with the lifetime of the Apostles, who died in a very few years, long before the end of the world ; and that the commission therefore was not given to the *men*, as

<sup>b</sup> See Bishop Beveridge’s Sermon on this text, vol. i. p. 2.



S. Peter, S. James, S. John, but to the *office* of the *Apostolical Ministry*, which was founded to last “always, even unto the end of the world.” And to all who are duly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to any order of this Apostolical Ministry, Christ gives the promise, “Lo! I am with you.” As God of old promised to Moses when He sent him into Egypt, “Certainly I will be with thee<sup>c</sup> ;” as God promised to Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee<sup>d</sup> ;” so Christ promised to His apostolical ministry, “Lo! I am with you ;” so that whatsoever ye do according to My holy institution, I am present in the doing, so as to make it effectual to the great ends and purposes for which it was designed. We are to look upon the Christian Ministry, not as Christ’s *successors* acting in their own name, but as the visible *representatives* of Him who is present but invisible, acting “as in His person,” because He is working in them, with them, and by them. Being Himself perpetually present at the administration of every sacrament and ordinance which He has instituted in His Church, He gives the effect, as the Ministry minister, to all who are rightly disposed and qualified for it. As if He had said, “I do you the honour to make you My instruments, but I will be the principal agent ; regard not your weakness, but My power ; and doubt not that I will do by you whatsoever I shall give you in charge<sup>e</sup>.” It is not to the person, but to the office, that the promise is made. In all the functions of the Ministerial Office, whatever is done in the Name and according to the institution of Christ, He Himself is the doer of it. When they speak with “the foolish-

<sup>c</sup> Ex. iii. 12.

<sup>d</sup> Joshua i. 5.

<sup>e</sup> Bp. Lake, Ordination Sermon on S. Matt. xxviii. 20.

ness of preaching, He speaks by them ; when they baptize, He baptizes ; when they bless, He blesses ; when they ordain, He ordains. To Him, present according to His promise in every act of His ministry, we trace the benefits derived through all their ministrations for Him among His people." He, in heaven, acts in earth by them. "Distributing to every man severally as He will," He works through each authorized act of His Ministry, as a visible instrument, the blessing which that act signifies and is intended to convey.

And so we find Christ identifying Himself with the *office* of the Priesthood: "He that receiveth *you*, receiveth *Me* ;" "He that heareth *you*, heareth *Me* ; and he that despiseth *you*, despiseth *Me*." And so also we read of S. Peter describing the deceit practised by Ananias on the Apostles as a lie, "not unto men, but unto God." Acting for Christ, "beseeching men *in Christ's stead* to be reconciled unto God," as Christ's agents, deputies, ambassadors, carrying out the "ministry of reconciliation committed to them," the sufficiency of the Christian Ministry is from God, by virtue of that promise, "Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Let me repeat again, that it is to the *office*, and not to the *person*, that the power was given and the promise made. For the *office*, and not for the men, we claim now the

† S. Matt. x. 40; S. Luke x. 16. Our Lord clearly distinguishes between *person* and *office* in S. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do:" because by virtue of their *office*, as sitting in Moses' chair, their words and acts are

with authority; "but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not:" in their *persons*, they are far from God. Mr. Ford, in his Commentary on S. Matthew, aptly quotes, "Si male vivat, suum est; si bene dicat, tuum est." The distinction between *personal* and *official* acts is laid down in Article XXVI.

spiritual power. It is not our persons, but our office, influenced and assisted by the Presence of Christ, which makes our acts efficacious. It is not we, but Christ working in us as His ministers, and making us fellow-workers with Himself.

### III.

WE have next to enquire into the manner of Christ's Presence with His Ministry in their authorized acts.

To explain this fully, it is necessary to turn to another of Christ's commissions to His Apostles, as recorded by S. John <sup>g</sup>. On the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, He came to the room where the Apostles were gathered together, and said to them, "Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Speaking of Himself as *the Son of Man*, He tells them that whatsoever power He had received from the Father, as the Son of Man, He delegated the same to them, for the conversion of the world and the government of His Church. "*Even so send I you;*" with no visible or declared inferiority of power, commission, or authority <sup>h</sup>. Taken simply as they stand, the words imply that as the Father sent Him with full power to send them, so He gave them power to send others vested with like authority. It is as plain as the light, that if the Apostles had not power to send others, they were not sent, *even so* as the Son of Man was sent by the Father.

"A power of transmitting authority, analogous to that which He was exercising Himself, was necessarily included

<sup>g</sup> S. John xx. 19—23.

<sup>h</sup> Moberly's "Great Forty Days."

in the power transmitted. *As He had the power of delegation, so by His own gift had His Apostles too*; and if they had the power of delegation, they had also, by the same express charter of their institution, a commission to hand on that power of delegation; and so on perpetually, whilst the visible Church should last on earth: so that, in each successive generation of ministers, the same commission having been in turn received and imparted, the humblest bishop in the present day has received and can impart it likewise: a commission the same in *kind* with that received and handed down by the Apostles, however much the *inspiration* of those chosen vessels may have exceeded the *ministerial grace* of these latter days in degree<sup>1</sup>."

And in order to convey that power to them, "He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:"—

"Whereby He certifies them," says Bishop Beveridge<sup>k</sup>, "that whatsoever power He had received from the Father for the instruction and government of His Church, He now left the same with them, *or rather with the Holy Spirit which He breathed into them*; and by consequence, that as He sent them, so were they to send others, *by conferring that Spirit upon them*, and so from one to another all along, that the Spirit which they now received might continue with them and their successors, and so supply His place upon earth until His coming again."

Let us look a little closer into the force of these words. Out of the number of His disciples, our Lord chose certain whom He named "Apostles," that is, "the sent:" to these he says, "As My Father *sent* Me." In the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>l</sup>, S. Paul speaks of Him as "the Sent," "the Apostle." S. Peter<sup>m</sup> describes Him sent, "anointed by God with the Holy Ghost

<sup>l</sup> Jelf's Bampton Lectures, p. 100. sense with His Ministers.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iii. 1.

<sup>k</sup> Sermon on Christ's Pre-

<sup>m</sup> Acts x. 38.



and with power;" that is, anointed as the Son of Man with the Holy Ghost for His office and ministry. Our Blessed Lord Himself tells us that He was both anointed and sent, and for a particular work: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath *anointed* Me that I should preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath *sent* Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised<sup>n</sup>." "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,"—evidently as *the Son of Man*, for the Spirit of the Lord was ever one with God the Son,—“because He hath anointed Me,” from the very moment of the miraculous conception in the blessed Virgin’s womb; as Bishop Andrewes writes<sup>o</sup>:—

“When the ‘Word became flesh,’ the flesh with the Word, and by means of it with the whole Deity, was anointed all over, and by virtue thereof filled with the fulness of all grace. For this we are to hold; that Christ ever was Christ, that is, ever anointed, from the very first instant of all; He was never unanointed, even for a moment. . . . Now the same Spirit that was upon Him at His conception to *anoint* Him, was upon Him again at His baptism, to *manifest* and *send* Him.”

By this descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him at Jordan, the Son of Man was made “the Apostle of our profession,” called of God, and sent by God. And so S. Paul explains Christ’s mission to the Hebrews: “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is *called* of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High-priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee<sup>p</sup>.”

<sup>n</sup> S. Luke iv. 18.      <sup>o</sup> Works, vol. iii. p. 285.      <sup>p</sup> Heb. v. 4.

As, therefore, the Son of Man was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and sent with the Holy Ghost, He anointed and sent with the Holy Ghost His Apostles, whom He Himself had called Apostles; "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." "He breathed on them and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." I, who have received from the Father the Holy Ghost, have power to hand on the Holy Ghost to you; and I now, by this act of Mine, deliver the Holy Ghost to you. "As the Son of Man He gave it; and as Man, to men He gave it<sup>q</sup>." As He was first *anointed* with the Holy Ghost, in private, at His conception, and then publicly at Jordan; *in private*, to give Him the office ordained for Him, *publicly*, to proclaim His mission from God; so He first anointed His Apostles in private for their Apostolical Office, and then publicly upon the Day of Pentecost to give them their credentials in the sight of men.

"We must allow a double giving of the Holy Ghost," says the learned Dr. South<sup>r</sup>; "one, in which Christ conveys *ministerial power*; the other, in which He conveys ministerial gifts and abilities. Now it was the *first* of these that happened before Christ's ascension, as is clear from the following words in verse 23, 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted,' which we know is *the great instance* of ministerial power and authority. And this, by the way, excellently explains the sense of our Church, as it uses the same words in the Ordination of Priests, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost;' whereby she does not profess to convey to the person ordained ministerial gifts and abilities, but only *ministerial power*. But the solemn giving of the Holy Ghost after Christ's ascension was a conferring gifts, graces, and abilities upon the Apostles, to fit them for the discharge of their ministerial office and power, which had been conveyed to

<sup>q</sup> Bp. Andrewes, vol. iii. p. 270.

<sup>r</sup> Sermons, vol. iv. p. 25.

them by the former giving of the Holy Ghost before Christ's ascension."

And as God breathed into Adam at the beginning the breath of life, and man became a living soul, able to hand on to others by natural generation the life received from God; so Christ breathed into His Apostolic college the Holy Ghost, and made the Apostles able to hand on to others the gift thus received from Him,—the ministerial *power*, which is to be perpetual, even unto the end of the world<sup>s</sup>.

"Hence the Apostles, being thus ordained and instructed by our Lord, took special care to transfer the same Spirit to others which they had received from Him. But this they could not do after the same manner as Christ had done it to them, even by breathing upon them; for that way was peculiar to Christ, from whom the Spirit proceedeth. Wherefore they, being doubtless directed thereto by the same Spirit, transmitted it to others by *laying their hands* upon them, which was the old way that had been used in the Church before; for so Moses communicated the spirit of wisdom to Joshua, thereby constituting him his successor in the government of Israel, even by laying his hands upon him<sup>t</sup>."

<sup>s</sup> "It would be easy to draw out *cumulative* evidence on this subject (of the *principle* of succession), which the Holy Ghost furnishes in the sacred volume; but this would require a treatise of itself,—a commentary on the whole scope of S. Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus, containing, as they do, instructions applicable to all times in regard to the pastoral office, and to its perpetuation. We shall see that these writings, assuming the *principle* we have been contending for, contain specific provisions for handing down the succession, and the outward

method of doing it, by the imposition of hands. Indeed, so specific is the instruction afforded, that, in perusing these Pastoral Epistles, taken in connection with the Acts of the Apostles, *it is hardly possible for the most prejudiced not to observe the germ of the ministerial constitution*. So intimately are the *principle* of succession and its *appointed form* blended together, that it becomes difficult to separate them even in thought." — *Jelf's Bampton Lectures*, p. 100.

<sup>t</sup> Bp. Beveridge.

And so we find S. Paul writing to S. Timothy, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, *which is in thee by the putting on of my hands*."<sup>u</sup>

"The Holy Ghost which Christ then gave," says the judicious Hooker<sup>x</sup>, "was a holy and a ghostly authority over the souls of men. . . . Seeing, therefore, that the same power is *now given*, why should the same form of words expressing it be thought foolish? The cause why we breathe not as Christ did on them unto whom He imparted power is, for that neither spirit nor spiritual authority may be thought to proceed from us, which are but delegates or assigns to give

<sup>u</sup> "Whatever the Apostles *did* is the best practical exposition of our Lord's meaning. It appears, then, from the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Barnabas 'ordained elders in every Church;' that these elders were recognised as empowered and required to 'feed the Church of God' in the 'flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers;' that they were left in charge as delegates, to be visited occasionally by those from whom they received their commission. In the Epistles to Timothy we read of the spiritual gift which was in him, and the manner of its communication 'by the putting on' of the Apostles' 'hands,' as well as by 'prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery;' that is, by the authoritative act of the Apostle, with the subordinate concurrence of the inferior order, (the germ of a well-known usage in the rite of ordination); we find also the power of delegation entrusted in turn to Timothy himself, expressly included in the charge to 'lay hands suddenly on no man,' and to be

*inferred* likewise from the rules given for the choice of fit persons to be ordained as bishops and deacons; and farther, the injunction to 'hold fast the form of sound words, which,' saith the Apostle, 'thou hast heard of me,' compared with what follows in the next chapter, 'Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me' (the same expression again) 'among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.' Here surely is the ordinance of ministerial succession provided for no less than three generations. The same inference is to be drawn from the commission to Titus: 'For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless,' and have the other qualifications which the Apostle proceeds to specify as required in a bishop."—Jelf's Bampton Lectures, p. 102.

<sup>x</sup> Bk. v. ch. lxxvii. 7, 8.



men possession of His graces. Now, besides that the power and authority delivered with those words is itself *χάρισμα*, a gracious donation which the Spirit of God doth bestow, we may most assuredly persuade ourselves that the hand which imposeth upon us the function of our ministry doth under the same form of words so tie itself thereunto, that he which receiveth the burden is thereby for ever warranted to have the Spirit with him and in him for his assistance, aid, countenance and support, in whatsoever he faithfully doth to discharge duty. Knowing, therefore, that when we take ordination, *we also receive the presence of the Holy Ghost*, partly to guide, direct, and strengthen us in all our ways, and partly *to assure unto Itself for the more authority those actions that appertain to our place and calling*, can our ears admit such a speech uttered in the reverend performance of that solemnity, or can we at any time renew the memory and enter into serious cogitation thereof but with much admiration and joy? Remove what those words do imply, and what hath the ministry of God wherein to glory? Whereas now, forasmuch as the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour in His first ordinations gave, doth no less concur with spiritual vocations through all ages, than the Spirit which God derived from Moses to them that assisted him in his government did descend from them to their successors in like authority and place, we have for the least and meanest duties performed by virtue of ministerial power, that to dignify, grace, and authorize them, which no other offices on earth can challenge. Whether *we* preach, pray, baptize, communicate, condemn, give absolution, or whatsoever, as disposing of God's mysteries, *our words, judgments, acts and deeds, are not ours, BUT THE HOLY GHOST'S.*"

Here, then, we see the *manner* of Christ's Presence with His Ministry, and how their acts are His.

"All the efficacy that there is, or can be, in the administration of any ecclesiastical office, depends altogether upon the Spirit of God going along with the office, and assisting at the execution of it<sup>y</sup>."

<sup>y</sup> Bp. Beveridge, as above.

And as the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father, and is of the same nature and essence with Him, *wheresoever the Spirit is, there is Christ also*. So then in every authorized act Christ is present with His Ministry by the Spirit working in them, and through their agency giving grace to man.

“Whatsoever the priest hath entrusted to him,” writes S. Chrysostom<sup>z</sup>, “is of God alone to give. And why say I priests? Neither angel nor archangel can effect anything as to the things given by God, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dispenseth all; yet the priest lendeth his tongue and affordeth his hand.”

To sum up the teaching of Holy Scripture on the points under discussion: we have seen that, as God’s Prophets and Priests of old had power to convey His gifts to men, the Christian Ministry were made in like manner channels of His gifts. As a *Prophet’s* prayers and intervention were necessary to Abimelech’s pardon and cure, so in like manner the prayers and intervention of the *Elders* conveyed healing and forgiveness in the Christian Church. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him<sup>a</sup>.” As a *Prophet’s* laying on of hands conveyed “the Spirit of wisdom” to man, so the *Apostles’* laying on of hands gave the Holy Ghost to men. As the *Priest’s* blessing was in effect God’s blessing, so whatsoever is done by the Christian Ministry, in Christ’s Name, according to Christ’s institution, is done by Christ Himself. It is not denied that God’s gifts

<sup>z</sup> In Johann. Hom. 86, fin.

<sup>a</sup> S. James v. 14, 15.

may, in some cases and under certain circumstances, “be obtained directly, through the immediate operation of the Spirit, without employing the agency of man.” “The grace of God is not bound but free,” says Bishop Andrewes<sup>b</sup>, “and can work without means either of Word or Sacrament; and as without means, so without Ministers, how and when to Him seemeth good. But speaking of that which is proper and ordinary in the course by Him established,” He employs the agency of His Ministry. “It is not *ordinarily* God’s will,” says Hooker<sup>c</sup>, “to bestow the grace of the Sacraments on any, but by the Sacraments,” and therefore through the agency of them that administer the Sacraments. And if this be true of one authorized act of the Ministry of reconciliation, it is true of every other authorized act. In fact, the language which is used in the New Testament concerning the Christian Ministry, *if it be interpreted in the plain and natural sense*, can convey no other meaning. We are there told to look upon them as “labourers together with God<sup>d</sup>,” “workers together with God<sup>e</sup>,” “ambassadors *for* Christ, as though *God* did beseech men *by* them,” having the Word of reconciliation committed to them, and the ministry of reconciliation given to them, praying men *in Christ’s stead* to be reconciled unto God<sup>f</sup>; acting “in the *person* of Christ<sup>g</sup>” and “in the Name of Christ<sup>h</sup>,” not as substitutes for Christ, but as the instruments of Christ; “ministers of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God<sup>i</sup>,” having His treasures in them, as earthen

<sup>b</sup> Works, vol. v. p. 92.

<sup>c</sup> Book v. ch. lvii. 4.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 9.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 1.

<sup>f</sup> Ib. v. 18—20.

<sup>g</sup> Ib. ii. 10.

<sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. i. 10; Acts ii. 38.

<sup>i</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 1.

vessels<sup>k</sup>, and channels of His grace. We look upon them not as the successors of Christ, but as the representatives of Christ, who is invisibly present with them in the authorized acts of their office by His Spirit; as coming not in their own name, but in His Name; doing not their own acts, but His acts; as lending the hand and the word, so that He by His Spirit through their hand and word conveys the grace. We claim the power, not for the men, but for the *office*. We assert the power, not to be inherent in the men, but given by the Spirit to the *office* which they hold from God, according to the institution and commission of the Son of Man: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you: receive the Holy Ghost." We magnify, not the men, but *the office*. If I depute a man and give him power to act in my name, that man's act done according to my commission, but only so far as it is done according to my commission, binds me, and is as if I had done it myself. If, therefore, God commits a power to His ministry to do certain things in His Name, in ways expressly directed by Him, He binds Himself to ratify and confirm all that is duly done, according to the commission He has given them. And so the acts of His Ministry, thus done according to His directions, in the manner pointed out by Him, agreeably to His institution, and in conformity to the conditions laid down by Him, are done by the power of the Holy Ghost (which is given them for their office, and is in them in such wise as that through Him Christ is present with them,) and have the same effect as if God did the acts by Himself *immediately*. And so Hooker<sup>1</sup>, in full accordance with

<sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 7.

<sup>1</sup> Book v. ch. lxxvii. 1.



this teaching of Holy Scripture, bursts forth into this sublime description of the Ministerial office:—

“The power of the ministry of God translateth out of darkness into glory, it raiseth men from the earth, and bringeth God down from heaven, by blessing visible elements it maketh them invisible grace, it giveth daily the Holy Ghost, it hath to dispose of that Flesh which was given for the life of the world and that Blood which was poured out to redeem souls, when it poureth malediction upon the heads of the wicked they perish, when it revoketh the same they revive. O wretched blindness if we admire not so great power, more wretched if we consider it aright and notwithstanding imagine that any but God can bestow it!”

#### IV.

We are now prepared to examine into the nature of those acts which Christ commissioned His Apostolical Ministry to perform in His Name, and the manner in which the Ministry executed their commission.

“He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned<sup>m</sup>.” Our blessed Lord not merely authorizes them to preach, but makes *their agency* in preaching a means of saving souls for ever. S. Luke states that He further told them particular points to be made the subject of their preaching; “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name<sup>n</sup>.” Accordingly, S. Paul preaches, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are

<sup>m</sup> S. Mark xvi. 15.

<sup>n</sup> S. Luke xxiv. 47.

justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses<sup>o</sup>." But the same Apostle asks, "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent<sup>p</sup>?" Concerning those who are *sent* he speaks in another place: "God hath *given to us* the ministry of reconciliation, and *hath committed to us* the word of reconciliation. Now then we are *ambassadors* for Christ, as though *God* did beseech you *by us*; we pray you in *Christ's stead*," as representatives and agents acting for Him, "be ye reconciled to God<sup>q</sup>." The Apostle most distinctly claims power and authority to be an agent for Christ; and to convey reconciliation with God through the Word entrusted to him. And in another passage he ascribes the salvation of certain to the instrumentality of the Word preached: "It pleased God *by* the foolishness of *preaching* to *save* them that believe<sup>r</sup>."

Again: our blessed Lord "took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you: *this do* in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My Blood which is shed for you<sup>s</sup>." Accordingly, we find the Apostles breaking bread and blessing the cup, after the manner of our Saviour Christ, our great High-priest, and so standing "in His stead," and doing an authorized act in His Name. And without enquiring into the nature of the gift of the Eucharist, I would simply draw attention to the fact that that

<sup>o</sup> Acts xiii. 38.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. x. 14.

<sup>q</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

<sup>r</sup> 1 Cor. i. 21.

<sup>s</sup> S. Luke xxii. 19.

gift is described by no less a person than S. Paul himself as conveyed *through the agency* of the Priesthood: "The cup of blessing *which we bless*, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which *we break*, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ '?"

And if words are to be taken in their plain and natural sense, the same principle is distinctly laid down by our blessed Lord in respect of the forgiveness of sin: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained<sup>u</sup>." Our Lord had taught the people that, as THE SON OF MAN, He had a delegated power, licence, and permission from God to forgive sins; and in order to prove that such power was given to Him as man, proceeded to work a miracle. S. Matthew, S. Mark, and S. Luke<sup>x</sup> have each given an account of this miracle and saying of Christ. In order that no one may charge me with putting an interpretation on the passage merely to suit my own purpose, I will quote the explanation given by Bishop Fleetwood, (a man of great moderation,) in his "Essay on Miracles<sup>y</sup>:"—

"On a certain occasion, when one sick of the palsy was brought unto Him, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in

<sup>t</sup> 1 Cor. x. 16. Burkitt in his Commentary remarks on this passage, "Observe, secondly, the *ministerial* actions performed in this solemn Ordinance, and they are the blessing of the Cup,

and the breaking of the Bread."

<sup>u</sup> S. John xx. 21.

<sup>x</sup> S. Matt. ix. 1; S. Mark ii. 3; S. Luke v. 18.

<sup>y</sup> Works, p. 148.

His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Our Saviour does not here blame them for thus reasoning with themselves; for certainly they reasoned right, that none but God could forgive sins; and it was no great matter to mistake, and think that Christ attributed such power to Himself, by pronouncing so absolutely 'that his sins were forgiven him;' and such a power they never knew committed to any man: He does not blame them therefore for so reasoning, but takes occasion from thence to shew them *who He was*, and *the power He had committed to Him*, and for what purpose; and therefore He goes on, 'Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee,' (speaking then to the sick of the palsy,) 'Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way unto thy house.' Consider with yourselves this matter. You heard Me lately tell this sick man that his sins were forgiven him, and thought immediately that I had spoken impious and blasphemous words, attributing to Myself a power plainly divine and incommunicable, that is, of forgiving sins. That God alone can forgive sins committed against Himself is certainly true; BUT IF YOU THINK THAT HE CANNOT COMMUNICATE THIS POWER, YOU ARE MISTAKEN; for I assure you, that the SON OF MAN, even I who speak to you, have power on earth to forgive sins, and I was exercising this good power upon this miserable paralytic, which was, you know, the occasion of your inward reasoning, and concluding Me to have blasphemed. And what think you? You see this poor creature, how impotent and weak he is before you, how altogether unable he is to stir and help himself: do not you believe it is as easy for God to give Me the power of forgiving sins, as it is to give Me the power of working miraculous cures? May I not say as easily, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' as I can say, 'Arise, take up thy bed, and walk?' If I, without the application of proper means, or any manner of prescription, shall cure this man of his distemper by the



bare word of My mouth, by saying only, 'Arise, take up thy bed, and walk,' will you not believe that I have also power to forgive sins, since one is full as easy as the other? Now, that you may know assuredly that I, *the Son of Man*, have power on earth to forgive sins, you shall see that I have power to cure this paralytic presently — 'I say unto thee, then,' thou lame and helpless creature, 'Arise, take up thy bed, and walk, and go thy way to thy house.' Whether his sins be truly forgiven him, according to My word, is what you cannot possibly discover; but whether I have power to cure this man's disease, the effect will shew immediately, and you will visibly discern. 'And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.' Here is an act of great mercy shewn to a poor miserable man; but it is plain that Christ's design was now to shew the Jews the truth of that doctrine, '*That the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.*' That was the thing the Jews stumbled at, and this was the way Christ took to set them right: the miracle was to procure attention and belief; the visible effect of a divine power was to convince them that what He said was true, although the effect (namely, the forgiveness of sins) was, and must be, invisible."

Our Lord does not deny that God only has the absolute power and right to forgive sins. He does not here claim to forgive sins as being God. He states simply that He, *THE SON OF MAN*, *has power on earth* to forgive sins. The word which is translated "power" is a clue to the meaning. It is not *power*, absolute and inherent, or prerogative; but *ἐξουσία*, delegated power, licence, permission, granted from a higher authority. And this delegated power to forgive sins on earth, this licence and permission to forgive sins on earth, He claims for Himself as the Son of Man. He had explained on another occasion

that *the Son of Man* cast out devils and worked miracles by *the Spirit of God*<sup>z</sup>. He had said, "The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed Me, . . . . He hath sent Me . . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised." The Holy Spirit gave Him, the Son of Man, power to work miracles and to forgive sins on earth.

And this power which was delegated to Him as the Son of Man, He delegated to the Apostles and conveyed to them by the same Holy Ghost, which gave the power to Him. "As My Father hath sent Me," "anointed with the Holy Ghost," "the Son of Man, with power on earth to forgive sins," "*even so* send I you" with the like power and gift: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." In some way the Apostolic Ministry are to be the agents through whom sins are remitted by God. The words "ye remit," and "they are remitted unto them," imply two acts; one, the act of the Ministry, the other the act of God: for which are needed two powers; one, the power of the Ministry, the other the power of God; distinct in the place of working, one being exercised in earth, the other being exercised in heaven, yet working to one end, the entire forgiveness of sin. "So that the case stands thus<sup>a</sup>: 'they are remitted,' which is God's power, is the primitive or original; 'ye remit,' which is the Apostles' power, is merely derived. That in God sovereign, this in the Apostles dependent. In Him only absolute, in them delegate. In Him imperial, in them ministerial. The power of remitting sin is originally in God, and in God alone. And in Christ our Saviour, by means of the union of the Godhead and manhood into one person; by virtue

<sup>z</sup> S. Matt. xii. 28.

<sup>a</sup> Bp. Andrewes, vol. v. p. 90.

whereof 'the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.'” Therefore as when Christ spake the word on earth, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” the sins were forgiven then and there in heaven; so when Christ’s Ministry speak the same word, the sins of the penitent are then and there forgiven in heaven. God, forgiving sins of His own power absolutely, and forgiving sins only on account of the merits of His Son Jesus Christ, hands over to the penitent, through the official acts of His Priesthood, the pardon of all his sins. The words most certainly imply that the Priesthood were to have some part in the work, “Whose sins ye remit.” “That<sup>b</sup> part is so delivered by Christ as if He were content it should be accounted their act, and that the Apostles were the agents in it, and Himself but the patient and suffered it to be done. For the Apostles’ part is in the active, ‘ye remit,’ and His own in the passive, ‘are remitted.’” Moreover, the Apostles’ act comes first, “ye remit,” to signify that God ordinarily conveys His forgiveness through His Ministry, and that through their act “sins are remitted by Him.” Again, “the sins *are* remitted,” in the present tense; without any delay, or holding in suspense; at once, as soon as the absolution is pronounced on earth; not they shall be, but they “are remitted.” Observe, too, that the same word is used in both parts, “ye *remit*,” “they are *remitted*.” “For Christ hath not thus indited it, Whose sins ye wish or ye pray for, or whose sins ye declare to be remitted; but ‘Whose sins ye remit;’ using no other word in the Apostles’ than He useth in His own. And all to certify us that He fully mean-

<sup>b</sup> Bp. Andrewes, vol. v. p. 102; the whole paragraph is quoted or paraphrased from him.

eth with effect to ratify in heaven that is done in earth, to the sure and stedfast comfort of them that shall partake it."

It is clear that our blessed Lord charged and empowered His Apostles to be His agents in forgiving sin, as He was His Father's agent in forgiving the sins of the paralytic and of the woman that was a sinner<sup>c</sup>. He claimed the power to forgive sins, and in the exercising that power He said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," the very words which He used to express the result of the Apostles' act, "ye remit." And therefore the meaning which is given to the act and the result in the one case must clearly be given to them in the other. Zuingle, and others of his school, interpret the Saviour's charge to His Apostles, "Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," to mean, "To whomsoever ye preach the Gospel and they believe it," or, "to whomsoever ye shall announce remission of sins, and they shall believe the Gospel preached by you," or, "to whomsoever ye attest the remission of sins," or, "when ye confirm pious consciences by the promises of the Gospel in the hope of freedom and remission," "to them sins are remitted." But if this interpretation is to be allowed in the one case, we must apply it in the other. We must say that the Son of Man had no power to forgive sins, and that He could only preach forgiveness of sins, or lead men to hope that their sins are forgiven by God. Bishop Hoadly, the champion of Zuinglianism, saw this at once. And therefore, boldly and *honestly* carrying out his principles, he asserted, that when our Lord said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," He meant only *that the man's affliction, the result of his sin, was re-*

<sup>c</sup> S. Luke vii. 48.



*moved*, or only declared the man's sins to be forgiven by God. Seeing plainly that if he admitted the sin to be forgiven through the word or act of Christ, he must admit sins to be forgiven through the word or act of His Apostolic Ministry, the bishop gets rid of the difficulty by denying to the Son of Man the power to forgive sin. Surely no reverent mind can admit an interpretation which requires such miserable shifts to support it, and can only be supported (as Bishop Hoadly admits) by an assertion which is a plain contradiction of our Saviour's words, "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins!"

"I hold it," says judicious Hooker, "I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that when a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst."

The Roman translation, "*Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,*" is not farther from the truth than is, "*To whomsoever ye preach the Gospel, and they receive it, to them sins are remitted.*" Let alone the fact that Christ did not give the same commission twice over, and that He said on another occasion, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," and that "it carrieth no likelihood that our Saviour bestowing on them nothing here but that which He had before, would use so much solemnity, so diverse and new circumstances, no new and diverse grace being here communicated<sup>d</sup>,"—let alone, I say, this fact, can any dare to say that if our Lord had meant only to give to His Apostolic Ministry authority to preach repentance and remission of sin, He would have used words which not only do not express this, but are liable to such misconstruction and misconception?

<sup>d</sup> Bp. Andrewes, vol. v. p. 95.

If He had meant not to give to His Apostles power like to that which was delegated to Himself as the Son of Man, why did He use the very words in giving them their commission, which He had used in the exercise of His own power ?

“Our Saviour has told us,” writes William Law to Bishop Hoadly, “that the way to heaven is narrow. Your lordship might as reasonably prove from hence that He meant it was broad, as that He did not mean He could forgive sins when He said, ‘that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.’”

And if He had power as the Son of Man by the Holy Ghost to convey the forgiveness of sins, He had power through the Holy Ghost to delegate that power to His Apostles : “As My Father hath sent Me, *even so* send I you.” And what we hold the Scripture to teach is simply this, that instead of God speaking the words of forgiveness out of heaven, instead of Christ staying on earth to say to repentant sinners, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” He authorizes the Christian Priesthood to do this in His stead ; so that, if the sinner is truly penitent and moved by a lively faith at the utterance of the Priest’s absolution, the sins are as much forgiven as if God Himself did pronounce them forgiven from heaven.

Our Lord before His Passion and Resurrection had promised this power to the Apostles : to S. Peter first, as the representative of the Apostolic College,—“I *will* give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven<sup>e</sup> ;” afterwards to all the Apostles,—“Whatsoever ye *shall* bind on earth,

<sup>e</sup> S. Matt. xvi. 19.

shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven<sup>f</sup>.” But that which before His resurrection He had promised to give, after His resurrection He authoritatively gave.

“And very agreeably<sup>g</sup> is this power now bestowed by Him upon His resurrection. Not so conveniently before His death, because till then ‘He had not made His soul an offering for sin;’ nor till then He had not shed His ‘blood, without which there is no remission of sins.’ Therefore it was promised before, but not given till now, because it was convenient there should be *solutio* before there was *absolutio*. Not before He was risen then. And again, no longer than till He was risen, not till He was ascended. First, to shew that the remission of sins is the undivided and immediate effect of His death. Secondly, to shew how much the world needed it, for which cause He would not withhold it, no not so much as one day—for this was done in the very day of His resurrection. Thirdly, but especially, to set forth His great love and tender care over us, in this, that as soon as He had accomplished His own resurrection, even presently upon it, He sets in hand with ours, and beginneth the first part of it the very first day of His rising.”

And He communicated this power to them by the gift of the Holy Ghost : “Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” It is thus that the text has been understood from the earliest times. Thus S. Ambrose<sup>h</sup> writes :—

“Mark this too, he that receiveth the Holy Ghost, receiveth the power of binding and loosing. For so it is written, ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained :’ therefore he that cannot loose sin hath not the Holy Ghost.

<sup>f</sup> S. Matt. xviii. 18.

<sup>g</sup> Bp. Andrewes, vol. v. p. 83.

<sup>h</sup> *De Pœnitentia*, lib. i. c. 2.

The gift of the Holy Ghost is the Priest's office, and the power of the Holy Ghost consists in the loosing and binding sins."

S. Augustine<sup>i</sup> in the same way explains :—

"In that He said, 'Receive the Holy Ghost,' it appears plainly that they do not this thing of themselves, but the Holy Spirit through them, as He saith in another place, 'It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.'"

Again, in another passage<sup>k</sup> he writes :—

"He who, not believing that sins are remitted in the Church, despises so great bountifulness of the divine gift, and in this obstinacy of mind closes his life, is guilty of that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, in whom Christ forgiveth sins."

S. Pacian<sup>l</sup> says :—

"God alone can forgive sin. True! But that also which He doth through His Priests is His own power."

Origen<sup>m</sup> writes to the same effect :—

"It cannot be doubted that the Spirit forgiveth sins, since the Lord Himself saith, 'Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins ye remit, they shall be remitted.' See how sins are forgiven by the Holy Ghost. But to the remission of sins, men supply their ministry, yet do not exercise the right of any power; for they do not forgive sins in their own name, but in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

So that by the Holy Ghost the Apostles and their successors were put "in the stead" of the Son of Man, and made for Him, because gifted with the Holy Ghost, the dispensers of His judgments and pardon here in earth.

<sup>i</sup> S. Aug. c. Ep. Parm., ii.  
§ 24.

<sup>l</sup> Ep. i. ad Sympr., § 11.

<sup>m</sup> *De Sp. S.*, iii. 18, § 137.

<sup>k</sup> *Enchir.*, c. 83.

And now let us turn to the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, and see the manner in which this power was exercised.

In the first place, we find the Apostles and others stating emphatically that God's mercy in forgiving sins can be exercised only on such as are qualified by faith and repentance to receive it. S. Peter's first sermon ended with an appeal to those who were pricked in heart to "repent." We are told of their testifying to Jews and Greeks alike, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." To faithful penitents only has God promised pardon, and such we find the Apostles and others exhorting all to be.

But we hear S. Peter promising to all faithful penitents "remission of sin," through the Sacrament of Baptism. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins<sup>n</sup>;" and Ananias saying to the penitent Saul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins<sup>o</sup>." To this holy washing, administered by the Apostolic Ministry, is attributed the forgiveness of sins. To the same Holy Baptism is attributed the partaking of the Death and Resurrection of Christ; "Know ye not, that so many of us as are baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His Death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death<sup>p</sup>;" "Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him<sup>q</sup>." Salvation; "Baptism doth now save us, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ<sup>r</sup>." Regeneration; "According to His mercy He saved us, by the wash-

<sup>n</sup> Acts ii. 38.

<sup>o</sup> Ib. xxii. 16.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. vi. 3, 4.

<sup>q</sup> Col. ii. 12.

<sup>r</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 21.



ing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost<sup>s</sup>." Sanctification; "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word<sup>t</sup>." "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water<sup>u</sup>." We hear the Apostles calling upon the people to be baptized; promising forgiveness through Baptism; asserting divine gifts and graces to have been given in Baptism; and so pointing out Baptism to be as necessary for the forgiveness of sin and other divine gifts (I mean, when it may be had), as faith and repentance in general. I know not how the Apostles could more strongly have asserted the power which was in them by the Holy Ghost, and was conferred by Christ, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted."

Moreover, we find the Apostles claiming in its fullness the power and authority to forgive and retain sins after Baptism. As they forgave sins by administering Baptism to such as were duly qualified, and retained sins by refusing Baptism to such as were not in their judgment meet to receive it; so, for those who had been baptized but had fallen afresh into sin, they remitted or retained sin by giving or withholding Absolution. What else can mean those words of S. Paul, in which he states that in condemning or forgiving he speaks in the person and with the power of Christ<sup>x</sup>; that Christ speaks in him when he does not spare<sup>y</sup>; and that when he uses sharpness of rebuke, he speaks according to the power which the Lord hath given

<sup>s</sup> Tit. iii. 5.

<sup>t</sup> Eph. v. 25.

<sup>u</sup> Heb. x. 22.

<sup>x</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 10.

<sup>y</sup> Ib. xiii. 2, 3.

him<sup>z</sup>? What else can the Apostle mean when he delivers Hymeneus and Alexander unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme<sup>a</sup>; and gives his apostolic absolution, and his approval of the sentence pronounced by the local priesthood upon the incestuous Corinthian<sup>b</sup>? Is not the same implied in those charges to Timothy and Titus, to “rebuke them that sin before all,” to “reprove and rebuke,” and to “rebuke sharply?” Certainly they of old time thus interpreted the Word of God:—

“Why,” says S. Ambrose<sup>c</sup>, “why baptize ye, if sins may not be remitted through man? for in Baptism is the remission of all sins. Where is the difference, whether through penitence (that is, Absolution), or through the laver (that is, Baptism), the priests exert this power given unto them? One is the mystery in both. But thou sayest, that in the laver the grace of the mysteries worketh. What in penitence? Worketh not the Name of God?”

And in like manner S. Jerome<sup>d</sup>:—

“What is written, ‘And the Blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin,’ is to be understood both of the confession of Baptism and of the clemency of penitence,” that is, Absolution. And again: the sinner “is bid to flee to the city of refuge, and there to abide until the High-Priest die, that is, until he be redeemed by the Blood of the Saviour, either in the house of Baptism, or in penitence, which imitates the grace of Baptism through the ineffable clemency of the Saviour.”

S. Chrysostom<sup>e</sup> explains:—

“Through the priests of God do we put on Christ, are buried with the Son of God, and become members of that blessed Head Christ Jesus; by them we are not only regenerated, but the sins after this they have power to remit.”

<sup>z</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Tim. i. 20.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 10.

<sup>c</sup> *De Pœnit.*, l. viii. § 37, 38.

<sup>d</sup> S. Jerom. c. Pelag., l. ii. c. 7.

<sup>e</sup> *De Sacerdot.* iii. 6.



S. Cyprian<sup>f</sup> says :—

“ We do not anticipate the judgment of the Lord who will come to judge, but that, if He shall find a sinner’s penitence full and entire, He will then ratify what has been determined by us. But if any have deluded us by a feigned repentance, God, who ‘is not mocked,’ and who ‘looketh on the heart’ of man, will judge of those whom we have not seen through, and the Lord will correct the sentence of His servants.”

And in accordance with the voice of antiquity and several Reformed Confessions, one of our own bishops<sup>g</sup> sets forth the interpretation put by our own Church on this Scripture :—

“ If our confession be serious and hearty, this absolution is effectual as if God did pronounce it from heaven. So says the Confession of Saxony and Bohemia; and so says the Augustan Confession; . . . so does our own Church in many places, particularly in the form of absolution for the sick. . . . Which power of absolution was not to end with the Apostles, but is a part of the ministry of reconciliation, as necessary now as it was then, and therefore to continue as long as the ministry of reconciliation, that is, to the end of the world. When therefore the Priest absolves, God absolves, if we be truly penitent. . . . And if it be so, then to doubt the effect of it, supposing we be truly penitent, and such as God will pardon, is to question the truth of God; and he that, under pretence of reverence to God, denies or despises this power, does injury to God in slighting His commission, and is no better than a Novatian, says S. Ambrose.”

And to the same effect writes one of the most learned and solid of English divines, Dr. Barrow :—

“ They remit sins *dispensativè*, by *consigning pardon* in administration of the Sacraments, especially in conferring Baptism, whereby, duly administered and undertaken, all sins are washed away; and IN ABSOLVING OF PENITENTS,

<sup>f</sup> Ep. lv. § 15.

<sup>g</sup> Bp. Sparrow, Rationale of the Book of Common Prayer.

wherein grace is exhibited and ratified by imposition of hands, the which S. Paul calls *χαρίζεσθαι*, to bestow grace or favour on the penitent.”—“The detention of a person in any state, or under any power, is called *ligation*; and a deliverance out of such a state and power, *solution*. So he that (by WITHHOLDING MEANS or assurance of pardon) *is detained under the guilt of sin*, is thereby bound; but he that hath the MEANS and overtures of pardon *conferred on him* is loosed; and thus do the pastors of the Church bind and loose, by retaining and remitting sin.”—“Thus hath every man, (upon declaration of his real faith and repentance, to the satisfaction of the Church,) being admitted to Baptism, the entire forgiveness of his sins . . . consigned unto him therein.”—“Likewise if Christian men, having fallen into sin, or failed of duty toward God, do seriously confess their fault, and heartily repent thereof; when the Ministers of the Church, in God’s Name and for Christ’s sake, do declare (or pronounce) to them so doing or so qualified the pardon of their sin, and absolve them from it; we need not doubt that their sins are really forgiven, and *the pardon expressed in words is effectually dispensed unto them.*”

## V.

I have thus endeavoured to shew the plain teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the forgiveness of sins, and the conveyance of that forgiveness to persons duly qualified through the authorized acts of the Christian Priesthood.

I have taken Holy Scripture in the literal and grammatical sense. And following out the principle expressed in the Canon of 1571, in the VIth, XXIVth, and XXIXth Articles, in the Preface to the Ordination Offices, as also in the Preface “Concerning the Service of the Church,” and “Of Ceremonies,” &c., and stated by the Reformers to be their rule and

guide, I have proved that sense to have been taken and taught by the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops. In the same Convocation which imposed upon the Clergy subscription to the XXXIX Articles, it was enjoined,—

“Let preachers take care that they never teach anything in the way of preaching which they wish to be retained religiously and believed by the people, except what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and what the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops have collected from that same doctrine.”

In the Articles and Prefaces the authority of these primitive witnesses is recognised and submitted to. In the Homilies constant reference is made to primitive times and to the Fathers, as witnesses of doctrine and practice. These are the words of Archbishop Cranmer :—

“I protest and openly confess, that in all my doctrine and preaching, both of the Sacrament, and of other my doctrine, whatsoever it be, not only I mean, and judge those things as the Catholic Church, and the most holy Fathers of old with one accord have meant and judged, but also I would gladly use the same words that they used, and not use any other words.”

Thus, too, Bishop Ridley, in his Treatise on the Lord's Supper, having first set forth the proofs of Scripture, brings forward six early writers of the Greek and Latin Churches, three of each respectively, as “*witnesses and expounders of their doctrine.*” And Bishop Jewell in his Apology writes to the same effect :—

“We are come as near as we possibly could do to the Church of the Apostles, and of the old Catholic Bishops and Fathers ; . . . and *have directed, according to their customs and*

*ordinances, not only our doctrine, but also the Sacraments, and the Form of Common Prayer."*

And I conceived that I could act on no safer plan in treating of the Ordinance of Absolution, and of the Priest's power in absolving, than, after the example of the Reformers and in imitation of the Homilies and in accordance with the Canon of Elizabeth, first to bring forth proofs from Holy Scripture, and then shew that I interpreted Holy Scripture as it was interpreted of old and from the first.

These, then, are the conclusions at which I have thus arrived:—

1. God alone has absolute power to forgive sin, to fix the conditions of forgiveness, and appoint the means of conveying forgiveness.

2. God forgives sin only on account of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and only to those who are duly qualified by repentance and faith, the conditions which He Himself has fixed.

3. The sin of the penitent is washed out by the Blood of Christ applied by the Holy Ghost to his soul.

4. God has appointed Sacraments and Ordinances, through which, by virtue of His institution, the Blood of Christ is applied by the Holy Spirit to the penitent; and, having commissioned in His Church certain officers to administer those Sacraments and Ordinances, has delegated to them through the Son of Man by the Spirit, handed down through imposition of the Bishops' hands, the power to forgive sins in His Name.

5. As in the Sacrament of Baptism God has sanctified water to convey this forgiveness, and by the uniform teaching of Holy Scripture leads us to be-

lieve that in His ordinary dealings, and where Baptism may be had, He has tied Himself to give the grace of Baptism only through the Sacrament of Baptism ; so in the Ordinance of Absolution God ordinarily gives to those who, having sinned after Baptism, are duly qualified by repentance and faith, through the Priest's Office and Ministry, the forgiveness of their sins. Through the Word spoken by the Priest in His Name—whether coupled or not with the laying on of hands—Christ by the Spirit applies His Blood to the penitent's soul, and washes him clean from sin. But we hold Absolution to be no such Sacrament as Baptism or the Holy Eucharist, because the inward grace was not by Christ Himself annexed to an outward visible sign.

6. And therefore we hold the Priest's power in absolving to belong, not to the man, but to the office ; to attach to him, not by any right naturally inherent in the man, but by the Divine will, the Divine calling, the Divine commission, and to be given and exercised by the Holy Ghost which is in him for this office and ministration. We hold that the power can be exercised only according to the instructions and laws and conditions which God has given, and is efficacious only when it is so exercised. We hold the power, when so exercised, to be as efficacious as if Christ Himself had spoken on earth, or God had spoken in heaven ; because the Holy Ghost is with the Priest in his office and official acts, and where the Holy Ghost is, Christ is present, and makes the act His own. We hold the power to be *ministerial*, because, ministering those Sacraments and Ordinances through which the forgiveness is conveyed from God, they minister that forgiveness to men. We hold the power



to be *judicial*, because they sit as judges on the souls of men, acquitting or condemning, binding or loosing ; seeing whether men are duly qualified by repentance and faith, and, if they are, admitting them to the means of grace, or if they are not, excluding them from the means of grace. We hold that by the power of Orders, to which the promise is annexed by Christ, and which is given by the Holy Ghost, the Priest is made a judge to *pronounce* the sentence, and not merely a crier to *declare* it ; and that as earthly kings minister justice to their subjects, not in their own persons, but by a power devolved on subordinate officers, so Christ absolves the penitent by the mouth of His Priests or Ministers. We hold, as they of old held, the act to be Christ's act *ἀντεξουσίως*, and theirs but *ὀργανικῶς*, *originally* His, and *ministerially* theirs ; so that what Christ decrees in heaven, *in foro judicii*, He pronounces on earth by His Ministry, *in foro pœnitentiæ*. We hold that the Priest may err in judgment, and in that case, that the All-knowing Judge on high corrects the erroneous judgment of His servant ; but we hold that, unless the sinner wilfully conceals the state of his soul, there is no reason why the Priest should err ; and that in His ordinary dealings, as S. Chrysostom says, "The Lord follows His servant, and whatever judgment His Ministers shall pronounce on earth, He ratifies in heaven ;" words which are a simple paraphrase of our blessed Lord's own commission to His Apostolic Ministry<sup>h</sup>,

<sup>h</sup> On the Apostolic Succession Bp. Bilson writes :—"This right of imposing hands to ordain Presbyters and Bishops in the Church of Christ, was at first from the Apostles unto Bishops,

and not unto Presbyters." — *The Perpetual Government of Christ's Church*, ch. ix. Bp. Pearson says :—"That the Order of the Ministry is necessary to the continuation of the Gospel



“Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

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## CHAPTER II.

I PROPOSE in the next place to consider a few of the objections which are made against the doctrine of Absolution, as it has been laid down in the foregoing chapter.

It is said that the doctrine is blasphemous, because it gives to man God's prerogative, and places a set of men above God Himself, and puts out of His own Hands the disposal of His blessings and His curses.

Before replying to this, let me ask, Is it not God's prerogative to give the Holy Ghost? And yet do we not read in Holy Scripture that the Apostles claimed the power to give the Holy Ghost? And are we not told that they *did* give the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands? Let it be noticed, too, that the gift of the Holy Ghost was not, as far as we read in the New Testament, annexed to the sign of laying on

according to the promises of Christ, as it was to the first plantation of it according to His institution, is a doctrine indubitable. That this Ministry is derived *by a succession* and constant propagation, and that the unity and peace of the Church of Christ are to be conserved by a due and legitimate Ordination, no man who considereth the practice of the Apostles and ecclesiastical history can ever doubt. . . . If we once admit a diversity in our Ordinations, we have lost *the honour of succession*; we have cast away our

weapons of defence; we have betrayed our own cause, and laid ourselves open to the common enemy of all Protestants; and we shall at last inevitably fall into the Socinian doctrine, to deny all necessity or use of any mission or ordination.”—*Minor Theolog. Works*, vol. ii. 231. See Chillingworth's “Episcopacy Vindicated,” on the list of the Christian Knowledge Society; Jones of Nayland's “Tracts on the Church,” J. H. Parker; and “The Churchman's Catechism,” J. H. Parker.

of hands by Christ Himself; and yet that when the Apostles laid on hands God gave the Holy Ghost, and so bore witness to the authority of His Ministry. Is not the giving of the Holy Ghost as great an act of power as giving the pardon of sin? And if there is no blasphemy in the claim to give the Holy Ghost, how can there be blasphemy in the claim to give forgiveness of sin? If the Apostles could say, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, . . . and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost," although we can find nowhere a distinct commission from Christ Himself authorizing them to promise and convey such a gift, why may not an Apostle, or one of an Apostolic Ministry, say, "Repent, and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, *for the remission of sins*," "Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away thy sins*," seeing that Christ Himself had expressly committed this power of absolving to them, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them?" Did the Apostles usurp God's prerogative in promising and giving the Holy Ghost? Did they pretend to be more than authorized instruments in God's Hands, and channels of His gifts? Is it not true, that "when the Hand of God was stretched forth for any act of Divine power, it was outwardly expressed by the hands of His Ministers? Their hands touched, but it was the Hand of God which healed, confirmed, ordained, and performed such other acts as were beyond the reach of human power<sup>1</sup>."

Now, we claim *for the Apostolic Ministry* in Absolution no greater power than is claimed *for the Apostles* both in Absolution and in giving the Holy Ghost. We say that *God only* has the *absolute* power to for-

<sup>1</sup> Jones of Nayland, "An Essay on Confirmation."

give sin. “If, therefore, man or angel shall challenge to himself this absolute power to forgive sin, let him be accursed<sup>k</sup>.” At the same time, “it is evident from the whole tenour of Sacred Writ, that it may consist with the goodness and justice of God to depute men to act in His Name, and be ministerial towards the salvation of others; and to lay a necessity upon His creatures of qualifying themselves for His favour, and receiving His graces by the hands and intervention of mere men<sup>l</sup>.” We claim for the Priesthood, not a sovereign, but a *limited* power; not an absolute, but a *ministerial* power: a *ministerial* power, effectually to convey and apply to the penitent the pardon of his sins; a power delegated by Christ to the Office, and given to the Office by the Holy Ghost; so that when God forgives it is outwardly expressed by the forgiveness of His Ministry; a *judicial*<sup>m</sup> power, by which we

<sup>k</sup> Bishop Hall.

<sup>l</sup> Law’s Second Letter to Hoadly.

<sup>m</sup> “Please you next to enquire of S. Jerome, who is said to be the patron of that opinion, that holds the Priest’s power barely *declarative*, and so indeed none at all: yet he speaks home in his Epistle *Ad Heliodorum de vitâ solitariâ*. God forbid, saith he, that I should speak a word amiss against the Priests, *qui sacro ore Corpus Christi conficiunt*, that is, in the Holy Eucharist; *per quos nos Christiani sumus*, that is, in Baptism; *qui claves Regni cælorum habentes, quodammodo ante diem judicii judicant*, that is, by remitting or retaining sins. He that can construe *judicant*, and understand what it signifies, needs no

comment upon the words. Hear next what S. Gregory the Great says, in his 26th Homily upon the Gospels; *Apostoli principatum supremi judicii sortiuntur, ut vice Dei quibusdam peccata retineant, quibusdam relaxent*; the Apostles, and in them all Priests, were made God’s Vicegerents here on earth, in His Name to retain and forgive sins, not *declaratively* only, but *judicially*. *Animarum judices fiunt*, as he goes on, they are made the judges of the souls of men, casting the obstinate down to the gates of Hell, by the fearful power of excommunication, and lifting the penitents into Heaven, by the blessed power of Absolution. And he is no better than a Novatian that denies it, says S. Ambrose. These I have

mean, not that their sentence is *infallible*, and that from their sentence there is no appeal, inasmuch as if they err God will most assuredly rectify their error, but that they are set by God in His Church as judges, to examine into the state of men's souls, and ascertain their fitness to receive God's gifts, and according to the presence or absence of repentance and faith, to give or withhold Absolution; but *not a discretionary* power, seeing that they are tied down to the Ordinances which God has instituted, and to the rules and laws which He has given for their observance in their office; nor an *unconditional* power, since their sentence takes no effect unless the recipient of their Absolution is duly qualified by repentance and faith. And seeing that we claim for the Priesthood only this *conditional, ministerial, and limited judicial* power, how is God robbed of His prerogative? Surely they rob Him most of His prerogative who rationalise in opposition to the plain literal teaching of Scripture, and deny Him the right and authority to give this power to men!

I will continue my argument with the words of William Law in his Second Letter to Bishop Hoadly:—“It will not follow from any thing I have said, that the laity have lost their Christian liberty; or that nobody can be saved, but whom the clergy please to save; that they have the arbitrary disposal of happiness to mankind. Was Abimelech's happiness in the disposition of Abraham, because he was to be received by means of Abraham's intercession? Or, could Job

named are enough to give testimony of the former generation, men too pious to be thought to speak *blasphemy*, and too an-

cient to be suspected of Popery.”  
—*Bp. Sparrow's Sermon on Remission of Sins*, 1704, p. 14.



damn Eliphaz, because he was to mediate for him, and procure his reconciliation with God?

“Neither do the Christian clergy pretend to this despotic empire over their flocks; they do not assume to themselves a power to damn the innocent or to save the guilty, but they assert a sober and just right to reconcile men to God, and to act in His Name in restoring them to His favour. They received their commission from those whom Christ sent with full authority to send others, and with a promise that He would be with them to the end of the world. From this they conclude that they have His authority, and that in consequence of it their administrations are necessary, and effectual to the salvation of mankind, and that none can despise them but who despise Him that sent them.

“And what is there in this doctrine to terrify the consciences of the laity? What is there here to bring the profane scandal of priestcraft upon the clergy? Could it be any ground for Abimelech’s hating Abraham, because that Abraham was to reconcile him to God? Could Eliphaz justly have any prejudice against Job, because God would hear Job’s intercession for him? Why then must the Christian priesthood be so horrid and hateful an institution, because the design of it is to restore men to the grace and favour of God? . . . . Why must we be treated as arrogant priests, or popishly affected, for pretending to have anything to do in the discharge of our ministry with the salvation of men? Why must we be reproached with blasphemous claims and absurd senseless powers for assuming to bless in God’s Name, or thinking our administrations more effectual than the office of a common layman? . . . . But who ever taught such



a necessity of absolutions, that God will pardon none without them? Who ever declared that all are pardoned who have the absolutions pronounced over them? We teach the necessity and the validity of the Sacraments, but do we ever declare that all are saved who receive them? Is there no medium between two extremes? No such thing as moderation?

“Who ever taught that any set of men could absolutely bless or withhold blessing independent of God? Who ever taught that the Christian religion, or Sacraments, or absolutions, saved people on course, or without proper dispositions? Who ever claimed such an absolving power, as to set himself above God, and to take from Him the disposal of His own blessings and curses? What has such extravagant descriptions, such romantic characters of absolution, to do with that power the clergy justly claim? Cannot there be a necessity in some cases of receiving absolution from their hands, except they set themselves above God? Is God robbed of the disposal of His blessings, when in obedience to His own commands, and in virtue of His own authority, they admit some as members of the Church, and exclude others from the communion of it? Do they pretend to be channels of grace, or the means of pardon, by any rights or powers naturally inherent in them? Do they not in all things consider themselves as instruments of God, that are made ministerial to the edification of the Church purely by His will, and only so far as they act in conformity to it? Is it any blasphemy for them to claim and exert their power? Is the prerogative of God injured, because His own institutions are obeyed? Cannot He dispense His graces by what persons and on what terms He pleases? Is

He deprived of the disposal of His blessings, because they are bestowed on persons according to His order, and in obedience to His authority ?

“ Pray consider the nature of Sacraments ? Are they not necessary to salvation ? But is God therefore excluded from any power of His own ? Is the salvation of Christians less His own act and deed, or less the effect of His own mercy, because these Sacraments in a great measure contribute to effect it ? Why then must that Absolution, that is attended with His grace and pardon, and which has no pretence to such grace but in obedience to His order and in virtue of His promise, be thus destructive of His prerogative ? Where is there any diminution of His honour and authority, if such actions of the clergy are made necessary to the salvation of souls in some circumstances, as their washing in water, or their receiving bread and wine ? Cannot God institute means of grace, but those means must be above Himself ? They owe all their power and efficacy to His institution, and can operate no farther than the ends for which He instituted them. How then is He dethroned for being thus obeyed ?

“ The Clergy are entrusted with a conditional power, which they are to exercise according to the rules God has given ; and it only obtains its effects when it is so exercised. Every instituted means of grace is conditional, and is only then effectual, when it is attended with such circumstances as are required by God. If the Clergy through weakness, passion, or prejudice, exclude persons from the Church of God, they injure only themselves. But are these things nothing, because they may be exercised in vain ? Have the Clergy no right at all to them, because

they are not absolutely infallible in the exercise of them ?

“ Can it be proved that they are not necessary, because they have not always the same effect? May not that be necessary to salvation which is only effectual on certain conditions? Is not the Christian religion necessary to salvation, though all Christians are not saved? Are not the Sacraments necessary means of grace, though the grace obtained thereby is only conditional? Is every one necessarily improved in grace who receives the Sacrament? Or is it less necessary, because the salutary effects of it are not universal? Why then must Absolution be less necessary, because the grace of it is conditional, and only obtained in due and proper circumstances? Is Absolution nothing, because if withheld wrongfully it injures not the person who is denied it, and if given without due dispositions in the penitent, it avails nothing? Is not this equally true of the Sacraments, if they are denied wrongfully, or administered to unprepared receivers? But do they, therefore, cease to be standing and necessary means of grace?

“ The argument, therefore, against this power, drawn from the ignorance or passions of the Clergy, whereby they may mistake or pervert the application of it, can be of no force, since it is as conditional as any other Christian institution. The salvation of no man can be endangered by the ignorance or passions of any clergyman in the use of this power; if they err in the exercise of it, the consequences of their error only affect themselves. The administration of the Sacraments is certainly entrusted to them, but will any one say that the Sacraments are not necessary

to salvation, because they may, through ignorance or passion, make an ill use of this trust ?

“There is nothing in this doctrine to gratify the pride of Clergymen, or encourage them to lord it over the flock of Christ. Who, that has the least sense of religion, can think it matter of triumph that he can deny the Sacraments, or refuse his benediction to any of his flock? Can he injure or offend the least of these, and will not God take account? Or if they fall through his offence, will not their blood be required at his hand ?

“Neither is there anything in it that can enslave the laity to the Clergy, or make their salvation depend upon their arbitrary will. Does any one think his salvation in danger, because the Sacraments (the necessary means of it) are only to be administered by the Clergy? Why, then, must the salvation of penitents be endangered, or made dependent on the sole pleasure of the Clergy, because they alone can reconcile them to the favour of God? If persons are unjustly denied the Sacraments, they may humbly hope that God will not lay the want of them to their charge. And if they are unjustly kept out of the Church, and denied admittance, they have no reason to fear but God will notwithstanding accept them, provided they be in other respects proper objects of His favour.”

There are some who admit that the Apostles had the power of remitting and retaining sins, but deny this power to their successors in the Ministry. They assert the power to have been an *extraordinary* gift for the needs of the Infant Church, and that, like the power of working miracles, it has now ceased.



Now, if this be really the case, it will be easy for those who advance the objection to point out a passage or passages in the New Testament which intimate that this power was one of the *extraordinary* gifts of the Holy Ghost. For my own part, after most diligent search, I cannot find one. On the contrary, I find everything to support the view that it is one of the *ordinary* gifts of the Holy Ghost to the Apostolic Ministry, to continue to the end of time. The commission to remit and retain was given by our Blessed Lord during the same period as the other commissions, Preach, Baptize, Feed My Sheep, Feed My Lambs. The commission was accompanied with the gift of the Holy Ghost,—“Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” It is perfectly clear that the power of remitting and retaining was given by the Holy Ghost then breathed into them. But it is equally clear that this gift of the Holy Ghost did not convey miraculous powers to the Apostles, and that such powers were not bestowed until the Day of Pentecost. Almost the last words which our Blessed Lord spoke, announced to those very Apostles, into whom He had breathed the Holy Ghost for the *ordinary* authority and power of the Ministry, that they had not yet received *extraordinary* powers and gifts. Having bidden them “not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father,” He says, “Ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” “Touching miraculous power of the Spirit,” says judicious Hooker<sup>n</sup>, “most apparent it is that as then (when He said, ‘Receive the Holy

<sup>n</sup> Book V. lxxvii. 7.



Ghost,') they received it not, but the promise thereof was shortly to be performed. The words of S. Luke concerning that power are therefore set down with signification of the time to come,—‘*Behold, I will send the promise of the Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.*’ Wherefore, undoubtedly, it was some other effect of the Spirit, the Holy Ghost in some other kind, which our Saviour did then bestow.” And S. Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost implies that the prophecy of Joel was on that day *first* fulfilled, and the *miraculous gifts* then *first* bestowed. And since this is so, we are authorized in declaring that when Christ breathed and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” He gave an *ordinary* gift; in Hooker’s words, “a holy and ghostly authority over the souls of men, a part whereof consisteth in power to remit and retain sins;”—a power and authority which they could hand on to others by virtue of their Mission, “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.”

Again, if we look at the object and intent for which the miraculous powers were given, we shall see that Absolution cannot be one of these. Since the Apostles were men of little education, and knew little more than their mother tongue, in order to fit them for the work of going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to every creature, the Spirit gave them utterance to speak with other tongues. Since they needed from time to time further revelations concerning divine things, the Spirit gave to certain the power to prophesy. Since it was necessary not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirit whether it be of God, to another power was given “of discerning spirits,” of deciding and declaring whether the pro-

phesy was from God. Since it was essential to convince the world that they came from God, the Spirit gave them the power of working miracles,—the Lord thus confirming their words with signs following. But “the Miracles necessary to prove the Divine Mission at first, and the authority of the Apostles to send others with like powers, cease as soon as the fact was once received and recognised; for the commission of the Christian Ministry now being the same with theirs, was proved by the Miracles which proved theirs. The *immediate Revelations* and *Inspirations* and *Prophecies* then necessary, are now useless, when the Canon of Scripture is perfected, since which time, if any man or angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, it is not to be received. The necessity of speaking with many tongues is now superseded, when to men of all nations and languages is the Word of reconciliation entrusted.” The miraculous powers were temporary, because the circumstances which called for them vanished away. But will any one say that there is now no need of forgiveness of sin? Will any one say that there is less need now of forgiveness of sin than in the Apostles’ days? And if the cause for which the gift was bestowed exists, can we reasonably say that the gift itself does not exist? If there were now no need of the forgiveness of sin, as there is now no need of the gift of tongues, prophecy, interpretation, and the like, then we might call the power of forgiving sins an extraordinary, not an ordinary gift, and assert that with the other miraculous powers it had ceased. “If it be said that God has promised pardon to all penitents, and therefore they may rest assured that God will pardon them without the Priest’s Absolution;

° Gloucester Ridley’s Sermons, p. 126.

the answer is, that His promise was as sure in the Apostles' days as it is now, and yet our Lord would, notwithstanding, vest them with His power of Absolution<sup>p</sup>." The objection, therefore, is as strong against the Apostles' exercise of the power, as it is now against their successors'. So long as there are sinners in the Church, so long will there be need of restoration. If ever Priestly Absolution was necessary for such restoration, there must be the same necessity now. Christ Himself thought there was once such necessity ; has He given a fresh revelation to say there is not such necessity now ? Everything goes to prove that the power, " Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," is an *ordinary* power of the Apostolic Ministry, as necessary to be exercised now for the benefit of our souls, as it was for the benefit of the first Christians in the early ages of the Church.

It is objected by others, who admit that the Apostles had the power of remitting and retaining sins, that the Apostles had also a miraculous gift of *discerning spirits*, by which they knew infallibly the sincerity and truth of men's repentance, and therefore had their authority to absolve penitents ; but that their successors, not having the like miraculous gift of discerning spirits, cannot have the like power of absolving.

Let us turn to the 12th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and see whether this gift of *discerning spirits* does certainly mean the power of knowing the sincerity of men's hearts :—" The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom ; to another the word of knowledge by the

<sup>p</sup> Sacerdotal Powers, 1711, p. 17.

same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." The mention of this gift immediately after the mention of the gift of prophecy, leads us (I think) to regard it as the power of detecting a true prophet from a false prophet, of trying the spirits whether they be of God. So, at least, S. Chrysostom explains it:—"What is discerning of spirits? the knowing who is spiritual, and who is not; who is a prophet, and who a deceiver: as he said to the Thessalonians, 'despise not prophesyings; but proving all things, hold fast that which is good.' For great was at that time the corruption of the false prophets, the devil striving underhand to substitute falsehood for the truth<sup>a</sup>." S. Ambrose and S. Anselm agree in this interpretation. And, coming down to later times, we find the same set forth by Estius<sup>r</sup>, by Bengel<sup>s</sup>, and lastly, by Dean Alford;—indeed by all the Commentators to whom I have made reference excepting Dr. Whitby. The words in the Greek are, *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων*; that is, says Dean Alford, "*distinctions of spirits; the power of distinguishing between the operation of the Spirit*

<sup>a</sup> Hom. on 1 Cor., on the passage.

<sup>r</sup> "ALII DISCRETIO SPIRITUM. *Discretio*, Græce, *διακρίσεις*, *discretionēs*. Significatur autem donum quo quis discernere et dijudicare possit, a quo spiritu proficiscantur ea quæ tanquam Prophetica proferuntur in medium: utrum a divino spiritu, an ab humano aut dæmonico. Hoc enim est quod plurali numero dixit *spirituum*. De hujusmodi dono Paulum loqui

satis liquet ex aliorum locorum collatione. Sic enim ait infra cap. 14,—*Prophetae duo aut tres dicant: et cæteri dijudicent: et 1 Thessal. 5,—Spiritum nolite extinguere: prophetias nolite spernere. Omnia probate: quod bonum est tenete.*"—*Estius, in loc.*

<sup>s</sup> " *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων*, *discretionēs spirituum*, ut possit aliis demonstrare, qualem quisque propheta spiritum habeat. c. 14, 29."—*Bengelius, in loc.*



of God and the evil spirit, or the unassisted human spirit; see 1 John iv. 1. ‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.’ The exercise of this power of *distinction of spirits* is alluded to in the 14th chapter of this same Epistle, ver. 29,—‘Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.’” And it is to be noted especially that the power did not belong to *all*, nor to the Apostles *exclusively*; but that as some had the gift of prophecy, some the gift of tongues, certain others had the power of “distinction of spirits.”

I know that Dr. Whitby and Archbishop Secker have lent the authority of their great names to the interpretation which makes *discerning of spirits* the power of infallibly knowing the sincerity and truth of men’s repentance. But it seems to have escaped the notice of these eminent men, that if this had really been the case, it would have been impossible for that profane usage of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ to have taken place in the Corinthian Church, which S. Paul describes. Surely if there were Officers in the Church of Corinth who had the power of knowing the exact state of men’s souls, we should not have heard of so many receiving unworthily, not discerning the Lord’s Body. We know that there were persons gifted with the power of “discerning spirits.” And surely S. Paul would have blamed severely the Priests of the Church of Corinth for allowing so many “to eat and drink damnation to themselves,” if those who could “discern spirits” had possessed the ability of knowing the state of soul in which those many came. And when we find S. Paul throwing no blame on the Priests of the Church for administering that



Sacrament to such, making no reference to the gift of "discerning spirits," which certainly was possessed by certain in the Church of Corinth, but throwing all the blame on the unworthy recipients themselves, and giving them strict admonitions for their future conduct, it is incredible that he could have meant by "discerning of spirits" any miraculous power of knowing the sincerity and truth of men's repentance and faith.

Again, if the Apostles had this power, how came Ananias and Sapphira to be baptized for the remission of sins? Surely, if the Apostles had the power in administering the Ordinance of Absolution, they must have had it also in administering the Sacrament of Baptism. The fact that persons were baptized who turned out to be hypocrites and deceivers, is a proof that in administering Baptism they had no infallible direction to know the sincerity of those to whom Baptism was administered for the remission of sin. There is not the least intimation in the Scriptures that they had this extraordinary capacity. We find them doing, exactly as their successors are obliged to do in like cases, accepting the open profession of faith and repentance, and regarding it as sincere until the contrary was discovered.

Lastly, it is quite clear that S. Paul laid claim to no such extraordinary power when he pronounced the absolution of the incestuous Corinthian. If we look at S. Paul's proceeding, it will be seen that he acted, not as one possessed with infallible power of knowing the state of the man's soul, but by the ordinary process of examining into the matter, and pronouncing judgment according to evidence received. Being at Philippi, and hearing that certain Christians at Corinth

were guilty of fornication, and one of incest, he wrote and commanded the Corinthian Authorities to excommunicate this incestuous person<sup>t</sup>. In his Second Epistle he tells them the reason of his writing and commanding them so to censure this notorious sinner; “that *he might know the proof of them*, whether they were obedient in all things<sup>u</sup>.” Such a statement as this would hardly have been made by one who had the miraculous power of infallibly knowing the state of souls. If he had possessed the gift, how could he have needed to know the proof of them as regarded their obedience? The Apostle adds that Titus, on his return, gave him the proof he needed, and assured him that the Corinthians had punished the offender<sup>v</sup>. Being thus informed in an ordinary manner of the obedience of the Corinthians, and of the sorrow and repentance of the incestuous man, the Apostle writes to them to forgive him<sup>x</sup>; and, upon the evidence brought by Titus, himself pronounces Absolution,—“To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also in the person of Christ<sup>y</sup>.” He then gives an urgent reason why the Absolution should no longer be withheld; “lest PERHAPS such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow.” Does this PERHAPS accord with the statement that the Apostle had *an infallible knowledge* of the penitent’s sorrow? If S. Paul had been gifted with this infallible knowledge, would he have used a word which implied doubt? Should we not have read CERTAINLY instead of PERHAPS? The very fact that he was not *positive*, is as strong a proof as we can have that he acted in this case simply upon

<sup>t</sup> 1 Cor. v. 1, 3, 4, 5, 13.

<sup>u</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 9.

<sup>v</sup> Ib. vii. 6, 12.

<sup>x</sup> Ib. xi. 6—8.

<sup>y</sup> Ib. xi. 10.

*a moral assurance* of the man's sorrow and repentance, gained from evidence in the ordinary way. The Apostle by using the word *perhaps* shews that it was possible for him to be mistaken, and therefore that he had no *infallible* knowledge of the state of men's souls. The like may be said also of S. Peter in his admonition to Simon Magus, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if PERHAPS the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." "So that since we find one of the Apostles absolving upon moral evidence and proofs of repentance, without the assistance of this miraculous power, their successors may do so likewise, because they have no less authority in that respect now than they had then: for indeed, as there was in those days no *absolute necessity* for such a *miraculous power* always to attend the Apostles in the exercise of their authority to absolve sinners, (as is plain from the example of S. Paul,) because the authority was no *consequent* of any such miraculous gifts, but *previous* to them, and miracles were but *occasional* and *transient* signs of their standing authority, which was to remain good by virtue of Christ's promise of concurrence with it to the end of the world, and consequently is valid when not so attested by miraculous gifts, which Christ *never* promised should constantly attend their ministrations; so in these days there is as little need for such a miraculous power always to accompany the Apostles' successors to discern *infallibly* the truth of men's repentance, in order to their absolution; because, both in the Apostles' days and now, men were, and are still bound, to give evidences of the sincerity of their repentance, if they would reap any benefit from Sacerdotal Ministrations; and the want of such a miraculous power to

discern men's hearts, could then, and may still, be supplied by other means; namely, by strict inquiry and examination into their lives, and by trials, testimonies, and evidences of the sincerity of their repentance; which if men refuse to submit to, they can have no right even to the benefits conveyed by Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which none can *profitably* partake of without sincere repentance; and therefore, as the authority of administering these two Sacraments remains good and valid, without the miraculous gift of discerning spirits, so does the power of absolving penitents from their sins. And if after all there should happen to be an error in giving Absolution to those who are unworthy of it, there is no more to be charged against the authority of absolving, than there is against the authority of administering the two Sacraments, when given to unworthy communicants; the error is not owing to the *insufficiency* of the *authority*, but either to the *personal* neglect, &c., of him who ministers, or else to the hypocrisy and insincerity of the pretended penitent, or both these together. So that though *clave errante*, there is *no absolution*, yet, when both Priest and People do perform their duty, the one by *examining*, &c., and the other by giving *good testimonies* of, the sincerity of their repentance, Absolution must be good and valid, and can never fail of its blessed effects; because the Authority is Christ's, and He as much concurs with it as He does with the right and due administration of the Holy Sacraments, which are also means of conveying to us the *remission* of our sins, upon condition of true and unfeigned repentance<sup>z</sup>."

<sup>z</sup> Sacerdotal Powers, 1711, p. 24.



## CHAPTER III.

It remains for me to shew that the English Church teaches the doctrine of Absolution in the same terms as it has been set forth in the preceding pages. And I proceed to bring forward from her Formularies and other Documents proof of her teaching, that (1) the Holy Ghost is given for the Office and Work of a Priest, (2) through the laying on of the hands of Bishops, (3) and conveys to them power and authority to absolve penitents in the Name of Christ.

First of all, I wish to draw attention to "The Form and Manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons." This was prepared by Cranmer and his colleagues in 1549, was published by authority of parliament in 1550, and remained without material alteration till 1662, when it was appended to the Book of Common Prayer<sup>a</sup>. And as Cranmer took the foremost place in the revision of the Offices, it will be of service to us to look at the views which he expressed about the period of the preparation of the Ordinal, on the subject of Orders. In 1540 Cranmer had expressed decidedly Erastian views, adding however, as if doubtful of their soundness, "This is mine opinion and sentence at this present, which nevertheless I do not temerarily define, but refer the judgement thereof wholly to your majesty." Several of the Divines who assisted Cranmer in drawing up the Ordinal expressed opinions in

<sup>a</sup> See Humphrey on the Book of Common Prayer.



1540 *diametrically opposite* to the Archbishop. In 1543, a Book was put forth under the sanction of the King and Convocation, called "A Necessary Doctrine," which defines "Order" to be "the gift or grace of ministration in Christ's Church, given of God to Christian men by the consecration and imposition of the bishop's hands," and declares the succession to be perpetual even to the end of the world. In 1548, Cranmer himself put forth "The Catechism," in which the Apostolical Succession, Episcopal Ordination, and the Power of the Keys are set forth and insisted on most strongly. "It is plain," Bishop Burnet remarks, "that Cranmer had now quite laid aside those singular opinions which he formerly held of the ecclesiastical functions; for now, in a work which was wholly his own, without the concurrence of any other, he fully sets forth their divine institution." In 1552, *three years after* the publication of the Ordinal, the *Reformatio Legum* was published, the chief writer of which was the Archbishop. In this, again, the three Orders, of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, are distinctly treated of. For Bishops are claimed the powers of jurisdiction and ordination, and all three Orders are spoken of as evidently holding their offices on Scriptural authority and by Divine appointment. Of the Divines, then, that prepared the Ordinal<sup>b</sup>, we have proof that Cranmer did not hold Zuinglian or Erastian views, and that certain were from among the number of those who had opposed the Archbishop's Erastian views in 1540. And as the Ordinal has received no material alteration since its first publication,

<sup>b</sup> In order that the charge of bolstering up my case may not be brought against me, I have taken this history of the Ordi-

nal from Browne's Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles, p. 558, where a reference to Authorities will be found.

we may expect to find it representing the views held by Cranmer and his associates in 1549.

The Form of Consecrating Bishops lays down, as positively as language can, that through the laying on of hands of Bishops the Holy Ghost is given for the office of a Bishop, and to convey authority to ordain, send, and lay hands on others. The Rubric is, “*Then the Archbishops and Bishops present shall lay their hands upon the head of the elected Bishop kneeling before them upon his knees, the Archbishop saying, Receive the Holy Ghost, for the Office and Work of a Bishop in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands ; In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And remember that thou stir up the grace of God which is given thee BY THIS IMPOSITION OF OUR HANDS.*” Here manifestly is a solemn assertion that “the grace of God,” that is, “the Holy Ghost” of the preceding clause, is given through men as instruments of God, “*by this imposition of our hands.*” My attention has been called to an expression in the 23rd Article, which seems to imply the same:—“And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work *by men* who have publick authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord’s Vineyard. “*By men :*” the Latin is *per homines* ; not *per eos*, as we might naturally have expected, but *per homines*, by men, as authorized instruments, in contradistinction to a direct and open appointment from God Himself. And if to these statements there be added the declaration in the Preface to the Ordinal,—“No man shall be accounted or taken to be a lawful Bishop, Priest, or Deacon in the United Church of

England and Ireland, or suffered to do any of the said Functions, except he be called, tried, examined, and admitted thereunto, according to the Form following, or hath had formerly *Episcopal* Consecration, or Ordination ;” and the 26th Article, which teaches that, be the Ministers thus duly called and ordained as evil as they may, we may use their ministrations, “ forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ’s, and do minister *by His commission and authority ;*”—and His commission and authority we have proved from Holy Scripture to be the gift of the Holy Ghost, which the Bishops in consecrating and ordaining claim the power to give ;—we have the strongest possible evidence that in the judgment of the English Church there can be no consecration or ordination except at the hands of a Bishop ; and clearly for this reason, that none but a Bishop has received the Holy Ghost for the office of ordaining, laying on hands, and sending divers Orders of Ministers in the Church. And for this judgment she claims the authority of Scripture<sup>c</sup>, as well as the evidence of antiquity. The

<sup>c</sup> “I could wish that they who plead so eagerly for the *jus divinum* of the Lord’s Day, and yet reject (not without some scorn) the *jus divinum* of episcopacy, would ask their own hearts (dealing impartially therein) whether it be any apparent difference in the nature of the things themselves, or in the strength of those reasons that have been brought for either, that leadeth them to have such different judgments thereof, or rather some prejudicate conceit of their own, which having formerly fancied to themselves even as they stood affected to parties, the same affections still abiding,

they cannot easily lay aside. Which partiality (for I am loath to call it perverseness) of spirit is by so much the more inexcusable in this particular, by how much episcopal government seemeth to be grounded upon Scripture texts of greater pregnancy and clearness, and attested by a fuller consent of antiquity to have been uniformly and universally observed throughout the Christian world than the Lord’s Day hath hitherto been shewn to be.” — *Bp. Sanderson, The Divine Right of the Episcopate, Tracts of the Anglican Fathers, vol. i. p. 256.*

36th Article states, "The Book set forth for consecrating Bishops and Ministers doth contain all things necessary ; neither hath it anything superstitious or ungodly." And in the 8th Constitution and Canon Ecclesiastical, it is made *penal* "to affirm or teach that the Form of making and consecrating Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, *containeth ANYTHING in it that is repugnant to the Word of God.*" Let me repeat the words of consecration : "Receive the Holy Ghost. . . And remember that thou stir up *the grace of God which is given thee* BY THIS IMPOSITION OF OUR HANDS." I do not know how language could express more strongly Scriptural authority for the doctrine, that the Holy Ghost is given by human hands. I do not know how the doctrine could be more emphatically pronounced essential, than by the threat of the Canon against such as should affirm it to be contrary to the Word of God ; "let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, not to be restored until he repent, and publicly revoke such *his wicked errors.*" The 35th of the Forty-two Articles set forth in Edward the Sixth's reign, spoke in like terms of "The Boke of ordringe Ministers of the Church" and of the other parts of the Prayer-book, that they "are *godly*, and *in no point* repugnant to the holsome doctrine of the Gospell, but *agreeable* thereunto, furthering and beutyfying y<sup>e</sup> same not a litle."

Turning to "The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests," we find the Rubric : "The Bishop with the Priests present shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one that receiveth the Order of Priesthood ; the Receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees, and the Bishop saying, Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the



Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands." Here, again, we have the Bishop clearly claiming to give the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands.

It is the fashion with certain to say, that these words, "Receive the Holy Ghost," are a relic of Popery, left in the Ordinal with the view to retain in the English Church persons who otherwise would have departed from it. By "relic of Popery," I suppose them to mean one of those errors which had been incrusting on the truth and maintained by the Roman Church, and which was not removed at the Reformation. Now, if it be an error, it must be opposed to the Word of God. And if it be opposed to the Word of God, how can the 36th Article speak of "The Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons," as "having in it nothing that is of itself superstitious and ungodly?" or the 8th Canon declare it to contain "nothing that is repugnant to the Word of God?"

But we have *direct* evidence that in the judgment of the Church of England the Bishop is Christ's instrument to convey the grace of Orders, and that when the Bishop uses the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost," he claims the power to give the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest or Bishop in the Church. Zuinglians and Puritans have from the very first objected to these words, as importing that the Holy Ghost is given through human means. And from the first we find the Authorities of the English Church defending the words; not excusing them, or pleading for their toleration on the ground that, if retained, the adhesion of many to the Church will be secured, but actually defending them, and retaining them in



the Office, as they are at this present time. Travers, in his Book on Ecclesiastical Discipline<sup>d</sup>, complains: "Papisticus quidam ritus stulte quidem ab illis et sine ullo Scripturæ fundamento institutus, et a disciplinæ nostræ auctoribus (pace illorum dixerim) non magno primum judicio acceptus, minore adhuc in Ecclesia nostra retinetur." In 1570, Thomas Cartwright put forth certain propositions, among which is placed, "These words, 'Receive the Holy Ghost,' at the Ordination of Ministers, is a ridiculous and wicked expression<sup>e</sup>." In "The Admonitions to Parliament" and in "The Reply to Whitgift," Cartwright expresses himself in even stronger terms: "These words, 'Receive, &c.,' are the imperative mood, and do expressly signify a commandment. And the Bishop may as well say to the sea, Peace, be quiet, as to say, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.'" Now we are in possession of the reply made by Whitgift, afterwards Archbishop: "The words . . . because they signify that God doth pour His Spirit upon those whom He calleth to this function, are most aptly used of the Bishop (*who is God's instrument in that business*) in the ordaining of Ministers." Hooker also writes: "A thing much stumbled at in the manner of giving Orders is our using those memorable words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.' The Holy Ghost, they say, we cannot give, and therefore we 'foolishly' bid men receive It. Wise men for their authority's sake must have leave to befool them whom they are able to make wise by better instruction. Notwithstanding, if it may please their wisdom as well to hear what fools can say as to control that

<sup>d</sup> P. 53, quoted by Keble in notes to Hooker, vol. ii. p. 459.      <sup>e</sup> Collier, Eccl. Hist., vol. vi. p. 477.

which they do, thus we have heard some wise men teach, namely, that 'the Holy Ghost' may be used to signify, not the Person alone, but the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and we know that spiritual gifts are not only abilities to do things miraculous . . . . but also that the very authority and power which is given men in the Church to be ministers of holy things, *this* is contained within the number of those gifts whereof the Holy Ghost is Author, and therefore he which giveth this power may say without absurdity or folly, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.' . . . . Seeing, therefore, the same power is now given," (as was given to the Apostles,) "why should the same forms of words expressing it be thought foolish<sup>f</sup>?" But the answer which the Church made to Travers and Cartwright is far more expressive of the judgment of the English Church than the words of either of these learned Divines. Cartwright was called upon to retract his heterodox teaching; and on refusing, *was deprived of his office in the Church*. And the High Commission silenced Travers, *who had not received Episcopal Ordination*, by declaring "that he was no lawfully ordained minister *according to the Church of England*."

In 1583, several Sussex Ministers objected amongst other things to this form of Ordination. Archbishop Whitgift's answer is as follows: "The third doubt was of these words in the Book of ordering Priests and Deacons, &c., 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' It was answered, that the Bishop did not thereby look upon himself to give the Holy Ghost, but only *instrumentaliter*, even as the minister gives Baptism when he says, 'I baptize thee in the Name, &c.' The words are Christ's words, used in the admitting of

<sup>f</sup> Eccles. Pol., bk. V. ch. lxxvii. 5—7.

the Apostles into the ministry, and therefore used by us in the like action, to signify that *God, by our ministry and imposition of hands*, doth give His Holy Spirit to all such as are rightly called to the Ministry<sup>g</sup>.”

It is inconceivable that the Church would have thus retained words, which were the cause of so many objections, if they had not been meant to be taken in their plain literal sense, and been thought to teach an essential doctrine. We must remember that they were retained at a time when very much was removed from the other Offices, and that they represent exactly the opinions of the learned Divines who prepared the Ordinal. If they had never been objected against, and if the objections had been admitted and excused, instead of being, as they were, answered and defended, plausible doubts might have been raised as to the intentions of the Church. But seeing that they were retained in the Office by Divines who have expressed in writing views in accordance with their literal meaning; that they have been objected to throughout by the Zuinglians and Puritans as bearing that meaning; that that same meaning has been admitted and defended by the Church's Champions and Bishops in answer to the objectors; and that in one instance deprivation has been inflicted by the Church for refusal to retract objections to this and other parts of the Church's Offices; we can only look upon all this as the Church's deliberate judgment, that in Ordination and Consecration the Bishop is the instrument through which God conveys the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest and Bishop in the Church of God<sup>h</sup>.

<sup>g</sup> Collier, *Eccl. Hist.*, vol. vii. p. 19; and for the proceedings against Cartwright and Travers,

vol. vi. p. 477; vol. vii. p. 160.

<sup>h</sup> I am borne out in this statement by a document which has re-

I will conclude this part of the subject with the words of Professor Browne<sup>i</sup>: “ All ministerial Authority has ever been believed to proceed from the Holy Ghost. Ministry, the right to minister, is one of the *charismata* of the Spirit. That *charisma* our Lord then for the first time fully bestowed upon His Church. But the same *charisma* was afterwards given ‘by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands<sup>k</sup>,’ and ‘with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery<sup>l</sup>.’ Not that the Apostles or their successors could from themselves send forth the Spirit of God, or the gifts of the Spirit ; but that as our Lord had appointed ordination to be the means of receiving the grace of ordination, so the Church in undoubting faith believes, that, whensoever ordination is rightly ministered, the proper gift of orders flows down direct from the ordaining Spirit ; not to sanctify the individual personally, but to constitute him truly a Minister of Christ, and to make his Ministry acceptable to God. Hence, when the Bishop’s hand is laid on the head of him whom he ordains, we doubt not that the *charisma* of God’s Spirit is given ‘for the office and work of a Priest (or Bishop) in the Church of God.’ ”

The Bishop, having thus through the laying on of hands conveyed to the Receiver the grace of the Priesthood, commissions him to exercise it in three distinct functions: (1.) “ Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost

cently appeared in the “ Record ” newspaper, signed by 307 Clergymen, who in a petition to the Queen for an Alteration of the Liturgy, shew to her Majesty “ that the expressions in the Consecration and Ordination Services appear to imply (however they

may otherwise be explained) the giving of the Holy Ghost by human hands.”

<sup>i</sup> Exposit. of the 39 Articles, p. 784.

<sup>k</sup> 2 Tim. i. 6.

<sup>l</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 14.



retain, they are retained," i. e. the power of Absolution; (2.) "And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God," in teaching, (3.) "and of His Sacraments," in administering them.

My present business is simply with Absolution, to ascertain what it is in the judgment of the English Church.

Clearly, the power of absolving is not merely the power to preach remission of sins through Jesus Christ, and to hold out to the sinner on his repentance and faith the hope of pardon in His Blood. That may be done by a Deacon; for when the Bishop delivers to every one of the newly ordained Deacons the New Testament, he says, "Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and *to preach the same*, if thou be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself." But it is not said to a Deacon, "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven;" and license is never given to a Deacon to pronounce absolution. At the Savoy Conference, the Bishops made answer to the Nonconformists, who wished the word "priest" to be erased, and the word "Minister" always to be used in the Book of Common Prayer: "It is not reasonable that the word Minister should be only used in the Liturgy. For since some parts of the Liturgy may be performed by a Deacon, others by none under the order of a Priest, viz., *absolution* and consecration, it is fit that some word, as priest, should be used for these offices, and not minister, which signifies at large every one that ministers in that holy office, of what order soever he be<sup>m</sup>." And in the Rubric before the Absolution in the Office for Daily Morning and Evening Prayer,

<sup>m</sup> Cardwell's Documentary Annals, ch. vii. prop. ii.



the word "minister" was erased, and "priest" substituted. Now, if a Deacon may read and preach, and so assure sinners of the mercy of God to penitents, and encourage them to believe the promises of God, yet none but a Priest pronounce absolution, it is very evident that Absolution is *not* preaching, or reading the Gospel.

Nor, again, is it spiritual counsel and advice. For in the Exhortation to be read when warning is given for the Celebration of the Holy Communion, it is advised: "If there be any of you, who by this means"—the means just prescribed—"cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the Ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the *benefit of absolution*, TOGETHER WITH ghostly counsel and advice." Manifestly, "*the benefit of Absolution*" is something distinct from "ghostly counsel and advice," which are to be had *together with* that benefit.

We are guided to the meaning of the word "*benefit*" by another passage in the Prayer-book<sup>n</sup>. In the Post-Communion we pray that "we may receive remission of our sins and all other *benefits* of His Passion." The "benefits" of Christ's Passion are the great blessings which come to us from His Sufferings and Death, of which one is here particularly mentioned—"the remission of sins." And so "the benefit of Absolution" must in consistency be interpreted to mean, the blessing which is to be obtained in, and conveyed through, the Ordinance of Absolution.

<sup>n</sup> See Carter on the Priesthood, p. 34, note.

And in the Homily “Of Common Prayer and Sacraments” we are told what that benefit is.

The passage to which I refer commences with defining the word “Sacrament,” and stating the number of the Sacraments. In the *exact* sense of the word, a Sacrament must have an outward visible sign, *expressly commanded in the New Testament*, and an inward grace *promised, joined, or annexed* to this outward sign. This inward grace consists of three things,—free forgiveness of sin, holiness, and joining in Christ. And of such Sacraments there are only two:—

“Now with like, or rather more brevity, you shall hear how many Sacraments there be that were instituted by our Saviour Christ, and are to be continued, and received of every Christian in due time and order, and for such purpose as our Saviour Christ willed them to be received. And as for the number of them, if they should be considered according to the *exact* signification of a Sacrament, namely, for visible signs, expressly commanded in the New Testament, whereunto is annexed the promise of free forgiveness of our sin, and of our holiness and joining in Christ, there be but two; namely, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.”

The Homily proceeds to shew that certain commonly called Sacraments are not Sacraments in the *exact* sense of the word:—

“For although Absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin; yet by the express word of the New Testament it hath not the promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is the laying on of hands. For this visible sign (I mean laying on of hands) is not expressly commanded in the New Testament to be used in Absolution, as the visible signs in Baptism

and the Lord's Supper are: and therefore Absolution is no such Sacrament as Baptism and the Communion are."

Absolution *has the promise of forgiveness of sins*,—the same promise which (according to the Homily) Baptism and the Lord's Supper have. But in Absolution this promise is not annexed and tied by express command of the New Testament to any outward visible sign, as it is in Baptism to the water, and in the Lord's Supper to the bread and wine. For although it has been the custom of the Church for the Priest to lay hands on the head of the penitent over whom he said the word of absolution; and although many, and among them Bishop Andrewes, consider S. Paul to refer to Absolution when he charges S. Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partakers of any man's sins;" still there is no express command from Christ in the New Testament to lay on hands in absolving, as there is to use water in baptizing and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper; nor any express promise that the pardon should be conveyed through laying on of hands. And therefore "Absolution is no such Sacrament as Baptism and the Communion are." But *Absolution HAS the promise of forgiveness of sins*. To all such as come duly prepared by repentance and faith in Absolution is promised the pardon of their sins. And according to the Homily, the BENEFIT OF ABSOLUTION IS THE PARDON AND REMISSION OF SIN.

The Homily adds,—

"And though the Ordering of Ministers hath his visible sign and promise; yet it lacks the promise of remission of sin, as all other Sacraments besides the two named above do. Therefore neither it, nor any

other Sacraments else, be such Sacraments as Baptism and the Communion are. But in a general acception, the name of Sacrament may be attributed to anything, whereby an holy thing is signified.”

The visible sign of Orders is the laying on of hands ; the promise attached to that sign is the *charisma* of the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work. There is no promise of forgiveness of sin annexed or tied to this visible sign ; nor have any other Sacraments, except Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the promise of remission of sins tied to any outward sign. This undoubtedly must be the meaning of the passage. We cannot suppose the writer of the Homily to be so strangely inconsistent as to assert, within the short space of fifteen lines, that Absolution *has* and *has not* the promise of forgiveness of sins. Such a flagrant self-contradiction would make the passage, if not the whole Homily, utterly worthless, and far from “ wholesome doctrine.” Therefore, if we wish to uphold the authority of the Homily, the sentence—“ it lacks the promise of remission of sins, as all other Sacraments besides the two named above do,”—must be interpreted as meaning that the promise is not tied to the outward sign.

Referring once more to the Ordination Office, we see that the power to give Absolution is conveyed to the Priest by the Holy Ghost given through imposition of the Bishop’s hands. “ Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven ; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.” The words imply that forgiveness is imparted *through the official act* of the



Priest, not that it is the absolute gift of the Priest. It is God Who forgives; but God forgives by His Minister. Pardon is really bestowed by the act of the Priest, because he has received the Holy Ghost for the work. The Priest conveys the Absolution only as an instrument, in the Name of Christ and by the authority of Christ, by virtue of his office and power given him by the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands.

And this is strongly insisted on in all the Forms of Absolution contained in the Book of Common Prayer. In "The Order for Morning and Evening Prayer," the *Priest* is directed to pronounce "The Absolution." The Absolution opens with a declaration of God's mercy and love in pardoning sinners, and of the commission which is given to the Christian Ministry<sup>o</sup> to pronounce to the penitent forgiveness of sin in His Name: "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live, and *hath given power and commandment* to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." The Priest proceeds, "He pardoneth

<sup>o</sup> "The Apostles and their successors are His Ambassadors, His Ministers and Stewards of Divine mysteries, nay, the presidents of souls, and the familiar friends of God. The Scripture calls them 'angels,' because they have the same employment which the ancients ascribed to angels, to convey messages between God and men, to present their prayers unto Him, and to bring back the news of His love, and especially to bring this pardon to the peni-

tent, yea, to proclaim it even to the impenitent. Wherefore, let those that despise the priest, or who invade his office, or allow no difference between a pardon pronounced by him and an ordinary person, take heed of contemning those whom God so highly honours, and *beware they entrench not upon the supreme power of the Sender, in disallowing the subordinate power of those that are sent.*" — *Dean Comber.*



and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe His Holy Gospel." The words imply that He, the Supreme Judge, uses this official act of His Commissioned Priest, to convey His pardon to all who are duly prepared. "While we are holding out this absolution, He that knows who among you are true believers and really penitent, will to such seal their pardon in Heaven, which will make ours to be valid; for it is our great Master that absolveth, because what we do is pronounced in His Name, dispensed by His Authority, offered on His conditions, and confirmed by His approbation<sup>p</sup>."

In "The Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper," immediately after the Confession of sins, the Rubric directs: "Then shall the Priest (or Bishop, being present,) stand up, and turning himself to the people, pronounce this Absolution." Here again is *the Official act* of the Priest; he *stands* to signify his authority, he *turns to the people* and shows that he is bringing a gift from God, he pronounces this Absolution,—“Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, Who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sin to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins.” The gift is God's; and these words of His Priest are the instrument through which He, Who alone can forgive sins, forgives all who have confessed to Him with repentance and faith. The Absolution is in the form of a prayer; “yet<sup>q</sup>

<sup>p</sup> Dean Comber.

<sup>q</sup> Dean Comber. See also Palmer's *Origines Liturgicæ*, vol. i. p. 215, 3rd ed.: "The Sacerdotal benediction of penitents was in the earliest times

conveyed in the form of a prayer to God for their absolution; but in after ages different forms of benediction were used, both in the East and West. With regard to these varieties of *form*,

being grounded on the promise, and agreeable both to the nature and design of God, it hath a mighty force, and ascends to Heaven *cum privilegio*; it is like the father's blessing, which hath always been believed to convey as well as crave the benediction. Thus Isaac 'blessed Jacob, and said, God give thee of the dew of Heaven;' and thus Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, and the Lord accomplished all the particulars." In the same way, the blessing of the Jewish Priesthood was in the form of prayer, and at the same time conveyed God's blessing to His people, as He Himself tells us: "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And *they shall put My Name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them*."<sup>r</sup> Under the Christian Dispensation, in Absolution as well as in Benediction, the Priest by this prayer in the optative mood puts God's Name upon His people, and God absolves them from their sins.

it does not appear that they were formerly considered of any importance. A benediction seems to have been regarded as equally valid, whether it was conveyed in the form of a petition or a declaration, whether in the optative or the indicative mood, whether in the active or passive voice, whether in the first, second, or third person. It is true that a direct prayer to God is a most ancient form of blessing; but the use of a precatory or an optative form

by no means warrants the inference, that the person who uses it is devoid of any divinely instituted authority to bless and absolve in the congregation. Neither does the use of a direct indicative form of blessing or absolution imply anything but the exercise of an authority which God has given, to such an extent, and under such limitations, as Divine Revelation has declared."

<sup>r</sup> Numbers vi. 22—27.

In "The Visitation of the Sick" the Absolution is partly deprecatory, and partly in a direct indicative form. It commences with the assertion that "Our Lord Jesus Christ hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him." The Church thus proclaims the Scriptural doctrine that Jesus, being rightly endued with plenary authority to forgive, exercises this power by His chosen deputies, the Bishops and Priests of His Church ; and that His absolution is limited to true penitents. Accordingly the Priest craves in the optative mood the absolution from Christ, "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . of His great mercy forgive thee all thy offences," that is, by confirming what I do on earth and forgiving by my ministry ; and then proceeds to the indicative part of the Absolution, "And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The pardon is *ministerially* conveyed, after the Priest has heard the penitent's confession and sat in judgment upon his soul, and ascertained if pardon may be safely dispensed. Our Lord gives the pardon, which the Priest as an instrument conveys, and pronounces in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Absolution sets forth the forgiveness as bestowed through the Priest's Act. The words being spoken by the Priest on earth are ratified in Heaven for the true penitent, who is hereby freely pardoned for the sake and through the merits of Jesus Christ.

It has been argued by some that in this last Absolution the Priest "is only setting persons free from any ecclesiastical censures that they may have deserved." It might be a sufficient reply to this, that the Abso-

lution is with two exceptions precisely the same as it was before the Reformation, and that most certainly it was then regarded as effecting more than the removal of Church censures. The learned men who set forth this Office omitted, after the sentence "I absolve thee from all thy sins," the words, "which thou hast confessed to me," in accordance with the Church's statement that an exact enumeration of every sin in oral Confession was not necessary to Absolution. They omitted also the words, "And I restore thee to the Sacraments of the Church<sup>s</sup>." Now, if any part of the Absolution as it stood before the Reformation could be intended to refer to Church censures, it must have been these last words, "I restore thee to the Sacraments of the Church." And I conceive that the Reformers, by omitting these and retaining the other parts of the Absolution, designed to keep to the doctrine which these words had always been taken to teach, that pardon of all sins is conveyed through this Absolution to such as are truly penitent.

<sup>s</sup> The Absolution in the *Ordo ad visitandum infirmum* of the Salisbury Use runs thus: "*Deinde absolvat sacerdos infirmum, ab omnibus peccatis suis, hoc modo dicens. Dominus noster Jesus Christus pro sua magna pietate te absolvat: et ego auctoritate ejusdem Dei Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli, et auctoritate mihi tradita absolvo te ab omnibus peccatis his de quibus corde contritus et ore mihi confessus es: et ab omnibus aliis peccatis tuis de quibus si tuæ occurrerent memoriæ libenter confiteri velles: et sacramentis te restituo. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*

Amen." It is particularly to be observed that, if the sick man had an Apostolic Bull *de plena absolutione et remissione peccatorum*, then the Absolution made particular mention of Church censures: "Et si immiscendo te divinis sic innodatus es aut unquam fuisti, quod aliquam notam irregularitatis contraxisti: vel pœnam suspensionis, interdicti, seu excommunicationis incurristi: eadem auctoritate tollo et amoveo, tecumque dispenso: et sacramentis te restituo. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."—*Monumenta Ritualia Eccles. Anglican.*, vol. i. p. 80.



But to turn to more direct evidence of the meaning of this Absolution;—In the year 1641, a Committee of Divines sat to consider “all innovations in the Church respecting religion.” Under “the strange necessities of the times<sup>t</sup>,” they seem to have felt inclined to make certain concessions to the Puritans, and to suggest certain changes in the Book of Common Prayer. Among “the more difficult concessions” suggested we find, “that the form of absolution provided for the sick should be made declaratory, instead of being authoritative.” These changes were not carried out, and the Form of Absolution remains as it stood in 1641. And I maintain that the words of the Divines are conclusive against that interpretation which makes the Absolution refer to Church censures. It seems never to have entered into their heads to have imagined such a thing. They considered that it was an “authoritative” Absolution of sin: they were willing for the sake of peace to make it simply “declaratory;” the change was not made, and the Absolution is still *authoritative*.

Again, at the Savoy Conference<sup>u</sup> the Presbyterians objected against this Absolution on the ground that in it the Priest claimed to convey pardon of sin. They requested “That the Form of Absolution be declarative and conditional, as ‘I pronounce thee absolved,’ instead of ‘I absolve thee,’ ‘if thou doest truly repent and believe.’ How easy it would have been for the Bishops to have answered, that nothing but release from Church censures was meant, if such had been considered the meaning of the Absolution! Yet instead of this, the Bishops reply, “The Form

<sup>t</sup> Cardwell, *Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 240.

<sup>u</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 332, 361.



of absolution in the Liturgy is more agreeable to the Scriptures than that which they desire, it being said in S. John xx., 'Whose sins you remit, they are remitted,' not, Whose sins you pronounce remitted; and the condition needs not to be expressed, being always necessarily understood." I maintain, therefore, that there is nothing to prove, but every thing to disprove, that the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick is meant to convey merely a release from Church censures.

And there is equally convincing evidence to prove that in the Church of England Priestly Absolution has always been considered to convey to all who are duly prepared the pardon of their sins.

In the first place, there is the stubborn fact that the old term and Forms of Absolution, which were always considered to convey pardon of sin, were retained at the Reformation, preserved at every revision of the Prayer-book in spite of strong opposition, and are in the Prayer-book now. If the old term "Absolution" was to bear a new sense, and if the Priest was no longer to be considered as empowered to convey pardon from God in Absolution, surely we should have had some explanation. Where has the Church of England given such explanation? Again, if these Absolutions were merely an edifying form or ceremony, we cannot imagine that the Reformers and other authorities of the Church, who have been considerate almost to an error of the weak brethren, would have for the sake of a mere form driven men to the sin of schism, from which we so frequently pray to be delivered. When so many decent and edifying Ceremonies were laid aside, it is taxing our credulity to ask us to believe that they considered as mere forms these Absolutions, so revolting to

Zuinglian minds, which had been and must have continued to be regarded by the people as actual means of grace. The Celebration of the Eucharist had been stripped of every thing that could possibly be deemed connected with the peculiarly Roman views of that Sacrament. Are we then to be asked to believe that, if our Reformers and others considered Absolution to be such a baneful thing as Zuinglians denounce it to be, they would have retained those Forms which must have been associated in the popular mind with the very thing to be removed? Nor can I do the honest but mistaken Nonconformists the injustice to suppose that they would have made such efforts for the removal of a mere form so easily reconcilable on the above supposition with their views. Indeed, the very weakness of our rulers is our strength. And the proposed concession of the Committee of 1641 is a standing evidence that in the Church of England the Ordinance of Absolution is a means of conveying to the penitent pardon from God.

But to advert to statements in authoritative Documents of the Church. In "The Interpretations and Further Considerations" of Queen Elizabeth's "Injunctions," drawn up by Archbishop Parker and the Bishops with him, three marks of the Church of Christ are mentioned: "The pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, and *the authority of the keys is retained* \*." Among "Certain principal Articles of Religion . . . . to be read by Parsons, Vicars, and Curates at their first possession-taking," is the following: "I do acknowledge the Church to be the spouse of Christ, wherein the Word of God is truly taught, the Sacraments orderly administered accord-

\* Cardwell's Documentary Annals, No. XLIII.

ing to God's institution, and *the authority of the Keys duly used* y." I would remark, that "the authority of the Keys" is something distinct from the "preaching the pure Word," or "truly teaching the Word;" and that in those days there would be no more doubt that by "the authority of the Keys" was meant Priestly Absolution, than that the Sacraments named are Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

The Visitation Articles of Archbishop Parker in 1567 positively assert that sins after Baptism are forgiven in Absolution. It is to be premised that "Penance" is the strict theological term for that Ordinance in which a person, who has the fit and proper dispositions, receives Absolution at the hands of the Priest, of sins committed after Baptism. "VI. *Item.* You shall enquire of the doctrine and judgement of all and singular hedd and members of your Church: . . . . . whether any of them do either privilie or openlie preach or teach any unwholsome, erroneous, seditious doctrine, . . . . or in any other point do perswade or move any not to conform themselves to the order of religion reformed, restored, and received by public authority in the Church of England. As for example, . . . . that every article in our crede, commonly received and used in the Church, is not to be received of necessity; or that mortal or voluntary sins, committed after baptisme, be not remissible by penance<sup>z</sup>," &c. This is indeed *strong* evidence. In the reign of Elizabeth, when public feeling was highly interested in favour of the Divines who had returned from their exile in Zurich impregnated with the novel opinions of Zuingle and Bullinger, and when, if ever, Zuinglian

y Cardwell's Documentary Annals, No. XLVI.

z Foxe, Acts and Monuments, vol. iii. p. 253.

views were likely to find favour with the Church, Archbishop Parker, the leading man of the age, “who bore so distinguished a part in establishing the Prayer-book in the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth<sup>a</sup>,” *ex cathedra* denounces it as opposed to “the order of religion reformed, restored, and received,” to deny that sin is remissible in the Ordinance of Absolution. Nor must we fail to notice that at the very time when the return of the Marian Exiles was so likely to commend Zuinglianism to the English Church, the Committee of Divines, assembled at Elizabeth’s command to revise the Liturgy, actually removed the Zuinglian novelties which had been inserted in the second Service-book of King Edward, and restored in all essential particulars the first Service-book of that King<sup>b</sup>.

At the accession of James to the throne, the Puritans presented a petition “excepting against the very name of Absolution, (as being a *Forinsecal* and *Juridical* Word, importing more, surely, than a *Declaration*,) which they desired to have corrected<sup>c</sup>.” At the Hampton Court Conference, Archbishop Whitgift “with regard to Absolution cleared the practice of the Church of England from all abuse of superstition, and for this appealed to the Confession and Absolution in the beginning of the Prayer-book. The King, perusing the Book, found the allegation true, and acquiesced. But the Bishop of London stepping forward, said, ‘It becometh us to deal plainly with your Majesty: there is also in the Book a more particular and personal Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick;’

<sup>a</sup> Berens’ Hist. of the Prayer-book, p. 81.

<sup>b</sup> Cardwell, Conferences, &c., p. 21.

<sup>c</sup> Heylin on the Creed, p. 490.



adding, that not only the Confessions of Augsburg, Bohemia, and Saxony, retained it, but that Calvin approved such a general Confession and Absolution as is used in the Church of England. The form being read, the King said, ‘I exceedingly well approve of it, being an Apostolical and godly Ordinance, given in the Name of Christ to one that desireth it upon the clearing of his conscience.’ The conclusion was, that the Bishops should consult whether the remission of sins ought not to be added to the Absolution Rubric for explanation<sup>d</sup>.” But the Absolution itself remained the same as it was when Archbishop Parker, the leader in Elizabeth’s Revision, declared it to be opposed to the order of the English Church to assert that pardon is not given through the Priest’s Absolution.

We have already examined the Decision of the Committee of Divines in 1641, and the Statement of the Bishops at the Savoy Conference in 1662, when the Book of Common Prayer was finally settled.

A very important document next claims consideration. Sir John Friend and Sir William Parkins were sentenced to death for conspiracy against the life of King William III. Certain Clergy having “openly and scandalously given them Absolution, though they made no special confession of their sins,” the Archbishops, and as many Bishops as could be brought together in London, put forth a “Declaration” concerning this irregular and scandalous proceeding<sup>e</sup>:—

“Lastly. For those Clergymen that took upon them to absolve these criminals at the place of execution, by laying, all three together, their hands upon their heads, and publicly pronouncing a form of abso-

<sup>d</sup> Berens’ History of the Prayer-book, p. 87.

<sup>e</sup> Wilkins’ *Concilia*, vol. iv. p. 627.



lution ; as their manner of doing this was extremely insolent, and without precedent either in our Church, or any way that we know of, so the thing itself was altogether irregular.

“ The Rubric in our Office of the Visitation of the Sick, from whence they took the words they then used, and upon which, if upon any thing in our Liturgy, they must ground this their proceeding, gave them no authority nor no pretence for the absolving these persons ; nay, as they managed the affair, they acted in this absolution far otherwise than is there directed.

“ That Rubric is concerning sick persons, and it is there required, first, that the ‘ sick person shall be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and then after such confession, the priest shall absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire it.’ But here they absolved, and that publickly, persons condemned by law for execrable crimes, *without so much as once moving them at that time to make a special confession of their sins*, at least of those sins for which they were condemned. And on the other side, here were persons absolved that did not humbly desire absolution, as feeling any such weighty matter to trouble their conscience.

“ If these Ministers knew not the state of these men’s souls before they gave them absolution, as it is manifest two of them did not, . . . *how could they without manifest transgression of the Church’s order, as well as the profane abuse of THE POWER CHRIST HAS LEFT WITH HIS MINISTERS, ABSOLVE THEM FROM THEIR SINS.*

“ If they were acquainted with these men’s sentiments declared in their papers, then they must look upon them either as hardened impenitents, or martyrs.

“ We are so charitable to believe that they would not absolve them under the former notion ; *for that had been*, IN EFFECT, SEALING THEM TO DAMNATION.

“ *April* 10, 1696.

“ Tho. [Tenison,] Cantuar. Sy. [Patrick,] Eliens.  
 Joh. [Sharpe,] Ebor. Gil. [Ironsides,] Hereford.  
 Henr. [Compton,] London. Jo. [Moore,] Norwich.  
 Nath. [Crew,] Duresme. Ric. [Cumberland,] Peterb.  
 P. [Mews,] Winchester. Ed. [Fowler,] Gloucester.  
 W. [Lloyd,] Cov. and Lich. Rob. [Grove,] Chichester.  
 Tho. [Sprat,] Roffen. E. [Jones,] Asaph.”

Three points are to be noticed in this Declaration : the Bishops declare that before particular Absolution there must be a special Confession of sin ; that Christ has left power with His Ministers to absolve penitents *from their sins*, and not merely from Church censures ; and that Absolution given to hardened impenitents is “ in effect sealing them to damnation.” This is a strong expression ; stronger, it seems to me, than that used in the Exhortation to the Holy Communion, “ for otherwise the receiving of the Holy Communion doth nothing else than increase your damnation.” At any rate, it puts unworthy receiving of Absolution on the same footing as unworthy receiving of the Eucharist. I claim, then, the Declaration of the Bishops as a proof that the Church of England regards Absolution as a means of conveying pardon to the penitent.

In the year 1711, Dr. Brett preached and published a sermon on the Remission of Sins. Dr. Cannon, Archdeacon of Norfolk, was greatly scandalized by the statements made in this sermon ; and on the

22nd of February, 1712, he brought forward two Motions in the Lower House of Convocation, calling upon the House to censure the sermon as unsound and teaching doctrines opposed to the decisions of the Church of England. Dr. Cannon published at the time an account of his "Two Motions concerning the Power of remitting sins," and at the end of his pamphlet he tells us his object in making the Motions:—

"Before I conclude, I humbly ask this question: If there be not good reason why a public Declaration should be made by the Bishops and Clergy to *remove* the *offence* taken by some at the very scandalous doctrine of late industriously taught concerning Remission of sin; to prevent its getting into the minds of such well-disposed and religious, but weak persons, as are yet clear of the infection; and to root out of the minds of others that superstition which moves them to believe that a Christian Priest has authority to absolve men from their sins, and, in consequence of that belief, to apply to a Priest, in order to obtain by private confession of their sins to him an authoritative Absolution from him<sup>f</sup>?"

Dr. Cannon seems in his pamphlet to admit that the House of Convocation refused to entertain or pass his Motions. And in another pamphlet published in 1714, called "THE PRINCIPLES OF THE LOW CHURCHMEN FAIRLY REPRESENTED AND DEFENDED, *by* A LAYMAN," I find allusion made both to Dr. Brett's sermon and to Dr. Cannon's Motions. "A Layman" thus sets forth Dr. Brett's teaching:—

"This (i. e. Remission of their sins) he very plainly tells us, we are to come to the *Priest* for, who is in-

<sup>f</sup> Page 37.

vested by Christ with authority to dispense it, with as *full* and *plenary* authority as He Himself, as Head of the Church, is possessed of, or exercised on earth. He says further, that at the time that Christ's Ministers pronounce Absolution to the Penitent, He Himself does *then* (and not before, as he afterwards tells us) actually forgive them. So that 'tis not sufficient, in order to forgiveness of sins, that we repent and believe the Gospel, unless we also repair to a Priest for that Absolution which God has ordered him to dispense. For he adds, 'To abstain from the pollutions of the world, and to pray to God never so heartily, and to have the firmest faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is *not* sufficient to procure our ACTUAL pardon; it only qualifies us to receive it of those to whom He has given power on earth to remit sins by *Absolution*.' And therefore he positively affirms, 'There is no reasonable ground to think that they can attain to remission of sins, however penitent they may be, who neglect this Absolution of the Priest, where it may be had.'"

And then "A Layman" adds:—

"I should not have taken so much notice of this sermon had it not been laid before the Lower House of Convocation; who *not only refused to censure the doctrine contained in it, but have given the world very great reason to believe that they themselves concur with the author*, from what a considerable Member" (*query*, Number) "said, viz., 'That as to the power of the Church and Clergy, in the Absolution of sinners, Dr. Brett had carried that doctrine no higher than the Liturgy and other acts of the Church had done.' Besides, that 'tis very well known the far greater part of those who would be esteemed



the most zealous for the Church, are professedly for the doctrine, tho' many of 'em blamed the Doctor's indiscreet and incautious way of declaring it<sup>g</sup>."

This refusal of the Lower House of Convocation, following, at so short a distance of time as eighteen years, the Declaration of the Bishops, is strong confirmatory evidence that, according to the teaching of the English Church, pardon of sin is conveyed to the penitent through the Absolution of the Priest.

We may add another very strong piece of evidence, the use of Absolution by eminent Christians in the English Church. Dr. Reynolds died in 1607. Heylin<sup>h</sup> gives the following account of his last hours, which is confirmed by Collier and Wood: "Though Dr. Reynolds, one of the Four Proctors for the Petitioners in the Conference at Hampton Court, may be conceived to be of the same opinion with those of the aggrieved sort whom he did appear for, yet he was so well satisfied in the power and nature of Sacerdotal Absolution, that he did earnestly desire it at the time of his death, humbly received it at the hands of Doctor Holland, and when he was not able to express his joy and thankfulness in the way of speech, did most affectionately kiss the hand that gave it."

Elizabeth Lady Capel, "three days before her death (26th January, 1660), asked and received the Church's last comfort and blessing, the benefit of Absolution, which she took with great thankfulness, and shewed a heavenly comfort and peace ensuing upon it<sup>i</sup>."

Edward Boteler, Rector of Wintringham, in a sermon on the funeral of Sibylla (Egerton), Lady Anderson, tells his congregation: "The day before

<sup>g</sup> Page 21.

<sup>h</sup> On the Creed, p. 490.

<sup>i</sup> English Churchwomen of the Seventeenth Century, p. 76.



she died (October, 1661), she desired me to pray with her and absolve her, according to the use of the Church of England, which I accordingly did, to her no little comfort<sup>k</sup>.”

Of Bishop Sanderson we read, in Isaac Walton's "Lives:" "After his taking his bed, and about a day before his death (1663), he desired his chaplain, Mr. Pullin, to give him absolution; and at his performing that office he pulled off his cap, that Mr. Pullin might lay his hand upon his bare head.”

Bishop Bull, who died in 1710, frequently received Absolution in his last illness. Of the learned Dr. John Ernest Grabe, we are told that in his last illness, 1711, "he commonly desired the imposition of the Priest's hands, when the absolution or blessing was pronounced on him<sup>l</sup>." The pious layman Henry Dodwell "that night (Wednesday, June 6, 1711) walked, though with trouble, from the room where he sat, and joined in the prayers of the Church, to his bed. At which time he, having lately received the Holy Eucharist in the Parish Church, desired and received the absolution directed by our Church from my hands<sup>m</sup>.”

A few remarks seem called for on the Collect which follows the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick, and which has been considered by some to do away with the idea that pardon is given in that Absolution. And in place of any remarks of my own, I will insert the words of the learned Authors of the Introduction to the *Visitatio Infirmorum*<sup>n</sup>:—

<sup>k</sup> English Churchwomen of the Seventeenth Century, p. 260.

<sup>l</sup> Nelson's Life of Bp. Bull, p. 223. Oxford, 1840.

<sup>m</sup> Brokesby's Life of Dodwell.

For these examples I am indebted to the valuable Introduction to the *Visitatio Infirmorum*.

<sup>n</sup> Page xeviii.

“The cases under the preceding rubric are peculiar cases: this rubric brings us back to the more ordinary case of reconciling the sick man to God, who, though truly repentant, does not feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and who does not therefore feel that he needs the ministration of special confession and absolution. It would seem that in such a case *the Church uses this prayer as the ministerial act of absolution and restoration*, consequent on the Priest’s ascertaining that the sick is truly penitent, and in right dispositions towards God and man. This is evident from the words of the Collect itself, which expressly pray for perfect forgiveness, renewal, and entire restoration, externally to the Church, internally to God’s favour. And it is to be observed, that the Church in this rubric prefixed to the Collect seems to restrict its use to the *Priest*; and that evidently by design, since she has substituted that word for ‘Minister,’ which at first stood in the Prayer-book. Archbishop Ussher, indeed, expressly notes the prayer of the Priest as one of the means in which ‘the exercise of the ministry doth mainly consist;’ as he proceeds to prove from the text in S. James v. 14, 15, in which the prayer of the Elders of the Church is expressly named as procuring the forgiveness of the sins of the sick man, and from the Commentary of S. Chrysostom thereon, ‘that Priests do perform this, not by teaching only and admonishing, but by assisting with their prayers.’ And Comber observes that the Church in the use of this prayer

° Answer to a Jesuit, p. 86, where he quotes S. Chrysostom, lib. iii. *de Sacerdotio*. Bp. Wilson, (*Sacra Privata*, Works, i.), Dean Comber, and Bp. Sparrow,

(*Rationale*, 271), also remark that the true rendering of the original, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ, is, “he shall be absolved,” or, “absolution shall be given to him.”

follows ‘the directions of two great Apostles, who prescribe prayer as the means to procure the absolution of a penitent<sup>p</sup>, as also the ancients do always teach that the Priest obtains remission by his prayers<sup>q</sup>.’ But that the Church intends this prayer as the ministerial act of absolution and restoration is established by the facts, that *this very prayer is ‘THE ORIGINAL ABSOLUTION WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO DYING PENITENTS FOR MORE THAN 1,300 YEARS IN THE WESTERN CHURCHES<sup>r</sup>,’* and that the use of this prayer is THE ONLY METHOD by which absolution is granted to the sick in the Greek Church<sup>s</sup>.

“If, therefore, the sick man is truly penitent, and is in other respects in fitting dispositions, (as contemplated in the first rubric after the Creed,) this prayer must never be omitted: in the case of special confession and formal absolution, it completes and ‘confirms the absolution<sup>t</sup>;’ in all other cases, it supplies and takes the place of that rite.”

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#### CHAPTER IV.

WE have seen that Absolution is one of the means through which God ordinarily gives His pardon to mankind; and that, as pardon is promised by God only to those who come to Him with repentance and faith, no pardon is given through the Ordinance of Absolution to any who are not thus duly qualified.

One *essential* part of repentance is *Confession of*

<sup>p</sup> S. James v. 15; 1 John v. 16. 3rd edit., p. 226.

<sup>q</sup> Comber, 753.

<sup>s</sup> Goar, *Rituale Græcorum*.

<sup>r</sup> Palmer's *Origines Liturgica*,

<sup>t</sup> Comber, 707.

*sins.* In the Psalms it is written, “I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord: and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin<sup>u</sup>.” S. John assures us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness<sup>x</sup>.” These, and other like texts, make confession of sin essential to forgiveness:

In the Book of Common Prayer we find mention made of three kinds of Confession, namely, Confession to God, Confession to a Priest in private as God’s Ambassador and deputed Judge, and Confession in public before the Church of notorious and scandalous offences after a judicial sentence, as is referred to in the Preface of the Communion. On the last it does not fall within the scope of my present object to make any remarks; but I propose to enquire briefly into the teaching of the English Church on Confession to God, and Confession to a Priest as God’s Ambassador.

Previous to the Reformation, Confession to a Priest was obligatory on every member of the Church in order to obtain Absolution. One of the first, and (I humbly think) one of the wisest steps taken by the English Church, was to remove this obligation, and return to the primitive practice of making oral Confession a voluntary act on the part of any who desired it. According to her decision, remission of sins is ordinarily conveyed through the public administration of the Ordinance of Absolution; for this, Confession to God is the ordinary preparation. Insisting no longer on the private opening of the heart to man, as had been for a long time the law, the Church bids each “examine his life and conversation

<sup>u</sup> Psalm xxxii. 6.

<sup>x</sup> 1 John i. 9.

by the rule of God's commandments, and whereinssoever he shall perceive himself to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail his own sinfulness, and to confess himself to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life;" and then to seek the Divine pardon through the public ministrations of God's duly commissioned Ministry.

Simultaneous with the relaxation of the law of oral Confession, was the insertion in the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer of a General Confession to be made by Priest and People, and of "The Absolution." Mr. Freeman<sup>y</sup> points out that the Confession and Absolution are constructed "in that form which would most completely adapt them for superseding, in all ordinary cases, private Confession and Absolution." The Confession is in general terms, so as to apply to the whole body of assembled Christians; yet in such wise as to admit of each individual making therein particular mention of his own sin, and burden, and grief. Keeping before the people the grand truth that there can be no forgiveness without Confession of sin to God, it calls on them to make that Confession, and puts into their mouths penitential words. The Priest, convinced that, if the Confession is as truly from the heart as the words betoken it to be, the penitents who make it are prepared for pardon, pronounces the Absolution. Assuring the assembled congregation that "God has given *power* and commandment to His Ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and remission of their sins," he consigns God's pardon to them by his authoritative words, "God pardoneth and absolveth all them that

<sup>y</sup> Principles of Divine Service, vol. i. p. 315.



truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His Holy Gospel." At that moment, to all who have duly confessed their sins, God conveys pardon through His Priest's words. And so we go on to pray for the grace of perseverance and genuine fruits of repentance, "Let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance and His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him, which we do at this present, and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy." For all ordinary cases, the sins of daily life, the sins of omission and commission of which we daily find ourselves guilty, the English Church looks upon this Confession as sufficient, and authorizes the Priest to absolve all those who thus make their confession to God.

Let us consider next the Office for the Holy Communion. In the Exhortation the people are cautioned to come duly prepared to that Holy Sacrament; "which being so divine and comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily, and so dangerous to them that receive it unworthily; my duty is to exhort you in the mean season to consider the dignity of that holy mystery, and the great danger of the unworthy receiving thereof; and so to search and examine your own consciences, (and that not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God; but so) that ye may come holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast, in the marriage garment required by God in Holy Scripture, and be received as worthy partakers of that holy Table." Here is a distinct statement that *all* must come *holy* and *clean* to that Heavenly Feast. Previous to the Reformation, *all* were required to come to Confession and receive Absolution in private, in order to be made holy and

clean for the Eucharist. In this particular the English Church has changed her law and practice. A public Confession and Absolution is again provided, and an Exhortation made to the people to prepare themselves for this Confession and Absolution by self-examination, and, if need be, restitution and satisfaction. When warning of the Celebration is given, there is pointed out the way and means of coming "holy and clean:"—"First, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments, and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life. And if ye shall perceive your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile yourselves unto them, being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the uttermost of your powers for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other, and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you, as ye would have forgiveness at God's hand." And, again, when all is prepared for the Celebration, the Priest calls upon all present to "consider how S. Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup;" bids them, "judge yourselves that ye be not judged of the Lord; repent you truly for your sins past; have a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour, and be in perfect charity with all men;" and then summons them, ere they take the Holy Sacrament, to make a humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon their knees. And thus believing that all have

made the Confession in sincerity, and assured that, if it is made in sincerity, the penitent is duly prepared for pardon, he pronounces the Absolution, and conveys from God pardon to the penitent, who is thereby made holy and clean for the Heavenly Feast that is now to come. It is no part of my purpose to enquire into the pardon of sin given in Absolution, as distinguished from the grace given in the Holy Eucharist. My object is simply to point out that, in place of the old compulsory Confession and private Absolution, the English Church deems public Confession and public Absolution sufficient in ordinary cases to make all "holy and clean" for the reception of the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. In this I believe she returns to the rule of Holy Scripture, and the practice of the Primitive Church:—"It was undoubtedly the tendency of the later ages of the Church," Mr. Freeman<sup>z</sup> admirably remarks, "in the West more especially, to narrow, in a manner unknown to earlier times, the application of pardoning grace to the soul of man through the Church's ministrations. There is not the slightest appearance, in the most ancient rituals, of the dependence of man, as a condition of the divine forgiveness, upon the entire privity of his fellow-man, as to the state of his heart. The ancient view manifestly was that which speaks in the absolutionary form which we have been considering, viz., that while the message of pardon has from the beginning been committed to mortal lips, the bestowal of it by them was meant to be as free as the breath of heaven itself. It is *therefore* committed to them that they may fling it abroad, not jealously narrow and husband its application.

<sup>z</sup> Principles of Divine Service, vol. i. p. 316.

The highest word spoken in His Master's Name by such a duly commissioned ambassador is with power, —his every prayer for his fellow-men has a peculiar promise of being accepted and ratified. Whether this ministration of his be public or private, whether in the form of a desire, a petition, or a declaration, matters nothing to its efficacy; for, in all forms alike, it waits on the same heavenly ratification. All that is needed is, that there be fit, i. e. truly repentant recipients of it; that secured, wheresoever it touches, it blesses and heals. Not as though private opening of griefs and receiving of assured pardon has not its own peculiar power for comfort, as the Exhortation in our Communion Office fully recognises, but that that is the extraordinary and occasional, this the ordinary and indefeasible ministration."

So, then, the English Church insists upon Confession to God before every Absolution, and considers this Confession to be, in ordinary cases, all that is required. Instead of *compelling* all her members to make private Confession to a Priest, she provides a public Confession as a preparation for Absolution, and orders the Absolution to be administered to all who thus confess.

At the same time, the English Church admits the practice, sets forth the utility, and recommends the use, within certain limits, of private Confession to a Priest. In the First Exhortation to the Holy Communion, the Priest as Minister having set forth the ordinary way and means of coming holy and clean to the Eucharist, is directed to say further: "If there be any of you who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth comfort or counsel, let him come to me," (the Parish Priest,) "or to some



other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the Ministry of God's Word he may receive the benefit of Absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." Here clearly oral Confession is recommended to such as are so burdened with grief for sin or with sin itself, as to be unable to make a proper clearing of the conscience in the ordinary Confession. Moreover, the Confession is to be made with the express object of receiving "the benefit of Absolution," and together with this, "ghostly counsel and advice." We have seen that "the benefit of Absolution" is the pardon of sin: we take the "ghostly counsel and advice" to be provided for leading the troubled sinner to a true repentance, and directing him to conquer his scruples and resist for the future the commission of the like sin. Again, in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, the Rubric orders: "Here shall the sick person be *moved* to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." I cannot think that the words "be moved to" can be regarded otherwise than as meant to direct the Priest to set forth in the strongest terms the advantages of Confession, to suggest the loss which may be sustained or the danger incurred by neglecting it, and to use every possible argument, exhortation, and persuasion to induce the sick man to lay open the festering sores of his soul, and disclose the weighty matter that troubles him. "And here it is worthy of attentive observation, that the words 'shall be moved' were inserted in this Rubric when the Prayer-book was finally arranged in its present form in 1661. The Rubric previously to that stood



thus: 'Here shall the sick person make a special confession, if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.' This evidently left it to the sick person to demand the reception of such confession; but did not render it incumbent on the Minister to exhort him to it, or even to bring it before him at all. But the Church, by the insertion of the words 'be moved,' seems to make the motive to such special confession no longer proceed from the sick man, who might naturally be backward, or timid, or ashamed to propose it; but to enjoin the Minister to suggest it to him, and to encourage him to it, if he in himself feels that it will be a relief to his conscience. This fact plainly forbids the notion that it was an obsolete custom which the Church did not remove from her formularies only that she might not offend weak minds, or from a disinclination to erase it, though she might not encourage it. For we see that on the very last occasion when she revised her Office-book, she not only treats it as a living, real, useful ministration, but so deals with it as to methodise its use, and to provide that all her sick members shall have at least the opportunity of disburthening their conscience in confession; it being in themselves to avail themselves of it as they feel the need<sup>a</sup>." Moreover, it is clear that the Confession is to be made with a view to Absolution: "After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort." The words within the parentheses were introduced at the last revision of the Prayer-book in 1661. By them the Church restrains her Priests from giving Absolution to any who may not care for it, or merely as a formal

<sup>a</sup> *Visitatio Infirmorum*, Introduction, lxxxv.

act in the case of all sick penitents. The sick man must shew a proper disposition and an earnest desire for Absolution after he has made special Confession of his sins. But that Confession must be voluntary. Though the English Church charges her Priests to offer to all the sick the opportunity of confessing, and to leave nothing untried or undone which may move them to confession, “*if* they feel their consciences troubled with any weighty matter,” no authority is given to enforce Confession as essential in any case. Recommending the Ordinance to all who may seem to need it,—in Bishop Wilson’s language, “earnestly pushing them to desire, and exhorting to dispose themselves to receive it,”—and denying it to none who desire it, with a wise moderation the Church leaves her members to take their own course, to use or refuse it, on their own responsibility.

And common sense will teach us that if there is such a salutary Ordinance in the Church, it is the duty of the Minister from time to time publicly in his teaching to explain and recommend it to his people, and to invite them or move them to confess, if they feel their self-examination and private discipline insufficient to quiet their troubled soul. When we see so many thousand habitual absentees from the Holy Eucharist, and hear one after another state their fears and their unfitness to communicate, surely we, who are put in charge of their souls, shall have their blood upon our heads if we fail to set before them the great privilege and means of grace which God and His Church offer them. When the invitation to confess is to *all* who cannot quiet their own conscience, shall we dare to say when men ought and when they ought not to *come*? Are we not bound to receive them as often as they

come? Thankful, indeed, may we well be that no man is *forced* to confess, and that Confession is purely voluntary; since no ordinance can be effectual for good to which a man comes otherwise than of his own free will, free from prejudice, with a desire to receive it, and with full faith in its efficacy. The Priest's duty, as defined by the English Church, in this matter simply is, to set before the troubled soul the existence and advantage of oral Confession, and to recommend it as a remedy for his disease; to exhort, entreat, and move the sick to confess, and to be ready to receive the Confession, but there to leave the matter. It is impossible for him to lay down rules concerning the frequency of Confession. So often as his people desire to confess, so often he is bound to receive their Confession. I conceive that it would be unlawful for him to refuse. I cannot think that he may turn one away. To this effect Dr. Isham writes in his work, "A Daily Office for the Sick:"—"It is fit for you to observe, that though our Church presseth particular confession to the priest only when conscience is disquieted with sins of deeper malignity, yet doth it not discountenance the more frequent use of it, and this, too, in so comprehensive a case as to take in great numbers that neglect it." Archbishop Sharp expresses the same opinion: "In all those instances where it can be useful, or serve any good purpose, *it is both commended and seriously advised*; that is to say, where a sinner either needs direction and assistance for the uncovering some sin that he labours under, or where he is so overwhelmed with the burden of his sins that he needs the help of some skilful person to explain to him the terms of the Gospel, to convince him from the Holy Scriptures

that his repentance (as far as a judgment can be made of it) is true and sincere, and will be accepted by God; and lastly, upon the full examination of his state, and his judgment thereupon, to give him the Absolution of the Church." And to the same effect is the statement of the Homily. After condemning "*their* auricular Confession," i. e. the doctrine and practice of Confession peculiar to the Roman Church, and shewing that certain texts of Scripture do not bear out the Roman doctrine or practice, the writer adds: "I do not say but that if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and shew the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's Word; but it is against the true Christian liberty that any man should be *bound* to the numbering of his sins, *as it hath been used heretofore* in the time of blindness and ignorance."

And if, as I conceive to be the case, a law to regulate a practice is a certain proof of the existence of that practice, we have as strong evidence as we can desire that the Church contemplates the use of Confession by her members. In the 113th of the Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, agreed upon in the Synod of 1603, and still in force, provision is made to secure the secrecy of Confession, by threatening one of the heaviest Ecclesiastical penalties against any Priest who shall reveal a sin committed to his trust in Confession. "If any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister, for the unburdening of his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him, we do straitly charge and admonish the said Minister, that he do not at any



time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever any crime or offence so committed to his trust and secrecy, (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same,) under pain of irregularity.” “ And *pain of irregularity*, as the Canonists tells us, not only doth deprive a man of all his *spiritual promotions* for the present time, but makes him utterly incapable of any for the time to come ; and therefore it is the greatest penalty, *except degradation from the Priesthood*, which possibly a Clergyman can be subject to<sup>b</sup>.” I say, that a law to regulate the Priest’s conduct concerning Confession is the very strongest possible evidence that the practice of Confession is contemplated by the English Church.

The 19th Canon of the Irish Church may be added as a corroborative authority. In the year 1634 the English Canons were introduced into Ireland with certain alterations. It must be remembered that the Irish Church at that period decidedly leaned to Puritanism ; and that the Irish Canons were drawn up by Bishop Bramhall, and approved of by the Primate Ussher, two of the greatest opponents that Rome ever had. And therefore it is not a little remarkable, and at the same time a proof that private Confession is not necessarily peculiar to the Roman Church, to find the practice of private Confession recommended in such decided terms. “ Canon XIX. Warning to be given beforehand for the Communion.—Whereas every lay person is bound to receive the Holy Communion thrice every year, and many, notwithstanding, do not receive the Sacrament once in a year, we do require every Minister to give warning to his Parishioners publicly

<sup>b</sup> Dr. Peter Heylin on the Creed, p. 486.



in the Church at Morning Prayer, the Sunday before every time of his administering the Holy Sacrament, for the better preparation of themselves ; which said warning he enjoin the said Parishioners to accept and obey, under the penalty and danger of the law. And the Minister of every Parish, and in Cathedral and Collegiate Churches some principal Minister of the Church, shall, the afternoon before the said administration, give warning by the tolling of the bell, or otherwise, that if any have any scruple of conscience, or desire the special ministry of reconciliation, he may afford it to those that need it. And to this end the people are often to be exhorted to enter into a special examination of the state of their own souls ; and that finding themselves either extremely dull, or much troubled in mind, they do resort unto God's Ministers, to receive from them as well advice and counsel for the quieting of their dead hearts, and the subduing of those corruptions whereunto they have been subject, as the benefit of Absolution likewise, for the quieting of their consciences, by the power of the keys which Christ hath committed to His Ministers for that purpose."

But to return to the documents relating more strictly to the English Church. In the Articles of Enquiry made by Bishops at their Visitations, we find constant reference to Confession. In 1619, Bishop Overall enquires : " Whether doth your Minister, before the several times of the administration of the Lord's Supper, admonish and exhort his parishioners, if they have their consciences troubled and disquieted, to resort unto him or to some other learned Minister, and open his grieffe, that hee may receive such ghostly counsell and comfort, as his conscience may be re-

lieved, and by the Minister he may receive the benefit of Absolution, to the quiet of his conscience, and avoiding of scruple?" In 1636, the Bishop of Peterborough enquires: "Doth your Minister . . . commonly premonish his parishioners, if they be troubled in conscience, to confess and open their griefs to him, that they may receive the benefit of Absolution?" The same enquiry is made in 1636 by the Bishop of Norwich. In 1638, Bishop Montague enquires: "Doth the Minister comfort the sick person, as concerning his soul's health, his state to Godward? Doth he, upon hearing of his confession, which he shall persuade him to make, absolve him from his sins? and hath he at any time discovered any part of his confession?" And in the Convocation of the year 1640, it was ordered that at all Episcopal and Archidiaconal Visitations this enquiry should be made of the Churchwardens: "Have you ever heard that your said Priest or Minister hath revealed and made known at any time to any person whatsoever any crime or offence committed to his trust and secrecy, either in extremity of sickness, *or in any other case whatsoever*, (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this land? &c.) Declare the name of the offender, when and by whom you heard the same." In 1686, in the Visitation Articles of the Diocese of Ely, we find: "Doth the Minister visit the sick? doth he, *upon their confession*, repentance, and faith, (being thereunto desired,) absolve them?"

Another corroborative proof is to be found in the Treatises on Confession, written by Bishops or other Divines of our Church, and the directions for making a Confession scattered here and there through the popular books of devotion: such as Bishop Duppa's

directions published in Bishop Jeremy Taylor's "Golden Grove;" and Bishop Baily's, in the "Practical Piety;" Bishop Sanderson's, in "The Nine Cases of Conscience;" Dr. Isham's, in the "Daily Office for the Sick;" Bishop Wilson's, of Sodor and Man, in *Parochialia*, and also in his Sermons; and Bishop Stearne's, in the *Tractatus de Visitatione Infirmorum*.

And the last piece of evidence that I shall bring forward is, some examples of the practice and use of Confession from the account of the last days of most faithful and attached members of the English Church. Isaac Walton, in his Life of Richard Hooker, informs us: "About one day before his death, Dr. Saravia, *who knew the very secrets of his soul*, (for they were supposed to be confessors to each other,) came to him, and after a conference of the benefit, the necessity, and safety of the Church's absolution, it was resolved the Doctor should give him both that and the Sacrament the day following. To which end the Doctor came, and *after a short retirement and privacy*, they two returned to the company, and then the Doctor gave him, and some of those friends which were with him, the blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus." In 1607, Dr. Reynolds, who appeared for the Dissenters at the Hampton Court Conference, "on his death-bed *conformed himself to the Church ceremonies*, and earnestly desired absolution in the form prescribed by the Rubric<sup>c</sup>." In 1623, Bishop Cosin, in his funeral sermon on Mrs. Dorothy Holmes, says: "Her preparation to her end was by humble contrition *and hearty confession of her sins*; which, when she had done, she received the benefit of abso-

<sup>c</sup> Collier's Eccles. Hist. ii. 694; and see Wood's *Ath. Oxon.* i. 340 and 377.

lution, according to God's ordinances and the religious institutions of our Church." James, seventh Earl of Derby, on the morning of the day on which he was put to death by the rebels in 1651, "commanded Mr. Greenhaugh to read the Decalogue, and at the end of every Commandment *made his confession*, and then received absolution and the Sacrament." Evelyn, in his Diary, under the date March 16, 1685, referring to his daughter whom he had that day buried, writes: "On looking into her closet, it is incredible what a number of collections she had made from historians, poets, travellers, &c., but, above all, devotions, contemplations, and resolutions on these contemplations, found under her hand in a book most methodically disposed; prayers, meditations, and devotions on particular occasions, with many pretty letters to her confidants; one to a divine (not named), to whom she writes that he would be her ghostly father, and would not despise her for her many errors and the many imperfections of her youth, *but beg of God to give her courage to acquaint him with all her faults*, imploring his assistance and spiritual directions. *I well remember she had often desired me to recommend her to such a person*; but I did not think fit to do it *as yet*, seeing her apt to be scrupulous, and knowing the great innocency and integrity of her life<sup>d</sup>." This is most valuable evidence. Twenty-four years after the final revision of the Book of Common Prayer, a most pious and faithful lay member of the English Church, who writes in very strong terms against Roman errors, tells us that his daughter had frequently asked him to recommend to her a Divine to whom she might go for Confession, and spiritual

<sup>d</sup> See *Visitatio Infirmorum*, Introduction, p. xcvi.



counsel and advice. He says that he had delayed to recommend such a person,—not because Confession was contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Church of England, not even because it was an unusual thing,—but simply because, “*as yet,*” in his judgment, Confession would not prove beneficial to her. He does not even blame her for having chosen, of her own free will and without his knowledge, a Divine to whom to confess. As she was nineteen years old, he seems to have considered her to have been of sufficiently ripe age to select her own Confessor. This surely is strong evidence that Confession was *then* considered lawful, and was not unusual in the Church. And, if then, why not *now*? Bishop Wilson, in his meditation on the death of his wife in 1705, returns thanks to God for “His mercies to her in the time of sickness. . . . For all the spiritual comforts the gracious God did vouchsafe her, the opportunities of receiving the blessed Sacrament, the prayers of the faithful, *the ministry of absolution*, and the assistance of her pious friends at the hour of her death.” And of Bishop Bull we read, that “a few days before his death, February 17, 1710, he received absolution, when, in the presence of several persons, *he made a solemn confession and declaration* of the conduct of his whole life, and so took his leave of the world in a manner the most edifying that could be.”

I believe that numerous other examples could be produced. But sufficient evidence surely has been brought forward to prove that Confession is taught and practised by the English Church: “The Church of England,” says Archbishop Wake, and his words are fully borne out by the statements I have adduced, “refuses no sort of confession, either public or private, which



may be any way necessary to the quieting of men's consciences, or to the exercising that power of binding and loosing which our Saviour Christ hath left to His Church. . . . We exhort men, if they have any the least doubt or scruple, nay, sometimes though they have none, but especially before they receive the Holy Sacrament, to confess their sins. We propose to them the benefits, not only of ghostly advice how to manage their repentance, but the great comfort of absolution too, as soon as they shall have completed it. . . . When we visit our sick, we never fail to exhort them to make a *special confession* of their sins to him that ministers to them, and when they have done it, the absolution is so full, that the Church of Rome itself could not desire to add anything to it<sup>e</sup>." And in "The Whole Duty of Man" we find the following observations on the exhortation to Holy Communion: "This is surely such advice as should not be neglected, neither at the time of coming to the Sacrament, *nor any other* when we are under any fear or reasons of doubt concerning the state of our souls. And for want of this, many have run into very great mischief, having let the doubt fester so long, that it hath either plunged them into deep distress of conscience, or, which is worse, they have, to still that disquiet within them, betaken themselves to all sinful pleasures, and so quite cast off all care of their souls."

And here let me be allowed to say that, if Confession is not sanctioned by the English Church, there must exist somewhere in her Authorized Formularies a condemnation of it. Such a condemnation I cannot find. I can read in the Homilies a condemnation of

<sup>e</sup> Exposition of the Doctrine of the Church of England, pp. 42 and 43, 4to. 1688.

the *compulsory* and *periodical* Confession used by the Church of Rome; I can find Extreme Unction, Masses for the Dead, lifting up and worshipping the Sacrament, worshipping of Images and Reliques, and compulsory celibacy, condemned and forbidden in the Articles: but where is to be found one word, I do not say in condemnation, but even in disparagement of Confession?

It may be that at some period of the Church's history the Ordinance of Confession has been neglected, and even has fallen into disuse. But the same may be said of other Ordinances and other practices, and no one in his senses would argue the non-existence of a thing from its disuse. To take as an example, the observance of Good Friday, which is ordered by the Church and enforced by the laws of the land. In the time of the Georges, the very time at which Confession was partially dropped, Good Friday had ceased to be observed. Bishop Porteus, aided by Archbishop Cornwallis, set about the revival of its observance amid much obloquy. Now it might have been said of Good Friday, as some in these days say of Confession, that as it had been allowed to be neglected, it was now no part of the Church's system. And it may be useful to many persons in our time, when so much clamour is raised against those who are honestly putting forth the teaching of the Church of England on subjects that have been overlooked, to read how precisely similar was the clamour raised against the Archbishop, and especially against Bishop Porteus, for their attempt, happily successful, to get Good Friday decently observed. In *Restituta*, edited by Sir Egerton Brydges, vol. iv. p. 416, we read: "It is inconceivable the clamour, uproar, and rage which

the order from the Archbishop to observe decently Good Friday, in 1777, gave to the faction: for many weeks together the presbyterian newspapers were full of abuse and lies relating to Archbishop Cornwallis and his family; and when one expected it should have subsided, two months after the day was observed, out comes the following long and severe paragraph in the London 'Evening Post' of May 29, 1777: 'On the late announcing a sort of outlandish name, one Porteus, to an English Bishopric, I naturally asked what was become of all our old learned and venerable English Clergy, of the best families, that they were all passed over with so much *contempt* and *injustice*? I was informed that the young Prelate was a man distinguished by his Majesty's own judgment, and exalted by his mere personal favour, as one of the most promising talents and disposition to fill the sacred office in a manner the most suitable to his own *pious* feelings and sentiments, and the mild and liberal plan of government adopted by him. A *countenance* and a *character* so *clear* of cynical and ecclesiastical pride and austerity could not escape the penetrating observation and the generous sympathy of the Royal Patron. A Charles has had his favourite Laud. Similar characters and principles will always attract each other. It has indeed been insinuated, that, over and above the great merit of *Scottish extraction* and interest, he has distinguished himself as a ministerial writer in the public papers almost as much as by the stretch of Church power and arrogance in shutting up the city shops on *Good Friday*; which, as a sanctified, hypocritical triumph over both reason and Scripture,—the civil and religious right of Englishmen,—could not but be highly acceptable to

tyrants and hypocrites of every denomination, particularly at court. By this experiment on the tame and servile temper of the times, it is thought the *Host* and *Crucifix* may be elevated to prostrate crowds in dirty streets some years sooner than could have been reasonably expected. And when a Wedderburne shall be keeper of the King's conscience and seals, and a Porteus of the spiritual keys, as the *alterius orbis papa*, there is no doubt but our consciences, and our property too, will be effectually taken care of.'” Happily the common sense and religious feeling of the people, in spite of this violent and gross abuse, acquiesced in a revival of the observance of Good Friday. And so it will ever be. Shallow and specious arguments and clamour will in the end be of no avail. And when a few years more shall have passed, we believe that English Churchmen will receive and act up to the Church's teaching on Confession as universally and as heartily as they now observe the once derided and neglected Fast of Good Friday.

In conclusion, a few words seem to be called for on the subject of Direction. We know that there is a morbid desire in many persons to shift their burden from their own shoulders to the shoulders of another, and to place their affairs under another's guidance, in order to avoid the trouble and responsibility of acting for themselves. And it is not to be denied, that in the business of salvation such a desire, if encouraged, must enervate the soul. I am persuaded that the Church of England is sternly opposed to the practice of Direction, and that her Priests are bound to refuse to guide in every case where the person seeking advice is far more likely to form a right judgment than



the Priest. I am persuaded that the Priest's duty is simply to hear the Confession of sins, to give Absolution, and to add spiritual counsel and advice in respect to the sins confessed, with a view either to comfort the penitent if he be cast down or timid about the future, or to point out the manner of avoiding the sins for the time to come. To act as a guide in the plans of daily life, occupations, amusement, study, and in choice of friends, or in any difficulty which by the ordinary aid of God's grace the Christian can determine and ought to determine by the guidance of his own conscience, the Word of God, and the Church's rules, is no part, as I conceive, of the Office of a Priest, and can only be injurious to himself, to the well-being of all who seek to him for such guidance, and to the Church at large.

At the same time I conceive that the penitent may be so disordered and debilitated in soul by sin as to need guidance in his spiritual life in matters which the sound Christian could settle by the ordinary means. Daily experience shews us many so enfeebled in body by disease as to need the constant attendance of the physician, if not to prescribe remedies, at least to preserve health by assurances that all is going on well. I can imagine, indeed I have known, souls which have been so steeped in sin and imbued with sin as to need incessant care on the part of the Priest, during their repentance and recovery, to prevent them falling into utter despair. Is it not the Priest's office in this case, as it is the Physician's in the other, if not always to give Absolution, to lead the soul to health by assurances that all is going on well? Are we to leave the soul, on first recovering from the fever of sin, to walk unaided, as if it were in its pris-



tine strength? So long as the soul longs for Absolution, ghostly counsel, and advice, where has the Church prescribed a law that her Priests should withhold their services? Has she not directed her Priests to say, "If any man cannot quiet his own conscience herein, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief." If the penitent's needs are *habitual*, where is the churlish law to forbid the *habitual* application of the remedy?

I do not say that it is not the Priest's duty to lead the penitent to wean himself more and more from this remedy; I do not doubt that there may be cases in which it is the Priest's part to point out to the penitent the advisableness of less frequent Confession: I only say, that to those who need it the Church of England nowhere denies it. I would strengthen my own view by sober words, spoken in a time of trial to the Church by one of her most attached and faithful sons, who then was standing on the edge of the grave, and is now called to his rest<sup>f</sup>: "If the Priest deal thus with meek and gentle spirits, who come to him to be healed of their wounds, is he to act differently towards members of his flock upon any other occasion, who seek his help? It may be considered that he is at all times preparing them for a devout attendance at the Lord's Table, and using a similar exhortation to that which he delivers in the Church. But, without reference to this Holy Mystery, and immediate preparation for it, should any feel their consciences hardened with a sense of sin, or perplexed with doubt and fear, or in any respect weary and

<sup>f</sup> The Rev. Thomas Bowdler, in a pamphlet styled "Thoughts on Confession and Absolution."

heavy laden, and therefore such as the merciful Saviour would invite to Him with promise of refreshment and rest, should they not come to one of those who are appointed to speak for Him and in His Name? And one who has opened his heart to his spiritual father in ante-sacramental confession, can scarce fail to continue a frequent communication with him for obtaining counsel and direction; relief in anxious fears, and inward questionings how far his heart is right before God; and confession of frailty and imperfection, and of stumblings which will alarm a tender conscience more than grievous falls one who walks heedlessly. And any who have been turned out of an evil course, and brought to penitence and godly living, and have learned to look to their pastor for lessons of progress in holiness, will gladly consult him, and ask his aid in prayer, and assurance of pardon and grace. Some will open their minds more freely than others, and to such he will act more freely the part of a Confessor; and if he finds any worn and harassed, and earnestly desirous to avail themselves of that power to remit sins which, by virtue of the laying on of hands, they believe him to possess, will he refuse to give them, by the Ministry of God's Holy Word, the absolution which may dismiss them in peace?"

Thanks be to God.



## APPENDIX,

CONTAINING QUOTATIONS FROM DIVINES OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH, FROM THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT DAY.

I WISH the reader to bear in mind that I do not advance these quotations as *proofs of doctrine*, but simply as proofs that a certain doctrine has been held and taught in the Church of England, by men of various opinions, and through the whole period of the Church's history since the Reformation. I wish it also to be distinctly understood that I am not seeking to identify my views with those of other persons; and that I do not adopt, or hold myself responsible for, the arguments or expressions of the authors from whom I have quoted. I have brought forward many simply to prove the fact, that men who have held the very highest views on Absolution, and have expressed those views in the very strongest language, have not been barely tolerated in the Church of England, but have been raised to its high places.

The list of authors might have been considerably enlarged, if time had allowed. As it is, I have quoted mostly from those authors who have spoken strongly against the Church of Rome, and from the recognised writers on the Book of Common Prayer. The Laudian divines have been quoted sparingly, because their views are notorious. The Nonjuring divines have for the same reason been altogether passed over.

Of the Laudian divines, however, Bishop Cosin and Bishop Sparrow seemed to claim attention from the fact that they were on the Commission at the Savoy Conference when the Prayer-book was last revised. And I think that those who make so much of Chillingworth and his sayings about "the Religion of Protestants," are bound to give attention to his views on Absolution.

The various authors quoted may hold and teach the doctrine of Sacerdotal Absolution more or less strongly, and may express their views more or less guardedly, and may differ among themselves as to the precise meaning of the term "judicial Absolution," and the proportionate benefits of private and public absolutions. But all will be found to teach that the priest's absolution is one means by which God's pardon is given to the penitent, and that the priest has the power to forgive sins in the Name of God and in the Person of Christ.

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#### ARCHBISHOP CRANMER.

"Good children, you shall stedfastly believe all those things which God's ministers shall speak unto you from the mouth and by the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ. *And whatsoever they do to you, as when they baptize you, when they give you absolution,* and distribute to you the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, THEN YOU SHALL SO ESTEEM AS IF CHRIST HIMSELF, IN HIS OWN PERSON, DID SPEAK AND MINISTER UNTO YOU. For Christ hath commanded His ministers to do this unto you; and He Himself, although you see Him not with your bodily eyes, is present with His ministers, and worketh by the Holy Ghost in the administration of His Sacraments. . . .

"Now God doth not speak to us with a voice sounding out of heaven; but *He hath given* the keys of the kingdom of



heaven, and THE AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SIN, to the ministers of the Church. Wherefore let him that is a sinner go to one of them. Let him know and confess his sin, and pray him that, according to God's commandments, he will give him absolution, and comfort him with the word of grace, and forgiveness of his sins. AND WHEN THE MINISTER DOETH SO, THEN I OUGHT STEDFASTLY TO BELIEVE THAT MY SINS ARE TRULY FORGIVEN ME IN HEAVEN. And such a faith is able to stand strong in all skirmishes and assaults of our mortal enemy, the devil; forasmuch as it is builded upon a sure rock—that is to say, upon the certain word and work of God. For he that is absolved, knoweth for a surety that his sins be forgiven him by the minister. And he knoweth assuredly also, that the minister hath authority from God Himself so to do. And thirdly, he knoweth that God hath made this promise to His ministers, and said to them, 'To whom ye forgive sins on earth, to him also they shall be forgiven in heaven.'

“Wherefore, good children, give good ear to this doctrine; and *when your sins do make you afraid and sad*, THEN seek and desire absolution and forgiveness of your sins of the ministers which have received a commission and commandment from Christ Himself to forgive men their sins, and then your consciences shall have peace, tranquillity, and quietness. But he that doth not obey this counsel, but being either blind or proud, doth despise the same, he shall not find forgiveness of his sins, neither in his own good works, nor yet in painful chastisements of his body, or any other thing whereto God hath not promised remission of sins. *Wherefore despise not absolution*, for it is the commandment and ordinance of God; and the Holy Spirit of God is present, and causeth these things to take effect in us, and to work our salvation.”—(*On the Authority of the Keys*, published in “The Catechism.” *Tracts of Anglican Fathers*, vol. i. pp. 22, 26.)

Cranmer put forth the “First Book of Homilies” in 1547, and “The Catechism,” out of which the above passage is extracted, in 1548.

At Cranmer's death, among his papers was found an article on Penitence, corrected by him ; in which "auricular confession" in private to the ministers of the Church is said to be very useful and necessary. And it is stated that "in private absolution the priest has power to absolve one confessing from all his sins, even those which are wont to be called 'reserved cases ;' only that for manifest crimes (if he be brought to justice) he is subject to public judgments." (See Art. 8, Cranmer's Works, vol. iv. p. 281, 3, ed. Jenkyns.)

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BISHOP RIDLEY.

"CONFESSIO unto the minister which is able to instruct, correct, and inform the weak, wounded, and ignorant conscience, indeed I ever thought might do much good to Christ's congregation, and so, I assure you, I think to this day."—(*Letter to one Master West: Works, Parker Society, p. 318.*)

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WILLIAM TURNER,

Dean of Wells ; one of the Reformers.

"WE do *not utterly* forsake auricular or ear confession ; but the additions of man's traditions are parted and sundered from wholesome doctrine, as chaff is from the corn. . . .

"If we perceive not, and be ignorant in anything that pertaineth unto a Christian man's living, and is not plainly taught in the open sermon, we must go to the curate, to hear of his mouth the judgments and testimonies of the Lord. If any doubt arise in our consciences, whom ought we rather to go to and ask counsel, than of the head man of our souls? Furthermore, when we be faint-hearted, or have no courage, and are vexed with temptations, *we may not despise the remedy that God ordained.* Thou hast God's word, Matt. xviii., John xx., "Whose sins ye remit," &c. Whom would not these fatherly promises provoke and allure

to confession, when the conscience is lifted up and established, not by man's word, but by God's word spoken by man's mouth?

"But these which follow be man's additions, viz., to bind a man's conscience with a law, and to compel him to confess all his sins, with all their circumstances, at a certain time, to his own priest or curate, whatsoever he be. Hereby men's consciences be marked with a hot iron. . . .

"Let the bishops appoint learned men to hear confessions, and not blockheads, and then the people shall come to the priests by heaps and swarms. . . .

"Furthermore, as concerning the receiving and keeping behind certain causes and chances<sup>a</sup>, let the head rulers in the Church tell a cause why they do differ and abhor so greatly the Apostles' rites and teachings. . . . In John xx. He saith unto them, 'Take ye the Holy Ghost, and whatsoever sins ye forgive, they shall be forgiven.' Where is here any difference in *this* matter of *forgiveness* between a bishop and a simple priest? Is it hard to know what this is to say, 'Whose sins ye remit, they shall be remitted unto them?' This is the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles."—(*The Old and New Learning. Tracts of Anglican Fathers*, vol. ii. p. 196.)

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THOMAS BECON, D.D.

BORN 1511; died 1567 or 1570; called in Mr. Darling's Cyclopædia "a Puritan writer."

"And when he (the minister) shall rehearse unto you the most sweet and comfortable words of absolution, give earnest faith unto them, being undoubtedly persuaded that *your sins AT THAT TIME BE ASSUREDLY FORGIVEN YOU, as though God Himself had spoken them*, according to this saying of Christ, 'He that heareth you, heareth Me;' and again, 'Whose sins ye forgive, are forgiven them.'"—(*Early Works, Parker Society*, p. 101.)

<sup>a</sup> Dean Turner says in another place,—"The Roman Church gives the bishop authority to receive and keep only to himself the forgiveness of cer-

tain sins, by the reason of their great enormity, the which a simple priest cannot absolve, but in the point of death."

The very same words are repeated at the end of his treatise called "The Castle of Comfort."

"*Whensoever the minister of the Lord's Word, be it privately or openly, shall rehearse unto men the sweet and comfortable words of God's mercy towards all them that repent in faith, they ought to give earnest faith unto them, being undoubtedly persuaded that their sins AT THAT TIME BE ASSUREDLY FORGIVEN THEM, as though God Himself had spoken these words, according to this saying of Christ, 'He that heareth you, heareth Me.'*"—(*Catechism and other Works, Parker Society*).

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DR. GEORGE HAKEWILL.

"ANSWER to the Treatise or Letter of Carier," printed in 1616.

"As for the people, they stand bound, as often as they meet in their solemn assemblies, to a public and general confession, howbeit they are indeed freed from the *necessity* of that which we call *auricular*, though not from the *possibility*, as you falsely pretend. For as we enforce none, if they come not, as knowing that force may work upon the body, but never upon the will; so we exclude none, if they come with a true penitent heart, or out of the scruple of conscience, either to seek counsel, *being ignorant of the quality or quantity of their sin*; or comfort against despair for sin known and acknowledged. In this case, the only imparting of a man's mind to a trusty friend, like the opening of a festered sore, cannot but bring content to a soul so anguished and perplexed; but much more if the ulcer be disclosed to a skilful and faithful pastor of the soul, who is no less able than willing, as well to understand the nature of the disease, *as by warrant of divine ordinance to apply the remedy*. And sure I see not but, the minister *standing in the place of God*, as His ambassador, and *pronouncing absolution*, upon humble and hearty repentance, *as from God*, it should prove a marvellous great ease and settlement to a poor distracted and distressed conscience: in which regard our Church hath



well ordained in one of the exhortations before the Communion, 'If there be any of you,' &c. ; and in the Visitation of the Sick, if the sick person feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, he is willed to make a special confession, and the minister there to absolve him in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; which is an absolution only declaratory, conditional, and ministerial : but the Church of Rome, not content herewith, challengeth to herself herein a power judicial, which is in truth individually annexed to the person and office of Him who is Judge both of quick and dead."—(p. 266.)

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DR. RICHARD CRAKANTHORP.

BORN 1567 ; died 1624. A very strong writer against the errors of the Church of Rome, and in defence of the English Church.

"*Confessionem privatam, quo in sinum, et si vis, in aurem presbyteri, angorem quis animi sui pro perpetratis uno pluribusque peccatis exonerat, etiam peccatoris talis post seriam, et non fucatam pœnitentiam ab eo factam, Absolutionem per Ecclesiæ clavis Presbyteris omnibus commissas, et probat et docet Ecclesia nostra. . . . Privatam tam Confessionem quàm Absolutionem non abrogavimus: nedum impii, ut tu calumniaris, abrogavimus.*"—(*Defensio Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ contra Archiepiscopum Spalatensem. Anglo-Cath. Lib., p. 565.*)

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BISHOP LANCELOT ANDREWES.

BORN 1555 ; died 1626. Author of the "Answer to Bellarmine," in defence of the English Church, and against the errors of the Church of Rome.

"'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted.' Now only a word of the third part, *of the efficacy*, or, as the lawyers term it, of God's ratihibition.

"Wherein God willing more abundantly to shew to them that should be partakers of it the stableness of His counsel, He hath penned it exceedingly effectually, and indeed



strangely to them that deeply consider of it; which He hath so done to the end that thereby such poor sinners as shall be partakers of it might have strong consolation of perfect assurance, not to waver in the hope which is set before them.

“And to that end, even for comfort, I will only point at four things in the inditing of it, all expressing the efficacy of it in more than common manner.

“1. The *order* is this, that ‘*ye remit*’ standeth first, and ‘*are remitted*’ second. It is St. Chrysostom’s note, that it beginneth in earth, and that heaven followeth after. So that whereas in prayer and in other parts of religion it is ‘*as in heaven, so in earth,*’ here it is ‘*as in earth, so in heaven.*’ *A terra judicandi principalem auctoritatem sumit cælum.* For the judge sits on earth; the Lord follows His servant, and whatever judgment the servant gives here below, that judgment the Lord ratifies above,” saith he.

“2. The time is this, that it is ‘*are remitted*’ in the present tense; there is no delay between, no deferring or holding in suspense, but the absolution pronounced upon earth, ‘*are remitted,*’ presently they are remitted; that He saith not, hereafter they shall be, but they *are already remitted.*

“3. The manner, in setting down of the two words. For it is so delivered by Christ as if He were content it should be accounted their act, and that the apostles were the agents in it, and Himself but patient and suffered it to be done. For the apostles’ part is delivered in the active, ‘*ye remit,*’ and His own in the passive, ‘*are remitted.*’

“4. The certainty; which in the identity of the word, in not changing the word, but keeping the selfsame in both parts. For Christ hath not thus indited it: Whose sins ye wish or ye pray for; or, Whose sins ye declare to be remitted; but ‘Whose sins ye remit;’ using no other word in the apostles’ than He useth in His own. And to all these in St. Matthew He addeth His solemn protestation of ‘Verily, verily;’ or, ‘Amen, Amen,’ that so it is and shall be. And all to certify us that He fully meaneth with effect to ratify in heaven that is done in earth, to the sure and stedfast comfort of them that shall partake it.”—(*Sermons*, vol. v. p. 102.)

## DR. JOHN DONNE,

BORN 1573 ; Dean of St. Paul's, 1620 ; died 1631.

“‘I will confess my sins unto the Lord,’ says David: sins are not confessed, if they be not confessed to Him; and if they be confessed to Him, in case of necessity it will suffice, though they be confessed to no other. Indeed, a confession is directed upon God, though it be made to His minister: *if God had appointed His angels or His saints to absolve Me, AS HE HATH HIS MINISTERS, I would confess to them. . . .*

“Men come not willingly to this manifestation of themselves; *nor are they to be brought in chains, as they do in the Roman Church, by a necessity of an exact enumeration of all their sins; but to be led with that sweetness with which our Church proceeds, in appointing sick persons, if they feel their consciences troubled with any weighty matter, to make a special confession, and to receive absolution at the hands of the priest; and then to be remembered, that every coming to the Communion is as serious a thing as our transmigration out of this world, and we should do as much here, for the settling of our conscience, as upon our death-bed.*”—(*Sermon lvi., vol. ii. p. 563.*)

“For confession, we *require public* confession in the congregation; and in time of sickness, upon the death-bed, we enjoin *private and particular* confession, if the conscience be oppressed; and if any man do think that that which is necessary for him upon his death-bed, *is necessary every time he comes to the Communion, and so come to such a confession, if anything lie upon him, as often as he comes to the Communion, WE BLAME NOT, WE DISSUADE NOT, WE DISCOUNSEL NOT, that tenderness of conscience, and that SAFE PROCEEDING in the soul.*”—(*Sermons, vol. v. p. 434.*)

“Do I feel *the remission of sins applied to me* when I hear the gracious promises of the Gospel shed upon repentant sinners by the mouth of His Minister? Have I a true and solid consolation when I receive the seal of His pardon in the Sacrament? Beloved, not in any moral integrity, not in keeping the conscience of an honest man, in general, BUT

IN USING WELL THE MEANS ORDAINED BY CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AM I JUSTIFIED.”—(*Sermon, S. John v. 22.*)

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BISHOP LEWIS BAILY.

BISHOP of Bangor. Born at Carmarthen; educated at Oxford. In 1611 he became minister of Evesham, in Worcestershire; consecrated Bishop of Bangor, 1616; died 1632. He is very strong indeed in condemning the errors of the Church of Rome.

Bishop Baily wrote one of the most popular books of devotion ever possessed by the English Church,—“The Practice of Piety, directing a Christian how to walk that he may please God.” I quote from *the fifty-first edition*, published in 1714; but I have seen the *seventy-second* edition referred to.

“(Table of Contents.)—‘Of the comfortable use of true Absolution.’

“*The sick person ought now to send for some godly and religious pastor.*

“In any wise, remember (if conveniently it may be) to send for some godly and religious *pastor*, not only to *pray* for thee at thy death (for God in such a case hath promised to *hear the prayers of the righteous prophets<sup>b</sup> and elders of the Church<sup>c</sup>*), but also upon thy *confession* and *unfeigned repentance*, to *absolve* thee of thy sins. For as Christ hath given him a *calling to baptize thee unto repentance, for the remission of thy sins<sup>d</sup>*; so hath He likewise given him a *calling*, and *power<sup>e</sup>*, and *authority<sup>f</sup>* (upon repentance) to *absolve thee from thy sins. I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven<sup>g</sup>*. And

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xx. 7; Jer. xviii. 20, and xv. 1; 1 Sam. xii. 19, 23.

<sup>c</sup> St. James v. 14—16.

<sup>d</sup> St. Mark i. 4; Acts xix. 4.

<sup>e</sup> 1 Cor. v. 8.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Cor. x. 1.

<sup>g</sup> St. Matt. xvi. 19.

again, *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*<sup>h</sup>. And again, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained*<sup>i</sup>. This doctrine was as ancient in the Church as *Job*, for *Elihu* tells him, *That when God strikes a man with malady on his bed, so that his soul draweth near the grave, and his life to the buriers; if there be any messenger with him, or an interpreter, one of a thousand, to declare unto man his righteousness, then will he have mercy upon him*<sup>k</sup>, &c. And answerable hereunto (saith Saint James), *If the sick have committed sins, (upon his repentance, and the prayers of the elders,) they shall be forgiven him*<sup>l</sup>. *These have power to shut heaven*<sup>m</sup>, and to deliver (the scandalous impenitent sinner) to Satan: for the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to cast down, &c., and to have vengeance in readiness against all disobedience<sup>n</sup>. They have the key of loosing<sup>o</sup>, therefore the power of absolving.

“The bishops and pastors of the Church do not forgive sin by any absolute power<sup>p</sup> of their own, (for so only Christ their Master forgiveth sins,) but ministerially<sup>q</sup>, as the servants of Christ, and stewards, to whose fidelity their Lord and Master hath committed His keys, and that is, when they do declare and pronounce, either publickly or privately, by the Word of God, what bindeth, what looseth, and the mercies of God to penitent sinners, or His judgments to impenitent and obstinate persons; and so do apply the general promises or threatenings to the penitent or impenitent. For Christ<sup>r</sup> from heaven doth by them (as by His ministers on earth) declare whom He remitteth and bindeth, and to whom He will open the gates of heaven, and against whom He will shut them. And therefore it is not

<sup>h</sup> St. Matt. xviii. 18.

<sup>i</sup> St. John xx. 22, 23.

<sup>k</sup> Job xxxiii. 19—24.

<sup>l</sup> St. James v. 15.

<sup>m</sup> Rev. xi. 6.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. x. 4, &c.

<sup>o</sup> St. Matt. xvi. 19. “Ministri peccata remittunt non αὐτεξουσίως, sed ὀργανικῶς.”

<sup>p</sup> 1 Cor. v. 4.

<sup>q</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2; Acts xiii. 38.

<sup>r</sup> To this end saith Basil in *Asc. c. 13*: “Christus omnibus pastoribus et doctoribus Ecclesiæ, ἰσὴν παρέχει ἐξουσίαν, æqualem tribuit potestatem, cujus signum est quod omnes ea æquo ligant et solvunt, ut *Petrus*.” *Papists* dare not deny this. “Quilibet sacerdos (quantum est ex virtute clavium) habet potestatem indifferenter in omnes.”—*In Supplement. Thomæ*, iv. 6 verse.



said, *Whose sins ye signifie to be remitted, but Whose sins ye remit.* They then do remit sins, because *Christ by their ministry remitteth sins, as Christ by His disciples loosed Lazarus*<sup>s</sup>. And as no water could wash away *Naaman's* leprosie but the waters of *Jordan* (though other rivers were as clear), because the *promise* was annexed unto the waters of *Jordan*, and not to other rivers; so though another man may pronounce the *same words*, yet have they not the like *efficacy* and *power* to work on the conscience, as when they are pronounced from the mouth of *Christ's ministers*, because the *promise*<sup>t</sup> is annexed to the *Word* of God in their *mouths*; for them hath He *chosen*<sup>u</sup>, *separated*<sup>v</sup>, and *set apart*<sup>x</sup> for this *work*, and to them He hath committed the *ministry and word of reconciliation*<sup>y</sup>: by their *holy calling*<sup>z</sup> and *ordination*<sup>a</sup> they have received the *Holy Ghost*<sup>b</sup>, and the *ministerial power* of binding and loosing. They are *sent forth of the Holy Ghost for this work, whereunto He hath called them*<sup>c</sup>.

“And Christ gives His ministers power to forgive sins to the penitent in the same<sup>d</sup> words that He teacheth us in the Lord's Prayer to desire God to forgive us our sins: to assure all penitent sinners that God, by His minister's absolution, doth fully, through the merits of Christ's blood, forgive them all their sins. . . . So that what Christ decreeth in heaven, *in foro judicii*, the same He declareth on earth by His *reconciling ministers, in foro pœnitentiæ*. So that as God hath *reconciled the world to Himself by Jesus Christ: so hath He* (saith the Apostle) *given unto us the ministry of this reconciliation*<sup>e</sup>.

“He that sent them to *baptize*, saying, *Go and teach all nations, baptizing them, &c.*, sent them also to *remit sins*, saying, *As My Father sent Me, so send I you; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them*<sup>f</sup>, &c. As, therefore, none can *baptize*, (though he use the same *water and words*), but only the *lawful minister*, which Christ hath *called and authorized to this*

<sup>s</sup> St. John xi. 44.

<sup>t</sup> St. John xx. 23.

<sup>u</sup> Acts i. 24.

<sup>v</sup> Acts xiii. 2.

<sup>x</sup> Rom. i. 1.

<sup>y</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

<sup>z</sup> Acts xiii. 2; 1 Cor. i. 1; Heb. v. 4.

<sup>a</sup> Titus i. 5.

<sup>b</sup> St. John xx. 22, 23.

<sup>c</sup> Acts xiii. 24.

<sup>d</sup> ἄν τινῶν ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας. St. John xx. 23. Καὶ ἀφῆς ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18.

<sup>f</sup> St. John xx. 21, 23.



*divine and ministerial function*; so, though others may comfort with good words, yet none can *absolve*<sup>g</sup> from sin but only those to whom Christ hath committed the holy ministry and word of reconciliation<sup>h</sup>: and of their *absolution* Christ speaketh, *He that heareth you heareth Me*. In a doubtful title thou wilt ask the counsel of a skilful lawyer; in peril of sickness thou wilt know the advice of the learned physician: and is there no danger in dread of damnation, for a sinner to be his own judge?

“Judicious Calvin<sup>i</sup> teacheth this point of doctrine most plainly. Beza<sup>k</sup> highly commended this practice. And Luther<sup>l</sup> saith, *that he had rather lose a thousand worlds than suffer private confession to be thrust out of the Church*. Our Church hath ever most soundly maintain’d the truth of this doctrine; but most justly abolish’d the tyrannous and antichristian abuse of Popish auricular confessions, which they thrust upon the souls of Christians, as an *expiatory sacrifice*, and a *meritorious satisfaction* for sin; racking their consciences to confess, when they feel no distress, and to enumerate *all* their sins, which is impossible; that by this means they might *dive* into the secrets of all men, which oft-times hath prov’d pernicious, not only to *private persons*, but also to *publick estates*. . . . But the *antichristian abuse* of this divine ordinance should not abolish the *lawful use* thereof betwixt Christians and their pastors in *cases of distress of conscience*, for which it was chiefly ordained.

“And verily there is not any means more excellent to *humble a proud heart*, nor to *raise up an humble spirit*, than this spiritual conference between the pastors and the people committed to their charge. If any *sin* therefore troubleth thy *conscience*, confess it to *God’s minister*; ask his *counsel*, and if thou dost truly repent, RECEIVE HIS ABSOLUTION. AND THEN DOUBT NOT, IN FORO CONSCIENTIÆ, BUT THY SINS BE AS VERILY FORGIVEN ON EARTH, AS IF THOU DIDST HEAR CHRIST HIMSELF, IN FORO JUDICII, PRONOUNCING THEM TO BE FORGIVEN IN HEAVEN. ‘He that heareth you, heareth

<sup>g</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 7, 10; Heb. v. 41.

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

<sup>i</sup> Institutes, bk. III. ch. iv. sect. 12.

<sup>k</sup> In *Antith. Papatus et Christianismi*, p. 66.

<sup>l</sup> Vol. vi. p. 109.

Me<sup>m</sup>.' Try this, and tell me, whether thou shalt not find more ease in thy conscience than can be expressed in words. Did prophane men consider the *dignity* of this divine calling, they would the more honour the *calling*, and reverence the *persons*."—(pp. 432—439.)

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GEORGE DOWNAME, D.D.

BISHOP of Derry, 1616 ; died 1634.

It may bespeak the attention of some people to Bishop Downame's views of Absolution, if I briefly quote his views upon the subject of Baptism. "Neither are any," he says, "regenerated, but such as are elected ; nor any justified, but such as shall be saved." I quote from the Rev. W. Goode's "Effects of Infant Baptism," p. 339, 2nd ed. Another treatise by Bishop Downame is called *Papa Antichristus*. These facts may as well be borne in mind while the reader peruses this extract from Bishop Downame's sermon "On the Dignity and Duty of the Ministry," preached in 1608 ; and which was no hindrance to his elevation to the bishopric of Derry in 1616.

"Neither hath the Lord, as appeareth by the story of Cornelius, committed the preaching of the Gospel to angels, but to His ministers, whom we are bound to hear and to receive, not only as angels of God, but even as Christ Jesus<sup>n</sup>.

"And as touching their authoritie ; to the ministers, saith Chrysostome, being conversant on earth, is committed the administration of things in heaven ; and they have received such an authority as God never communicated to the angels. For to which of the angels hath God said at any time, which He hath said to His ministers, 'Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, it shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, it shall be

<sup>m</sup> St. Luke x. 16. The capitals are mine.

<sup>n</sup> Gal. iv. 14.

loosed in heaven<sup>o</sup>?' And again, 'Whose sins you forgive, they shall be forgiven; and whose sins ye retain, they shall be retained<sup>p</sup>.' On which words Theophylact's annotation is something hyperbolical, but, in a qualified sense, true: 'Mark me,' saith he, 'the dignity of priests, that it is divine; for it belongeth to God to forgive sins; wherefore you must honour them as God.' As if, in plainer terms, he had said: *The authority of forgiving sins is divine; which being communicated after a sort to ministers, IN THAT THEY PRONOUNCING THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN according to their commission, THE SINS INDEED ARE FORGIVEN, their authority also may be said to be divine<sup>q</sup>.* Wherefore, they bearing the image of God's authority before men in forgiving or retaining sins, you are to honour and obey them as God, whose vicegerents they be. The like hath Ignatius:—'Be subject,' saith he, 'unto your bishop, as unto the Lord.' And again, 'Reverence your bishop as Christ.' Neither is this any more than is commended unto us in the example of the Galatians, who received the apostle as an angel of God, yea as Jesus Christ<sup>r</sup>.'—(*A Sermon on the Dignity and Duty of the Ministry*, p. 57.)

"To impugn the ministers which are sent of God, is not to repugn men, but giant-like 'to fight with God<sup>s</sup>.' For it 'is not Aaron that you strive against,' saith Moses to Corah and his accomplices, but 'even against God Himself<sup>t</sup>.'"—(p. 70.)

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JOSEPH MEDE.

BORN 1586; died 1638. A very strong writer against the errors of the Church of Rome.

"An effect of this contrition is Confession; when out of a contrite and wounded heart, we acknowledge and lay open our sins before the face of Almighty God (our heavenly Father), begging pardon and forgiveness for them. A duty always necessary to be performed to God Himself, whom we have chiefly and principally offended; *and in some cases*

<sup>o</sup> St. Matt. xviii. 18.

<sup>p</sup> St. John xx. 23.

<sup>q</sup> The capitals and italics are mine.

<sup>r</sup> Gal. iv. 14.

<sup>s</sup> Acts v. 39.

<sup>t</sup> Numb. xvi. 11.

*also convenient to be made unto His ministers, not only for advice, but for consolation, by that power and authority which God hath given them to exercise in His Name, according to that, Whose sins ye remit, shall be remitted<sup>a</sup>."*

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BISHOP MONTAGUE.

BORN 1578 ; died 1641. An Arminian divine.

"It is confessed that all priests, and none but priests, have power to forgive sins ; it is confessed that private confession unto a priest is of very ancient practice in the Church, of excellent use and practice, being discreetly handled. We refuse it to none, if men require it, if need be to have it. We urge and persuade it in extremes ; we require it in case of perplexity, for the quieting of men disturbed, and their consciences."—(*A Gag for the new Gospel*, p. 83.)

"In some sense it is not true, that *none but God can forgive sins or retain them*. For by delegation others also might do it ministerially. GOD DOTH FORGIVE THEM BY THE MINISTRY OF MEN. *The priest, to do this, hath power conferred upon him by God in as ample a sort as he or any man can receive it.*"—(*Appello ad Cæsarem*, p. 312.)

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ARCHBISHOP USSHER.

BORN 1580 ; died 1655. "Answer to a Jesuit's Challenge," first printed in 1625.

"Be it known unto him, that no kind of Confession, either public or private, is disallowed by us, that is any way requisite for the due execution of that ancient power of the keys which Christ bestowed upon His Church. The thing which we reject is that new picklock of Sacramental Confession, obtruded upon men's consciences, as a matter necessary to salvation, by the Canons of the late Conventicle of Trent."—(p. 75.)

<sup>a</sup> St. John xx. 23.

“OF THE PRIEST’S POWER TO FORGIVE SINS.”

“We acknowledge most willingly, that the principal part of the priests’ ministry, is exercised in the matter of forgiveness of sins;” the question only is of the manner how this part of their function is executed by them, and of the bound and limits thereof, which the pope and his clergy, for their own advantage, have enlarged beyond all measure of truth and reason.”—(p. 100.)

“To forgive sins, therefore, being thus proper to God only and to His Christ, His ministers must not be held to have this power communicated unto them, but in an improper sense, namely, BECAUSE GOD FORGIVETH BY THEM, *and hath appointed them to apply those means by which He useth to forgive sins*, and to give notice unto repentant sinners of that forgiveness. ‘*For who can forgive sins but God alone? YET DOETH HE FORGIVE BY THEM ALSO UNTO WHOM HE HATH GIVEN POWER TO FORGIVE,*’ saith St. Ambrose and his followers.”—(p. 108.)

“As it is the office of this messenger and interpreter, ‘to pray us in Christ’s stead that we would be reconciled unto God;’ so when we have listened unto this motion, and submitted ourselves to the Gospel of peace, it is part of his office likewise to declare unto us, in Christ’s stead, that we are reconciled unto God; and *in him Christ ‘Himself’ must be acknowledged to speak*, Who ‘to us-ward,’ by *this means*, ‘is not weak, but is mighty in us.’

“But our new masters will not content themselves with such a ministerial power of forgiving sins as hath been spoken of, unless we yield that they have authority so to do properly, directly, and absolutely . . . .”—(p. 127.)

“To think, therefore, that it lieth in the power of any priest truly to absolve a man from his sins, without implying the condition of his ‘believing and repenting as he ought to do,’ is both presumption and madness in the highest degree. Neither dareth Cardinal Bellarmine, who censureth this conditional absolution in us for idle and superfluous, when he hath considered better of the matter, assume unto himself, or communicate unto his brethren, the power of giving an



absolute one. For he is driven to confess, with others of his fellows, that when the priest saith 'I absolve thee,' he 'doth not affirm that he doth absolve absolutely, as not being ignorant that it may many ways come to pass that he doth not absolve, although he pronounce those words.' Therefore the minister signifieth nothing else by those words, but that he, as much as in him lieth, conferreth the sacrament ('for so they call it') of reconciliation and absolution, which in a man rightly disposed hath virtue to forgive all sins."—(p. 133.)

"Whether the Ministers of the Gospel may be accounted judges in some sort, we will not much contend; for we dislike neither that saying of St. Jerome that 'having the keys of the kingdom of heaven, they judge after a sort before the day of judgment;' nor that other of St. Gregory, that the apostles and such as succeed them in the government of the Church, 'obtain a principality of judgment from above, that they may, in God's stead, retain the sins of some, and release the sins of others.' All the question is, in what sort they do judge, and whether the validity of their judgment do depend upon the truth of the conversion of the penitent; wherein, if our Romanists would stand to the judgment of St. Jerome or St. Gregory, the controversy betwixt us would be speedily at an end. For St. Jerome, expounding that speech of our Saviour touching 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' in the sixteenth of St. Matthew, 'The bishops and priests,' saith he, 'not understanding this place, assume to themselves somewhat of the Pharisees' arrogancy, as imagining that they may either condemn the innocent or absolve the guilty; whereas it is not the sentence of the priests, but the life of the parties, that is enquired of with God. . . . Therefore as there the priest doth make the leper clean or unclean, so here the bishop or priest doth bind or loose; not bind the innocent or loose the guilty; *but when, according to his office he heareth the variety of sins, he knoweth who is to be bound and who to be loosed.*' Thus far St. Jerome."

St. Gregory likewise . . . "The causes ought to be weighed, and then the power of binding and loosing exercised. It is to be seen what the fault is, and what the repentance is that hath followed after the fault; *that such as Almighty God doth*

*visit with the grace of compunction, those the sentence of the pastor may absolve. For the absolution of the prelate is then true, when it followeth the arbitrament of the eternal Judge.”—*  
(p. 135.)

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BISHOP HALL.

BORN 1574; Bishop of Exeter, 1627; Bishop of Norwich, 1641; died 1656. Author of “No Peace with Rome,” and other works against the Church of Rome.

In his “Resolutions and Decisions of divers practical Cases of Conscience,” Bishop Hall discusses the following point. Case ix. :—

*“Whether I need, in case of some foul sin committed by me, to have recourse to God’s minister for absolution; and what effect I may expect therefrom.*

“A mean would do well betwixt two extremes; the careless neglect of our spiritual fathers on the one side, and too confident reliance upon their power on the other. Some there are that do so overtrust their leaders’ eyes, that they care not to see with their own; others dare so trust their own judgment, that they think they may slight their spiritual guides; there can be no safety for the soul but in a midway betwixt both these.

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“Doubtless, every true minister of Christ hath, by virtue of His first and everlasting commission, two keys delivered into his hand,—the key of knowledge, and the key of spiritual power. The one, whereby he is enabled to enter and search into, not only the revealed mysteries of salvation, *but also in some sort into the heart of the penitent; there discovering, upon an ingenuous revelation of the offender, both the nature, quality, and degree of the sin; and the truth, validity, and measure of his repentance.* The other, whereby he may, in some sort, either lock up the soul under sin, or free it from sin.

“These keys were never given him but with an intention that he should make use of them upon just occasion.

“The use, that he may and must make of them, is both general and special.

“General, in publishing the will and pleasure of God, signified in His Word, concerning sinners; pronouncing forgiveness of sins to the humble penitent, and denouncing judgment to the unbelieving and obdurate sinner. In which regard he is as the herald of the Almighty, proclaiming war and just indignation to the obstinate, and tendering terms of pardon and peace to the relenting and contrite soul; or rather, as the apostle styles him<sup>v</sup>, God’s *ambassador*, offering and suing for the reconciliation of men to God, and, if that be refused, menacing just vengeance to sinners.

“Special, in particular application of this knowledge and power to the soul of that sinner which makes his address unto him.

“Wherein must be enquired, both what necessity there is of this recourse, and what aid and comfort it may bring to the soul.

“Two cases there are, wherein certainly there is a necessity of applying ourselves to the judgment of our spiritual guides.

“The first is, in our doubt of the nature and quality of the fact, whether it be a sin or no sin; for both many sins are so gilded over with fair pretences and colourable circumstances, that they are not to be descried but by judicious eyes; and some actions, which are of themselves indifferent, may, by a scrupulous conscience, be mistaken for heinous offences. Whither shall we go in these doubts, but to our counsel, learned in the laws of God, of whom God Himself hath said, by His prophet, *The priest’s lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts*<sup>x</sup>.

“The second is, in the irresoluble condition of our souls, after a known sin is committed; wherein the burdened conscience, not being able to give ease unto itself, seeks for aid to the sacred hand of God’s penitentiary here on earth, and there may find it.”

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<sup>v</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

<sup>x</sup> Mal. ii. 7.

“In case of some dangerous sickness of the body we trust not our own skill, nor some ignorant quack-salvers, but seek to a learned and experienced physician for the prescription of some sure remedies; whereas, if it be but for a sore finger or a tooth-ache, we care only to make use of our own receipts. And so in civil quarrels, if it be only some slight babble, we think to compose it alone; but if it be some main question importing our freehold, we are glad to wait on the stairs of some judicious lawyer, and to fee him for advice. How much more is it thus in the perilous condition of our souls! which, as it is a part far more precious than its earthly tabernacle, so the diseases, whereto it is subject, are infinitely more dangerous and deadly.

“Is your heart, therefore, embroiled within you with the guilt of some heinous sin? labour, what you may, to make your peace with heaven; humble yourself unto the dust before the Majesty whom you have offended; beat your guilty breast; water your cheek with your tears; and cry mightily to the Father of mercies, for a gracious remission: but if, after all these penitent endeavours, you find your soul still unquiet, and not sufficiently apprehensive of a free and full forgiveness, betake yourself to God’s faithful agent for peace; run to your ghostly physician; lay your bosom open before him; flatter not your own condition; let neither fear nor shame stay his hand from probing and searching the wound to the bottom; and that being done, make careful use of such spiritual applications as shall be by him administered to you. This, this is the way to a perfect recovery and fulness of comfort.

“But you easily grant that there may be very wholesome use of the ghostly counsel of your minister in the case of a troubled soul, but you doubt of the validity and power of his absolution; concerning which it was a just question of the Scribes in the Gospel, *Who can forgive sins but God only?* Our Saviour, therefore, to prove that He had this power, argues it from His Divine Omnipotence: He only hath authority to forgive sins that can say to the decrepid paralytic, *Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.* None but a God can, by his command, effect this; he is, therefore,



the true God, that may *absolutely* say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*<sup>1</sup>.

“Indeed, how can it be otherwise? Against God only is our sin committed; against man, only in the relation that man hath to God: He only can know the depth of the malignity of sin, who only knows the soul wherein it is forged; He only, who is Lord of the soul, the God of Spirits, can punish the soul for sinning; He only that is infinite can doom the sinful soul to infinite torments; He only, therefore, it must be, that can release the guilty soul from sin and punishment. If, therefore, man or angel shall challenge to himself *this absolute power* to forgive sin, let him be accursed.

“Yet, withal, it must be yielded that the blessed Son of God spake not those words of His last commission in vain: *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained*<sup>2</sup>: neither were they spoken to the then present apostles only, but, in them, to all their faithful successors to the end of the world.

“It cannot, therefore, but be granted, that there is some kind of power left in the hand of Christ’s ministers, both to remit and retain sin.

“Neither is this power given only to the governors of the Church in relation to the censures to be inflicted or relaxed by them; but to all God’s faithful ministers, in relation to the sins of men; a power not sovereign and absolute, but limited and ministerial; for either quieting the conscience of the penitent, or further aggravating the conscience of sin and terror of judgment to the obstinate and rebellious.

“*Neither is this only by way of a bare verbal declaration; which might proceed from any other lips; but IN THE WAY OF AN OPERATIVE AND EFFECTUAL APPLICATION; by virtue of that delegate or missionary authority, which is by Christ entrusted with them.* For certainly our Saviour meant, in these words, to confer somewhat upon His ministers, more than the rest of the world should be capable to receive or perform.

“The absolution, therefore, of an authorized person must be of greater force and efficacy than of any private man, how learned or holy soever; since it is grounded upon the

<sup>1</sup> St. Mark xi. 6—12.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xx. 23.



institution and commission of the Son of God, from which all power and virtue is derived to all His ordinances; and, *we may well say, that, WHATSOEVER IS IN THIS CASE DONE BY GOD'S MINISTER, (the key not erring) IS RATIFIED IN HEAVEN.*

“It cannot, therefore, but be a great comfort and cordial assurance to the penitent soul, to hear the messenger of God, after a careful inquisition into his spiritual estate and true sight of his repentance, in the name of the Lord Jesus pronouncing to him the full remission of all his sins. And if either the blessing or curse of a father go deeper with us than of any other whosoever, although but proceeding from his own private affection, without any warrant from above; how forcibly shall we esteem the (not so much apprecatory as declaratory,) benedictions of our spiritual fathers, sent to us out of heaven.

“Although, therefore, you may, perhaps, through God's goodness, attain to such a measure of knowledge and resolution as to be able to give yourself satisfaction concerning the state of your soul; yet it cannot be amiss, out of an abundant caution, to take God's minister along with you, and, making him of your spiritual counsel, to unbosom yourself to him freely, for his fatherly advice and concurrence: the neglect whereof, through a kind of either strangeness or misconceit, is certainly not a little disadvantageous to the souls of many good Christians. The Romish laity make either oracles or idols of their ghostly fathers: if we make cyphers of ours, I know not whether we be more injurious to them or ourselves. *We go not about to rack your consciences to a forced and exquisite confession, under the pain of a no-remission; but we persuade you, for your own good, to be more intimate with, and less reserved from, those whom God hath set over you, for your direction, comfort, salvation.*”—(*Works*, Hall's ed., vol. vii. p. 451—455.)

In “The Balm of Gilead,” chap. ii., sections 1 and 2, Bishop Hall mentions “comforts for the sick soul.”

“But when thou hast emptied thine eyes of tears, and unloaded thy heart of leisurely sighs, I shall then, by full

commission from Him that hath power of remission, say to thee, Son, be of good comfort, thy sins are forgiven thee.

“Think not this word merely formal and forceless. He that hath the keys of hell and of death<sup>a</sup>, hath not said in vain, *Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted. The words of His faithful ministers on earth are ratified in heaven.* . . . . .

“ . . . . . *I am, however unworthy, a messenger sent to thee from heaven; and, in the Name of that great God that sent me, I DO HERE, UPON THE SIGHT OF THY SERIOUS REPENTANCE, BEFORE ANGELS AND MEN, DECLARE THY SOUL TO STAND RIGHT IN THE COURT OF HEAVEN: the invaluable ransom of thy dear Saviour is laid down and accepted for thee: THOU ART DELIVERED FROM GOING DOWN INTO THE PIT OF HORROR AND PERDITION.*”

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GEORGE HERBERT, D.D.

BORN 1593 ; died 1632. In his “Priest to the Temple” Herbert writes :—

“In his visiting the sick or otherwise afflicted, *he followeth the Church’s counsel*, viz. IN PERSUADING THEM TO PARTICULAR CONFESSION; labouring to make them understand *the great good use* of this ancient and pious ordinance, *and how necessary it is in some cases.*”—(*The Parson Comforting*, chap. xv.)

“Blessing differs from prayer in assurance, because it is not performed by way of request, *but of confidence and power*, EFFECTUALLY APPLYING *God’s favour to the blessed by the interesting of that dignity wherewith God hath invested the priest*, AND ENGAGING OF GOD’S OWN POWER AND INSTITUTION FOR A BLESSING.”—(*The Parson Blessing*, chap. xxxvi.)

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WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH.

BORN 1602 ; died 1644. Author of the “Religion of Protestants;” and of that popular saying, “*The Bible, and the Bible only, the religion of Protestants.*”

“Give me leave, I pray you, to give you the state of the

<sup>a</sup> Rev. i. 18.

question, and the doctrine of our Church, in the words of one who both now is, and for ever will worthily be accounted, the glory of this kingdom. 'Be it known (saith he) to our adversaries of Rome, (I add also, to our adversaries even of Great Britain, who sell their private fancies for the doctrine of our Church,) that no kind of confession, either publick or private, is disallowed by our Church, that is any way requisite for the due execution of that ancient *power of the keys*, which Christ bestowed upon His Church. The thing which we reject is that new picklock of sacramental confession, obtruded upon men's consciences, as a matter necessary to salvation, by the canons of the late conventicle of Trent, in the fourteenth section.'

"And this truth being so evident in Scripture, and in the writings of the ancient best times of the Primitive Church, the safest interpreters of Scripture, *I make no question, but there will not be found one person amongst you who, when he shall be in a calm, impartial disposition, will offer to deny it.* For, I beseech you, give yourselves leave impartially to examine your own thoughts. Can any man be so unreasonable as once to imagine with himself, that when our Saviour, after His resurrection, having received (as Himself saith) all power in heaven and earth, having led captivity captive, came then to bestow gifts upon men; when He, I say, in so solemn a manner (having first breathed upon His disciples, thereby conveying and insinuating the Holy Ghost into their hearts,) renewed unto them, or rather confirmed and sealed unto them, that glorious commission, which before He had given to Peter, sustaining, as it were, the person of the whole Church, *whereby He delegated to them an authority of binding and loosing sins upon earth, with a promise that the proceedings in the court of heaven should be DIRECTED and REGULATED by theirs on earth*; can any man, I say, think so unworthily of our Saviour, as to esteem these words of His for no better than compliment? for nothing but court holy water?

"Yet so impudent have our adversaries of Rome been in their dealings with us, that they have dared to lay to our charge, as if we had so mean a conceit of our Saviour's gift of the keys; *taking advantage indeed from the unwary ex-*

*pressions of some particular divines, who, out of too forward a zeal against the Church of Rome, have bended the staff too much the contrary way; and instead of taking away that intolerable burden of a sacramental, necessary, and universal confession, have seemed to void and frustrate all use and exercise of the keys.*

“Now, that I may apply something of that which hath now been spoken to your hearts and consciences, matters standing as you see they do; since Christ, for your benefit and comfort, hath given such authority to His ministers, upon your unfeigned repentance and contrition to absolve and release you from your sins; why should I doubt, or be unwilling to exhort and persuade you to make your advantage of this gracious promise of our Saviour’s? Why should I envy you the participation of so heavenly a blessing? Truly, if I should deal thus with you, I should prove myself a malicious, unchristianlike, malignant preacher; I should wickedly and unjustly, against my own conscience, seek to defraud you of those glorious blessings which our Saviour hath intended for you.

“Therefore, in obedience to His gracious will, *and as I am warranted, and even enjoined, by my holy mother the Church of England expressly, in the Book of Common Prayer, in the rubric of Visiting the Sick, (which doctrine this Church hath likewise embraced so far,)* I beseech you that by your practice and use, you will not suffer that commission, which Christ hath given to His ministers, to be a vain form of words, without any sense under them; to be an antiquated, expired commission, of no use nor validity in these days; but whensoever you find yourselves charged and oppressed, especially with such crimes as they call *Peccata vastantia conscientiam*, such as do lay waste and depopulate the conscience, that you could have recourse to your spiritual physician, and freely disclose the nature and malignancy of your disease, that he may be able, as the cause shall require, to proportion a remedy, either to search it with corrosives, or comfort and temper it with oil. *And come not to him only with such a mind as you would go to a learned man experienced in the Scriptures, as one that can speak comfortable, quieting words to you,* BUT AS TO ONE THAT HATH AUTHORITY DELEGATED



TO HIM FROM GOD HIMSELF, TO ABSOLVE AND ACQUIT YOU OF YOUR SINS. If you shall do this, assure your souls, that the understanding of man is not able to conceive that transport and excess of joy and comfort, which shall accrue to that man's heart, that is persuaded that he hath been made partaker of this blessing, orderly and legally, according as our Saviour Christ hath prescribed."—(*Sermons*, vii., p. 83.)

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BISHOP MORTON.

BORN 1564 ; Bishop of Durham, 1632 ; died 1659. Author of a treatise, "Discovering the superstitious, sacrilegious, and idolatrous abominations of the Roman Mass."

"It is not questioned between us whether it be convenient for a man burthened with sin to lay open his conscience in private unto the minister of God, and *to seek at his hands* both the counsel of instruction, and *the comfort of God's pardon* : but whether there be (as from Christ's institution) such an absolute necessity of this private confession, as that without it there can be no remission or pardon hoped for from God."—(*Catholick Appeal*, pub. 1609, p. 253.)

"*The power of absolution*, whether it be general or particular, whether in publick or in private, *it is professed in our Church* : where both in her publick service is proclaimed pardon and absolution upon all penitents, and a private applying of absolution unto particular penitents by the office of the minister ; and greater power than this no man hath received from God."—(*Catholick Appeal*, p. 270.)

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GUIDE FOR THE PENITENT.

WRITTEN either by Bishop Jeremy Taylor, or Bishop Duppa, and united with Bishop Jeremy Taylor's "Golden Grove," 1660.

"*Advice concerning Confession*.—I. That besides this ex-



amination of your conscience, which may be done in secret between God and your own soul, there is great use of holy confession; which, though it be not generally, in all cases, and peremptorily commanded, as if without it no salvation could possibly be had; yet you are advised by the Church, under whose discipline you live, that before you are to receive the holy Sacrament, or when you are visited with any dangerous sickness, if you find any one particular sin, or more, that lies heavy upon you, to disburden yourself of it into the bosom of your confessor, who not only stands between God and you, to pray for you, but *hath the power of the keys committed to him, upon your true repentance to absolve you in Christ's Name from those sins which you have confessed to him.*

“II. You are to remember, that you bring along with you to confession, not only unfeigned sorrow and remorse of conscience for sins past, but settled resolutions for the time to come, never to offend in the same kind again; for without this, confession is but a mere pageant; and rather a mockery of God than any effectual means to reconcile you to Him.

“III. That having made choice of such a confessor, who is every way qualified, that you may trust your soul with him, you are advised plainly and sincerely to open your heart to him; and that laying aside all consideration of any personal weakness in him, YOU ARE TO LOOK UPON HIM ONLY AS HE IS A TRUSTEE FROM GOD, AND COMMISSIONED BY HIM, AS HIS MINISTERIAL DEPUTY, TO HEAR, AND JUDGE, AND ABSOLVE YOU.

“IV. That the manner of your confession be in an humble posture on your knees, as being made to God rather than man. And for the matter of it, let it be severe and serious; but yet so as it may be without any inordinate anxiety and unnecessary scruples, which serve only to entangle the soul; and instead of setting you free, (which is the benefit to be looked for by confession,) perplex you the more.”—(p. 105, ed. 1735.)

## BISHOP SANDERSON.

BORN 1587; died 1662: originally a strict Calvinist; but from this he afterwards relaxed. One of the commissioners at the last review of the Book of Common Prayer. In the "Nine Cases of Conscience," published under the imprimatur of John Hall, Bishop of London, he writes, concerning "the case of unlawful love:"—

"Sect. 13. *Secondly*, that having thus humbled herself before God by inward contrition, she also make an outward free confession of her said sins to him TO WHOM GOD HATH DELEGATED A MINISTERIAL POWER TO REMIT SINS, that she may receive comfort and absolution from his mouth; I MEAN THE PRIEST: . . . . wherein the more freely she shall make confession of her said sins, and the more cheerfully she shall subject herself to perform such further acts, whether of *humiliation* or *charity*, as the bishop or priest shall advise to be done, in testimony of her *unfeigned repentance*, the more sound comfort undoubtedly will the *sentence* of *absolution* bring unto the soul."—(p. 33.)

## BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR.

BORN 1613; Bishop of Down and Connor, 1660; died 1667. Author of "Dissuasive from Popery."

"In all which circumstances, because we may very much be helped if we take in the assistance of a spiritual guide, therefore the Church of God in all ages hath commended, and in most ages enjoined, that we confess our sins *and discover the state and condition of our souls to such a person whom we or our superiors judge fit to help us in such needs*. For so, if we confess our sins one to another, as St. James advises, we shall obtain the prayers of the holy man whom God and the Church have appointed solemnly to pray for us; and when he knows our needs, he can best minister comfort

or reproof, oil or caustics, he can more particularly recommend your state to God, he can determine your cases of conscience, and judge better for you than you do for yourself; and the shame of opening such ulcers may restrain your forwardness to contract them; and all these circumstances of advantage will do very much towards the forgiveness. . . . And it were well if this duty were practised prudently and innocently in order to public discipline, or private comfort and instruction; but that it be done to God is a duty, not directly for itself, but for its adjuncts, and the duties that go with it, or before it, or after it: which duties because they are all to be helped and guided by our pastors and curates of souls, he is careful of his eternal interest that will not lose the advantage of using a *private guide and iudge.*—(*Holy Living.* On Repentance, ix. 5.)

“Let the minister of religion be sent to not only against the agony of death, but be advised with in the whole conduct of the sickness . . . .

“Whether they be many or few that are sent to the sick person, let the curate of the parish, or *his own confessor*, be amongst them; . . . he that is *the ordinary judge* cannot safely be passed by in his extraordinary necessity, which in so great portions depends upon his whole life past.”—(*Holy Dying*, c. 5, § 2, 4.)

“Confess your sins often, hear the word of God, make religion the business of your life, your study and chiefest care, and be sure *that in all things a spiritual guide take you by the hand.*”—(*Golden Grove.* Agenda, 82.)

“For the forms of absolution in the Liturgy, though I shall not enter into consideration of the question concerning the quality of the priest’s power, which is certainly a very great ministry; yet I shall observe the rare temper and proportion which the Church of England uses in commensurating the forms of absolution to the degrees of preparation and necessity. At the beginning of Morning and Evening prayer, after a general Confession, usually recited before the devotion is high and pregnant, whose parts, like fire, enkindle one another, there is a form of absolution in general, declarative, and by way of proposition. In the

Office of the Communion, because there are more acts of piety and repentance, previous and presupposed, there the Church's form of absolution is optative, and by way of intercession. But in the Visitation of the Sick, when it is supposed and enjoined that the penitent shall disburden himself of all the clamorous loads upon his conscience, the Church prescribes a medicinal form *by way of delegate authority*, that the parts of justification may answer to the parts of good life. For, as the penitent proceeds, so does the Church; pardon and repentance being terms of relation, they grow up together, till they be complete; this the Church, with the greatest wisdom, supposes to be at the end of our life; grace by that time having all the growth that it will have here, and therefore then also the pardon of sins is of another nature than ever it was before, it being now more actual and complete, whereas before it was *in fieri*, in the beginnings and smaller increases, and upon mere accidents apt to be made imperfect and revocable. So that the Church of England in these matters of dispensing the power of the keys, does cut off all disputings of impertinent wranglings, whether the priest's power were *judicial* or *declarative*, for possibly it is both, and it is *optative* too; and something else yet, for it is an emanation from all parts of his ministry; and he never absolves, but he preaches, or prays, or administers a sacrament, for this power of remission is a transcendant passing through all parts of the priestly offices, for the keys of the kingdom of heaven are the promises and the threatenings of the Scripture, and the prayers of the Church, and the word, and the sacraments, and all these are to be dispensed by the priest, and these keys are committed to his ministry, *and by the operation of them all he shuts and opens heaven's gates ministerially*; and therefore St. Paul calls it *Verbum reconciliationis*, and says it is dispensed by ministers, as by 'ambassadors' or delegates, and therefore it is an excellent temper of the Church *so to ascribe her forms of absolution, as to shew them to be the results of the whole priestly office*, of preaching, of dispensing sacraments, of spiritual care, and authoritative deprecation. And the benefit which pious and well-disposed persons receive by these public



ministries, as it lies ready formed in our Saviour's promise, *erit solutum in caelis*, (shall be loosed in heaven,) so men will then truly understand, when they are taught to value every instrument of grace or comfort by the exigence of a present need, as in sadness of spirit, in an unquiet conscience, in the arrest of death."—(*Apology for authorised and set Forms of Liturgy. Preface*, vol. v. Eden's ed. p. 251.)

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WILLIAM NICHOLSON.

Bishop of Gloucester, 1660 ; died 1671.

"To believe, then, the remission of sins, is to believe those two great fundamental doctrines of justification and sanctification.

"Which in brief is this,—

"1. That God graciously and freely, without any merit or desert on our part, gave His Son to die for the world.

"2. That for His meritorious death and passion He remits the fault, absolves from the guilt, and acquits from punishment all penitent and believing sinners.

"3. That, imputing to them the obedience of His own Son, and His righteousness, He accounts them just in His sight.

"4. That all who are justified, and thus acquitted, have holiness in some degree, according to the condition of this life, inherent in them; which, though it cannot wholly discharge from sin, yet it frees from the dominion of sin, so that no justified person yields himself a slave and a vassal to sin, but resists its commands, mortifies, crucifies it, and makes it die daily. 'He that hath this hope purifieth himself.'

"And that of this article we might have greater security, God hath committed to His ministers the word of reconciliation; to effect which, all He hath left in their hand and power especially tends.

"1. His Word He hath committed unto them, and that



hath a cleansing power. 'Now ye are clean, by the word I have spoken unto you.' Preach they must, and the main part of their doctrine is repentance and remission of sin.

"2. They are to pray, *ex officio*, and one part of their prayer is intercession; to stand betwixt the temple and altar, and cry, 'Spare Thy people, O Lord, spare Thy people.' Aaron, Phineas, stood in the gap, and made atonement; and the presbyters are to be called to pray over the sick person, that the sin he hath committed may be forgiven.

"3. Come to the Sacraments, of which they are the ministers; two they are, and both have remission of sins annexed to them, that is, the grace assured by these seals. 'Go and baptize all nations for remission of sins,' that is the promise made to Baptism. 'This is My Blood of the New Testament shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins;' that is the grace of the Eucharist.

4. Lastly, *to the priest's hand He hath delivered a key, and the use of it is for the detention and remission of sin*, 'Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.'

"Cast but up all this, and you shall see to what it will amount. The total will set forth unto us the infinite justice and mercy of God about sin. His justice that would not pardon a sinner without satisfaction first made; His mercy and readiness yet to grant a pardon, that He would give His Son to purchase a remission for us. And that *to pass over the security to us*, He hath left us His Word to publish His will about it, instituted Sacraments to seal it, *ordained us priests, and left keys in their hands, to administer*. That so by the words dropped from their lips, by the prayers offered by their devout and charitable hearts, by the Sacraments consecrated by their hands, BY THE KEYS left in their office, THE FULL PARDON AND REMISSION OF SIN might be known, obtained, sealed, and DELIVERED OVER to sinners."—(*Exposition of the Catechism*, p. 67, *Ang.-Cath. Lib.*)

## BISHOP COSIN.

BORN 1594; died 1672. One of the Commissioners at the Savoy Conference; and author of a treatise against Transubstantiation.

*“The Precepts of the Church.—5. To receive the blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ with frequent devotion, and three times a year, at least, of which times Easter to be always one. And for better preparation thereunto, as occasion is, to disburthen and quiet our consciences of those sins that may grieve us, or scruples that may trouble us, to a learned and discreet priest, and from him receive advice, and the benefit of absolution.”—(Works, vol. ii. p. 121, Ang.-Cath. Library.)*

*“The benefit of the remission of sins came from the Blood of Christ’s veins, from the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, which He made upon the Cross; and we cannot name the one, but we must of necessity include and have relation to the other. It came by the death and blood-shedding of Christ, the sacrifice that He offered for the world.*

*“And, for the applying of this unto us, there are divers means and powers established by Him in His Church; which are all conferred upon the priest by these words: ‘Receive the Holy Ghost: whose,’ &c.*

*“Where the Holy Ghost signifieth not the person, but the gifts of the Holy Ghost; by which authority and power is given unto men in the Church to be dispensers and ministers of holy things. . . .*

*“Now all and every of these means working forth remission of sins, which is the first and greatest benefit that our Saviour hath obtained for us, and of all these the priest being a dispenser for that end that men may be freed from their sins and united to God, therefore is this power of remitting sins (as the summary of the rest) conferred and given in holy orders. And it was the judgment of ancient fathers, that the orders of priesthood were given by these words, and that by them priests have power to do their office in the Sacraments of the Church, as well as in this particular of absolving penitents from their sins.”—(Works, vol. iv. p. 254, Ang.-Cath. Lib.)*

## DR. ISAAC BARROW.

ONE of the most eminent English divines. Born 1630; Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, 1663; died 1677. Author of a treatise against the Supremacy of the Pope.

“Now they may be understood to remit or retain sins divers ways :

“1. They do remit sins *dispositivè*, by working in persons fit dispositions, upon which remission of sins, by God’s promise, is consequent; the dispositions of faith and repentance.

“2. They remit (or retain sins) *declarativè*, as the ambassadors of God, in His name pronouncing the word of reconciliation to the penitent, and denouncing wrath to the obstinate sinner.

“3. They remit sins *impetrativè*, obtaining pardon for sinners by their prayers, according to that of St. James: *Is any man sick among you? let him call the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him; and, The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him*<sup>b</sup>.

“4. They remit sins *dispensativè* BY CONSIGNING PARDON in administration of the Sacraments, ESPECIALLY in conferring baptism, whereby, duly administered and undertaken, all sins are washed away; and IN THE ABSOLVING OF PENITENTS, wherein grace is exhibited and ratified by imposition of hands, the which St. Paul calls *χαρίζεσθαι*, to bestow grace or favour on the penitent.”—(*The Power of the Keys*. Works, vol. vi. p. 56.)

“I shall only further take notice, that although it be true that God in the Gospel doth generally propound remission of sins, (upon account of our Lord’s performances, and in His Name,) to all that truly repent and turn unto Him, chiefly granting it on this consideration, and not withholding it from any upon a blameless default of other performances; yet He requires (*and complying with His will therein is part of the duty which repentance disposes to, and is declared by,*)

<sup>b</sup> St. James v. 14, 15.

that (as well for public edification and the honour of the Church, as for the comfort and advantage of persons concerned therein) this repentance should be solemnly declared and approved by the Church; THAT THIS REMISSION SHOULD BE FORMALLY DISPENSED BY THE HANDS OF GOD'S MINISTERS, being declared by express words, or ratified by certain seals, or signified by mysterious representations appointed by God." —(*Works*, vol. vi. p. 50.)

"God requires. . . . .that this repentance,—1. Be publicly declared and approved by the Church; that THIS REMISSION BE SOLEMNLY AND FORMALLY IMPARTED BY THE HANDS OF GOD'S MINISTERS, declared by express words, or ratified by certain seals, and signified by mysterious representations appointed by God. Thus hath every man, (upon declaration of his real faith and repentance, to the satisfaction of the Church,) being admitted to baptism, the entire forgiveness of his sins, and reception into God's favour, consigned unto him therein. . . . .

"2. Likewise, if Christian men *having fallen into sin, or failed of duty toward God*, do seriously confess their fault, and heartily repent thereof, *when the ministers of the Church, in God's Name and for Christ's sake, do declare (or pronounce) to them so doing or so qualified the pardon of their sin, and absolve them from it*; WE NEED NOT DOUBT THAT THEIR SINS ARE REALLY FORGIVEN, AND THE PARDON EXPRESSED IN WORDS IS EFFECTUALLY DISPENSED UNTO THEM.

"3. Moreover, if persons having committed notorious enormities, adjudged of a deadly and destructive nature, ('sins unto death,' St. John calls them,) inconsistent with the state of grace, and scandalous to the Christian profession, are therefore justly secluded from communion of the Church; when upon submission to the penances enjoined, and satisfactory demonstrations of repentance, they are resumed into the bosom of the Church, we may be assured that (according to the Catholic resolution against the Novatians), supposing the repentance true and real, THEIR SINS ARE REMITTED, AND THEY ARE RESTORED TO A STATE OF GRACE. . . . .The Church, (*to which the public and ordinary DISPENSATION OF GOD'S GRACE, according to the dispositions and*



conditions which He hath declared to require in order to men's becoming capable thereof, *is committed*;) hath sufficient warrant to receive such persons into a state of grace and reconciliation with God; so THAT WE NEED NOT DOUBT, BUT WHOSE SINS THEY SHALL THUS REMIT, SHALL IN EFFECT (ACCORDING TO OUR SAVIOUR'S WORD) BE REMITTED; WHOM THEY SHALL THUS ABSOLVE ON EARTH, THEY SHALL BE ABSOLVED IN HEAVEN."—(*Works*, vol. vi. p. 426.)

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ANTHONY SPARROW, D.D.

BORN at Depden, in Suffolk. Ejected from his Fellowship at Queen's College, Cambridge, for refusing the Covenant, 1643. Bishop of Exeter, 1667. Translated to Norwich, 1678, where he died, 1685; one of the Commissioners at the Savoy Conference.

In a Sermon on "The Confession of Sins and the Power of Absolution," published in 1637, thirty years before he was made bishop, he writes:—

"To whom can we better confess than to Him that hath the power of absolution? Would you know who this He is? 'I, even I,' saith God, 'am He who blotteth out all your iniquities, and that forgiveth your sins:' to Him, even to Him, let us confess: be sure this is necessary, and no pardon to be hoped for unless we confess to Him at least. But there is another confessor that would not be neglected. 'He that would be sure of pardon, let him seek out a priest, and make his humble confession to him,' saith St. Augustine; for God, who alone hath the prime and original right of forgiving sins, hath delegated the priests His judges here on earth, and given them the power of absolution; so that they can, in His Name, forgive the sins of those that humbly confess unto them. But is not this blasphemy? said the Scribes at once. Is it not popery? say some with us now. Take the counsel that is given in Job: 'Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the



search of their fathers ;...shall not they teach thee and tell thee<sup>c</sup>?' ”—(p. 14.)

After quoting St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Gregory, St. Ambrose, and referring to St. Cyprian and others, he says :—

“These I have named are enough to give testimony of the former generation, men too pious to be thought to speak blasphemy, and too ancient to be suspected of popery. But to put all out of doubt, let's search the Scriptures ; look into the 20th of John, (ver. 23) ; here is plainly a power of remitting sins granted to the priest by our Blessed Saviour. Nor can it be understood of remitting sins by *preaching*, as some expound it, nor by *baptizing*, as others guess. For both these, *preach* and *baptize*, they could do before : but this power of remitting they received not till now, that is, after His resurrection. That they could preach and baptize before, 'tis plain. *Preach* they might, they had a licence for it—‘As ye go, preach<sup>d</sup> ;’ and *baptize* they could and did—‘Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples<sup>e</sup>.’ But this power of remission in the text they received not till now, (that is after His resurrection,) as appears, first by the ceremony of *breathing*, by that signifying that then He infused that power into them which He bade them receive ; and secondly, by the word *receive*, which He could not properly have used if they had been endued with it before. So then it is not the power of preaching or baptizing which is here given to the apostles, but, as the fathers interpret the place, *a peculiar power of pronouncing, as God's deputed judges, pardon and remission to the penitent, a power of absolving from sins, in the Name of God, all such as patiently confess unto them* : a form of which absolution our holy mother the Church hath prescribed in the Visitation of the Sick. HE THEN THAT ASSENTS TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, OR BELIEVES THE SCRIPTURES, OR GIVES CREDIT TO THE ANCIENT FATHERS, CANNOT DENY THE PRIEST THE POWER OF REMITTING SINS : and since he can, in the Name of God, forgive us our sins, good reason we should make our confession to him.

<sup>c</sup> Job viii. 8.

<sup>d</sup> St. Matt. x. 7.

<sup>e</sup> St. John iv. 2.

Surely God never gave the priest this power in vain; He gave it for our benefit, and expects that we should do the best we can to make use of it; having ordained in the priest the power of absolution, He requires that we should use the best means we can to obtain that blessing. Now the only means to obtain this absolution is our confession to him. The priest may not and cannot absolve any but the penitent, nor can he know their penitence but by their outward expression: it is God's prerogative to know the thoughts of the heart; the priest's eye cannot pierce so far, he only reads the sorrows of our hearts by our outward confession, without the which we cannot receive, nor he give, the benefit of absolution. Confess as the Church directs us, confess to God, confess also to the priest, if not in private in the ear, since that is out of use, (*male aboletur*, saith a devout bishop, 'tis almost quite lost, the more the pity;) yet, however, confess as the Church appoints, publicly before the congregation, that so we may at least by this reap the great benefit of absolution. And if we slight this, hear what St. Augustine saith: 'Let no man flatter himself, and say, I confess in private to God, and God, that knows my heart, will pardon me, though I never at all confess to the priest. Hath God in vain said, 'Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted?' Hath God in vain given the priest the power of the keys? Shall we by our wilful neglect go about to make void the promise of Christ?'"—(pp. 16—19.)

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DEAN COMBER.

BORN 1644; died 1699. "Companion to the Temple," published about 1685. Author of three works against the Church of Rome.

"Whoever hath a just right and absolute authority, may either exercise it in person, or depute others, by communicating to them their power, to act subordinately, and then these persons have a ministerial right, so far as their commission extends. A temporal prince can do this, and choose

which of his subjects he pleaseth to act in his name and by his authority. Much more may the God of heaven do so; and we are taught whom He did choose, viz., the apostles and their successors, who are His ambassadors, His ministers and stewards of divine mysteries, nay, the presidents of souls, and the familiar friends of God. The Scripture calls them 'angels,' because they have the same employment which the ancients ascribed to angels, to convey messages between God and men, to present their prayers unto Him, and to bring back the news of His love, *and especially to bring this pardon to the penitent*, yea, to proclaim it even to the penitent. . . . .

"We give to God the things which are God's, and plainly declare *He is the Author, and we the dispensers only, of His favour*, the witnesses and messengers to bring certain news thereof. The Supreme Judge, He from Whom there is no appeal, pardoneth thee. . . . He pardoneth, that hath no equal to examine or approve, much less superior to disannul, His actings. Our absolution, therefore, is profitable when the persons are meet to receive it, but the stamp of God will make it current in heaven itself. The priest's pardon is not complete till it be ratified there; WHILE WE ARE HOLDING OUT THIS ABSOLUTION, He that knows who among you are true believers and really penitent, will to such seal their pardon in heaven, which will make ours to be valid; for it is our great Master that absolveth, because what we do is pronounced in His Name, dispensed by His authority, offered on His conditions, and confirmed by His approbation."—*(Companion to the Temple; On the Daily Absolution.)*

"We advise the sick man to a special confession, if his conscience accuse him for any great transgression; and this is no more than God requires by His holy apostle St. James; for after the order for the sick man to send for the elders of the Church to pray over him, and the promises of recovery and remission, he adds, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much<sup>f</sup>;' hence it appears to be our duty to confess our sins, not only to God, but to men also, especially to the elders of the

<sup>f</sup> St. James v. 16.

Church, mentioned in the former verse, and meant here by the title of 'a righteous man,' a name properly given to the ministers of God<sup>g</sup>. They were to confess to those who prayed over them, which was the elders; . . . and though the phrase may seem to allow us to confess to any, yet the use of those words elsewhere assures us they are to be limited according to the preceding matter; so 'be subject one to another<sup>h</sup>,' is meant only of inferiors to superiors; and 'use hospitality one to another<sup>i</sup>' is meant only of the rich to the poor, even as here 'confess one to another' is the people to the elders of the Church, for to them only Christ committed the power of binding and loosing<sup>k</sup>; and when a man is 'overtaken with a fault, he that is spiritual must restore him<sup>l</sup>.' *And this was so received a doctrine in the primitive times, that THE CONFESSION OF SINS TO A PRIEST, in case of a troubled conscience, WAS ESTEEMED AN APOSTOLICAL INSTITUTION.* But even the Scriptures inform us that the penitent Jew was to confess his sins to the priest as well as to God<sup>m</sup>, and the form then in use is still extant. The converts which St. John baptized *confessed* their sins to him<sup>n</sup>; and the Ephesians whom St. Paul converted, 'came to him, and *confessed*, and shewed their deeds<sup>o</sup>.' . . . We wish, therefore, that the people, even in time of health, (when their conscience is troubled for some great sin, or their souls are assaulted with a violent temptation,) would come and make their case known to their spiritual physician, to whom the Fathers elegantly compare the priest in this case. . . . But if we have omitted this before, we have more need to send speedily for God's minister in our sickness."—(*On the Offices*, pp. 309, 310.)

"Since it is certain there is such a power vested in the ministers of the Gospel, to support the spirits of a dejected penitent BY ANTEDATING HIS PARDON IN THE NAME OF GOD; there can be no fitter opportunity to exercise this power than now, when so many poor humbled sinners are kneeling to God, and begging forgiveness at His hand. . . . And he that cannot value this absolution from the priest, can no other

<sup>g</sup> St. Matt. x. 41, xxiii. 29.

<sup>h</sup> Ephes. v. 21.

<sup>i</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 19.

<sup>k</sup> St. Matt. xviii. 18; St. John xx. 23.

<sup>l</sup> Gal. vi. 1.

<sup>m</sup> Levit. v.; Numb. v. 6, 7.

<sup>n</sup> St. Matt. iii. 6.

<sup>o</sup> Acts xix. 18.



way receive satisfaction to his doubts and fears, unless he expect to be assured of his remission by an immediate revelation, or can be content to stay till the day of judgment for the resolution of this great enquiry." — (*Companion to the Temple; On the Absolution in the Office of Holy Communion.*)

"If Christ have this power, and have committed it to us, when we have petitioned Him to grant a pardon, we may safely dispense it; yet that we may in no way encroach upon our great Master's prerogative, we do here again declare with St. Paul, we do it 'in the person of Christ<sup>p</sup>,' that so He, not we, may have the praise for it. Jesus gave this power to His apostles, and they to their successors, who communicated it to us by prayers and imposition of hands at our ordination, saying, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. . . . whose sins ye remit, they are remitted,' &c. And now when we see good evidence that the sick man is prepared to receive this grace, and know he needs it exceedingly, and will be wonderfully supported by it, we give it him in God's name, and he ought to look on us but as **THE INSTRUMENTS to convey the pardon which Jesus gives. . . .** The absolution is only ministerially conveyed by the priest; but the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in Whose name it is pronounced, do join in the confirmation thereof." — (*On the Offices*, p. 320.)

"Let the pastor firmly believe that so much of the Holy Ghost and His gifts are now<sup>q</sup> imparted to him as are necessary for the discharge of that office to which the Spirit hath called him, *so much as will qualify him to judge so rightly concerning remitting and retaining sins, that God may ratify his sentence in heaven, forgiving those he declares penitent, and condemning such as he pronounces impenitent*; and this will make him careful in his managing of sinners, and bring a great and deserved veneration upon all his solemn acts of ecclesiastical discipline, as well as an incredible benefit to his people's souls." — (*On the Office for making Priests*, p. 363.)

<sup>p</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 10.

<sup>q</sup> i. e. when the words are said at the laying on of hands, "Receive the Holy Ghost."



## JOHN PEARSON, D.D.

BISHOP of Chester ; born 1612 ; died 1686. One of the Commissioners at the Savoy Conference. Author of " The Exposition of the Creed."

"The unfeigned exercise of religion is undoubtedly, as never more necessary, so never so comfortable, as upon the bed of our sickness, especially upon the approach of death ; wherefore the Church hath taken great care that the minister shall attend, and how he shall behave himself in the visitation of the sick for their comfort and advantage. This comfort, I confess, must be taken from you who are of that persuasion (the Nonconformist) concerning your pastor ; for if upon the apprehension of your latter end, you feel your conscience troubled, *and being observant of the method prescribed, desire to make a special confession, and receive the benefit of absolution ;* to which end the priest is ordered to use these words : ' By the authority of Christ committed to me, I absolve thee of all thy sin ;' *you will never acquiesce in the absolution where you acknowledge no commission,* NOR CAN YOU EXPECT ANY EFFICACY WHICH DEPENDETH UPON THE AUTHORITY."—(*Minor Works*, vol. ii. p. 232.)

## SYMON PATRICK, D.D.

BISHOP of Ely ; born 1626 ; died 1707. Author of several sermons and treatises against the errors of the Church of Rome.

"There is indeed another sort of *absolution* or acquitting, which in certain cases is in the power of every particular minister of Jesus Christ ; I will mention *two* which our Church, and the Church of God everywhere, hath always approved.

"*First*, in case of great dejection of spirit which any pious soul labours under. If upon laying open the state of that soul, and a serious survey of it, and comparing it with the

rule of the Gospel, it be found faithful unto Christ, he that ministers unto it in Christ's name *ought not only to apply comfort to it, but more than that, pronounce a pardon to it, and assure it of God's grace and favour. . . . .*

“*Secondly*, in time of sickness and approaching death, a good man who hath given testimony of a sincere repentance in his life-time, and behaved himself religiously in the family of Christ, will receive no small addition of hope of future happiness from the judgment of a faithful minister of Christ, who, knowing the state of his soul and manner of life, SHALL ABSOLVE HIM FROM HIS SINS IN THE NAME OF CHRIST.”  
—(*Dignity of the Christian Priesthood*, p. 74.)

“Absolution of penitents is a thing of great moment, which may alone be sufficient to convince you both of the *dignity* and the *difficulty* of your holy function. For what an high honour is it TO BE MADE A JUDGE OF THE STATE OF MEN'S IMMORTAL SOULS, AND TO PRONOUNCE A SENTENCE UPON THEM, ACCORDING AS YOU FIND THEM UPON EXAMINATION? But how industriously then ought you to labour to understand the Gospel of Christ whereby you are a judge, that you may not pass a wrong sentence, through ignorance of the conditions of salvation by Christ? . . . .

“In short, this may well make you reverence yourselves, so as to live up to this dignity and high authority He hath committed to you; and this very power, if you use it well, will procure you reverence from others who understand anything of religion.”—(*The Work of the Ministry*, p. 78.)

“If so be you find your dulness and backwardness to your duty at any time continue so long and increase so much that you are afraid there is danger in it, and it may prove pernicious to your soul, *then go and take counsel of your spiritual physician, to whom I would have you open your case as plainly and as fully as you can. . . .* For I believe the same words spoken by him and by another, are not the same. They are more acceptable when they come from a friend, and carry the greater authority from the mouth of God's minister. And therefore be no more lacking to reveal the secrets of your soul to him, when it is beyond your own skill to heal your distempers, than you are to let a physician know

those maladies in your body which must be beholden to him for a cure. . . . .

“Such the Holy Scripture calls our leaders, (‘rulers’ we render it, Heb. xiii. 17,) the conductors and governors of our motions in the way to heaven. Those that take us by the hand, as I said, both to guide and support us by their advice and counsel, by their admonitions and exhortations, by their prayer and blessing, by comforts and spiritual consolations,—they are ministers of the word, expounders of the holy books, monitors to our duty, mediators with God, and dispensers of the mysteries of salvation. And therefore it will not be safe to travel without the instructions of some or other of them; to whom, when you have committed yourself, look upon him as your good genius or tutelar angel, by which name the highest ministers of the Church are called, whom you would have as near you as you can, and in whose company, and under whose care and tuition, you may hope to arrive in safety at your journey’s end. To him it will be necessary to repair on all occasions, that he may instruct and teach you in that whereof you are ignorant, or awaken you when you are sleepy, or refresh and cheer you when you are wrong, or cure you when you are sick and ill at ease, or resolve you in your doubts, or quicken your dulness, or bridle your fervours. . . . .

“Having, next to the gift of His Son and of the Holy Ghost, settled an order of men to minister unto souls, to look after them and see that they do not perish for want of instruction or good advice; as He would have our Saviour lay down His life for them, so He hath thereby made Him a most compassionate High-Priest, and preferred Him to a kingdom, which is nothing else but an office, power, and authority to take care of souls, and do them good continually. By virtue of which He hath committed authority unto others in a perpetual succession, that they should watch for men’s souls, as the apostle to the Hebrews speaks, declaring to them their own worth and His love, engrafting that word in them which is able to save them, calling them to repentance, establishing them in the faith, encouraging their progress in virtue, ordering their goings, feeding them with His blessed

Body and Blood, *absolving them from their sins*, assisting them in their last agony, that they may finish their course with joy. . . . .

“And therefore be not slack to use their ministry, nor doubt of the blessing of God upon it. But have so much love to your soul as to apply yourself to *them* for assistance, who are particularly concerned to give it, and so much love to God as to be confident He will make those means successful which He hath particularly ordained for your good.”— (*Advice to a Friend*, sect. 13. *When we are much indisposed to advise with our Spiritual Physician.*)

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TIMOTHY PULLER, D.D.

DIED 1693. Author of “Moderation of the Church of England.”

“Our Church doth declare the necessity of such a confession as is useful to the purposes of true repentance; that is, when confession to the ministers of God may be useful for spiritual advice, and for the quieting of any one’s conscience, in order to a good life or happy death, and particularly in order to the fruitful receiving of the Holy Communion. . . . .

“Such auricular confession as is in practice in the Roman Church, the Church of England hath utterly rejected, it being desired to pry into the secrets of governments, and such private circumstances of actions, which to unveil is neither the interest of private persons nor of priests. ‘It is more plain (saith our homily) that this auricular confession hath not its warrant of God’s word. *Yet the same Homily earnestly commends to us* the confession of our sins before God and one to another for reconciliation of offences, *and to the minister of God for his ghostly counsel and absolution*, and publicly in case of public scandal.”—(*On Penance.*)

“The absolution of the priest hath its due honour and use in our Church, although it be made no part of any sacrament of penance. And that the moderation of the Church may be



more perceived, observe, first, that our Church ascribeth not the power of remission of sins to any but to God only; secondly, it constantly holds that faith and true repentance are the necessary conditions of receiving the benefit of remission of sin; thirdly, it asserts, what is most true, that *the ministers of the Church have a special power and commission*, which other believers have not, *authoritatively to declare this absolution and remission of sins, for the benefit and consolation of true penitency*, WHICH, IF DULY DISPENSED, CANNOT BUT HAVE A REAL EFFECT FROM THE VERY PROMISE OF CHRIST.—(*On Penance. Tracts of the Anglican Fathers*, vol. iii. p. 304.)

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JOHN ISHAM, D.D.

“A DAILY Office for the Sick,” published 1694, 1696, 1702.

“If you feel your conscience troubled with any weighty matter, you are exhorted by the Church to make a special confession of your sins to the minister that visits you; and then, having testified your hearty repentance, you are encouraged to desire absolution, and to receive it in the form of the Church with all possible humility and thankfulness. And you are to look upon the priest that declares it as speaking from God, who gave that authority to His Church, and to the pastors of it: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.’ These are our Blessed Saviour’s own words and promise, in the twentieth chapter of St. John’s, and the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel. However, since the ministerial power cannot absolve any whom God doth not absolve, you are to remember that you can have no advantage by this absolution, but upon the condition of your sound and sincere repentance, and by consequence you are earnestly to frame yourself to such a contrition. It is fit also for you to observe; that, though *our Church PRESSETH particular confession to the priest only when conscience is disquieted with sins of deeper malignity,*



*yet* IT DOTHT NOT DISCOURTENANCE *the more frequent use of it* ; and this, too, is so comprehensive a case as to take in great numbers that neglect it : and it is the declared judgment of the learned and pious Bishop Taylor, himself a pious doctor of the sick, that confession being *useful in all cases*, and *necessary* in some ; and encouraged by evangelical promises, by Scripture precedents, by the example of both Testaments ; and prescribed by apostolical injunctions, and the canons of all Churches, and the example of all ages ; and taught us by the analogy to the ministerial power, and the very necessities of every man ; he that for stubbornness, or any other criminal weakness, shall decline it in the days of his danger, is near death, but very far off from the kingdom of heaven."

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BISHOP BEVERIDGE.

BORN 1636; died 1708.

"Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.' As if He should have said, I, the Son of Man, *having power upon earth also to forgive sins*, DO NOW COMMIT THE SAME TO YOU : so that whose sins soever are remitted or retained by you, are so by Me also. From whence it is plain, both that the apostles received power to remit and retain sins, and that Christ Himself concurs with them in the exercise of that power ; and how He doth it, even by His Holy Spirit now breathed into them.

"To explain the full latitude and extent of this power would require more time than can be allowed upon this day, whereon it is to be exercised ; and therefore I shall observe only two things concerning it ; whereof the first is, that how great soever the power be which our Lord committed to His apostles and their successors for the government of His Church in all ages, it is but ministerial ; they act only under Him, as His ministers and stewards, and must one day give an account to Him of all their actions. Yea, whatsoever power they have of this nature, it is still *His power in their hands* ; they derive it continually from

Him, who is always present with them. And therefore, as they themselves need to have a care how they exert this power, or neglect the exerting of it; so others had need to take care too, that they neither resist nor despise it.” —(*Sermons on the Church. Works*, vol. i. p. 14. *Ang. Cath. Lib.*)

“And here it is (after the absolution in the Communion Office) that our faith must begin to work, as it is the substance of things hoped for, so as firmly and constantly to believe, that upon our hearty and sincere repentance we are NOW ABSOLVED FROM ALL OUR FORMER SINS, and that from this time forward God will assist us with His grace and Holy Spirit, to serve and please Him, according to the prayers which we have put up to Him, and the promises which He hath made to us for that purpose, in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: for all the benefit of absolution, as pronounced by the minister, depends upon this our believing in the promises and word of God, upon which it is grounded.” —(vol. viii. p. 600.)

Bishop Beveridge speaks of the absolution pronounced by Christ’s ministers as “Christ’s absolution,” in the “Sermon on the Advantages of Public Worship,” vol. iii. p. 119.

“While the minister is pronouncing the absolution in the name of God, every one should lay hold upon it for himself, so as firmly to believe that, upon true repentance and faith in Christ, *he is NOW DISCHARGED AND ABSOLVED FROM ALL HIS SINS, as certainly as if God Himself had declared it with His own mouth*, as He hath often done it before, and now by His ministers.” —(vol. viii. p. 527.)

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#### ARCHBISHOP SHARP.

BORN 1644; Archdeacon of Berkshire, 1672; Dean of Canterbury, 1689; Archbishop of York, 1691; died 1713-14. Author of “Sermons against Popery,”

preached by him when Rector of St. Giles's-in-the-Fields.

“All Protestants that I know of do not only require acknowledgment and confession of injuries to the injured person, as necessary to repentance, and approve of public confession of public sins in the face of the Church, but even as to private sins, whereby no particular man nor no society is injured, but only God offended; I say as to these, they not only allow of, but approve of, confession to men, even private confession to men; and more especially such confession as is made to those who are ministers. No one Protestant, so far as we can judge by the public declarations of their faith, is against private confession of sins to any man, much less to a minister or pastor. Nay, they are so far from being against it, that they advise it and recommend it in sundry cases as a most excellent instrument of repentance.

“So that the papists do very unjustly traduce and calumniate the Reformation, when they say that the Protestants are against private confession. There is no such thing. There is no Protestant Church but gives it that due esteem and regard that it ought to have. All that they have done is to regulate it, to set it upon its true basis and foundation; which is done, not by requiring private confession as a thing necessary, but by exhorting men to it as a thing highly convenient in many cases. In all those instances where it can be useful, or serve any good purpose, it is both commended and seriously advised; that is to say, where a sinner either needs direction and assistance for the uncovering some sin that he labours under, or where he is so overwhelmed with the burden of his sins that he needs the help of some skilful person to explain to him the terms of the Gospel, to convince him from the Holy Scriptures that his repentance (as far as a judgment can be made of it) is true and sincere, and will be accepted by God; and lastly, upon the full examination of his state, and his judgment thereupon, to give him the absolution of the Church. In all these cases no Protestant (that understands his religion) is against private confession. . . . If there be any difference among them, it is that the

Lutherans are more strict in requiring private confession than either the French or Dutch Protestants are.

“As for our own Church, she has directly given her judgment in the matter, as we have now represented, namely, in the *public exhortation*, which is to be read when notice is given of a Communion; there it is advised, that if there be any of the congregation that cannot by other means quiet his own conscience, but requireth comfort or counsel, then he should come to some discreet and learned minister of God’s Word and open his grief; that by the ministry of God’s holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness.” (*Works*, vol. vii. pp. 158—161.)

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WILLIAM NICHOLLS, D.D.

BORN 1664; died 1712. Author of a “*Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer.*”

On the Exhortation in the Order of the Holy Communion, Dr. Nicholls says,—

“It is very plain from this passage that our Church *does not condemn private confession and absolution*; though she does not universally require them, (as the Church of Rome does,) as being necessary for the pardon of all sins.”

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DR. FIDDES.

BORN 1671; died 1725. Author of a “*Body of Divinity.*”

“Whether any conditions, besides those of faith and repentance, be pre-required to the forgiveness of sins.—It will not be denied that God may convey His pardoning grace to sinners, upon what conditions or by what means He pleases; and that His promises are always to be understood according to His own method of applying them. If, therefore, it appear that, besides the general conditions of faith and re-



penitance, in order to the pardon of sin, there be any divine institutions of God proper to apply or ascertain His pardoning grace, when administered by persons duly authorized, and to persons duly qualified, *then such institutions are as necessary to the forgiveness of sin*, (I mean where they can and ought to be administered,) *as faith and repentance in general*. This, I conceive, will not be disputed, with respect to the two Sacraments. But it has been much controverted whether, our Saviour having left a power to His Church of remitting and retaining sin, a formal declaratory sentence of the Church is not, in certain cases, necessary to those ends.

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“ . . . When we say that the Church can remit or retain sins, *we mean no more than that God, Who may employ what instruments He pleases in executing His will, makes use of the sentence pronounced by the Church to that end as a means of His retaining or remitting them*. Thus, when it is said *Baptism saves us*, we do not intend that it does so absolutely, or by any natural efficiency, but only in virtue of God’s institution, and according to the terms whereunto the salutary power of it is annexed: for otherways it would, without distinction, have the same effect on all baptized persons whatever.

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“The Church of England, particularly, in all her absolutions, supposes a condition implied of true repentance in the party absolved. And that if she err IN PRONOUNCING ANY JUDICIAL SENTENCE, her error can be of no effect either in favour or to the prejudice of the person upon whom it is pronounced. So far is she from making the salvation of men to depend upon her arbitrary will or decisions, that all her sentences, relating to the favour or displeasure of God, are conditional. But when the condition is observed, though known only to God, they are not for that reason less authentick; for, notwithstanding, *the judgment is God’s*; because so far she acts in His Name, by a power derived from Him, and according to His will. He, therefore, *who despises that power, despises not man, but God*.

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“We must distinguish between such duties as are of absolute and standing obligation, and such as are only to be considered, under certain circumstances, as matter of expedience. It may be proper to confess our sins for the quiet and relief of our own minds, or for the removal of any doubt or scruple, to a person capable of directing us, and especially to our spiritual guide, to whom the direction of our consciences is more immediately committed. But the Scriptures have no where made this a duty incumbent on us. Repentance indeed is absolutely required in order to the remission of sins, which we are to testify the sincerity of by all the signs of a true and hearty contrition, before the priest can or ought to absolve us. But a particular confession of our sins, with the several circumstances of them, is no where expressly required. It may be, in some cases, and to some persons, an act of piety or prudence, to make such a confession: *and dying penitents, under any great conflicts of mind, are particularly exhorted and supposed by our own Church to do it.* But still, *Christ* not having made it a necessary condition that penitents should make confession of their secret sins except to God only, (the case as to those sins whereby they have injured others without making restitution is different,) there can be no absolute necessity why they should make such confession.

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“However, as confession is, under certain circumstances, a duty; as the priest is our proper spiritual guide; as all his administrations are supposed, for that reason, to be attended with a special benediction of God; as he is invested with a power, upon our repentance, of remitting sins; and lastly, as a particular confession of sin is one good evidence of a true repentance,—*it seems, upon the whole matter, the safest and most comfortable method we can take, when we appear in the form of penitents, to make a particular confession of our sins to him,* in order to our receiving the stronger assurances of their being, in truth, remitted to us.

“But whether this be incumbent on us, in point of strict duty, or not; whether a particular confession of sins be in any case necessary in order to qualify sinners for the sacer-

dotal absolution ; or whether other general testimonies of their repentance be sufficient to this end,—*it seems highly requisite, IF NOT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, to all true penitents, where the sacerdotal absolution may be had, that, as it is a means God has appointed to declare the forgiveness of sins, it ought to be had.* And that he, therefore, who dies without thinking himself obliged to have any regard to the sacerdotal office in this respect, or in contempt of it, dies, to speak in the softest terms, in a very dangerous state ; both AS HE REFUSES GOD'S PARDON IN HIS OWN WAY OF APPLYING IT ; and he cannot be supposed, while he does so, to be really, in other respects, a true penitent.

“I desire it may be observed, this is only spoken on supposition that a dying sinner, who may have the benefit of the sacerdotal absolution, wilfully slights it as a vain or insignificant ceremony.”—(*Body of Divinity*, vol. i. p. 592—599.)

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MATTHEW HOLE, D.D.

ENTERED the University of Oxford, 1657 ; died 1730. Published “*Practical Discourses on the Liturgy,*” 1715-19.

“1. The power of absolution consists in removing the guilt and punishment of sin, and receiving the guilty person into favour, as if he were perfectly innocent. This is variously expressed in Holy Scripture ; it is sometimes made the same with justification, which is the acquitting of a person from guilt, and looking upon him as perfectly righteous ; it is opposed to condemnation, which is a laying of sin to his charge. This power is expressed in St. John xx. 23, by remitting or retaining of sin, which is the pardoning or punishing of it ; it is sometimes called the power of opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven, which is by admitting into, or excluding out of the Church ; for none can be received into the kingdom of glory hereafter, but such as are admitted into the Church or kingdom of grace here, called

‘the power of the keys.’ It is called in St. Matthew, the power of ‘binding and loosing<sup>r</sup>.’ Sinners are said to be ‘tied and bound with the chain of their sins,’ to be ‘holden with cords,’ and to ‘be in the bond of iniquity.’ Now to loosen this bond, to untie these cords, and so be freed from their chains, is done by what we call the power of absolution or remission of sins; and so the words in St. Matthew are the same in effect with these in St. John: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ And this will lead me,

“2. To the persons to whom this power is given; and they were first and chiefly to the apostles of Christ, to whom the words of our text were immediately spoken, but yet not so as to be confined to them only; for the promise, to ‘be with them to the end of the world,’ could not be to them in their own persons, who died a little after, but to them that succeed in their office to the world’s end; to which time there will be as much need of this office, and the Divine assistance in it, as when it was first given. Neither could the *συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος*, relate only to the end of that age, but to the end and consummation of all things, when time itself shall be no more. . . . . Our Church tells us that God ‘hath given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce this absolution and remission of sins.’ He that hath a just authority of doing any thing, may either do it himself in person, or depute others to do it in his stead.

The power of ‘remitting or retaining of sins’ is originally in God only, and in Christ as God and Man; for which reason ‘the Son of Man’ is said to ‘have power to forgive sin.’

“*This power Christ exercised Himself in person during His stay upon earth; but being to ascend up to heaven, HE DELEGATED IT TO HIS APOSTLES AND THEIR SUCCESSORS, in these words, ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,’ &c.*

“Now *this power of pardoning is ANNEXED to some acts of*

<sup>r</sup> Chap. xvi. 19.

*religion, instituted by God FOR THIS PURPOSE, and executed ONLY by Christ ministers.* As—

“1. Baptism was ordained for the remission of sins; so St. Peter told his converts<sup>s</sup>.

“2. The Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted for this purpose, as we read St. Matt. xxvi. 28.

“3. The preaching the word is for the proclaiming of pardon, called therefore the ‘ministry,’ or ‘word of reconciliation.’

“4. The prayer of the ‘elders over the sick,’ hath joined to it ‘the forgiveness of sins<sup>t</sup>.’

“Now these ministerial acts for the ‘remission of sins’ are peculiar only to the ‘priest’s office;’ neither is the virtue or effect of them to be imparted by any other; for to them it is said, and to no other, ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;’ and therefore a pardon pronounced by them must be of greater efficacy than by any ordinary person.

“3. But are the ministers of Christ hereby empowered to pardon the sins of all men? And shall the offences of every one, when they think fit to remit, be remitted to them? No; it is to ‘people being penitent,’ which is after explained, and confined only to such as ‘truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel.’ . . . . God Himself will pardon none but such: and we may be sure He never gave any power to pardon any other. This is every where the sense and language of holy Scripture; suitable whereunto, our Church hath three forms of absolution in her public liturgy, all which are confined only to penitent and returning sinners.

“The first is declaratory, in this daily absolution, that is ordered to follow the confession. . . .

“The second is petitionary, in the Communion Service. . .

“The third is *judiciary or authoritative* in the office for the sick, where the priest, upon the hearty confession and desire of the sick person, is empowered to say: ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners that truly repent and believe in Him, of His

<sup>s</sup> Acts ii. 38.

<sup>t</sup> St. James v. 14.



great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

"This power was given for the ease of dying and despairing persons, and must therefore be used with great tenderness and discretion; and the rather, because *the sentence duly pronounced on earth will be ratified in heaven, and DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE AND FINAL STATE.*"— (pp. 129—131.)

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DR. THOMAS BISSE.

M.A. 1698; died 1731. Preacher at the Rolls.

"This confession" (in the Daily Office of Common Prayer) "is in its form most solemn, in its extent most comprehensive, for it takes in all kinds of sin, both of omission, 'in leaving undone those things which we ought to have done;' and of commission, in 'doing those things which we ought not to have done.' And while every single person makes this general confession with his lips, he may make a particular confession with his heart, I mean of his own personal sins, known only to God and himself; which, if particularly, though secretly confessed and repented of, will assuredly be forgiven. For every church or house of prayer is dedicated to God with the same privileges as was Solomon's temple<sup>u</sup>, to wit, that 'whatever supplication be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and shall spread forth his hands towards this house, then hear, O Lord, from heaven, and forgive; for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of the children of men.' This, then, is the privilege of our confession, that under the general form every man may mentally unfold 'the plague of his own heart,' his particular sins, whatever they be, as effectually to God, Who alone knoweth his heart, as if he pronounced them in express words."— (p. 25.)

<sup>u</sup> 1 Kings viii. 38.



“This confession of sins being duly made by the whole congregation, then the priest standing up, doth in the name and by the commission of God pronounce the ABSOLUTION; which, if rightly understood, believed, and embraced by the confessing penitent, *ought to be of like comfort to him as that declaration of Christ was to the man sick of the palsy*, ‘Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.’

“For all the three forms of absolution in our service, namely, this now before us, and that in the Communion, and the other in the Visitation of the Sick, though differing in expression, are by the best expositors on our liturgy judged to be of equal signification. ‘All these forms (saith Bishop Sparrow) are but several expressions of the same thing, in sense and virtue are the same, and are effectual to the penitent by virtue of that commission mentioned St. John xx. 23, ‘Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.’ And it is upon this account that the Church hath not allowed this form of absolution to be pronounced by a *deacon*, to whom this commission is not given; but hath reserved it to the *priests*, who at their ordination are vested with that authority.”—(p. 28.)

“Let us observe the fitness and necessity of this order, which appoints confession of sin with absolution to bear the first part in our public worship. For till our persons be sanctified, absolved, and reconciled unto God, all we do in His sanctuary will be unacceptable.”—(p. 35.)

“Confession of sin, then, strengthened by absolution, being the main groundwork of public worship, upon which the acceptableness of the following service regularly depends; as I hope this will excuse my being so full and particular upon these heads, so I must crave leave, before I proceed, to leave upon your minds two exhortations.

“First, to thank God, that in our worship this groundwork is not only of a tried soundness and of a just breadth, but also laid in a proper place.”—(p. 36.)

“Secondly, let me exhort you to give all diligence to come to church before the confession; otherwise you lose the great benefit of absolution. For though there be other short confessions of sin, as in the Litany, yet there is appointed no other absolution. *I call the benefit of absolution great, be-*

*cause it sanctifies your persons, which sanctifies all your offerings. To set this in a true emblem before you, which may justly affect and last upon your thoughts: every person when he stands before God is to be looked upon, like Joshua the high-priest, 'as clothed in filthy garments.' But after he hath confessed and repented of his sins, then the Lord saith to the priest appointed to pronounce the absolution, as He did to those that stood by Joshua<sup>x</sup>, 'Take away the filthy garments from him;' and to the person himself thus absolved He saith, as He did to Joshua, 'Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will cloathe thee with change of raiment.' They, therefore, that come in after the absolution, however they may come prepared and arrayed in their own righteousness, may yet look upon themselves still, 'as cloathed in filthy rags.' For what is all our righteousness in the sight of God? the prophet answers<sup>y</sup>, it is 'as filthy rags.'*"—(*The Beauty of Holiness*, 5th ed., 1717, p. 37.)

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ARCHBISHOP WAKE.

ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury. Born 1657; died 1737. Author of various books against the errors of the Church of Rome.

"The Church of England *refuses no sort of confession, either public or private*, which may be any way necessary to the quieting of men's consciences, or to the exercising of *that power of binding and loosing*, which our Saviour Christ has left to His Church. We have our penitential canons for public offenders; we exhort men, *if they have any the least doubt or scruple*, NAY SOMETIMES THOUGH THEY HAVE NONE, *but especially before they receive the holy Sacrament*, to confess their sins. We propose to them the benefit *not only of ghostly advice* how to manage their repentance, but *the great comfort of absolution* too, as soon as they shall have completed it. . . . When we visit our sick, *we never fail to exhort* them to make a *special confession* of their sins to him that minis-

<sup>x</sup> Zech. iii. 3, 4.

<sup>y</sup> Isaiah lxiv. 6.

ters to them: and when they have done it, THE ABSOLUTION IS SO FULL, THAT THE CHURCH OF ROME ITSELF COULD NOT DESIRE TO ADD ANYTHING TO IT.”—(*Exposition of the Doctrine of the Church of England, in Gibson’s Preservative against Popery, vol. iii. p. 31.*)

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BISHOP BERKELEY.

BORN 1684; died 1753. Author of the “Minute Philosopher.”

In a Letter to Sir John James, Bart., written in 1741, on the Roman Catholic Controversy, is the following passage:—

“I had forgot to say a word of CONFESSION, which you mention as an advantage in the Church of Rome, which is not to be had in ours. But IT MAY BE HAD IN OUR COMMUNION *by any who please to have it; and, I admit, IT MAY BE VERY USEFULLY PRACTISED.*”

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CHARLES WHEATLY, M.A.

Born 1686; died 1742.

“Since the priest has the *ministry of reconciliation* committed to him by God, and hath both *power and commandment* (as it is expressed in this form) to declare and pronounce to His people being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins; therefore when he does, by virtue of this power and commandment, declare and pronounce such absolution and remission regularly in the congregation, those in the congregation that *truly repent and unfeignedly believe God’s holy Gospel*, (though the priest does not know who or how many they are that do so,) have yet *their pardon conveyed and sealed to them* AT THAT VERY INSTANT *through his ministration*; it being the ordinary method of God with His Church, to communicate His blessings through the ministry of the priest.”—(p. 114.)

“This absolution is more than declarative, it is truly effective; insuring and *conveying* to the proper subjects thereof the very absolution or remission itself.”— (*On the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 119.)

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BISHOP STEARNE.

Bishop of Dromore, 1713; died 1745.

In a treatise called “*Tractatus de Visitatione Infirmorum*,” reprinted in the editions of the “*Clergyman’s Instructor*” of 1807 and 1813, Bishop Stearne gives directions how “to move” the sick to confession, and how to act under certain difficulties. One example will shew the spirit of the whole treatise:—

“*Si ægroto defuerit voluntas confitendi peccata, quæ, ut recte ei consulatur, revelari oporteat; inquirendum est parcho, quam ille ob causam ea nolit detegere; an, quod puduerit dicere, quæ patrare non erubuit; an quod vereatur, ne CONFESSARIUS ex malitia, aut culpanda levitate, ea aliis quandoque revelet; an demum quod metuat ne Pastor, si secretorum criminum factus sit conscius, de eo malam opinionem concipiat. Si malus pudor a dicendo reprimat, quem bonus a patrando non repressit: tum Pastor ita eum affetur: fideli medico morbos maxime erubescendos non ægre detegeres, si de corporis salute tu eum consuleres. Si te quispiam in jus traheret, aut tu alium in jus provocares, jurisperitum, cujus consilio inniti velis, minime celares quæ in re faciant; imo, nisi esses imprudens, omnes quos in causa tua tuiipse senseris defectus ei ultro indicares. Quidni et latentia animi vitia ei manifestes, quem de salute animæ tuæ consultum cupias? Is certe casum tuum miserebitur, non ridebit; docebit, ut peccata eluere, et a derisorum notitia celare possis; non ruborem tibi inducet, propalando aliis quæ absurde aut ridicule fecisti. . . .*

“*Eligas quem velis confessarium; at ex amore moneo, ne eum celes, quæ nisi noverit, consilio suo tibi parum proderit. . . .*

“Dicat autem Pastor, . . . quo accuratius et lubentius sua peccata fuerit confessus, eo certius pœnitentiæ suæ indicium præbuerit; et apud omnes pro innocente habetur, quem peccasse vere pœniteat.”—(p. 417.)

“Si Parocho, silentium et salutare consilium amice spondenti, secreta sua delicta timidius æquo revelarit visitatus; moneatur alium aliquem verbi ministrum advocare, cui ex ipsius sententia tutius innitatur.”—(p. 405.)

The bishop, at the end of his treatise, adds a list of books which explain more at length to the parish priest the work of visiting the sick. Amongst them are Dr. Comber’s “Companion to the Temple,” Bishop Taylor’s “Holy Dying,” Mr. Kettlewell’s “Companion for the Penitent,” Dr. Hammond’s “Power of the Keys,” and Archbishop Usher’s “Answer to a Jesuit;” all of which teach the doctrine of sacerdotal absolution.

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#### BISHOP WILSON.

BORN 1663; Bishop of Sodor and Man, 1698; died 1755: “whose praise is in all the Churches.”

“We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, *Who*, that He may fit us for heaven and happiness, *hath appointed several ordinances, in the due use of which we may certainly expect the assistance of His Holy Spirit, to renew our nature, and to restore us to the image of God, from which we are sadly fallen.*

“And though these ordinances, and the instruments He makes use of, have no manner of virtue in themselves to renew and to restore us to the favour of God; and though the power that accompanies them be as invisible as the wind; *yet the effect and blessing that attends the due use of them is as certain as that God is true.*

“Thus, for instance, He has appointed certain persons, men of like infirmities with yourselves, to be His ministers or



stewards. To them He has committed *the word of reconciliation, and the several ordinances which He has appointed to make it effectual.*

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“And because by reason of the frailty of our nature we are but too apt to fall, by virtue of this commission, these ministers of Christ restore you again by a godly discipline, *absolving those that are truly penitent*, and sealing their pardon by administering unto them the Body and Blood of Christ, by which alone we obtain remission of our sins.

“Well now; will you, because these ministers of God are men like yourselves, *will you despise their ministry, and the favours offered you by their hands, and refuse to be reconciled to God by their means?* Or will you despise the ordinances of God because the graces that attend them are invisible? . . .

“...It is true, the graces that accompany all these holy ordinances are not visible, no more is God that bestows them; and yet we believe *Him* to be; and have we not *His* word and ordinance for the truth of these things?”—(*Works*, vol. iii. p. 341. *Ang.-Cath. Lib.*)

“And they that are sick, and have any faith in God’s word, will, as St. James advises, send for the minister of God, that he may pray over him, that he may examine the sincerity of his faith, and his repentance, and that, if he is truly penitent, HE MAY RECEIVE ABSOLUTION, *which the Spirit of God assures him shall have A REAL EFFECT.* ‘If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.’

“These are they *by whose ministry* you are made Christians; they to whom the care of your souls is committed; who have Christ’s commission to teach you, to pray for you, and to bless you in His name; to reconcile you to God, and God to you. ‘They are’ (as St. Paul calls them<sup>z</sup>) ‘stewards of the mysteries of God;’ DISPENSERS OF HIS MERITS AND HIS GRACES TO HIS ELECT. BY WHOM He *instructs* them in the truth; *feeds* them with the bread of life; *by whom* He *comforts* afflicted souls, ABSOLVES THE PENITENT, *arms* them against the fear of death, and *fits them* for a blessed eternity.”—(vol. iii. p. 416.)

<sup>z</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 1.

“Be assured of it, therefore, good Christians, if you, on your part, do not hinder God’s graces and blessings from falling upon you, God will vouchsafe them to you, upon the prayers of His ministers. ‘When you go into an house,’ saith our Lord to His apostles, ‘salute it;’ that is, beg that God’s blessing may rest upon it; ‘and if the son of peace be there,’ that is, any one desirous to hear the truth, and to do the will of God, ‘your peace,’ that is, the peace and blessing of God, ‘shall rest upon him;’ if not, ‘it shall turn to you again.’ Here is a certain effect promised upon the blessing prayed for by God’s minister; as sure to *the eye of faith* as any thing that is visible to the *bodily eye*. . . . .

“*I know it is with difficulty that people will believe that THEIR ETERNAL SALVATION CAN DEPEND UPON THE MINISTRATION OF A MAN LIKE THEMSELVES. BUT SO MOST CERTAINLY IT IS.* . . . . .

“And though there is no question to be made of it, but God can dispense with His own ordinances when He thinks fit, and save a sincere soul without them; yet *it is as sure, He will not save such as despise His ordinances, or wilfully neglect to make use of them.*

“In short, let men be never *so great*, never *so learned*, never *so knowing*, never *so good* in their own eyes, THEY MUST RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF GOD BY THE HANDS OF HIS OWN MINISTERS. He will save men in His own way; and will be glorified in making use of weak instruments to bring about the greatest works; will make use of frail men to destroy the power and kingdom of Satan, and to bring men to heaven.

“*Lastly*, He appointed *His* ministers, not the ministers of earthly princes, nor the princes themselves, to receive into His Church and kingdom such as they should deem worthy, and to turn out the unworthy; with this assurance, ‘that what they should bind on earth should be bound in heaven; and what they should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven.’ . . . . .

“To despise, therefore, the word and Sacraments, the *blessing and favours* of God, because they are offered to us *through the hands* of the meanest of men, is plainly to despise

our own salvation. And if there are any so unhappy as to carry their folly and prejudices so far as to look upon *the means of salvation*, which God has appointed, as unnecessary, or not likely to convey *His blessings and graces* to them, there is no help for it; they must undoubtedly perish.

“Do not, therefore, mistake, and think that when the minister of God prays for you, or blesses you, or administers to you the ordinances of God, that he does it as an ORDINARY, PRIVATE PERSON. No; he does it as *God’s minister*,—as one *authorized to bless you* WITH SURE EFFECT, *if it be not your own fault*; who does it, as St. Paul speaks, IN THE PERSON OR PLACE OF CHRIST. . . . .

“*Lastly*, if the priest, the minister of God, blesseth *with a real effect* all those that repair to the Church to receive God’s blessing, how unhappy are they who are *shut out of the Church* for their crimes, and consequently are deprived of the blessing of God. And how unhappy are all they who deprive themselves of this blessing, by *absenting* themselves from the public assemblies of Christians. Little do Christians consider what they lose by doing so.”—(Vol. iii. p. 416—424.)

The whole of this sermon, “On the Great Blessing of a Standing Ministry,” is worth careful study, as bearing upon *the conveyance of God’s blessings through sacraments and ordinances*.

“V. And this brings us to consider another duty incumbent upon the ministers of Christ, and that is, *to exercise a godly discipline*, without which the Church of Christ, which *ought to be holy and without blemish*, would become the contempt of unbelievers.

“Our duty, therefore, is to *rebuke* gainsayers, to reprove all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness, to let careless and obstinate sinners know plainly whither their wicked ways will lead them at the last; and in the meantime, until they shall give tokens of repentance and amendment, to deny them the ordinary means of grace, because they render themselves unworthy of them; and finally, if they continue impenitent, to turn them out of the Church, which is the

house of God, that *being reduced to the state of heathens, without hope, and without promises*, they may be awakened into a sense of the danger they are in, and by a timely repentance recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.

“And this, by the way, is the true end of excommunication and Church discipline, where it is rightly administered. To turn wicked men out of Christ’s family, as the prodigal in the Gospel left his father’s house, until, being forced to feed with swine, and weary of such a life, they may with him remember the blessing of being under the government of a tender Father, and with him return with words of sorrow and repentance: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son; make me as one of Thy hired servants.’ And then the ministers of Christ, with joyful hearts, and with the compassion of a father, are ready to receive them again into God’s household and family. And they have authority from their great Master so to do. ‘Whatsoever,’ saith He, ‘ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.’ *A power very great indeed; but not too great for God to give, or mortal men, having authority from God, to execute.*

“And happy it is for sinners, that there is room left for a return (with the prodigal) to their Father’s house; that there are persons appointed to receive them, and to restore them to that favour of God which they forfeited by their disobedience to His laws.

“And let men account this a mercy or not; of the ministers of Christ, (who are entrusted with His power,) whether they esteem them or no, this will one day be found true: *that* SUCH AS ARE, BY THE JUST SENTENCE OF THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST, SHUT OUT OF HIS CHURCH, WILL BE SHUT OUT OF HEAVEN; AND SUCH AS UPON THEIR TRUE REPENTANCE ARE RECEIVED INTO THE CHURCH, WILL BE RECEIVED INTO GOD’S FAVOUR. ‘God,’ saith St. Paul, ‘hath given to us this ministry of reconciliation.’

“VI. Pursuant to which, there is another *duty and power* belonging to the ministers of Christ; and this is a power *of absolving penitent sinners.*



“ All men being subject to *sin*, and to sin unpardoned an awakened conscience being an insupportable burden and torment, our merciful Lord ‘has given power and commandment to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins;’ that is, they are in the first place to convince men of the nature and danger of sin, and that it never can be forgiven but by a true repentance; then they are to shew them in what true repentance consists; namely, in forsaking of sin, in returning to God, and in bringing forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

“ It is, then, the duty of the minister of Christ to examine whether there appear such marks of a true repentance; and if there do, to absolve him in the name, and by the authority, of Jesus Christ.”—(*Works*, vol. iii. pp. 437-9.)

“ Pray consider from whom do you receive Baptism? from whom do you receive the Lord’s Supper? from whom do you receive instruction to life eternal?

“ And are not *we* as much the ministers of Christ, when we rebuke and censure the wicked, and turn out the obstinate and profane, as when we baptize and receive men into Christ’s Church, as when we pray for, instruct, and comfort the faithful? And will not Jesus Christ hear us, and confirm our sentence, as well as hear our prayer? . . . We have power to receive the penitent, *to absolve*, and to comfort them.

“ And the same Lord, *who gives us this power, gives all penitents who submit to it an assurance that THEY MAY DEPEND UPON what we do in His name*, ‘Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven;’ ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.’ ”—(*Works*, vol. iii. pp. 475-6.)

“ Absolution benefitteth by virtue of the power which Jesus Christ has given His ministers. In short, our Lord having purchased the forgiveness of sins for all mankind, He hath committed the ministry of reconciliation to us, that having brought men to repentance, we may in Christ’s name, and in the person of Christ, pronounce their pardon. And this will be the true way to magnify the power of the keys, which is so little understood, or so much despised;



namely, to bring as many as we possibly can to repentance, that we may have more frequent occasions of sealing a penitent's pardon by our ministry. And now, if the sick person has been so dealt with as to be truly sensible of his condition, he should then be instructed IN THE NATURE AND BENEFITS OF CONFESSION, (at least of such sins as do trouble his conscience,) AND OF ABSOLUTION. For instance, he should be told, that as under the Law of Moses God made His priests the judges of leprosy, and gave them rules by which they were to determine who were clean and fit to enter into the congregation (which was a type of heaven,) and who were not clean; even so, under the Gospel, HE HAS GIVEN HIS PRIESTS AUTHORITY TO JUDGE SIN, which is the leprosy of the soul. He has given them rules to judge by, with AUTHORITY TO PRONOUNCE THEIR PARDON, IF THEY FIND THEM QUALIFIED; for this is their commission from Christ's own mouth: 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.'"  
—(*Parochialia, Works, i. 426.*)

"Every Christian whose life has been in the main unblameable, and whose repentance has thus been particularly examined, and who has given a satisfactory answer to these questions, ought not to leave the world without the benefit of absolution, which he should be earnestly pushed to desire, and exhorted to dispose himself to receive, as the Church has appointed."—(*Ib., Works, i. 436.*)

"Our Church ascribeth not the power of remission of sin to any but to God only. She holds that faith and repentance are the necessary conditions of receiving this blessing. And she asserts, what is most true, that Christ's ministers have a special commission, which other believers have not, authoritatively to declare this absolution for the comfort of true penitents, and WHICH ABSOLUTION, if duly dispensed, WILL HAVE A REAL EFFECT from the promise of Christ<sup>a</sup>."—(*Sacra Privata, Works, i. 252.*)

In another place he says, "We are bound to encourage penitents earnestly to desire absolution."

<sup>a</sup> St. John xx. 23.

## PETER WALDO, ESQ.

LECTURES on the Liturgy of the Church of England, published 1775.

“ Upon the whole, our Church maintains (appealing to Scripture for the proof of it) that *some power of absolving or remitting sins, derived from the Apostles, remains with their successors in the ministry* ; and, accordingly, at the ordination of priests, the words of our Saviour on which the power is founded are solemnly repeated to them by the bishop, AND THE POWER AT THE SAME TIME CONFERRED. We do not pretend it is in any sort a *discretionary* power of forgiving sins, (for the priest has no *discernment of the spirits* and hearts of men, as the Apostles had,) but a power of pronouncing authoritatively in the name of God, who has committed to the priest *the ministry of reconciliation, His pardon and forgiveness to all true penitents and sincere believers.* That God alone can forgive sins, that He is the sole Author of all blessings, spiritual as well as temporal, is undeniable ; but that *He can declare His gracious assurance of pardon,* AND CONVEY HIS BLESSINGS TO US BY WHAT MEANS AND INSTRUMENTS HE THINKS FIT, *is no less certain.* In whatever way He vouchsafes to do it, it is our duty humbly and thankfully to receive them ; not to dispute His wisdom in the choice of those means and instruments, for in that case, *he that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.* Would a rebel, who had received a promise of his prince’s pardon, call in question, or object to, his manner of conveying it? would he not thankfully accept it from the officer commissioned to deliver it? And shall sinful dust and ashes prescribe rules to the great Sovereign of the universe, *and not rather with the most profound reverence and gratitude RECEIVE HIS PARDON from the mouth of His minister, whom He has deputed to pronounce it?* Let us then devoutly attend to the priest thus officiating, while he declares in the name of God that ‘ He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel.’ And here let us silently pray to God, that He will confirm and make this declaration of His pardon

effectual, which we may be assured He will do, provided we are not wanting in the conditions required on our parts, which are faith and repentance.”—(*Third Ed.*, 1813, pp. 26, 27.)

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BISHOP HORNE.

BORN 1730; died 1792. “He was considered the best preacher of his time, a sincere and exemplary Christian, and a scholar and writer of no ordinary qualifications.”—(*Mr. Darling.*)

“The second measure of grace is the *ecclesiastical* measure, or that which is given to the ordinary ministry for the standing government and continual edification of the Church. This likewise is the gift of Christ, He being the fountain-head of all principality and power, and it is conferred by the Spirit, who only commissions men to be the representatives of Christ, and to act in His name . . . .

“When Christ, after His resurrection, appointed His Apostles to the work of the ministry, He breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’ *The next words shew for what purpose the Spirit was there given by His breathing on them:* ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ The Apostles afterwards ordained ‘by the laying on of hands,’ as their successors have done, and do to this day, saying, after the example and by the authority of their great Lord and Master, ‘Receive thou the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins thou dost remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins thou dost retain, they are retained.’

“The first portion of sanctifying grace is given at Baptism, which is the seal of justification and the beginning of sanctification; inasmuch as the sinner being then sacramentally buried with Christ into His death, arises with Him in the power of His resurrection, justified from the guilt of sin through repentance and faith in His blood, and renewed unto holiness by the operation of His Spirit. This total renewal, at first conferred by the baptismal laver, is styled *regeneration*, and answers in things natural to the birth of an

infant. But then, as an infant, though born complete in all its parts, yet comes to its full stature and strength by slow and imperceptible degrees, by being supplied with proper kinds of food for its nourishment when in health, and proper medicines for its recovery when otherwise; so it is with the regenerate spirit of a Christian, while it is (as St. Peter calls it) a babe in Christ, it must be fed with the milk of the Word; when it is more grown in grace, with the strong meat of its salutary doctrines; when it is infirm, it must be strengthened by the comforts of its promises; *and when sick, or wounded by sin, it must be RECOVERED AND RESTORED by godly counsel and wholesome discipline, BY PENANCE AND ABSOLUTION, by the medicines of the Word and sacraments, as duly and properly administered in the Church, by the lawfully and regularly appointed DELEGATES AND REPRESENTATIVES of the Physician of souls.*—(Bp. Horne's *Discourse* xviii. on Eph. iv. 7.)

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DR. JOHN HEY.

BORN 1734; died 1815. Norrisian Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. Bishop Kaye calls him one of the most acute, the most impartial, and most judicious divines of modern times.

“To me it seems that private confession, *under ecclesiastical laws*, is bad even in *theory*. . . . What can be expected from reducing indeterminate duties to determinate laws, but a mechanical religion, coldness and evasion? What man pays with generous fervour what he is obliged to pay by law? . . . .

“The Church of England may seem, from some things, to approach towards Romish confession: ‘Repentance,’ says Bishop Sparrow, ‘consists of three parts, as the Church teaches in the Communion: 1. *Contrition*, or lamenting of our sinful lives; 2. Acknowledging or *confessing* our sins; 3. An endeavour to bring forth fruits worthy of penance, which the ancients call *satisfaction*.’ Thus Bishop Sparrow; and of the fourth thing, called *absolution*, the Church of England affords several instances.



“*Confession*, in some sort private, is *often commended by our divines, and even in our liturgy*: we may instance in the first exhortation to the Communion, and in the Visitation of the Sick. But in the first place, let me observe that I look upon it as always a mark of good sense, when men are avoiding anything, not to do it rashly, and through mere disgust, but to take every good they can find, though mixed with evil which they disapprove: in avoiding one extreme, it shews rational moderation not to run precipitately into another. And with regard to particular regulations, there is a great difference between requiring a constant, *ordinary* confession of *all* sins, and recommending it to an unhappy man, who wants much to unburden his mind, in one or two extraordinary situations, and to have his difficulties solved; to apply to one who must of course be better informed than himself, and may be supposed free from religious melancholy. The ordinary language of our Church is, ‘Confess yourselves to Almighty God,’ and it is found even in our first exhortation to the Communion; but when the mind is tormented with scruples, or debilitated by sickness, advice is wanted; and the weak should be ‘*moved*’ to get over their reserve, and solicit spiritual comfort and counsel.

“The real purpose of our Church in quitting *the laws* of auricular confession, and at the same time recommending some confidential intercourse between a minister and those troubled in conscience, was, probably, to throw off a yoke hard to be borne; to give liberty where the delicate and sensible mind most longs for it; *to substitute affectionate exhortation in the room of penal laws and mechanical observances, and thereby prevent hypocrisy and evasion, without dissolving the pastoral connexion and relation, or weakening the mutual confidence and mutual kindness between minister and people.*”—(*Articles*, vol. iv. p. 219.)

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“In order to have an idea even of the historical part of the subject (of *absolution*), one must attend to the distinction between *ministerial* and *judicial*: a person gives *ministerial* absolution when he acts as a *minister* or *agent* under God as a principal; *judicial*, when he acts in the capacity of a *judge*



*from whom lies no appeal.* Nor can we proceed rightly without remarking here, that all judicial absolution must consist in releasing offenders from punishments inflicted by religious society among *men*, or from Church censures: and that ALL ANTICIPATION OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, IN ABSOLVING, must be ministerial; its end, to warn and comfort: though EVERY DECISION OF A MINISTER OR AGENT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE RATIFIED, if the agent acts in his proper character, and is rightly informed; which he cannot be, except the repentance, in any case before him, be sincere: and as he can only pronounce absolution on supposition of sincerity in his penitent, his absolution must be, in some sort, *conditional*.”— (p. 221.)

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BISHOP TOMLINE.

Born 1750; Bishop of Lincoln, 1787; died 1827.

“Confession of sin to God is an indispensable duty, and confession to priests may sometimes be useful, by leading to effectual repentance: and therefore our Church encourages its members to use confidential confession to their priest, or to any other minister of God’s holy Word.”—(*On the 25th Article*.)

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BISHOP HERBERT MARSH.

Born 1757; died 1839.

“The case is widely different when men *voluntarily* go to consult their minister, in order to seek relief from a troubled conscience, and relate to him, at *their own discretion*, the offences which cause their uneasiness. Now the confessions *required* by the Church of England are general confessions to Almighty God, in which the priest joins with the congregation; and though on certain occasions especial confession is *recommended*, it always depends on the will of the person himself.”—(*Comparative View of the Churches of England and Rome*, p. 195.)

“It would be foreign to our present enquiry to consider how far a Christian minister can go beyond the act of *declaring* that God pardoneth and absolveth those who truly

repent, as in the Absolution of the Morning and Evening Service; or of offering a solemn *petition* to Almighty God for that purpose, as in the Absolution of the Communion Service. *But if the form of the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick implies a JUDICIAL power, or a power of pardoning vested in the minister HIMSELF, it is still an act of injustice to the Church of England to compare a form which is prescribed for the bed of sickness, at the approach of death, and even then to be used only in extreme cases, with the ordinary form of absolution in the Church of Rome. . . . The cases, indeed, are widely different; the confession which precedes absolution being in the one case compulsory, in the other case voluntary.*”—(Note, p. 197.)

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ROBERT ANDERSON,

OF Trinity Chapel, Brighton. Born 1792; died 1843.

Mr. Anderson published in 1841 “A Practical Exposition of the Gospel according to St. John.” In commenting on chap. xx. 21—23, he quotes very largely from Bishop Andrewes’ Sermon on Absolution, and makes the Bishop’s views his own.

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BISHOP SHORT,

Bishop of St. Asaph.

“In the Church of England, the confession of particular sins is recommended in the Exhortation to the Sacrament and the Visitation of the Sick; but so little are we accustomed to *this most scriptural duty*, that these recommendations are frequently unknown and generally neglected, while scarcely a vestige remains of ecclesiastical law for the restraint of vice; and though the punishment of many offences has been transferred to the courts of common law, yet the laxity which prevails with regard to numerous breaches of

the law of God may be well esteemed a deficiency in our national duty.”—(*History of the Church of England*, p. 170, fifth ed., published 1847.)

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DR. JELF,

Canon of Christ Church, Oxford.

“And yet, while with our Church we acknowledge the effects of absolution to be *conditional*, and *relative* to the inner qualifications of the recipients, *it would be an error, very contrary to the spirit of her teaching, to account the ordinance itself unreal or inoperative*. She herself speaks of ‘the benefit of absolution,’ to ‘the quieting of the conscience.’ The *true penitent*, after absolution pronounced, is not in the same state as he was before it: and so long as he does not forfeit the benefit by fresh acts of sin, he may humbly assure his heart before God, that he is visibly and confessedly restored to the full privileges of God’s grace. It is not only that the judgment of God’s minister, if not mistaken, will be ratified in the judgment at the last day,—the sins bound or loosed in heaven, as bound or loosed on earth; but there is surely an immediate and present result in the *official restoration of God’s grace*, and of the *full and fruitful enjoyment* of all the divine ordinances. The *result*, too, of absolution lawfully bestowed is *peace*; and peace of conscience in Christ’s atoning Blood is *grace*, and *that which procures it is a means of grace*. Forgiveness assured upon foregone repentance leads to deeper penitence still: the weight is cast off; the race is begun anew; and towards the goal thus once more hoped for, we do, in this hope, more earnestly press forward. And therefore it is that ‘peace and grace’ are so often associated in Scripture as correlative terms; therefore ‘the fruits of righteousness’ are called ‘peaceable;’ and therefore our Lord, with a special reference to this inestimable gift, said, ‘Peace be unto you’ to those who were to be the ambassadors of peace, that they might *possess* what they were to *confer*. *Doubt we not, therefore, but earnestly believe, that absolution*

*exerts a real influence upon our spiritual condition; and when the message of peace falls from the lips of the officiating priest, let us receive it as from Him in whose name he speaks; let us pray to Him whom he represents, to Him who only can forgive sins, that He would 'speak peace unto His people, and unto His saints, that they turn not again.'*"  
(*Bampton Lectures*, p. 117.)

"Of strife and of dissention  
Dissolve, O Lord, the bands,  
And knit the knots of peace and love  
Throughout all Christian lands."





