

A MODERN THEORY ABOUT CONFIRMATION.

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I.

A FEW words from Bishop Gore's handbook on *The Religion of the Church* will best show the theory which is fashionable on this subject to-day with a certain section of Anglo-Catholic theologians. He writes, "From the beginning the laying on of hands by the apostles followed baptism. Thus baptism and the laying on of hands taken together (and sometimes called by the one name of baptism) were held in the early Church to constitute the ceremony of initiation into the Christian Society . . . they should still be regarded as the two parts of the one ceremony."

The practical importance of such a theory seems to consist in this, that laying on of hands is made such an essential part of baptism that without it the gift of the Spirit is not given. Now, quite apart from any reference to Scripture, this view is of comparatively recent growth in the Anglican Church.

To see that this is so it is only necessary to consult the chief works on the Articles which have been in use within the last half century. Fifty years ago Bishop Browne's work held the field. He speaks with no uncertain voice. For him one of the blessings of baptism is the "aid of the Spirit of God." Twenty-five years later saw the first edition of Bishop Gibson's work. He writes somewhat more doubtfully, and, after speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism, adds not very consistently, "It is a further question whether it is right to say precisely that the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is given in baptism apart from confirmation"; and suggests that the question requires "a fuller consideration than it has yet received in the Church." In Mr. Bicknell's recent work it is significant that there is no separate section on confirmation at all. Even under Article XXV. only two of the "sacramental rites call for special treatment," namely, Penance and Extreme Unction. For him, "Confirmation is really a part of baptism," and he therefore includes what he has to say

about its relation to baptism in his discussion of Article XXVII. He considers it hopeless to decide either by Scripture or the early Fathers the relation of the baptismal gift to that bestowed in confirmation. He honestly states the difficulties, but his own leaning is shown by his last words, "The separation of the two parts of a single sacrament is unscriptural, and the best solution is to see that it ceases at the earliest opportunity."

Whatever may have been the cause of this change of opinion, one curious result has arisen from it, that on this point the position of the Evangelical School in the Church of England, especially of those in it who are ready to accept in their natural meaning the statements of the Baptismal Service and the Church Catechism, is closer to that of the Church of Rome than is the position of these writers of the so-called Anglo-Catholic party. A glance at the decrees of the Council of Trent or the Catechism of Pius V shows that the Church of Rome knows nothing about the identification of baptism and confirmation¹ as two parts of one sacrament.

II.

Advocates of the view above outlined would call our attention to the fact that in the earliest Service books which we have—those books, chiefly, which are often described under the inclusive name of Church Orders—we find that anointing and laying on of hands follow immediately after baptism. But what, after all, does this prove? The most that can be said of these books is that they give us the practice of the Church at a date which, at the earliest, would not be earlier than the middle of the third century. Other evidence would perhaps take us back to the end of the second. We would go back to the New Testament.

Laying on of hands is mentioned six times in the Acts of the Apostles, once in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and three times in the Pastoral Epistles. The references in the Pastorals need not detain us long. Two of these (1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 6) refer clearly to ordination. About the first passage there is no dispute, and the words "neglect not the gift that is in thee," which occur in it, seem to make it clear (*pace* Dr. Chase) that the words "stir up the gift of God which is in thee" in 2 Timothy i. 6 refer also to Timothy's *χάρισμα* received at his ordination. The third passage is 1 Timothy v. 22, "Lay hands hastily on no man." This has

been taken of ordination, of absolution, or of confirmation. It can scarcely refer to the last of these, for, even allowing that laying on of hands formed the second part of the ceremony of baptism, why should it be mentioned rather than the preliminary baptism? The baptism, on any theory, would be the initiation ceremony.

In Hebrews vi. 1, 2 the writer speaks of six of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment. These fall naturally into three groups of two. The two points in the first and third groups are connected but not identical. Repentance is not the same as faith, though intimately allied therewith; the resurrection is not the same as the judgment, though the two are naturally associated together. Is it not, then, a natural inference that the same is the case in the second group, and that it likewise consists of two connected, yet not identical, members? The wording is somewhat strange (why "baptisms" in the plural?) and, as Bishop Bernard says, vague, but probably the writer is referring to Christian baptism and to the Apostolic rite which is the basis of confirmation. We can hardly rise above a "probably," but certainly there is no indication of a unification of the two.

There remain, then, for consideration the passages in the Acts. With three of these we are obviously not concerned, referring as they do to the ordination of the "Seven" (vi. 6), to the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul at the beginning of the first missionary journey (xiii. 3), and to the cure of the father of Publius (xxviii. 8). In Acts ix. 12 ff. we have the story of Ananias' visit to Saul in Damascus for the recovery of the latter's blindness. That this was the purpose of the laying on of hands is distinctly stated in verse 12. Of the sequel Mr. W. K. Lowther Clarke has thus written in a recent (May, 1921) number of *Theology*:—

"Verse 17, describing the coming of Ananias, fulfils the vision of verse 12. The result of verse 17 is given in verse 18. We now give verse 17 in full:—

"That (a) thou mayest receive thy sight, and (b) be filled with the Holy Ghost.' Verse 18 runs: '(a) Straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight, and (b) he arose and was baptized.' As 18 (a) answers to 17 (a), so 18 (b) answers to 17 (b). The baptism—following presumably after an interval—consists of a twofold rite, baptism and the laying on of hands."

I quite agree as to parallelism between verses 17 and 18, but

would not make the same inference therefrom. 18 (b) answers to 17 (b), and "the filling with the Holy Ghost" refers to baptism. According to the theory, on which Mr. Clarke's statement of the facts of the case is based, baptism comes first and is followed by a laying on of hands. In Acts ix. no such subsequent imposition of hands is hinted at. The previous act was for the purpose of healing the future apostle's blindness.

Two other passages are left, the story of Peter and John in Samaria (Acts viii.), and that of Paul at Ephesus (Acts xix.). Philip—one of the Seven—preached in Samaria and baptized his converts. The Apostles Peter and John were sent down later and they laid their hands on those who had been baptized by Philip that they might receive the Holy Ghost. Was this, or was it not, exactly the same as our confirmation? It is often assumed that it was. The second story in Acts xix. will help us to answer. St. Paul is at Ephesus. There he finds some disciples of John the Baptist. These men, when they heard of the fuller revelation of Jesus, were baptized into His name. Then St. Paul laid his hands on them, *and they spake with tongues and prophesied*. These last words about tongues and prophecy, though they seem to contain the clue to the whole question, are entirely omitted by Dr. Mason in his account of the incident (*Relation of Confirmation to Baptism*, pp. 23 ff.). The real meaning seems to be that the miraculous Pentecostal gifts were conferred by the laying on of the Apostle's hands. It is true that in the former account of what happened at Samaria there is no direct mention of tongues and prophecy. Something such is surely, however, implied. Clearly there was some external manifestation of the Spirit's gifts, else how could Simon have known what had happened and have wished to receive the power of conferring the same gifts. Tongues and prophecy were the signs in Samaria no less than at Ephesus. Hence the references in the Acts are to something which must not be assumed to be exactly identical with the laying on of hands which was practised later. We are quite in the dark, from lack of evidence, as to when this earlier laying on of hands ceased.

Besides this it must not be forgotten that there are numerous references to baptism in the Acts, and they are to something complete in itself and not requiring the addition of any other rite. To take but one example, we have St. Peter's words on the Day of

Pentecost, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38). Here the gift of the Holy Ghost is definitely connected with baptism; the modern exegesis is that it means that baptism prepares the way for the gift of the Holy Ghost which is imparted by laying on of hands.

Outside the pages of the New Testament we have in the *Didache* an early account of the method of the administration of baptism, and there is no hint given that it was followed by any other ceremony. I am not at all sure that this is not one of the reasons why the *Didache* is so often assigned now to some obscure or later community outside the ordinary lines of the Christian tradition.

In the sub-apostolic Fathers baptism is seldom mentioned (Ignatius, *Smyrn.* viii. 2; *Polyc.* vi. 2; 2 *Clement* vi. 9; vii. 6, viii. 6). These, I think, are the only references. In the last two passages of 2 *Clement* the word *σφραγίς*, which was in later times used of the laying on of hands, is applied to baptism. To say, as is sometimes said, that baptism here includes the laying on of hands as the second part of a single ceremony, is, of course, to beg the question.

III.

This is no mere academic question. It is rather one with intensely practical issues in more than one direction, issues with regard to which Evangelicals are called to take up a definite and determined position.

The question is of importance, first of all, because the modern view, in reality though not in intention, depreciates a Sacrament of our Lord's appointment. His command was to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," no word about anything else save "teaching"; no suggestion that the baptism of which He spoke was to be regarded as in any sense incomplete, or requiring anything for its perfection. There is no need to enlarge upon this, not because it is of less importance, but rather because it is more obvious and patent than the considerations which follow.

Again, if this modern view comes to prevail, a large part of the Prayer Book will have to be rewritten. Not to speak of the Confirmation Office, the words of the Catechism and of the Baptismal

Service will need to be altered drastically. The modern view is that the gift of the Holy Spirit comes by the laying on of hands. That is not the view of the Prayer Book. Anyone who will read through the Service of Holy Baptism can see how full it is of the Spirit's work. "Sanctify him with the Holy Ghost," "Give Thy Holy Spirit to this infant," "That all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him," "It hath pleased Thee to regenerate this infant with Thy Holy Spirit." These quotations are not exhaustive, but they are perhaps the clearest. Here, as definitely as words can do it, the gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with baptism and not with confirmation only.

Or take the Catechism. "How many Sacraments hath Christ ordained in His Church?" "Two only, as generally necessary to salvation, that is to say, baptism and the supper of the Lord." If confirmation be a part of baptism, then it also is generally necessary to salvation, but the succeeding questions of the Catechism make no mention of it. So far as these treat of baptism, they are concerned with the due external matter and form, and the inward grace of that Sacrament as well as the requirements necessary in one who is to be baptized. Dr. Gore, in words already quoted, tells us that "they (i.e., baptism and confirmation) should still be regarded as two parts of one ceremony," and goes on to describe the proper matter and form of confirmation. The ceremony on his view ought to be one, and he would no doubt regard it as a Sacrament. So we have the curious result—one ceremony which contains two Sacraments with two "matters" and two "forms." It is perhaps needless to add that this "two parts of one ceremony" is altogether foreign to the formularies of the Church in which Dr. Gore is a bishop, for its rule is that the child baptized "is to be brought to the bishop, so soon as he can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc." Whatever our opinion may be as regards the age hinted at by these words, they imply in any case a considerable interval.

Further, this modern view will require a change in the definition of what constitutes a member of the Catholic Church. The old doctrine was that it was baptism into the name of the Trinity. It did not matter (so far as the validity of the baptism was concerned) who the ministrant was. There were rules laid down to govern the regular administration of the Sacrament, but baptism

by laymen, or by women was, though irregular, considered valid and was not repeated. The person baptized was "a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." The logical inference from this new idea is that, if baptism is incomplete, its effect is incomplete, and that for membership of the Church something more is required, namely, the laying on of hands. No doubt the reason of the theory is the supposed necessity for bringing each one into direct communication with the bishop either by actual imposition of hands or by the use of unction with oil consecrated by a bishop. No true membership of the Church except in the Apostolical Succession. Such is the idea.

It is not difficult to see some ways in which this theory may be expected to work out in practice. It is quite within the bounds of possibility, some would say it is practically certain, that the disestablishment of the Church of England will be an accomplished fact at no very distant date. What is to be the condition of membership of that Church? Is it to be baptism, or must it include confirmation also? Even as things now are, the effort has been made to make confirmation the basis of franchise in voting under the Enabling Act for such bodies as Parochial Councils, etc. Evangelicals do not belittle the rite of confirmation. It has its due and proper place in the series of Church Ordinances. Would that it were more used, and more intelligently. It must not be exalted, however, to the same, or even a higher, level, with one of the two "Sacraments of the Gospel."

So far I have been thinking most of the Church of England herself. We must consider the matter also as it has respect to the question of Reunion, or that of the intercommunion of the different Protestant Churches now, before any actual reunion or federation comes. I have seen on the Continent godly members of some of the so-called Free Churches refused admission to the Lord's Table, because, though they were regularly admitted communicant members of their own Church, they were as yet unconfirmed and had no desire for confirmation. There were many similar cases during the late war, even on the eve of a battle.

It is necessary to be fair to those who differ from us and to allow that, if they believe that without laying on of hands there has been no complete baptism, they are justified in such a case in excluding those whom they deem unqualified from the Lord's

Table. This may be granted, but it then becomes all the more necessary for every member of the Church of England who thinks differently to do what he can to do away with such an unscriptural and uncharitable idea.

As Dr. Headlam points out in the Preface to the second edition of his Bampton Lectures, confirmation is not a Sacrament which has the authority of our Lord for its institution, and besides this the custom of the Catholic Church with regard to it has varied very considerably. "Therefore," he continues, "I do not see what authority we have for imposing our particular Anglican customs on others." He is speaking against the suggestion that confirmation should be made an essential condition of Reunion, but his words are equally applicable to those cases in which members of Churches outside the Anglican communion are, through no fault of their own, cut off from opportunity of making their communions with their fellow-members, and yet would obey the command of their Master. In such cases His principle of "Mercy and not sacrifice" should hold.

In 1920 the Bishops of the Anglican Communion laid down as one of the foundations of Reunion "the divinely instituted Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion." Mr. Lowther Clarke, in a paper already referred to, has suggested that "some, at least, of those who endorsed the Appeal must have mentally included confirmation in baptism." The words "mentally included" have an ugly sound. Mr. Clarke's own view is the right one, when he adds: "If we do not intend to dissociate baptism and confirmation, it would be well to say so frankly, and thereby avoid misunderstandings."

It is, let me repeat, no mere academic question, but one of the utmost importance.

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