

this occasion, everything which humility and condescension could have suggested; but in the facts now referred to, in which Congregationalists see only manifestations of these graces, we see, as has been explained, the proof of something else, of something different from this, and much more specific; a proof, viz., that they did not act in this matter as inspired men under infallible guidance, but as ordinary office-bearers in conjunction with the elders; and we venture to think, that if they were really upon this occasion exercising their infallible apostolic authority, as Congregationalists allege, the facts referred to would furnish indications rather of something like simulation and deceit, than of humility and condescension.

It thus appears, upon a survey of this whole subject, that the first controversy which arose in the Christian church, and which broke out while the church enjoyed the guidance of inspired men, was taken up and disposed of in such a way as was fitted and intended to afford general lessons as to the mode in which the affairs of the church should be conducted, after the miraculous and supernatural gifts of the Spirit should be taken away.

#### *Sec. VI.—Obligation of Apostolic Practice.*

There can be no reasonable doubt that it may be justly laid down as a general principle, that apostolic practice, such as that exemplified in the Council at Jerusalem, does impose a permanent binding obligation in regard to the constitution and government of the church, and the administration of its affairs; though it has been generally conceded by Presbyterians, that there are some limitations or modifications attaching to this principle in its practical application. The truth of this general principle seems very clearly deducible from these two positions—First, that Christ commissioned and authorized the apostles to organize His church as a distinct visible society, and to make provision for preserving or perpetuating it to the end of the world; and secondly, that the apostles, in executing this branch of their commission, have left us few direct or formal precepts or instructions as to the constitution and government of the church, and have merely furnished us with some materials for ascertaining what it was that they themselves ordinarily *did* in establishing and organizing churches, or what was the actual state and condition of the church and the churches while under their

guidance. Whatever *precepts* or *directions* they might have given on this or on any other subject, would have been received as binding, and whatever precepts or directions they *have* given, are admitted to be so; but as they were executing their Master's commission when they were establishing and organizing churches,—as they did little in the way of executing this branch of their commission except by their practice in establishing and organizing churches, and by giving us materials for ascertaining what their *practice* in this respect *was*,—and as there is no intimation in Scripture, either in the way of general principle or of specific statement, that any change was ever after to take place in the constitution and government of the church, or that any authority was to exist warranted to introduce innovations, the conclusion from all these considerations, taken in combination, seems unavoidable, that the practice of the apostles, or what they actually did in establishing and organizing churches, is, and was intended to be, a binding rule to the church in all ages; that the Christian churches of subsequent times ought, *de jure*, to be fashioned after the model of the churches planted and superintended by the apostles.

It is proper, however, to advert to some of the limitations and modifications under which this general principle is to be held and applied, and to the objections commonly adduced against it. One very obvious limitation of it is, that the apostolic practice which is adduced as binding, must be itself established from the word of God, and must not rest merely upon materials derived from any other and inferior source. This position is virtually included in the great doctrine of the sufficiency and perfection of the written word,—a doctrine held by Protestants in opposition to the Church of Rome.

If this doctrine be true, then it follows that anything which is imposed upon the church as binding by God's authority, or *jure divino*, whether the medium, or proximate source, of obligation be apostolic practice or anything else, must be traced to, and established by, something contained in, or fairly deducible from, Scripture. Unless Scripture proof be adduced, we are entitled at once to set aside all claim alleged upon our submission. If God really fitted and intended the written word to be the only rule of faith and practice, and has made this known to us, He has thereby not only authorized, but required us to reject or disregard anything obtruded upon the church as binding that cannot be traced to that

source. Papists and Prelatists, as we shall afterwards have occasion to show, profess to produce to us evidence of apostolic practice, or of what the apostles did, not derived from Scripture, but from later authors; and on this ground demand our assent and submission to their views and arrangements, in regard to the constitution and government of the church.

We think it can be shown that neither of these parties has produced proof of apostolic practice favourable to their views, which can be regarded as sufficient, when tried fairly by the ordinary rules of historical evidence. But even if they could produce evidence of apostolic practice that answered this description, and was adequate to establish any ordinary point of history as a matter of fact, we would hold it sufficient to disprove any alleged *obligation* to submit to it, that it could not be deduced from anything contained in the written word. Subsequent ordinary historical evidence of apostolic practice might be legitimately employed in elucidating the meaning and confirming the sense of a scriptural statement which was somewhat obscure or dubious in its import, but could not of itself be sufficient to impose an authoritative obligation.

It is generally conceded, however, that everything which the apostles did or sanctioned, connected with the administration of the affairs of the church, is not necessarily and *ipso facto*, even when contained in or deduced from Scripture, binding universally and permanently upon the church. It has, for instance, been the opinion of the great body of divines of all sects and parties, that the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem, simply as such, and irrespective of anything else found in Scripture bearing upon any of the subjects to which they refer, were not intended to be of universal and permanent obligation, and are not now, in fact, binding upon Christians. It was undoubtedly made imperative upon the churches of that age by the decree of the Council, to abstain from things strangled, and from blood; but the great body of divines of all parties have been of opinion, that an obligation to abstain from these things was not thereby imposed permanently upon the church, and is not now binding upon Christians. If this principle may be warrantably applied to what was then by express injunction, in accordance with the mind of the Holy Ghost, imposed upon the church, it must be at least equally warrantable to hold it applicable to what merely prevailed in fact in the primitive churches under apostolic superintendence. And,

accordingly, there are things which, as we learn from Scripture, obtained in the apostolic churches, but which scarcely any church now considers itself under an obligation to preserve. There were some things which, from their nature, seem to have been local and temporary, suited only to the particular circumstances of the church in that age, and in the countries where the gospel was first preached; and these have been generally regarded as destitute of all permanent binding force.

When this concession is once made, that there are some things made known to us in Scripture about the apostolic churches which were local and temporary, and not binding permanently upon the church in future ages (and it is a concession which could not be reasonably withheld), some degree of doubt or uncertainty is of course introduced into the application of the general principle formerly established, as to the permanent binding force of apostolic practice in regard to the constitution and government of the church and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs. But this doubt or uncertainty as to *some* of the applications of the principle affords no ground for the use which some have made of it in rejecting the principle altogether, and denying that apostolic practice, ordinarily and as a general rule, forms a binding law for the regulation of the affairs of the church. The general considerations already adverted to establish the truth of the general position as to the ordinary binding force of apostolic practice. These considerations cannot be directly answered and refuted, or shown to involve anything erroneous or absurd; and therefore, as nothing formidable can be adduced upon the other side, the general principle must be held as proved. And neither the ground we have to believe that the principle is to be held with some qualifications, nor the difficulties that may arise in particular cases, as to the practical application of the principle viewed in connection with these qualifications and limitations, warrant us in refusing to admit and maintain it, and to make a reasonable application of it.

It must be admitted, indeed, that some practical questions have been started upon the particular subject we are now considering which are not of very easy or certain solution. But they are all of such a kind as are manifestly, from their very nature, and from the general genius and spirit of the Christian economy, of no great intrinsic importance; and such as that the consciences of men who are conscious to themselves of a sincere and honest desire to do the

will of Christ, so far as they clearly see it, need not be greatly distressed about the precise adjustment of them. We cannot enter into much detail upon this subject, or give any exposition of the particular questions that have been controverted under this general head; but we think the substance of the truth upon this topic—the principal general rules by which we ought to be guided in the regulation of this matter—may be summed up in the following positions :—

First, That nothing ought to be admitted into the ordinary government and worship of the Christian church which has not the sanction or warrant of scriptural authority, or apostolic practice at least, if not precept; but with this exception or limitation, as stated in the first chapter of our Confession of Faith, ‘that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.’

Secondly, That the scriptural proof of any arrangement or practice having existed in the apostolic churches ordinarily and *prima facie* imposes an obligation upon all churches to adopt it,—an obligation that is imperative and unlimited in regard to all those things which obviously enter into the substance of the government and worship of the church, and the mode in which they are administered.

Thirdly, That the *onus probandi* lies upon those who propose to omit anything which has the sanction of apostolic practice, and that they must produce a satisfactory reason for doing so, derived either from some general principle or specific statement of Scripture bearing upon the point, or from the nature of the case, as making it manifest that the particular point of practice under consideration was local and temporary.

There are two great practical questions involved in the right adjustment of this general topic of the binding force of apostolical practice, or of the permanent obligation of what we know from Scripture to have been actually done in the primitive churches under apostolic superintendence, viz.,—first, whether it be lawful for Christian churches now to omit any arrangement or observance which the apostles introduced into, or sanctioned in, the churches; and, secondly, whether it be lawful to introduce into the church

any arrangement or observance which they did not sanction or require. To maintain the affirmative on either of these questions, as a general rule, seems to amount to something like a negation of the place or standing which is plainly ascribed to the apostles in the New Testament, as supernaturally authorized and guided by Christ for the work of organizing and establishing His church in the world. If this function were really devolved by Christ upon the apostles, and if they were supernaturally qualified by Him for the execution of it, then there is no reason whatever to reject, but, on the contrary, every reason to admit, the conclusion, that what they *did* in this matter, either in introducing or in omitting, when ascertained from Scripture, forms a rule or standard which the church in all ages is imperatively bound to follow. To deny this is virtually to reduce the apostles, with reference to what was evidently one of the main parts of their special function, to the level of ordinary uninspired men, and to ascribe to the office-bearers of the church in subsequent times an equal right and an equal fitness to determine the arrangements of Christ's kingdom with that which the apostles possessed. The rejection of apostolic practice as a binding rule for the church in all ages is of course glossed over by its defenders under plausible pretences; but it really amounts, in substance and in effect, to a preference of their own wisdom to that of the apostles, *i.e.*, of the wisdom of man to that of God.

The chief pretences employed in this matter are the alleged impossibility of making arrangements and instituting observances that might be equally adapted for all ages and countries; the allegation that the apostles introduced somewhat different arrangements into the different churches which they planted,—an allegation of which no evidence can be produced; and the alleged propriety and expediency of leaving room for a judicious adaptation of things so insignificant as external arrangements and ceremonies to the suggestions of experience, and to the existing state of the development of the Christian life and the Christian consciousness, to use the favourite phraseology of our own day, of particular churches or classes of men.

There might have been some plausibility in the allegation of the impossibility of introducing at once arrangements and ceremonies that would be equally adapted to all ages and countries, if Christianity, as an outward system, had at all resembled in its

general features and objects the Mosaic economy—if it had been intended to be a system of minute prescription and observance. This manifestly was not intended. Accordingly there is very little, as compared with the Mosaic economy, of what is external that can be held to be fixed or determined for the Christian church in all ages, either by the precepts or by the practice of the apostles. Christianity is adapted for permanence and for catholicity by the very absence of any detailed standard or directory of external arrangements and observances; and when so little that is merely external can be held to have been prescribed and imposed, even when it is assumed that apostolic practice constitutes a permanent binding rule, the presumption is very strong that nothing which has been so sanctioned may be omitted in subsequent ages, unless there be pretty manifest indications, either in the nature of the case or in some scriptural statements, that it was intended to be but local or temporary. Accordingly, almost all churches have admitted, as a general principle, their obligation to have still what apostolic practice has sanctioned, and have not differed very materially as to the limitations and practical applications of this principle.

In making this statement, of course I do not refer to those questions which have been started and debated between different churches, as to whether or not particular arrangements *were* made by the apostles, and did obtain in the apostolic churches,—as, for instance, whether the apostolic church was under the government of Peter as Christ's vicar,—whether it was ruled by diocesan prelates,—whether presbyters or elders, who were not ordinary pastors, had a share in the administration of its affairs. In discussing these points, the question is not, whether apostolic practice is a binding rule,—for both parties in these controversies usually concede that it is,—but whether the practice of the apostles did, in point of fact, include and sanction these particular arrangements. We refer to cases with respect to which *it is admitted* that the apostolic practice did sanction them, and where, of course, the question that arises is, Did this admitted practice of the apostles render the observance of them imperatively binding upon the church in future ages? The chief points to which *this* question has been applied, are of no great importance in themselves, and have not occasioned any great diversity of opinion, or much controversial discussion among men of sense and discrimination. They are principally these: the washing of the feet of the dis-

ciples, practised, and in some sense enjoined, by our Lord,—abstinence from blood,—the order of deaconesses,—the kiss of charity, or what some of the more strenuous defenders of its permanent obligation have called the ordinance of salutation,—and the *αγαπαί*, or love-feasts, which seem to have usually succeeded the celebration of public worship. There is no great difficulty in showing, partly from the nature of the case, and the manifest relation of the practices to temporary or local circumstances, partly from the manner in which they are spoken of in Scripture, and partly from other statements in the New Testament, which bear upon the particular point, though not directly and immediately treating of it, that these things are *not* binding upon Christians and churches in all ages, and that men's consciences need not be disturbed by the omission or disregard of them. The churches of Christ in general, while holding that these practices are not permanently binding, although admitting that we have in the New Testament sufficient grounds to believe that they did in fact generally obtain in apostolic times, have, at the same time, usually held, as a general principle, the binding force of apostolic practice or example, and have professed to apply this general principle to the actual regulation of their own conduct.

There is one topic connected with this subject which has given rise to a good deal of discussion in our own day, and on which, for this reason, we may make a passing observation, especially as it occupies a sort of intermediate position between the two classes of cases formerly adverted to, in the one of which the fact of the apostolic practice is admitted on both sides, and in the other of which it is controverted. I refer to the attempt which has been made to show that apostolic precept and practice fix one exclusive mode of providing for the temporal maintenance of a gospel ministry, viz., by the voluntary contributions of those who enjoy the benefit of it. That apostolic precept and practice impose an imperative obligation upon those who are taught to provide for the maintenance of him who teaches, and of course give him a right to maintenance from them, and that this was the way in which ordinarily ministers were maintained in the apostolic church, is of course admitted; and so far the parties are agreed as to what *de facto* the general apostolic practice was, while they are also agreed in this, that, *de jure*, this obligation to give, and this right to receive maintenance, permanently attach to the two parties respectively.

But it is contended on the other side—and, we are persuaded, with complete success—that there is nothing either in the statements of Scripture, or in the practice of the apostles, which affords any ground for the position, that it is unlawful for ministers to derive their support from any other source than the contributions of those among whom they labour; and that a survey of all that Scripture teaches upon the subject, and especially of the diversified procedure adopted by the apostle Paul in regard to his own maintenance, affords positive grounds for holding that this position is not true.

We have dwelt, however, longer than we intended upon the less important department of the subject, viz., the lawfulness or unlawfulness of *omitting* what apostolic practice sanctions; and we must now briefly advert to the other and more important topic comprehended under this general subject, viz., the lawfulness or unlawfulness of *introducing* what apostolic practice has *not* sanctioned. The difference upon the former question is one merely of degree; for it is generally admitted, even by those who hold as a general rule the binding force of apostolic practice or example, that there are some things which have the sanction of apostolic practice which may be lawfully omitted as not permanently binding. But, on the latter question, the difference is one of kind or of principle, because we hold it as a great general truth, that it is unwarrantable and unlawful to introduce into the government and worship of the Christian church any arrangements and ordinances which have not been positively sanctioned by Christ or His apostles; and because, when this general truth is denied, there is no limitation that can be put to the introduction of the inventions of men into the government and worship of Christ's house. There is no valid argument, or even reasonable presumption, against the truth of this general position, *as we have above explained it*; and there is a great deal that cannot be answered to be adduced in support of it. There is no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine laid down in the twentieth Article of the Church of England, that 'the church has power to decree rites and ceremonies,' unless this power be restricted within the limits indicated in the quotation formerly given from the first chapter of our own Confession of Faith. If these limits are carefully observed, the principle we have laid down is safe, for scarcely any case has ever been started where there was any real difficulty in deciding,—and on this the question turns,—whether a particular ecclesiastical arrangement about the

government and worship of the church was really the introduction and establishment of a new and unauthorized thing into the church, or merely the regulation of the circumstances requiring to be regulated in the mode of doing things, which things Christ or His apostles have sanctioned.

#### Sec. VII.—*Divine Right of a Form of Church Government.*

Another question suggested by the history of the council of Jerusalem is, whether or not a particular form of church government is laid down in Scripture so as to be binding by God's authority, or, *jure divino*, upon the church in subsequent ages? This question has given rise to a good deal of discussion, though it has not unfrequently been discussed in such a way as to resolve very much into a dispute about words, in which men, whose views did not very materially differ from each other, might support the affirmative or the negative in the question, according to the precise sense in which its terms might be explained. It has been the most generally prevalent opinion in the Christian church, that a particular form of church government has been laid down in Scripture so as to be binding upon future ages, though there has, of course, been much difference of opinion as to what the particular form of church government is which has received the sanction of Scripture. Those who have disputed or denied this *general* position about the Scripture sanctioning a particular form of church government, have been most commonly men who had some particular purpose to serve, who were exposed to the temptation of being influenced in their views and practice by some other consideration than a pure love of truth,—as, for instance, a desire to leave room for the interference of the civil power in the government of the church, or to palliate their own submission to what the civil power may have sanctioned and established in this matter. And in defending the position, that no particular form of church government was laid down in Scripture, they have usually represented the opposite opinion in a manner which the statements of its supporters do not warrant, as if *they* meant to assert that the whole detailed particulars of a full directory for the government of the church were laid down in Scripture, and admitted of no change,—a position which is manifestly untenable.

Papists, Prelatists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists, have,

in general, contended that their own system of church government is laid down in Scripture, and is binding upon the church in all ages; but they have also in general admitted, that it is only the leading features, or fundamental principles of their system, that are sanctioned by Scripture, without claiming direct scriptural authority for its details, and without denying that there are things of minor importance connected with the government of the church which the church herself may regulate from time to time, according as local or temporary circumstances may suggest or require. In this way it sometimes happens, that the more reasonable and judicious *affirmers* and *deniers* of the *jus divinum* of a particular form of church government, do not differ very materially from each other on the general question, while very considerable differences are to be found on both sides as to what particular form of church government it is that has the sanction of Scripture, or can make out the most plausible claims to support upon scriptural grounds. It is also to be noticed, that those who concur in maintaining that there is a form of church government laid down in Scripture, differ considerably among themselves as to the *extent* to which they claim a scriptural sanction for the *subordinate* features of their own scheme; and as to the view they take of the fulness and clearness of the scriptural evidence even of what they may think the Scripture sanctions. So that, in laying down the position usually maintained by the defenders of the binding scriptural authority of a particular form of church government, it must be stated in this way, that the fundamental principles or leading features of a particular form of government for the church of all ages are indicated in Scripture, and are indicated in such a way as to impose an obligation of conformity upon the church in all succeeding times. I have no doubt of the truth of this position, and think that it can be satisfactorily established.

I think it can be, and has often been, proved that the Presbyterian form of church government, *in its fundamental principles and leading features*, is sanctioned by Scripture and apostolic practice; or, to adopt the language of our ordination formula, "is founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto;" and that this can *not* be truly predicated of any other form of church government, such as Prelacy and Congregationalism. I am not called upon *at present* to establish this position, as I am merely proposing to illustrate the general topic of the way in which the

subject of the *jus divinum* of church government has been, and should be, discussed. I may remark, however, in general, that the mode in which this position is to be established is that of an induction of particulars,—*i.e.*, we proceed in the way of collating from Scripture certain rules in regard to the government of the church, which have the sanction of apostolic practice; we combine these together; we show that, when combined, they constitute what may be fairly called a scheme or system of church government; and that this scheme or system is just Presbyterianism in its fundamental principles and leading features, as it has been held by the great body of those who have been usually classed under this designation. It is no very difficult matter, I think, to prove from Scripture that the apostles, in establishing and organizing churches, committed the ordinary administration of divine ordinances, and the ordinary regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, not to the body of the ordinary members of the church, but to rulers or office-bearers; that these office-bearers, settled and constituted by the apostles in the churches which they founded, were of two classes, *viz.*, presbyters,—called also bishops,—and deacons; that no other ordinary class of functionaries was introduced by them into the administration of the government of the church, and especially no class of ordinary functionaries of superior rank or authority to the ministers of the word—the pastors of congregations; that these presbyters or bishops were divided into two classes, one of whom both taught and ruled, and the other only ruled, but did not ordinarily exercise the function of public teaching; that while these presbyters alone administered the spiritual affairs of the church, they all, in conjunction with the deacons, managed its temporal or secular affairs; that, in some cases at least, several congregations were placed under one presbyterial government; and that some countenance is given to the general idea of a gradation of judicatories—the general principle of a subordination of courts.

This was the way in which we see from Scripture that the apostles organized and made provision for the government of the churches which they planted. These different rules and arrangements, if really scriptural, as we believe they are, manifestly constitute, when combined together, a full scheme or system of government—what may be justly and reasonably called a particular form of church government; and *that* form of church government is manifestly just Presbyterianism in all its essential

principles and leading features, as distinguished from Prelacy on the one hand, and from Congregationalism on the other. The Presbyterian form of church government, then, has the warrant and sanction of apostolic practice, *i. e.*, we can show from Scripture that the churches planted by the apostles were organized substantially in accordance with the arrangements of what is usually called the Presbyterian system; and we have shown that there is no good ground for denying, and that there is quite sufficient ground for maintaining, as a general principle, with the limitations or modifications then explained, that the practice of the apostles in establishing and organizing churches, as made known or indicated to us in Scripture, is, and was intended to be, a permanent binding rule for regulating the government of the church of Christ, and of all its branches or sections. From all this the conclusion manifestly follows, that a particular form of church government has been laid down in Scripture as permanently binding upon the church of Christ—that form being the Presbyterian one.

This is what is implied in the profession which the ministers of our church are called upon to make when they receive ordination, and which, as I have already mentioned, is expressed in these words, that “the Presbyterian government and discipline of this church are founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto.” The language here employed is cautious and temperate, and is thus well suited to the circumstances of a solemn profession to be made by a numerous body of men, who might not all see their way to concur in stronger and more specific phraseology. Besides, it is to be observed that the profession respects not merely the fundamentals or essentials of Presbyterianism in the abstract, which alone can be reasonably maintained to have the clear and positive sanction of apostolic practice; but “the Presbyterian government and discipline of this church,” including the detailed development of the essential principles of Presbyterianism as exhibited in the actual constitution and arrangements of our church, and of all this in the concrete, or taken complexly, nothing higher or stronger could with propriety be affirmed, than that it is founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto. Of the *fundamental* principles and *leading* features of the Presbyterian system of church government as above described, and as distinguished from Prelacy and from Congregationalism, I would not

hesitate to use stronger and more specific language than our ordination formula applies to the Presbyterian government and discipline of this church—viz., this, that *in its substance it is the form* in regard to which Christ has, with sufficient plainness, indicated in His word, by the practice of His inspired apostles in establishing and organizing churches, that it is His mind and will that *it*, to the exclusion of all others, in so far as they are inconsistent with it, should be the form of government adopted in His church, and in all its branches: in other words, that Presbyterianism, in its substance or fundamental principles, is binding *jure divino* as the form of government by which the church of Christ ought permanently and everywhere to be regulated.

Some, in opposing the principle of the permanent scriptural authority or *jus divinum* of any one particular form of church government, take the ground that we have no sufficient materials in Scripture for determining what the apostolic practice in establishing and organizing churches was. Others—and this is the view taken by Mosheim—that the apostolic practice, though substantially known and ascertained, does not constitute a rule permanently binding upon the church; while others, again—though this is virtually a modification of the first view—found much upon an allegation that the apostles did not establish the same form of government in *all* the churches which they planted. For this last allegation no evidence whatever can be produced, and unless it be restricted to matters of a comparatively insignificant kind, and of a manifestly local and temporary character, such as would not affect the real position in dispute, there is much that conclusively disproves it. The first of these views implies a large amount of distorting and perverting the word of God,—the exercise of a great deal of sinful ingenuity in involving it in obscurity and confusion; while the second, unless restricted, as we have explained, within such narrow limits as to make it incapable of affecting the proper question in dispute, is based, as we have shown, upon a general principle that is not only untenable, but dangerous, as infringing upon the sufficiency and perfection of the written word.

These are nothing more than mere hints upon a somewhat difficult and complicated subject;\* but if pondered and followed

\* *Vide* Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation, p. 37.—EDRS.

out, they may help to form a judgment upon a topic of considerable practical interest and importance in the present day, and may contribute to guard against the loose and latitudinarian views that are generally prevalent concerning it.

In conclusion, I would simply advert to another pretence which is sometimes employed in our day by those whose views concerning the government of the church, and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, cannot stand a scriptural investigation, and which is had recourse to for the purpose of evading the authority of Scripture, without needing to face the question of what it is that Scripture teaches and imposes upon the subject. It consists in the insinuation (for the notion is too absurd to be openly and explicitly asserted) of some such idea as this, that the obligation to be subject wholly to Christ, and to be guided exclusively by His written word in all things, attaches only to the invisible church, or to individual believers; and not, or at least not so fully, to the visible church and its separate branches.\* To state this notion plainly and distinctly is to refute it, for nothing surely can be more obvious than that the obligation to be subject wholly to Christ's authority, and to be guided exclusively by His word in all matters on which it furnishes any information, attaches equally to all societies as to all individuals, which profess to receive Him as their Master; that the general principles, in this respect, which apply to the invisible must apply equally to the visible church; and that the general principles and rules applicable to the catholic visible church in its totality, must apply equally to every particular church, *i.e.*, to every section or branch of the catholic visible church, to every distinct organized society, large or small, Prelatic, Presbyterian, or Congregational, which assumes to itself the character and designation of a church of Christ.

\* *Vide* Elliott, author of *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, in his reply to Dr Candlish.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE APOSTLES' CREED.

I ASSUME it as settled and proved, that the books which compose the New Testament were all given by inspiration of God; that the other works which have been ascribed to the apostles, whether assuming the form of gospels, or epistles, or liturgies—for we have some under all these heads—are to be regarded neither as genuine nor authoritative; and that the books of the New Testament, along with those of the Old Testament, as commonly held canonical by Protestants, form the only authoritative standard of faith and practice. All the different productions here referred to, though claiming to emanate from the apostles of our Lord, are destitute of any adequate external historical evidence, and their spuriousness can be fully established by conclusive internal evidence derived from their contents. There is, however, one production, in favour of which a claim has been set up to an apostolic origin, and of the genuineness of which it has been generally admitted that there is no specific internal proof. I refer to what is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, *Symbolum Apostolicum*.\* It is the doctrine of the Church of Rome, though some of the most candid and judicious Romanists have been

\* Books and references on the Apostles' Creed:—

Catech. Trident, P. i., c. i.  
 Natalis Alexandri Hist. Eccles., Saec. i., Diss. xii.  
 Usserius, de Romanae Ecclesiae Symbolo.  
 Vossius, de tribus symbolis. Op., tom. vi.  
 Fabricius, Codex Apocryphus N. T., P. iii., tom. ii., pp. 359–364, where a list is given of authors who have written upon the Creed.  
 Heideggerus, Dissertationes Selectae, tom. ii., Diss. xv. and xvi.

Voetius, Disputationes Selectae, tom. i., Disp. v., p. 64.

Ittigius, Hist. Eccles., Saec. i., c. iii., sec. i., pp. 76–120.

Ittigius, de Pseudepigraphis Christi, Mariae et Apostolorum (subjoined to Disputatio de Haeresiarchis), c. viii., p. 144.

Carpzovius, Isagoge in Libros Eccles. Lutheran. Symbolicos, Pars. i., sec. i.

Walchii Introductio in Lib. Eccl. Luth. Symb., Lib. i., c. ii.

King's History of the Apostles'



unable to assent to it,\* that this creed was composed by the apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and that, of course, it is to be regarded as possessed of the same direct divine authority as the canonical Scriptures; and Protestants in general, though they have commonly denied that it was composed by the apostles, or is possessed in itself of any proper authority, have admitted that it contains sound apostolic doctrine, which is in accordance with, and can be established by, the word of God. The Lutheran and Anglican churches have adopted it along with the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, as a part of their authorized symbolical profession of faith. The Westminster divines subjoined it, along with the ten commandments and the Lord's prayer, to their catechisms, accompanied with this explanatory statement: "It is here annexed, not as though it were composed by the apostles, or ought to be esteemed canonical Scripture, as the ten commandments and Lord's prayer, but because it is a brief sum of the Christian faith, agreeable to the word of God, and anciently received in the churches of Christ."

It is not, however, possessed of any great antiquity, for it was not generally received in its present form till the very end of the fourth, or the beginning of the fifth century, since which time it has been adopted as the creed of the Roman or Western Church, and is often spoken of by old writers under the name of *Symbolum Romanum*, though it has never been received by the Oriental or Greek churches. Among other notions borrowed from the Church of Rome, this of the apostolic origin and authority of the creed has been embraced and advocated by the Tractarians. Dr Newman, long before he joined the Church of Rome, described it as "the formal symbol which the apostles adopted and bequeathed to the church," and asserted that "it has an evidence of its apostolical origin, the same in kind with that for the Scriptures."†

Mosheim says that "all who have the least knowledge of antiquity look upon this opinion as entirely false, and destitute of all foundation." The reasons which led Dr Newman and other

Creed, with critical observations on the different articles.

Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, B. x., c. iii., vol. 3, p. 318.

Goode's *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, c. iv.; Peck's *Rule of Faith*, p. 206.

The chief doctrinal expositions of the Creed are those of Pearson, Barrow, Witsius, and Nicole.

\* *Cat. Trid.*, P. i., c. i., sec. 3.

† Goode's *Rule of Faith*, vol. 1, pp. 109, 110; new edition of 1853, p. 107.

Tractarians, who certainly had some knowledge of antiquity, to assert that the Creed was composed by the apostles, were probably these. They had been much in the habit, under the influence of a strong Popish leaning, of copying statements without much examination, notwithstanding all their pretensions to learning, from unscrupulous Popish controversialists. It is impossible, I think, for any man to doubt this, who has read Goode's very learned and valuable work, entitled, "The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice." With the views which these men held, in common with the Church of Rome, on the subject of tradition and the rule of faith, it was important to break down, as it were, the monopoly of infallibility which Protestants assign to the Scriptures, by bringing forward *one* other document not contained in Scripture, but handed down by tradition, which yet possessed apostolic authority. There is thus a great principle—that, viz., of the completeness or perfection of the sacred Scriptures—involved in the claim put forth on behalf of the Creed to an apostolic origin. And I have no doubt that another motive which induced them to support this notion was this, that, being determined enemies to the doctrines of grace—the great doctrines of the Reformation—they were glad to have a pretence for representing, as an inspired summary of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, a document in which these great truths were not explicitly asserted. Some of the early Protestant writers, such as the Magdeburg Centuriators, were disposed to concede the apostolic origin of the Creed, influenced apparently by the desire of being able to maintain, in opposition to the Romish charge against them of departing from the apostolic faith, that they held the whole doctrines which the apostles embodied in their summary of faith. Even Calvin\* talks as if he had no great objection to concede to it an apostolic origin, and were rather disposed to favour the notion. It is nothing more than ascribing to Calvin (who may be fairly regarded as being, all things considered, the greatest and most useful gift that God has given to the church since the apostolic age) a participation in the common infirmities of humanity, if we suppose that he may have been unconsciously disposed to think more favourably of the apostolic origin of the Creed than the historical evidence warrants, because it seems to contain a more explicit

\* *Instit.*, L. ii., c. xvi., sec. 18.

assertion than the word of God does, of a doctrine which he held, and to which he appears to have attached some importance, viz., that Christ descended into hell,—in this sense, that after death He went to the place of the damned, and shared somehow in their torments. Calvin says that the ancients, with one accord, ascribed it to the apostles, and Newman says that the evidence of its apostolic origin is the same in kind as that for the Scriptures. Let us briefly state how this stands as a matter of fact.

We have no notice of the Creed *in its present form* till about the end of the fourth century, and we have no evidence antecedent to that period of its being asserted, or generally believed, that the apostles drew up and committed to writing *any* formal creed or summary of faith. A notion of this sort, originating in the end of the fourth century,—not existing previously, and not based upon anything like evidence previously recognised,—is entitled to no weight whatever in proof of a matter of fact of the kind in question. The precise facts are these. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, in a letter written about the year 380, speaks of the Creed of the Apostles, which the Roman Church always preserves uncorrupted. But he does not expressly assign to it, as a document, an apostolic origin, and he might call it the Apostles' Creed merely to indicate that it contained a summary of the doctrine which the apostles taught. Ruffinus, in his Exposition upon the Creed, published about fifteen years later, near the very end of the century, is the first who expressly ascribes it to the apostles; and his statement embodies some circumstances which throw much doubt upon his leading position. He describes it as a tradition of their forefathers, *tradunt majores nostri*; which may perhaps be regarded as an admission that this had not previously been asserted in writing in any of those ancient works which are now lost, any more than in those which have been preserved. He tells us that the apostles, before dispersing to preach the gospel over the world, resolved to prepare a common summary of the Christian faith, in order to guard against any diversity in their future teaching,—“*ne forte alii ab aliis abducti diversum aliquid his qui ad fidem Christi invitabantur, exponerent;*”—and accordingly they met together, and, under the guidance of the Spirit, they prepared this Creed in this way, by each contributing a portion as he thought best,—“*conferendo in unum quod sentiebat unusquisque.*” This is certainly a very improbable story, both as it respects the motive and the pro-

cess of the composition. His statement as to the mode of composing it was very soon improved and adorned in a sermon, falsely ascribed to Augustine, and published in the fifth century, which informs us that each of the twelve apostles, when assembled to compose the Creed, uttered in succession one of the clauses of which it consists: Peter saying, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of heaven and earth;” Andrew, “and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord;” “James, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,” etc. Pope Leo the Great, who flourished in the middle of the fifth century, repeats the substance of this story, ascribing a clause to each of the twelve apostles, but without specifying the individual authors of each. From this time, the apostolic origin of the Creed, in the sense of the document having been prepared in its present form by the apostles, was generally held as an article of faith in the Western churches, though so late as the Council of Florence, about the middle of the fifteenth century, the Greeks maintained that this Creed was, and had always been, unknown in the churches of the East.\*

This is really the whole evidence from antiquity in support of the apostolic origin of the Creed, in its present form, as a document; and, even if we were to concede to Dr Newman that the evidence is the same in kind as for the Scriptures, still it is manifest that the difference in *degree* is so great, that we may confidently maintain, that in the one case it amounts to a conclusive proof, and in the other it does not reach even to a presumption. Some of the fathers, though none more ancient than the time of Ambrose and Ruffinus, have told us that the apostles used a creed which was not committed to writing, but handed down by memory and tradition. But this, even if true, is not relevant to the point under consideration; unless, indeed, it could be proved that the creed which they used and transmitted was precisely identical, not only in substance, but in words, with that which we now have.

Some of the earlier fathers speak frequently of a canon or rule of faith, evidently meaning by this, a brief, comprehensive summary of the leading doctrines of Christianity. But they did

\* Ittigius, *Dissertatio de Pseudepigraphis Christi, Virginis Mariæ et Apostolorum*, p. 146, subjoined to his *Dissertatio de Hæresiarchis ævi Apostolici et Apostolico proximi.*

Fabricii *Codex Apoc. N. T.*, P. iii., p. 349.  
Natalis Alexander, *de Symbolo.*

not, in using this language, refer to the present Creed,—for some of them, in using it, and even in applying to the summary the word *symbolum*, refer explicitly to the general confession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in the administration of baptism, as prescribed by our Saviour, and recorded in Scripture; and the rest, when they speak of the creed, the canon, the rule of faith, give us a creed of their own, agreeing, indeed, in substance with the present Creed, but not by any means identical with it. This latter statement applies more particularly to Irenæus and Tertullian in the second century, who have given us each two different summaries of the faith generally received in the Christian church; and to Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus, in the third, who have given us each one such creed or summary;—all these agreeing in substance with each other, and with the present Creed, but all so far differing from it, as to prove that it was not during the first three centuries known in the church as an apostolic document, and that no one brief summary of the Christian faith, supposed to possess apostolic authority, was then generally known and adopted. The entire absence of all reference to the Apostles' Creed in the proceedings and discussions connected with the Nicene Council, and the formation of the Nicene Creed, affords conclusive proof that the church in general, even in the early part of the fourth century, knew *nothing of any creed* that was generally regarded as having an apostolic origin and authority. And this is confirmed by the fact that, whereas the Nicene Creed, like the creeds or summaries of faith which we find in Irenæus, Tertullian, and Origen, was but an amplification of the confession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with a much more precise and specific condemnation of Arianism than we find in any previous creed or summary; it was not till the Council of Constantinople in 381, when our present Creed was becoming better known through the growing ascendancy of the Church of Rome, that there were added to the Nicene Creed, along with a much fuller profession concerning the divinity of the Holy Ghost, in opposition to the heresy of Macedonius, the other articles not so immediately connected with the confession of the Trinity, which still form the conclusion of the Creed.\*

\* The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon make no mention of the Apostles' Creed, and virtually repudi-  
ate any other than the Nicene. What we commonly call the Nicene Creed is really the Constantinopolitan.

The diversities which we find subsisting among the ancient creeds or summaries,—and which are very considerable as to their fulness, or the number of the different articles they contain, and as to the words in which they are expressed, though they all agree as to their substance so far as they go,—furnish satisfactory evidence that there was not during the first four centuries any creed, written or oral, which was generally regarded as the production of the apostles. And what is specially important and altogether conclusive, in showing that the present Creed has no claim to an apostolic origin in any other sense than this, that it contains, as all admit, a summary of the doctrine which the apostles taught, is the express testimony of Ruffinus, that the two articles, of the descent of Christ into hell, and the communion of saints, were not to be found in the creed of the Roman Church, or of any of the Eastern churches even at the end of the fourth century; while the creed of some other churches which contained these articles, wanted others which were found in the creeds of the Roman and Oriental churches.

In opposition to all this body of evidence, Romanists have really nothing to say that is possessed even of plausibility. They can say nothing but this,—that there was no material variation among the early creeds in point of substance. But this is not to the point. No one doubts that all those creeds which have been referred to, including the different versions of the present Creed, exhibit correctly, so far as they go, the substance of the doctrine which the apostles taught, and which is accordant with the Scripture. The only question is,—Was the present Creed,—as a document of course, as to the words of which it is composed,—or any other creed or summary of Christian doctrine, the production of the inspired apostles? and the evidence which has been referred to, *requires* us to answer this question in the negative. Yet the Church of Rome has defined in the Trent Catechism, that the apostles not only composed the Creed, but gave it the name of *symbolum*; and she exacts the belief of this of her subjects.

Laurentius Valla, a learned and candid writer who flourished before the Reformation in the end of the fifteenth century, maintained that the Creed was not the production of the apostles, and was not composed till the time of the Council of Nice; but the Inquisition compelled him to retract this heresy, and to profess that he believed what holy mother church believed upon