

The validity of Anglican orders

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THE VALIDITY OF ANGLICAN ORDERS.

At the recent Congress at Rotterdam, just before we sat down to the festal banquet which did so much to inspire those present at the Congress with a spirit of mutual good-will, there was placed in my hands a copy of a report on the validity of Anglican Orders, issued by a Committee specially deputed to investigate the subject. I desire, with your permission, to make a few remarks on the report in question. The more thoroughly the matter is thrashed out, the better it will be for all parties. And it is the special value of the *Revue Internationale*—a value, I may add, which is being increasingly felt throughout Christendom—that it affords a means whereby questions of interest to the members of the Christian Church at large may be fully and freely discussed, and the results of such discussion communicated to every part of the Christian world.

In what I have to say, I shall confine myself to the broad general features of the question. I shall be glad if others who have a right to be regarded as experts, such, for instance, as our own Bishop of Salisbury, will take part in the discussion when once initiated in your columns.¹⁾ For myself, I cannot pretend to any minute familiarity with the details of the subject. I can only lay claim to a general knowledge of the main current of the history of the Church and nation to which I belong. But even a general familiarity with the history of our Church may enable an Englishman to throw light upon the details with which those not so familiar with that history are called upon to deal.

¹⁾ This paper was written before the Bishop of Salisbury's able and exhaustive reply to the Report presented to the members of the Old Catholic Congress at Rotterdam had appeared.

English Churchmen owe a debt of gratitude to the Dutch clergy who have undertaken the task of investigating the validity of our orders for having cast aside the Nag's Head Fable and the attempt made to throw doubt on the fact of Barlow's consecration, on which so much stress has been laid. But had they been more familiar with English history and with the British constitution, they might have spared themselves the trouble of investigating these assertions altogether. For they bear their own refutation upon the face of them, as I hope to shew before I conclude. I should like, however, before doing so, to remark on some misconceptions of the main principles at work in our English Reformation into which the investigators have been betrayed. To begin with, they do not understand the circumstances by which the Reformation in England was brought about. They are not to blame in this respect; for it is only of late years that English historians have discovered the causes of that Reformation to have lain, not in the personal character of Henry the Eighth, nor in his relations with Queen Catharine, but in the effect of the usurped authority of the Pope upon the political position and prospects of the English nation. Thus the statement on p. 21 of the Report, which makes the cause of Henry's quarrel with the Pope, to be his "pretended scruples" about the validity of his marriage with Catharine, and his desire to replace her by Anne Boleyn, is, I would submit, altogether inadequate to explain what actually occurred. Henry the Eighth, whatever his private and personal character, was not utterly destitute of common sense; and he would hardly have placed his life and crown in peril for a pretty face, the more especially as in those days crowned heads found no difficulty whatever in the indulgence of their sensual passions, as the history of contemporary monarchs shews plainly enough. Moreover, Henry the Eighth, though by no means immaculate in his earlier days, led a far purer life than most sovereigns, and for some time before his divorce from Catharine, had apparently been quite faithful to her. The problem, as it presented itself to Henry and to the leading statesmen of the realm, was the very grave peril which hung over England in case of a failure of the Tudor line. This explains why so many of those statesmen, Wolsey and Sir Thomas More included, were inclined to favour the divorce. Even the Pope himself admitted, in an interview

with one of Henry's agents, that if the divorce were not granted, it might cost England 100,000 lives. During a considerable portion of the preceding century, England had been deluged with blood by wars concerning the succession, and they had only been brought to an end by the merging the rival lines into one by the marriage of Henry VII with the Princess Elizabeth of York. The failure of their issue would have led to the renewal of the strife. One frail life, that of Mary, the sole survivor of the six children of Henry and Catharine, stood between England and a prospect at which every far-sighted and patriotic Englishman stood aghast. Nor was the prospect of Mary's accession to the throne much more reassuring. She must either marry a crowned head, in which case England might become a province of a more powerful and populous country, such as France or Spain, or a dependency of a smaller country like Scotland, regarded at that time by England with mingled dislike and contempt. Or she must marry a subject, a course which would have unchained all the fiercest jealousies of the English aristocracy. Readers of history may remember how very near this country was to the realization of the first alternative, and our Dutch brethren may not unreasonably be asked to congratulate us that we escaped falling under the paternal rule of Philip II, and such memories as the sieges of Haarlem and Leyden. Elizabeth avoided all these alternatives by refusing to marry at all, and the country by degrees became reconciled to the prospect, once so unwelcome, of a Scottish monarch. But to return to Henry the Eighth. The only escape possible for England from the perils he dreaded, appeared to be afforded by his divorce from Catharine, and his marriage with some one who might afford a reasonable prospect of male issue. Divorces for state reasons were granted by the Popes with the utmost readiness, whenever it suited them. A flaw could be found, if needed, in almost every marriage. And a marriage more open to question than that of Henry and Catharine it was impossible to conceive. It had only been solemnized by the Pope's special permission, and there were many divines who held that the Pope himself could not authorize the breach of the law Divine. Why, then, was the Divorce refused? and why did Clement put off his decision for seven long years? Not because he thought the application unjust or unreason-

able, nor, as the history abundantly shews, because he was personally disinclined to grant it, but *because he was not a free agent*. At the moment when the divorce was sought, he was a captive in the hands of Charles V, Emperor of Germany, King of Spain, and over-lord of the Netherlands. Not only was Charles V the nephew of Catharine, but it was his ambition to be master of Europe, and so astute a politician was not in the least likely to overlook the fact that to refuse the divorce was to reduce England to a condition in which she would in all probability be compelled to be subservient to his plans. This was the danger which alarmed Henry and his leading statesmen, and drove him finally to the resolution not to allow the best interests of his country to be trifled with by the tool of his most dangerous rival. Moreover, in crushing the political authority of the Pope in these realms he did but revert to the state of things in existence in the time of William the Conqueror. In making the Archbishop of Canterbury the arbiter of his divorce projects he entered on a course dangerous indeed to the independence of the English Church, but, as it appeared to him, and not without reason, absolutely necessary to the independence of the English nation. Thus the English Reformation was not, as has so often been asserted, the result of the caprice of a dissolute tyrant, but the work of a monarch despotic and unscrupulous, no doubt, but nevertheless, on a large view of his position and surroundings, distinctly wise and patriotic. It has been a source of great mischief to the religious history of England that her own historians have so persistently misrepresented the motives of a man who, though violent, vindictive, and cruel, was notwithstanding one of the ablest sovereigns who ever reigned over this country.

Beside this misconception in regard to the origin of the English Church, the Committee have also fallen into error in regard to the final ecclesiastical settlement in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. She is described in pp. 24 and 25 as the "head" or "chief" of the English Church. It should be remembered that although Mary accepted this title, Queen Elizabeth steadily refused to adopt it, and caused herself instead to be described in the Act of Supremacy as the "Supreme Governor" in the realm "in all causes, ecclesiastical as well as civil". Even Henry VIII disclaimed any *spiritual* headship over the

Church of Christ. He simply claimed to be the only fountain of *judicial* power in the kingdom.¹⁾ Previously to the Reformation, not only spiritual but *temporal* authority had been exercised by the Bishops, and for the exercise of that authority they were responsible, not to the King, not to the English law, but to a foreign Bishop and a foreign system of jurisprudence. It was this temporal jurisdiction, and not the spiritual powers inherent in the Church, which the English Reformation finally swept away.

We now come, from these general considerations on the causes and character of the English Reformation, to the attempts which have been made by Roman writers to cast discredit on the succession of the English Episcopate. The Committee have of course rejected the Nag's Head story. But though they rightly reject it as absurd, they hardly appear to have realized how preposterous and unworthy of serious consideration it really is. In the first place, its source is tainted with suspicion. It arose with the Jesuits, and the Jesuits, as we know, have not been particularly careful about the truth of the stories they have circulated. As with the application of the term "Jansenist" to the members of the Dutch Old Catholic Church, so with the succession of the English Church, their motto has been "Throw mud enough—some of it will be sure to stick".

That a few years after the accession of Queen Elizabeth a story was current in Jesuit circles that Barlow and others consecrated Parker at a common tavern by placing a Bible on his head and calling him Archbishop of Canterbury is unquestionably true. But that this fact is sufficient to outweigh the record of Parker's consecration, the mention of it in Machyn's Diary, and the other evidence, direct and indirect by which those facts are supported, is surely rather a hazardous assertion in itself. But when combined with the gross and palpable absurdity of the story in the face of the circumstances of the time it is surely wonderful that any one with a character to lose should attempt to defend it. For such a consecration

¹⁾ The Act of Supremacy (1534) gives him the power to "visit, repress, redress" etc. all "errors, heresies, abuses, contempts and enormities", which "by any manner of spiritual *jurisdiction* ought to be reformed". But it is of *legal* jurisdiction of which he speaks. He never took upon himself the power to define the faith, or to decree any theological proposition to be heretical.

would have aroused a tempest of indignation and scorn throughout the whole of Christendom. It would not have needed forty years to bring that tempest to a head, nor would it have been reserved for that veracious controversialist Sanders to call attention to so monstrous a scandal. The fact that no such tempest arose is sufficient evidence to any reasonable person of the falsehood of the story. But there is more to follow. Queen Elizabeth and her advisers, as is well known, were persons of more than usual prudence and sagacity. And Queen Elizabeth was notoriously anxious, especially at the beginning of her reign, to conciliate those of her subjects who inclined to the Roman obedience. What policy could have been imagined more utterly foolish in itself, and more certain to throw even moderate men into the arms of the Papal party, than such a wanton affront to the susceptibilities of every lover of ecclesiastical dignity and order in the country? Authors like Renaudot and Le Quien may endeavour by ingenious special pleading to sustain the "probability of the story". But except on the principle "it is the impossible which always happens", such a foolish tale stands so condemned upon the face of it that every one blessed with the smallest conceivable share of the historical imagination must feel himself constrained to dismiss it without inquiry.

As every respectable Roman Catholic writer feels his co-religionists to have been driven in utter rout from such a position, it becomes necessary to retire to another. But another less vulnerable is hardly to be found. Attempts have been made to throw doubts on the consecration of Barlow on the ground (1) that the record of his consecration is lost, and (2) that he is said by one Roger Lewis to have declared that "if the King's grace did elect any one to be a Bishop, he so chosen would be as good a Bishop as any one in England". If we reply that Barlow was not the only consecrator, we are told that the acts of all the consecrating Bishops are invalid unless the actual consecrator were himself a Bishop. But even if that were the case, it would be tolerably clear that at so critical a conjuncture in our history not Barlow, but one of the other consecrating Bishops would have been chosen to perform the rite, if there existed in any one's mind even the shadow of a doubt whether he had been validly consecrated. As to the loss of the record

of Barlow's consecration, that of Gardiner is also missing. As no one doubts the validity of Gardiner's consecration on this ground, it must be tolerably clear to any unprejudiced person that the argument would never have been brought against Barlow, had he not taken part in the consecration of Parker. As for the foolish piece of gossip which tells us how somebody said that Barlow had on some occasion made a foolish and indiscreet speech, it is noteworthy that though the report in question rests on no trustworthy evidence, it is nevertheless thought quite good enough for the purpose, although the clearest and strongest evidence on the other side goes for nothing. But I fail to see, even if the story be fact, how it affects the argument. For we are discussing, not Bishop Barlow's private opinions, but his public position. There was such a thing, in the sixteenth century, as in the nineteenth, as the British Constitution, with its rules and regulations. He would have been a bold man who, in the reign of Henry the Eighth, should presume to act as a Bishop, to sit, speak, and vote in the House of Lords, without having complied with the King's mandate ordering his consecration, which was required by the known laws of the country—laws which, as we know, were enforced just then with terrible severity. We may be pretty sure, that during the Roman reaction which marked the latter years of Henry VIII, with the Statute of the Six Articles in force, with Latimer in prison and Cranmer under a cloud, Barlow's enemies would have made considerable use of his violation of both ecclesiastical precedent and statute law, and he might have esteemed himself fortunate if he had escaped the block. If we are asked to accept such glaring violations of the laws of probability as the theory that Barlow was never consecrated involves, the evidence in their favour ought to be very decisive indeed. But the case of our opponents rests on nothing more than idle reports, surmise and conjecture. It is surely high time that scholars should refuse even to enter on the consideration of arguments which involve improbabilities so vast as those to which I have referred.

In regard to the point on which the Committee have based their rejection of the validity of Anglican orders, I have only one remark to make. The Old Catholic Congresses have repeatedly declared that not the private opinions of individuals or theological schools are to be considered as essentials of the

faith, but the doctrines which, contained in the Scriptures, and handed down from the first by ecclesiastical tradition, have formed part of the decrees of the undisputed Œcumenical Councils of the universal Church. Where, I would ask, in those Scriptures, that tradition, those decrees, do we find the doctrine that it is necessary, in ordaining a priest, to specify the particular functions which a priest is commissioned to fulfil? It is reported that Queen Elizabeth, when in her sister's reign she was accused of heresy, and interrogated on the doctrine of the Real Presence, replied:

“Christ was the word that spake it;
He took the bread and brake it;
And what that word did make it
That I believe and take it.”

Have we not an equal right to say that when a man is duly ordained priest by the laying on of Episcopal hands he is thereby invested with all the powers belonging to the priestly office, including the power of presenting and pleading the Sacrifice of Christ before the throne of God? The necessary doctrine of the Church must have been taught “ubique, semper, et ab omnibus”. How do we know that the Apostles, in ordaining elders (i. e. presbyters or priests—for the latter word is but a contraction of the former) in every Church, made use of such a form of words as would be approved by the members of the Committee which drew up the report I am considering? Or how do we know that the Ordinal in Apostolic times contained such a specification of the duties belonging to the order of priesthood as would satisfy the requirements of the members of that Committee? And if we have no evidence that such specific definitions existed in the form of Ordination in use in the Apostolic Church, it follows, on the Committee's principles, that the orders of all subsequent Bishops, priests and deacons are invalid, or at the very least that their validity is doubtful. Would it not be wiser on the whole to lay down only such Canons for the validity of ordinations as rest on acknowledged facts, and not such as depend on the theories of divines in later ages? We of the Church of England have no fear of historical investigation. But we desire that our position in the face of Catholic Christendom shall be decided on definite historical principles, established by direct evidence,

and not in accordance with *doctrinaire* theories, which sprang up one hardly knows when, and which are incapable of being established by an appeal to the doctrine and practice of the Apostles and their successors in the earliest days of the Catholic Church.

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