

and ridicule, admits of no doubt. It involves the question of divine authority in the Protestant ministry and churches; and, for that matter, the divine authority of the church of Rome itself. For, if the alleged successor, of St. Peter, by a method of reasoning satisfactory to himself and his council, arrives at what the Protestants of this generation will regard as a startling conclusion, viz: that their ministry and churches are without divine authority, the Protestants will reply in kind. They will revive the charges brought against the church of Rome during the revolt from the Pope's authority in that wonderful sixteenth century revolution called the "Reformation." They will proclaim him the Anti-Christ of New Testament scripture; charge upon the church of Rome complete apostasy from primitive Christianity; and accuse all those continuing in communion with her as being idolaters and Pagans. Such a rejoinder on the part of the Protestants is inevitable, since it is only on the ground that the church of Rome was become a corrupt church, in complete apostasy, and dispossessed of divine authority, that the so-called "Reformation" of the sixteenth century, or the existence of Protestant churches today can be justified.

Why is the unity of the Christian churches broken? Why does there exist a Roman Catholic church and numerous Protestant churches? Because the Protestants of the sixteenth century believed that the church of Rome was in a state of apostasy from true Christianity, and hence they came out from her dominion; revolted against and rejected her authority, while the church of Rome, on her part, regarded the Protestants of the same century as heretics, as renegade children, apostates. That there has been no change in the attitude of the respective parties to this great controversy since one first denounced the other as "a heretic" and the other replied with the charge of "anti-christ," is emphasized by this latest utterance of the bishop of Rome, in which he declares that "ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been and are absolutely null and utterly void."

This question of possessing divine authority goes right down to the foundations of Christianity. No one will attempt to say that a man has a right to act in the name of Jesus Christ without authority from Him to do so. If it required direct authority from God to handle the sacred utensils of God's sanctuary in the wilderness, and to care for the Ark of the Covenant, and for touching these things without authority, one was smitten with death (see numbers chapter iv. and xi. Samuel vi 3); if it required divine authority to burn incense before the altar in the Temple of God at Jerusalem, and for usurping the priest's office and attempting without divine authority to burn incense one was cursed of God with leprosy, even though a king (ii. Chronicles xxvi); if it required divine authority to cast out devils, and certain ones in attempting to cast them out without having authority to so command them, were leaped upon by the evil spirits and prevailed against (Acts xix);—if, I say, it required divine authority to do these several things, how reasonable it is to conclude that it will more abundantly require divine appointment, or delegated power from God to make proclamation of the Gospel and

administer its ordinances. As the sacraments of the Christian religion are of infinitely more importance than the handling of sacred utensils, touching the Ark of the Covenant, burning incense or casting out devils, so, too, it is to be expected that God will be all the more careful to entrust their administration only to those having a divine commission.

To say, as the bishop of Rome does say, that the "ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been and are absolutely null and utterly void," is, of course, to deny to the English clergy divine authority. To deny them divine authority by saying that their orders are and have been null and void, is to say that their administration of the Christian sacraments through all the years that have elapsed since the church in England revolted against the authority of the Pope, have been useless. And if Rome denies the validity of the church of England orders, it may be taken for granted that she will deny the validity of the orders of all other churches separated from her; for of all the churches separated from the Roman see the church of England has most nearly conformed to, or what would be more accurate to say, departed the least from the ritual of the old church. In plain terms the church of Rome holds all churches that have separated from her, and all churches that have sprung into existence from the churches so separated, as being without authority from God, and regards their ministry as a disorderly crowd.

I know there are a class of Protestant churchmen, who seek to satisfy themselves on this question of authority by claiming it to have come down to them on lines independent of the church of Rome. But, unfortunately for this contention the church of England herself and the other Protestants cut off not only the source of divine authority that might be claimed as coming from the church of Rome, but also every other source from which that authority could spring. In her great homily on the "Perils of Idolatry" the church of England says: "Laitie and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages and sects and degrees have been drowned in abominable idolatry most detested by God and damnable to man, for eight hundred years and more. (Perils of Idolatry, page 3.) By making this charge against all Christendom one is unable to see how the church of England can make any claim whatsoever of divine authority; for, if all Christendom was plunged into this awful abyss of apostasy for eight hundred years and more, no divine authority survived that period.

Nor is the church of England the only Protestant authority which makes this charge of universal apostasy from primitive Christianity. John Wesley, in making an explanation of the cessation of scriptural gifts among Christians, says: "It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking of i Corinthians xii.) were common in the Church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian; and from a vain imagination of promoting the Christian cause thereby heaped riches and power and honor upon Christians in general, but in particular upon the Christian clergy. From this time they (the spiritual gifts) almost totally

ceased; very few instances of the kind were found. The cause of this was not (as has been supposed) because there was no more occasion for them, because all the world was become Christians. This is a miserable mistake, not a twentieth part of it was then nominally Christians. The real cause of it was the love of many, almost all Christians, so-called, was waxed cold. The Christians had no more of the spirit of Christ than the other heathens. The Son of man, when he came to examine His Church, could hardly find faith upon earth. This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian church—because the Christians were turned heathens again and only had a dead form left." (Wesley's works, vol. vii, sermon 89, pages 26, 27.)

If the Christians were turned heathens again, and only had a dead form of religion left, like the other heathens, it will be extremely difficult for the followers of Mr. Wesley, and those who have received whatsoever of authority they possess from him, to point out just where their divine authority came from since their great leader proclaims this entire corruption of the Christian church. If on the one hand the Catholic church denies to Protestant Christendom the possession of divine authority, and if on the other hand Protestants declare the universal corruption and apostasy of Mediæval Christianity in order to justify the religious revolution of the sixteenth century, and their own existence as so-called reformed churches, then there is no possible channel through which they can claim that divine authority to administer the ordinances of the Gospel has come down to them; unless they shall claim that the heavens have again been opened and a new dispensation of the Gospel, including as it would divine authority, has been committed to them. Not one of all the Protestant sects claims that such a new revelation has been given, and as every other source from which divine authority could come is cut off by them, there is left but one conclusion to come to and that is that they are without divine authority, and hence their administrations of the Christian sacraments are vain.

The position of the Catholic church is logically more consistent than that of Protestants; for she insists that there has been an unbroken line of authority and mission divine through the succession of her bishops, and more especially through the succession of the bishops of Rome from St. Peter to Leo XIII. But the church of Rome is asking us to believe too much when it demands that we shall believe that God's authority has come down to modern times through the corrupted line of the Catholic Priesthood. One has only to become acquainted with the melancholy history of the Roman popes to be convinced of the impossibility of God acknowledging them as the line down which he has transmitted the power to speak and act in His name. One need only contrast the spirit of humility which characterized the Apostles and Elders of the Church of Christ with the worldly pride, ambition and wickedness of the popes of Rome, to see how far the latter have departed from the standard of character established by the lives of the former, and one need only contrast the beautiful simplicity of the ordinances of the early Christian church, as described in the New Testament, with