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CYPRIAN.

Third Article.

CYPRIAN'S doctrine of the CHURCH we have found to be fundamental to his whole theology and religious life. In proportion as this is the case, it becomes important to understand well in what relation it stood to the faith and life of the Christian world generally in the first ages. To do justice to the man, as well as to judge properly of the doctrine, we must inquire how far this was peculiar to himself and to the time when he lived, or is to be regarded as having come down by legitimate inheritance and tradition from a still older period, as part of the faith which was supposed to have been originally delivered to the saints. To feel the full significance of such an inquiry, we need only to bring to mind distinctly the leading features of the Cyprianic doctrine of the church, and to observe at the same time the broad contrast and contradiction in which they may be seen at once to stand, with the thinking of a large portion of the modern so called evangelical world on the same subject.

What is most necessary to be kept in view in the Cyprianic

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EVANGELICAL RADICALISM.

THE CHURCH MEMBER'S MANUAL OF ECCLESIASTICAL PRINCIPLES, DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE: *Presenting a systematic view of the structure, polity, doctrines, and practices of Christian Churches, as taught in the Scriptures.* By WILLIAM CROWELL, &c. Boston: Gould and Lincoln. 1852.

A truly interesting and suggestive book—though not exactly in the way of its own intention. The author is a Baptist, who proposes to set forth a scheme of the Church to suit the rationalistic standpoint of his own sect; “his only desire being to follow truth, wherever it may lead.” To answer the question, “What and where is the church?” he scorns the thought of taking counsel of the Church itself. “I might as well go to Delphi or Dodona,” he tells us, “or the shrine of Jupiter Ammon, to inquire who is the god, and where is his temple.” Pagan and Christian theocracies, it seems, are alike without truth and entitled to no trust. The whole appeal must be “to the Bible;” which means, of course, to the Bible as read by William Crowell and his Baptist brethren, in distinction from the reading of Presbyterians, Lutherans, &c., &c., as well as from the sense attached to it by the ancient Fathers and the Catholic Church of all past ages. “Hitherto Baptists have paid but little attention to the subject of church polity;” too busy with the interests of “*spiritual Christianity in its primitive form,*” to give much attention to any such outward concern. We will not pretend here to go minutely into the theory now concocted out of the Bible, for their special accommodation and use, by this *Church Member's Manual*. Suffice it to say, that it is pre-eminently rationalistic. The idea of a general church, save in the sense of a mere abstraction, is discarded; the only true order in the case, is that of *many distinct churches*, each perfectly original and independent in its own sphere. A church thus is simply an association of believers, who join together in this way for their common advantage in the Christian life, under the pledge of baptism. “Men have a natural right to associate by mutual agreement for the accomplishment of any innocent or useful purpose. In this way civil government was first formed, and God owned the institution as one of his own appointment. The disciples of Christ have the right to unite themselves together in churches, for the promotion of their piety and the spread of the Gospel, unless he has forbidden them in his revealed word. This he has not done. It is, therefore

from the nature of the case, proper that men should unite in a mutual, voluntary covenant for religious purposes. The objects in view are more important than those attained in the civil compact, in which men unite in a mutual covenant for a common benefit; and the act is as reasonable and as necessary in itself."—P. 55, 56. Every particular church, so formed by *social contract*, holds its powers directly and exclusively from Christ, who alone is head over all things to the *churches*, without the intervention of Pope, Bishop, or General Assembly. "Each one," as the celebrated Dr. Wayland dogmatizes the matter, "is a perfect and complete system. The decisions of one are not binding on another. Each one is at liberty to interpret the laws of Christ for itself, and to govern itself according to that interpretation. Each church is therefore as essentially independent of every other, as though each one were the only church in Christendom."—P. 80. So runs this *Bible* scheme of the Baptists. We have no room here to go into any close consideration of its merits. But it speaks for itself. Only think of Rousseau's theory of *social contract*, deliberately applied to the grand and glorious mystery of the HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

The scheme is completely at war, it will be readily seen, with what was held to be Christianity in the first ages. Of this its patrons may not feel it necessary to make any account. Enough that they can pretend to have the Bible at all events on their side. Weighed against such authority, of what worth or force is Christian antiquity—even though it *should* reach back to the very age next following that of the Apostles? Still however the fact is one, which ought to be distinctly seen and acknowledged. Let it pass for what it may, it deserves to be fully understood and held up to view. This Baptist theory of Christianity is not what was held to be the "mystery of godliness," in the early church. Neither is the difference circumstantial only and accidental. It goes to the heart of religion. It has to do with its universal system. We have in the two cases actually two gospels, two altogether different versions of the Christian salvation. In one case, all rests on the Creed; in the other this fundamental symbol is charged with heresy and falsehood. In one case, the church is made to be supernatural, and is honored as the real medium of salvation to her children; in the other she is treated as a "figment" in every such view, and falls into the conception of a social contract. The ministry in one case holds its commission and its powers from God; in the other case it is the creature of man. In the one case, the sacraments are seals and bearers of heavenly grace; in the other, they possess

no such mystic force whatever. The creed of the ancient church, this modern system openly turns into a lie. What all antiquity believed, it takes a pride in refusing to believe; and affects to be *spiritual*, by treating with contempt the real mystery of the Spirit's presence, in the only form in which it was to all Christian antiquity an object of faith. How can two such contrary systems be considered for one moment the same? They exclude each other. If one is to stand, the other must fall. Brought before the tribunal of this modern system, the ancient Christianity is found to be altogether wrong and false. We have only however to reverse the procedure, by bringing the modern system to the bar of the ancient, and at once the falsehood and wrong fall just as conclusively over to the other side. The two schemes are completely at issue. The contest between them is one of life and death. When the modern system challenges our faith, it asks us in fact to renounce all connection with the faith and religious life of the Church of the first ages. And so on the other hand if we feel it necessary to hold fast to the communion of this primitive piety—if we cannot bear the thought of giving up all spiritual fellowship with the martyrs, confessors, fathers and saints, of the early ages, and are not willing to set them all down for fanatics and fools—if we tremble to stigmatize the Christianity that conquered the Roman world as the invention of Satan, root and branch—we must not, and dare not, shrink from the responsibility of declaring the rationalistic unsacramental system now before us a dangerous delusion, which all who value the salvation of their souls are bound religiously to avoid. It would have been so regarded, beyond all controversy, by the universal church in the beginning. There would have been as little patience with it precisely, as there was with Gnosticism. It would have been branded openly as a virtual denial of the entire mystery of the Gospel. Of this, we say, there can be no doubt, and in regard to it there should be no equivocation or disguise.

Shall we be told then, that it is harsh to think and speak as we do of the religious system now under consideration, because it embraces a large amount of respectable Christian profession at the present time, and is nothing more in fact than the last phase of what is called orthodox Puritanism, which many hold to be the very perfection and *ne plus ultra* of evangelical religion? We reply by asking, How is it to be helped? We are shut up to a sore dilemma here, from which there is no possible escape. We must break with this modern Puritanic system, or else break with the whole Christianity of the first ages. No sophistry can

cause them to appear the same. The Creed of the one, is the Lie of the other. What was the mystery of godliness in the old church, this new faith unblushingly declares to be the mystery of iniquity. In such circumstances we have no choice, except to say with which of the two interests we hold it best to make common cause. To justify the one, is necessarily to condemn the other. To show respect towards this new faith, because it is outwardly respectable, must we cover with reproach and disgrace the old faith from the days of Polycarp and Ignatius to those of Ambrose and Augustine? Do we owe no respect also, and no charity, to the first Christian ages? What right indeed can those have to demand our tenderness and forbearance, in so grave a case, who make no account whatever of the reputation or credit of whole centuries of past Christian history, but modestly require us to set them all down as heretical and false over against themselves? What is the peculiar merit of this Baptist Puritanism, a thing comparatively of yesterday, that it should be allowed thus to insult all Christian antiquity, and have full exemption at the same time from every unfavorable judgment upon its own pretensions and claims? "What!" we may well say to it in the language of St. Paul, "Came the word of God out from you; or came it unto you only?" Who art thou, upstart system! that thou shouldst set thyself in such proud style above the universal church of antiquity—the immediate successors of the Apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the goodly fellowship of the fathers, the vast cloud of witnesses that look down upon us from these ages of faith—charging it with wholesale superstition and folly, and requiring us to renounce its creed, the whole scheme and habit of its religious life, and to accept from *thy* hands, in place of it, another form of belief, another scheme of doctrine altogether, as infallibly true and right? Who gave thee this authority? Whence came such infallibility?

With immense self-complacency, the system lays its hand on the Bible, and says: This is my warrant. Aye, but who is to interpret this written revelation? *Reason*, replies the system. "The Bible is the church's supreme law, reason is her court. The Bible is the compass; reason, lighted by the Spirit of God, is the binnacle lamp." There we have it. Reason, every man's reason for himself, the world's private judgment and common sense with such religious illumination as it may come to in its own sphere, is the court, the tribunal, by which the law in this case is to take the form of truth and life. Is that not rationalism almost without disguise? What more could the worst radi-

calism ask or want? But for the present, let that pass. Baptist Puritanism appeals to the Bible. We now boldly deny, that it has the Bible on its side. This goes on the contrary full as much against its claims and pretensions throughout, as Christian antiquity itself. When it seems to have any part of the Bible in its favor, it is only by reading into it in the first place its own sense, by begging before hand the whole question in debate, by taking for granted what is to be proved, and by making its own rationalistic hypothesis in this way the standpoint from which is taken afterwards every observation of the Divine text. Even then the result is at best but a lame and forced construction. The New Testament is as far removed, as it well can be, from the Baptist and Independent habit of mind. It proceeds throughout on the assumption, that Christianity is a mystery, a constitution above nature, objectively at hand under a real historical form in the world, to which men must submit by faith in such view in order to be saved. This of itself involves the whole doctrine of the Church, with its Divine jurisdiction and heavenly powers, its ministry starting from Christ, its grace bearing sacraments, its unity and catholicity, the universal course of the new creation, we may say, as it is made to pass before us in the Creed. Only let the standpoint of this old faith be taken, in reading the Scriptures, the same that was occupied by the church in the beginning, and it will soon be found all that is needed, to expose the huge illusions of the Baptist exegesis, and to set the Bible before us in a wholly different light and sense.

And why should *not* this old standpoint be taken, when we thus approach the Bible? Why should we renounce the posture of faith in which the ancient church stood, and take, at the bidding of Puritanism, what must be considered as compared with it a posture of infidelity or no-faith, that we may be supposed to study God's word to purpose and effect? The absurdity of such a requirement is greater than can be easily expressed. Its most enormous presumption may well fill us with wonder and surprise.

J. W. N