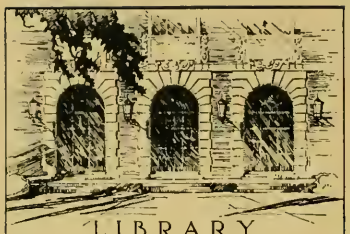

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A PASTORAL LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

THE CLERGY AND LAITY

OF HIS

PROVINCE,

BY

CHARLES THOMAS, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

LONDON;
RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE:
AND HIGH STREET, OXFORD.
1864.

LONDON:
GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

A

PASTORAL LETTER,

&c.

Lambeth Palace,
14th March, 1864.

My Rev. and dear Brethren,

I have reason to believe that the minds of many among you are profoundly moved by the Theological questions which are at this moment agitated. I daily receive from various quarters addresses and letters of enquiry expressing much perplexity, and seeking counsel at my hands; many members of our Church, eminent for their rank, station, and talents, have urged me to make a statement of my sentiments on these subjects; and my opinion on single points has meanwhile transpired in a manner unbecoming the occasion. I feel, therefore, that the time has now arrived when I can no longer refrain from publicly declaring my views on these topics; thus giving a common answer to every memorial, and a reply to

every enquirer. The Church has a right to know my mind on matters of such solemn interest to each of her members; and the present seems to be the most proper channel for such a communication. If it be asked why these sentiments were not announced at the time of the delivery of the late Judgment, the answer will be, that an ancient order of the Privy Council and the precedents of its Judicial Committee seemed to forbid such a course.

It would be entirely unbecoming in me as a member of the Court, to presume to criticize the terms of a Judgment concurred in by the able and distinguished persons who assented to it: but on a question so momentous, involving as it does such grave issues to the Church of England, I must claim to myself the privilege of giving expression to opinions formed prior to the delivery of the Judgment, and wholly irrespective of the terms in which it is couched.

In dealing with those passages in the Essays and Reviews, touching the authority of Holy Scripture, which were objected to, I felt that I was in nowise called upon to attempt any definition of inspiration, seeing that the Church had not thought fit to prescribe one; but I did conceive that I was bound by the most solemn obligations, to maintain at its exact level that estimation in which Holy Scripture is held by our Church, as shewn by the tenor of her Articles and Liturgy, and to beware lest I should seem to

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sanction a decision which should detract one jot or tittle from the authority with which it is invested according to their language.

Now, in reviewing the terms in which the Church of England speaks of Holy Scripture, it appears that in the 20th Article the Church designates it as "God's Word written." "It is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing contrary to God's Word written." In the 6th Article, the following language is used:—"In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." In the Ordination Service the Deacon is required to declare that he "unfeignedly believes all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament,"—and in delivering the Bible to the person to be admitted to the Order of Priesthood the Bishop says, "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God."

From these passages it appears that the Church authoritatively declares Holy Scripture to be identical with all those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church, that it is "The Word of God," and "God's Word written."

That by the term "Canonical Books" is meant, Books which lay down a rule of faith authoritatively, may be clearly deduced from a subsequent passage in

the same 6th Article, in which it is stated that as to the other Books (which are not Canonical) the Church doth not apply them to establish any doctrine: leaving us to draw the natural inference that the Canonical Books can be so applied; while in the previous sentence the Church declares that nothing must be required to be believed as an Article of Faith, but what is read therein or may be proved thereby.

It remained for me to consider how far the statements of Dr. Williams, respecting Holy Writ, were reconcileable with those express declarations of the Church in her formularies and articles. His estimate of the Bible is, "That it is an expression of devout reason, and therefore to be read with reason in freedom;" he finds in it "a record of the Spiritual Giants whose experience generated the Religious Atmosphere we breathe;" and speaking of the Eternal Spirit, he says, "If such a Spirit did not dwell in the Church, the Bible would not be inspired; for the Bible is before all things the written word of the Congregation. Bold as such a theory of inspiration may sound," he adds, "it was the earliest creed of the Church; and it is the only one to which the facts of Scripture answer."

To myself these views of Holy Scripture appeared entirely inconsistent with the terms of our formularies as cited above. "The expression of devout

reason" must be the expression of man's reason, and not of the Divine Intelligence; for to speak of the Deity, who has no superior, as "devout," seems a manifest absurdity. Holy Scripture, then, under this view, must be the word of Man; and can have no more authority for the establishing of doctrine, than such expressions of devout reason as we have in the works of Hooker, Taylor, and Barrow, who all wrote under such guidance doubtless, with prayer for the "inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Again, if Holy Scripture be no more than the "record of the experience of Spiritual Giants," it can have no more authority for establishing doctrine than the writings of the authors just named. They too were "Spiritual Giants," and they have recorded their experience for the benefit of the Church; but their words are not "the Word of God;" their writings are not "God's Word written;" they are not "Canonical."

Lastly, if the Bible be "before all things," and no more than the "written voice of the congregation," even though that congregation shall have prayed to God that "by His Holy Inspiration[1]" they "may think those things that be good," it will be at the utmost no more than the voice of the Church, which cannot be adduced to establish doctrine if that

[1] Collect for Fifth Sunday after Easter.

voice shall utter or "ordain [2] any thing contrary to God's Word written," of the Church, which may not "so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another." The authority of the Church, by the 20th Article, is clearly subordinate to the written Word; but if the written Word be the voice of the Church, then follows the paradox, that the written Word is subordinate to itself. Holding therefore as I did, that there is an irreconcileable difference between the language of the 6th and 20th Articles respecting Holy Scripture on the one hand, and the statements of Dr. Williams concerning it on the other; and regarding the essential quality which constitutes the difference to be, that Holy Scripture is treated of in the Articles of Religion as of unimpeachable authority for the final establishing of doctrine; whereas no such authority can reside in "the expression of devout reason," in "the record of the experience of Spiritual Giants," or in "the written voice of the congregation," I felt no hesitation whatever as to the course which it would be my duty to pursue in respect of the charge brought against Dr. Williams touching the Word of God.

On examining the charge under the same head, brought against Mr. Wilson, I find an assertion on his part, that in what he calls the "pivot article of

[2] Art. XX.

the Church," viz. the 6th Article of Belief, the expression "Word of God" does not appear, and he would seem to infer hence, that the Church never calls Holy Scripture by that name; that this term is not applied collectively to the Books of the Old and New Testament. But in the 20th Article, Holy Scripture is styled "God's Word written;" it is spoken of as "Holy Writ;" phrases corresponding exactly with the term "Holy Scripture" in the 6th Article, in which it is declared to be co-extensive with the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, and in the Ordering of Priests the Church styles the Bible "the Word of God." The term Canonical, as I have before stated, as applied to all the contents of the Bible except the Apocryphal Books, denotes that they have the property of a Canon; i. e. "regulative," furnishing a Rule of Faith, competent to be applied for the establishing of doctrine. Thus, according to the mind of the Church, the terms "Holy Scripture," "The Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament," "The Word of God," and "God's Word written," appear to be equivalent.

How far is the language of Mr. Wilson reconcileable with that of the Church on these points?

The sum and substance of that which he labours repeatedly to establish, I cannot but consider as conveyed in the following sentence: "It may," he

says, "be expressed thus, The word of God is contained in Scripture, whence it does not follow that it is co-extensive with it." The meaning fairly to be put upon these words I hold to be, that there are parts of Holy Scripture which are not the Word of God; and this assertion I conceive to be entirely inconsistent with the Articles, which identify the Holy Scripture, and the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, with God's Word written, and thus make the one co-extensive with the other.

In truth, the inconsistency seems to me to be so great as to approach to a logical contradiction; the Church treating Holy Scripture as God's Word written, without stint or qualification; Mr. Wilson, on the contrary, maintaining that some parts of Holy Scripture are not the Word of God. I may add, that the passage of the 20th Article which says that the Church may not "so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another," is rendered nugatory, if one portion only of the Bible is of Divine authority, and the rest of human composition; for the Church might then overrule the human portion by appeal to the divine, if indeed it could distinguish between the two.

On the whole, I could not but perceive that no less momentous a question than this was at issue: Whether a clergyman should be permitted to proclaim to his people that the term "Word of God"

is not to be identified with "Holy Scripture;" whether, in fact, the Bible is still to be our guide in matters of faith, still to have any power for establishing doctrine, still to be Canonical in the sense in which I hold the term to be undoubtedly used by our Church; for if there be some portions of Holy Scripture which are merely human, and have no divine sanction at all, the Bible must cease to be an infallible Rule of Faith and Duty so long as we have no certain criterion whereby to distinguish between the human and the divine element.

The conclusion at which I arrived on the subject of the charge against Mr. Wilson relating to the everlasting punishment of the wicked, did not result from any doubt in my mind as to the doctrine of the Church of England upon this point. This doctrine I considered to be clearly indicated in the Commination Service, the Burial Service, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed; to the effect that the reward of the righteous is everlasting life, and the punishment of the wicked everlasting death; nor do I conceive that the Church has any more sure warrant for belief in the eternal happiness of the saved, than it has for belief in the eternal suffering of the lost. But there was so much obscurity in the forms of expression used by Mr. Wilson on this head, that I did not consider the passages extracted from his Essay would warrant the charge that he had "ad-

visedly declared and affirmed in effect that after this life, at the end of the existing order of things on this earth, there will be no Judgment of God, according to those men whom He shall then approve, everlasting life, or eternal happiness; and to those men whom He shall condemn, everlasting death or eternal misery."

Before I conclude, I would address a few words of counsel to those among you who are my brethren in the Ministry. You may be induced to ask what is the degree of liberty allowed to each of you, according to the mind of the Church, in dealing with the Bible. The view I have taken of the claim which the whole of the Holy Scripture has to be treated as the Word of God, cannot interfere with the right of discussing questions as to various readings, or the genuineness of a disputed text; for this is no more than to argue that a given text or reading is not a part of any Canonical Book. But such an argument on the part of a Clergyman is a widely different thing from his assertion that a portion of the Bible which he has acknowledged to belong to a Canonical Book, is not the Word of God. Without any such latitude as this, there is ample room for fair criticism; but criticism in the case of a Minister of our Church must have its limits; inasmuch as he has bound himself to adhere to the plain meaning of the Articles and Formularies. You will, I am per-

suaded, feel convinced that it cannot be agreeable to the mind of the Church that you should transgress these limits. For the Church prescribes order and not confusion; but what would not be the amount of confusion, if it were left to each minister to proclaim from his pulpit which portion of the Bible was the Word of God, and which not? And would not such licence on the part of the Clergy prove the bondage of the Laity, who would thus be left without redress against such a dangerous innovation?

Again, I am sure you will beware of giving any other interpretation to the word "everlasting" in the passages of our Formularies which relate to the punishment of the lost, than that of "eternal" in the sense of "never-ending." For whatever be the meaning of the word in these passages, in the case of the lost, the same must be its meaning in the case of the saved; and our certainty of never-ending bliss for penitent believers is gone, if the word bears not the same signification in the case of the impenitent and unbelieving. You will also do well to observe how the teaching of the Church as to the eternity of the Son of God must be vitiated, if, when the 2nd Article of our Church declares that He was begotten from everlasting of the Father, she leaves us at liberty to suppose, under this restricted sense

of the word everlasting, that there was a time when the Son of God was not.

Well weighing, then, these grave considerations, you will, I doubt not, resolve to adhere stedfastly to those interpretations of the language of our Church which have been commonly accepted as agreeable to Holy Scripture, and to the doctrine of the Catholic Church. You will yourselves reverence, and will teach your flock to reverence, the Canonical Scriptures as the Word of God. You will recollect, that as regards the Old Testament, you have the witness of St. Paul that all that portion of Holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God; while our Church declares that God has "caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning;" and speaks of the comfort of God's Holy Word (which it here again identifies with Holy Scripture) as that which will enable us to embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.

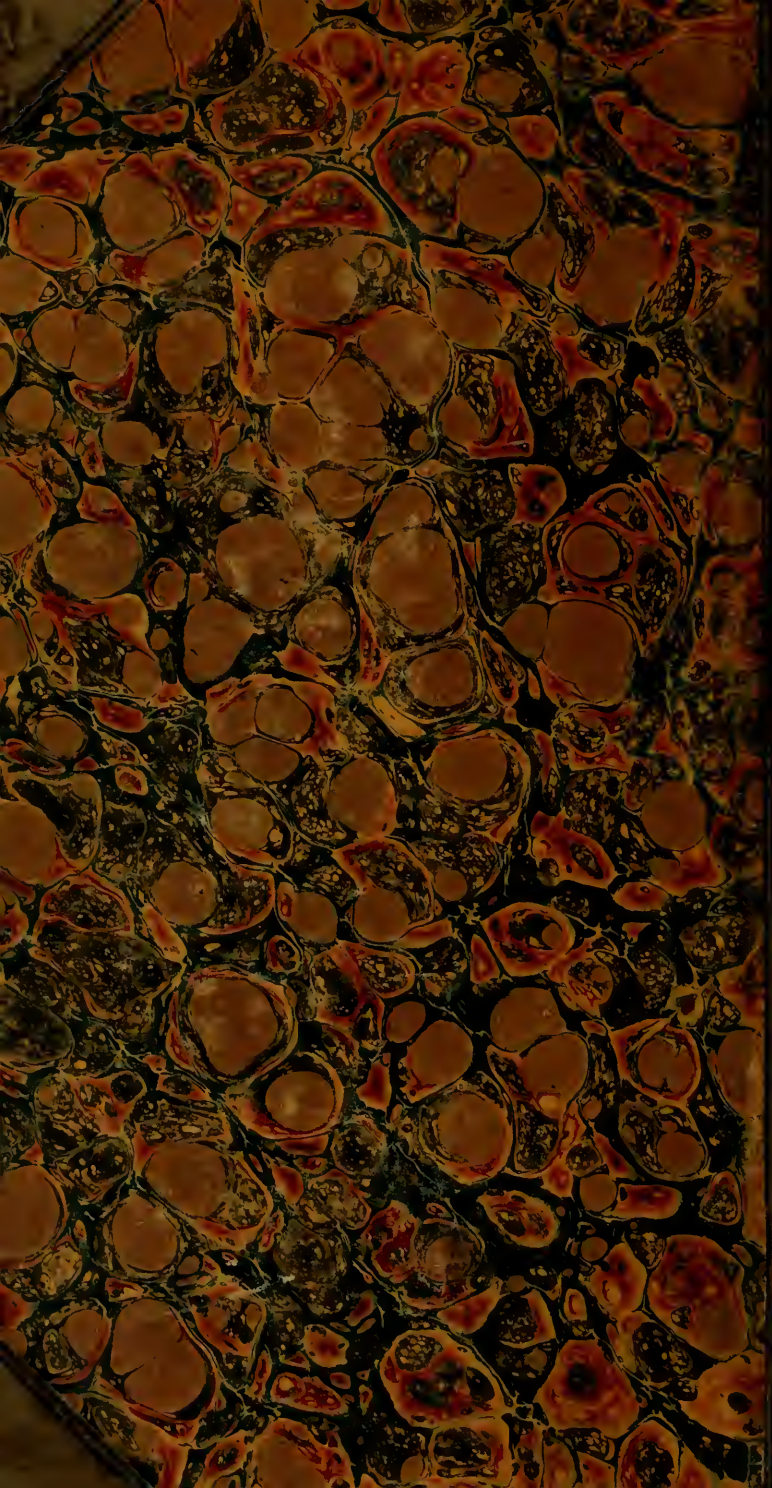
May God, of His infinite mercy, forbid that our people should ever be robbed of the Divine consolations thence derived! May that blessed Book continue to be regarded by us all as our only infallible authority concerning matters of faith and practice; as the Volume which proclaims the Saviour of the world from Genesis to Revelation, and bears within it the Gospel message of salvation through

Christ from its beginning to its end; may we find and feel it to be our solace in sickness, and our strength in the season of temptation; our guide and comfort in life, our stay and support in the hour of death; may it be our privilege to preserve it in all its integrity and purity to this generation, and hand it down as the Word of God "to all them that are yet for to come."

I am,

Your faithful and affectionate

Friend and Brother,

C. T. CANTUAR.

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