

GS224

MY REASONS

FOR RETIRING FROM THE

MINISTRY

OF THE

CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

HAVING been engaged in the Ministry of the Catholic Apostolic Church in one of the seven Churches in London for more than twenty years past, I think it my duty, on retiring, to explain my reasons for so doing.

I never was a convert to the Apostolic faith, but was trained up in it from a child, and I received it as true on the authority of those who were over me. For some years before I was in the Ministry and still more afterwards, I was glad of any opportunity of conversing with those who took an interest in theological subjects; and in order to be prepared to answer the questions they put to me, I found it necessary to make myself acquainted with other forms of faith. This I did, not with the slightest idea that they were true, but solely to enable me to expose their weak points. In this I think I was rather successful, and until recently I never felt any difficulty in replying to any objection made against the Apostles' doctrine; but at last, like Bishop Colenso, I met my Zulu, and his objections were put in such a manner as to lead my thoughts and investigations into a totally different channel, and I found my position not so tenable as I formerly thought it. I still think the Apostles' faith more scriptural than the Romish or orthodox Protestant, but I regard the Scriptures now from quite a different point of view.

Following the example of those above me in the Ministry, I had been calling on people to exercise their reason on the truths revealed in Scripture, and complaining that they did not make use of their common sense in reference to religious subjects; but I did not suspect that I had not followed this rule myself to its legitimate consequences. I had been complaining that Protestants made the Bible an idol and regarded it in a superstitious manner, but I did not suspect we were doing the same, until recently my eyes were open to the fact that, like the heathen priests, we were making our idol sanction anything we pleased to teach. By our system of literal and spiritual, prophetic and typical interpretation we were finding twenty texts in favour of any doctrine where others could only find one. I believe that such a system of interpretation is fallacious. I believe that the words of Scripture should be taken to mean precisely what they say, and no more. The idea of any miraculous or supernatural inspiration of the writers of the Books contained in the Bible is utterly indefensible. The only view of inspiration that appears to me reasonable is that propounded by Theodore Parker. My limits will scarcely enable me to do justice to his view, but briefly it is this: God is everywhere, and therefore not only in every place but in every man. Whatever ability a man has it is the gift of God, and everything good which he does is by the inspiration of God; but this inspiration, we all know by our own experience, does not involve infallibility.

The belief in miraculous inspiration ages ago has led us to put forward similar claims now. If ever men were inspired, why should they not be so now? But it appears to me that we should rather say men are not so inspired now, and we see no reason to suppose that they ever were.

In my experience of the Catholic Apostolic Church I have seen no evidence of anything miraculous or supernatural. It is but a well-meant attempt to remedy the present unsatisfactory state of Christendom; but being based on suppositions, instead of facts, it has met with but little success, and at the present time it appears to be rapidly approaching a crisis, which must lead to a collapse or else to a re-organization. I have heard some thousand so-called prophetic utterances, but (with two exceptions) they have contained nothing beyond the ability of any ordinary man to speak. They were largely composed of quotations from Scripture, and all else they contained has been better expressed from the pulpit. The two exceptions were poetical utterances, and although it is beyond the ability of ordinary men to extemporise poetry, the gift is not so rare as to require us to suppose that any other than human agency was concerned in it. The only thing remarkable about these utterances is the unnatural

way in which they are spoken. They seem to me to be merely the result of a kind of excitement very prevalent among the Primitive Methodists.

It is commonly admitted by us that there is no essential difference between the prophetic utterances now and those which were heard among the Society of Friends in their early days. If these are, as we admit, the work of the same Spirit, is it not remarkable that they have led to such a different result? If the Society of Friends have been led by the same Spirit, may not their view of the Sacraments be more divine, as it is certainly more reasonable, than ours?

Concerning the Second Advent, we know that the first Apostles were mistaken in supposing it would take place in their life time. The same has been the experience of nine of the twelve Apostles of the present generation. This event has been continually promised, or threatened, for forty years as being about to take place immediately, but on what grounds do we expect it? It depends entirely upon the supposition that our Lord was the Messiah expected by the Jews, and this idea has been unnecessarily connected with the doctrine of our Lord's divinity. The Jews, as an oppressed people, naturally looked for a deliverer; but a careful examination of the prophecies concerning their Messiah will show that not one of them had any necessary reference to our Lord's life on earth. Certain words have been applied to Him by His first disciples because they were Jews, and had Jewish ideas and Jewish hopes and expectations. The words of the Old Testament applied to our Lord are nearly all in the past tense, and, according to all principles of grammar and common sense, are not prophecies at all, but necessarily referred to events which had happened before the words were written.

It appears to me that we have no sufficient ground for teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. It may be true, but it is quite impossible for us to ascertain whether it be so or not. We cannot even ascertain with any certainty what was the primitive faith of Christians on this subject. It was a debated point in the time of the Emperor Constantine, and the Trinitarian party prevailed only through the aid of the secular power. The lapse of centuries has increased the difficulty, so that the doctrine is still merely an inference which may be drawn from Scripture. One of the strongest texts on this subject is admitted by all parties to be an interpolation, or—as straightforwrad men would say—a forgery.

The doctrine of eternal punishment seems to me the most repugnant of all the doctrines taught in the Catholic Apostolic Church. I cannot suppose that a loving Father would punish His

children otherwise than for their good. Temporary punishment is quite consistent with the love of God, but eternal punishment is cruel and vindictive. The most horrible part of the doctrine is that this punishment is threatened for an error in judgment—a mistaken opinion. A man may be as just and upright and kind as possible to his fellows, but if he does not think rightly concerning certain doctrines, he will perish everlastingly. While a gambler, a forger, a thief, and a murderer, if he repent at the last moment, and assent to certain doctrines which he cannot possibly understand, will enter into an eternal life of happiness. Can anything be more repugnant to our ideas of the justice or love of God? The other doctrines of the Apostles may be true, although they cannot be proved; but it seems to me that this frightful doctrine of eternal punishment cannot be true.

I cannot teach such doctrines, but, in retiring from the work in which I have been engaged, I desire to express my thanks to those with whom I have been so long associated for their uniform kindness to me. All my wishes and my interest would lead me to remain with them, but my regard for the truth will not allow me. I have been now four months in communication with the Angel of the Church respecting this change in my views, and during that time have had five interviews with him and one with an Elder whom he deputed to see me. The result is this explanation.

I am still ready to hear any proof of the authority of the Apostles and those associated with them; but I think that if there were any proofs I should have heard of them before making this painful though necessary change.

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