

reigns from their thrones, and to absolve subjects from their oaths of allegiance. In regard to this latter point, the monstrous claim of the Pope to supremacy in temporal things, there is indeed a difference of opinion among the adherents of the Papacy. There is one party, with Gregory the Seventh at their head, who maintain the Pope's supremacy in temporal matters as directly involved in the spiritual office he holds, as the vicar of Christ on earth. There is a second party, with Bellarmine at their head, who deny to the Pope a direct, but ascribe to him an indirect, supremacy in temporal matters, in so far as it may be necessary for spiritual ends,—an ascription which practically amounts to the same thing as a direct authority. And there is a third party, made up mainly of the defenders of the Gallican Liberties, who deny to the Pope any proper jurisdiction, direct or indirect, in civil affairs. But this latter party have always formed but a small minority in the Church of Rome, compared with the adherents of the former two theories. The temporal supremacy of the Pope, direct or indirect, has been avowed by Popes declared to be infallible, and by the fourth Council of Lateran, accounted to be œcumenical and authoritative; and it never has been disowned as a doctrine by the Church.¹ And unless history is to be regarded as an old almanack, and the witness of history is to be disowned, it will be found written there, that Popery has never failed, when circumstances permitted the assumption, to claim the temporal along with the spiritual authority, and to grasp the double sword of civil and priestly power; and among the merchandise wherewith she has trafficked with the merchants of the earth, and made herself rich, in addition to the treasures of gold, and silver, and precious stones, there have been found both “the bodies and the souls of men.”²

¹ [Vide supra, pp. 104–106. Edgar, *Variations of Popery*, 2d ed. pp. 124–157, 181–208. Stillingfleet, *Doctrines and Practices of the Church of Rome*, Edinr. 1837, pp. 170–196.]

² Rev xviii. 2–13.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXTENT AND LIMITS OF CHURCH POWER.

THERE are two extremes of opinion manifested on opposite sides of the question in regard to the extent of the power of the Church. There is one class of men who exaggerate and overrate the extent of Church power; there is a second class who unduly limit and underrate the extent of it. We have not far to seek for the representatives of both parties in the present day. There are, on the one hand, those who overrate the extent of Church power, and stretch the limits of Church authority beyond the warrant of Scripture,—High Churchmen in all communions, who advocate claims on behalf of the Christian society not justified by the purposes of its institution, or consistent with the will of its Founder,—in whose eyes Church power is an undefined and mysterious thing, having no very well marked limits at all,—a magic charm, a supernatural virtue, when it administers ordinances, or dispenses sacramental grace, or exercises priestly offices to the members,—an absolute and irresponsible spiritual authority, not to be profanely scanned or impiously restricted, when it imposes obligations, and dictates laws to bind the conscience and obedience in spiritual things. Such opinions in regard to the nature and extent of Church power, if fairly and consistently acted on, must inevitably lead to a priestly usurpation and an uncontrolled despotism both over the conscience and the civil rights of men,—a despotism the most insupportable of any, because in its nature spiritual, and in its pretensions of Divine authority. There are those, on the other hand, who unduly limit and under-estimate the extent of Church power, and the exercise of Church authority,—Low Churchmen of all communions, who deny to that power its proper place and standing as a Divine ordinance,—in whose eyes it ceases to be a power of God at all, and its exercise is no longer stamped with a Divine warrant, or accompanied with a

Divine and special blessing; a nullity when it administers laws in the Christian society, carrying with it no binding obligation except from the consent of the members; and an empty and unblessed form, divorced from any Divine or gracious influence, when it dispenses sacraments and ordinances in the Church. Such views, consistently carried out, go to the opposite extreme, and evacuate Church power of all that belongs to it by the institution of God in the way either of authority or grace, reducing it to the level of a mere human appointment, binding no Divine obligation on the conscience, and communicating no Divine blessing to the soul. (Both of these views are unfounded,) and both are to be guarded against, more especially in the present day, when the one extreme is so apt to generate the other, and when both may thus co-exist and prevail side by side. There can hardly be a more important inquiry connected with this subject, than that which seeks to ascertain the extent and the limits of Church power. (It is necessary to mark the extent of Church power, as contradistinguished from a mere voluntary and human arrangement, and as connected with both a Divine authority and a Divine blessing. It is no less necessary to mark the limits of Church power, as contradistinguished from a spiritual and uncontrolled tyranny, or a supernatural and mysterious charm, and as restricted by the nature of its office and the appointment of its Divine author. To these two points, taken in their order, we shall now advert.

1. In regard to the extent of Church power, and the place occupied by it in the arrangements of God with His people, there is one sentence of the Westminster Confession of Faith which will help not a little to explicate the question. The proposition to which I refer is applied by the Confession to certain departments of Church power only—those, namely, which have respect to doctrine, government, and discipline; but it is equally applicable to the remaining department, or that which relates to the administration of ordinances and Sacraments in the Christian society. “It belongeth to synods and councils,” says the Confession of Faith, “ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God and government of His Church; to receive complaints in case of mal-administration, and authoritatively to determine the same; which decrees

and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, *not only* for their agreement with the Word, *but also* for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word.”¹ The latter part of this sentence very distinctly marks out the place and extent of Church power. The exercises of that power in ministerially deciding in matters of faith, or ministerially carrying into effect the law of Christ in matters of government or discipline, “are to be received with reverence and submission, *not only* for their agreement with the Word, *but also* for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word.” In other words, there is a certain obligation which Church power carries with it, because its acts and decisions are agreeable to the Word of God; there is a second and additional obligation which Church power carries with it, because it is itself an ordinance of God, appointed expressly for such ends. When Church power is employed ministerially to declare the truth of God in a question of faith, or ministerially to judge in a question of government or discipline, the declaration of doctrine and the decision of law are to be received and submitted to on two grounds: *first*, and chiefly, because they are agreeable to the Word of God; but *second*, and in a subordinate sense, because they are emitted by the Church, as an ordinance of God instituted for that very purpose. And what is true, as intimated in the Confession, in regard to the exercise of Church power in matters of faith, or government, or discipline, is true also of Church power in any other of its exercises,—as, for example, in regard to the administration of the Sacraments in the Christian Church. There is a something that belongs to such administrations, because they are agreeable to the appointments of Christ in His Word; but there is also a something that belongs to the administration, because it is an act of the Church, as an ordinance of God instituted expressly for that end.

In short, admit that Church power in its various branches is itself an appointment or ordinance of God, and it is impossible to deny that, because it is a Divine ordinance, there must be a Divine authority and a Divine blessing connected with its use, apart from and over and above what is connected with it, because

¹ Conf. chap. xxxi. 3.

what it does is agreeable to the Word of God. In the ordinance itself there will be a Divine virtue or Divine authority, just because it is an express ordinance of God. It will show itself to be from God by the power or blessing it carries along with it; and that altogether apart from what the doings or decisions may derive from the fact that they are agreeable to His revealed will. The exercise of Church power, when in accordance with the Word of God, will have a blessing more and better than the exercise of a merely human power when in accordance with that Word; just because the one is of God, and the other of man. The use of Church authority, when agreeable to the Scriptures, will have in it a power more and better than human authority when agreeable to the Scripture; just because the one is Divine and the other is not. In fine, the power of the Church is one of authority and not only of advice, when employed in the administration of government; because it is Christ's ordinance for rule. The power of the Church is a power of blessing, and not a power without a blessing, when employed in the dispensation of ordinance and Sacrament; because it is Christ's appointed channel to bless. The power of the Church is one judicial, and not extrajudicial, when employed in the execution of discipline; because it is Christ's ordinance on earth to bind or to loose. To this extent the power of the Church unquestionably goes, being "an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His Word."

Now this fundamental position as to the extent of Church power is expressly denied, or practically set aside, more especially by two parties: the one of which affirm that Church power is of mere human ordinance and institution; the other of which limit and restrict its exercise upon the principle of the Independents.

1st. The position now laid down is denied by those who make the power of the Church, like the Church itself, to be a matter of private and human arrangement or institution.

With this class, Church power is the mere delegation by the members of the power common to all into the hands of a few; and the extent of it is determined and limited by what they thus consent to give or to withhold. According to this theory, there can be no such thing in the government of the Church as authority in the proper sense of the term at all, that is to say, a power binding upon the members apart from their own appointment of it, and consent to its existence. There can be no such thing in

the administration of Sacraments as a gracious power, in the proper sense of the words; for, over and above their meaning and influence as signs, there can be no Divine grace or blessing in them. There can be no such thing in the discipline of the Church as a judicial act sufficient to bind or loose; for discipline in its highest form, as excommunication, can be no more than is the exclusion of a member by any private or voluntary society. Under such a system there would be laws without authority, ordinances without grace, and discipline without judgment. It is not necessary to delay to deal with such a theory of the Church and of Church power as this. It is plainly founded on the doctrine, which has already been considered and found wanting, that the Church is no more than a private and voluntary society, and that its prerogatives and privileges are derived from the delegation and consent of its members. (If the Church be of God, it has powers and prerogatives, not its own, but His. If the Church be His ordinance for administering doctrine, government, Sacrament, and discipline on earth, the power of the Church must be something more and higher than merely human power, or human permission.)

2d. The fundamental position as to the extent of Church power already laid down is denied or set aside by those who hold the principle of Independents.

The denial by the Independents of the doctrine we have stated in regard to the power of the Church is more especially directed against that particular department of its exercise which has reference to government and discipline. The authority of the Church or its office-bearers in these matters is so limited and curtailed by Independents, as to amount, properly speaking, to a power of advice, rather than a power of authority. The views of the Independents on this point naturally result from the place which their theory of ecclesiastical polity gives to every member of the Church in its rule, and from the right which every man in connection with the society has, upon their principles, to take part with the actual office-bearers in the government of it. The authority which the office-bearers, upon such a system, can wield over the members must be very limited indeed, being from the very nature of the system an authority exercised by the rulers in conjunction with, and by the permission and consent of, the ruled. An authority so conditioned and checked by the necessity of the

consent of the parties over whom it is exercised, cannot, in the proper sense of the word, be authority at all. (It is advice, or it is counsel, administered by one party to another; but it cannot be authoritative power, exercised by one party over another, when the concurrence of both is required before it can be exercised at all, and when either party may refuse that concurrence at their pleasure.)

It is hard to gather from the statements of Independents on the point, what is the precise nature of the office they assign to the rulers, as distinct from the members of the Church; for that there are such office-bearers as rulers they cannot, in consistency with the express declarations of Scripture, deny; and, in point of fact, it is generally admitted by them. It is no less difficult to understand what is the extent or kind of power they allow such rulers to possess; for a distinct power, separate from that of other members, they must, in accordance with many explicit statements of the Scriptures, concede to them. In so far as it can be understood from their explanations, it is a power shared by the rulers and the ruled, to this extent, that it is not binding upon the ruled, except with their own permission and consent, and that without that permission and consent it is invalid and not binding. Such power seems to be a power on the part of the rulers to give advice to, not to exercise authority over, the members,—advice which may be lawfully rejected by the members if not concurred in by them, and not authority which cannot lawfully be rejected, whether ultimately concurred in or not. In the work of Mr. Innes on *Independency*, he says: "In an Independent Church nothing is decided by representation. Whatever is done by those appointed to rule, is considered in presence of the general body, and with their consent." "There could be no room for authority if conviction were deemed necessary, because it is only by instruction and persuasion that it is produced. Like the sensitive plant, it shrinks at the gentlest touch of power, and the rude intruder must be completely withdrawn before it again exerts its energy. On these principles, I consider the authority of Presbytery as standing on a most unscriptural basis."¹ To the same effect, in speaking of the kind and extent of power confided to pastors

¹ Innes, *Letters on Independency*, quoted by Brown in his *Vindication of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government, in reply to Independents*, Edinr. 1805, p. 20.

or rulers, Dr. Wardlaw, in his work on *Congregational Independency*, says: "They (the pastors) have no wish for more power,—no wish for either the power to make laws, or the power to execute the laws that exist, *independently of the concurrence of the brethren.*"¹ In like manner, Dr. Davidson, in his work on the *Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament*—although he somewhat inconsistently disavows the notion that the power of the Church in matters of government is no more than a power of advice—gives the following explanation of the extent of authority vested in its rulers: "Having explained and authoritatively declared the will of Christ concerning matters brought before the brethren, the minister pronounces sentence *with their consent.* *He has no authority to enact regulations for the guidance or discomfort of the brethren without their approval.* On the contrary, he must proceed all along *with their knowledge and sanction.* It is expedient and *necessary* that they admit the propriety of all his measures."² Now it is plain, that whatever name may be given to the power belonging to the rulers apart from the ruled, all these eminent Independent writers now quoted agree in this, that it is a power valid with the concurrence, consent, and sanction of the ruled, but not valid without their consent, concurrence, and sanction. Whatever name such a power may be expressed by, it is not authority, in the proper sense of the term, which, when lawfully exercised by the rulers, cannot lawfully be rejected by the ruled, whether they concur or not.

In dealing with the principles held by Independents, when they deny or practically set aside the exercise of power and authority, properly so called, in the Church of Christ, there are certain concessions which justice requires us to make in their favour.

First, the power claimed by the governors of the Christian Church is not an arbitrary or capricious authority, to be wielded at will by them, in disregard of the rights or consciences of the

¹ Wardlaw, *Congregational Independency*, Glasgow 1848, p. 320. "The distinctive polity of Independents consists in the two particulars: 1st, that each Church is entrusted with its own government; and 2d, that that government is to be conducted not by the office-bearers alone as its representatives, but by the office-bearers and the congregation conjointly," p. 234. Comp. also pp. 316-320.

² Davidson, *Eccles. Polity of the New Testament*, London 1848, p. 276. Compare Dr. King's vigorous and able criticism of these statements, as well as of Dr. Wardlaw's position referred to above. *Exposition and Defence of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government*, Edinr. 1853, pp. 50-65, 84-89.

members. There are certain limitations of a most important nature affixed to that power, and certain principles of a definite kind laid down for the use and administration of it, which set bounds round about it, and bring it into harmony with the liberty of conscience, rightfully belonging to every private individual of the Christian society.

Second, there are means of a most indispensable kind to be employed in the way of explanation and instruction, counsel and persuasion, to secure the convictions and concurrence of the private members of the Church, in whatever act or declaration the rulers, in the exercise of their judicial, or legislative, or administrative functions, may find it necessary for them to perform or to adopt. Without the use of such means to carry the conscience and understanding of the members of the Church along with them in all that they do and declare, the office-bearers are not at liberty to use or enforce their peculiar power at all. And it is only when all such means have been employed and exhausted without effect, and when the members of the Church, so dealt with in the way of Christian persuasion and instruction, still refuse their concurrence, that it may be necessary and is lawful to use authority to strengthen the appeal, and to fall back upon the ultimate resource of all societies,—namely, the inherent right of the rulers to rule, and the no less inherent duty of the ruled to obey.

Third, it may be yet further conceded, that the members and office-bearers of the Church are mutually entitled to give as well as to receive advice and counsel; and that those in office are bound to give all due weight to the opinions of the membership, so as, if possible, to bring about a mutual understanding and agreement.

Fourth, there is yet another concession which it is necessary to make in regard to this matter, and which it is of some importance to note; and it is this, that the mere resistance to authority as authority alone, ought not to be made a ground for Church censure or punishment, when there is no moral or spiritual offence connected with the resistance. Of course resistance to authority, even when that authority is put forth, as it sometimes may and must be, in enforcing a thing indifferent, may yet be associated with moral guilt on the part of those who indulge in it. Such resistance may arise out of feelings of hatred to all restraint, or opposition of a malignant kind to all authority; it may become contumacy, and as such involve moral blame. But until resist-

ance to authority becomes in one way or other morally wrong, when the consent of the members to the act or deed of the rulers is withheld from no cause in itself sinful, such want of consent or concurrence ought to be dealt with on the principle of forbearance in things indifferent, and not be visited with censure or penalty of an ecclesiastical kind.

But after making these concessions to the advocate of Independent views, it is still true that these views come very far short of the right and Scriptural doctrine on the subject of the extent of Church power.

In the *first* place, such views, if fairly carried out, are inconsistent with the nature of every orderly and well-regulated society.

A joint authority shared by the rulers and the ruled, or an authority vested in the rulers, but only to take effect when the ruled add their consent and concurrence, and not otherwise, is, from the very nature of the case, a power which it is impossible consistently or practically to carry out. A right of government dependent for its validity and binding obligation upon the giving or withholding sanction to it by those who are governed—which there is no duty in yielding submission to, and no blame in refusing to obey—considered simply as authority, can, it is plain, be no government at all, in the proper meaning of the word, and was never yet practically realized in any community under heaven. In the purest democracy, whether civil or ecclesiastical, where the consent and concurrence of the largest number of the members of the society is needed to the act of government, the consent and concurrence of *all* was never yet obtained. Both in civil and ecclesiastical matters, in such cases, a majority must have the right to rule, and a minority must be under obligation to obey. And such, in point of fact, must be the case in the instance of Independent Churches, where all the members have a joint right to rule, by giving or withholding their concurrence to the act of authority done. There is no exemption in such instances from the necessity laid upon every society, however purely democratic, to be ruled, when a difference of opinion shall arise, by the decision of the majority. Whenever differences cannot be accommodated by explanation or concession on either side, and when both parties still retain their opinions, it may be conscientiously and from conviction, there is and can be no resource except for the will and decision of the majority to become the law both of the

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majority and minority. In such a case, even in an Independent congregation, the judgment of the majority is invested with all the right to rule, and to command obedience from the others, which the judgment of the office-bearers alone, according to the principles of Presbyterianism, would possess. The unanimity to which some Independent writers refer as prevailing in their congregational meetings is only a nominal one, the dissenting minority, if they do not leave the Church, being compelled to give in by what is really a species of coercion. In point of fact, government on the principle of a right to give or withhold consent and concurrence to the act of the governors by all, and so to make them binding or the reverse, is practically an impossibility. It is inconsistent with the very idea of authority, and with the nature of an orderly and well-regulated society.¹

In the second place, such views are incompatible with the many and explicit statements of Scripture in regard to the nature and extent of Church power.

These statements may be conveniently classified under four heads:—1. The names or designations given to the parties ruling in the Church, in the strongest manner demonstrate that their office and power were in the strict sense of the term authoritative, and are incompatible with the limitation implied in the Independent theory. They are entitled bishops, *ἐπισκοποι*, in many passages of Scripture,—a word which in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament is repeatedly employed to denote the civil or military power of the Jewish officers over those committed to them, and which is not consistent with the idea of authority de-

¹ Four points may be noted with respect to the power of Church rulers on the Presbyterian system, as distinguished from the Independent, the Popish, or the Prelatic. 1. Their power is not lordly, but ministerial. 2. It is not compulsory, but spiritual. 3. It is not capricious, but regulated by law. 4. It is not oppressive, but bounded by the liberties of the Christian people. It is the same power as that of the majority over the minority in Independent Churches; but it is checked and modified by two things,—the popular election of the rulers, and the principle of representation. The latter, or the representative principle in Presbyterianism, averts the necessity of those sharp personal collisions which occur in Independent Church meetings, as in all pure democracies. Any case of difficulty or delicacy that arises in a Presbyterian congregation can at once be extricated from its personal and local entanglements, and handed over to be dealt with calmly and deliberately in the higher representative Church Courts.

The two root principles of Independency, as stated by Wardlaw, are: *first*, each congregation stands alone in the management of all its affairs; *second*, a conjoint system of government by the concurrent judgment of the whole

pendent on the consent or concurrence of the ruled. Again they are frequently spoken of under the title of presbyters, *πρεσβυτεροι*,—a term likewise in common use among the Jews, as is shown by the Septuagint, to signify the civil magistrates or elders who judged and sat in the gate of a city; and which, when applied to ecclesiastical magistrates, is incompatible with the limitations put upon their office by the Independents. They are further called rulers, *ἡγουμενοι*,—a word generally employed both in the Septuagint and in the New Testament to express the power and authority of civil rulers, and which, used ecclesiastically, can admit of no such restriction as that of a dependence on the concurrence of the ruled. Finally they are spoken of as pastors, *ποιμνές*, which both by sacred and profane writers is made use of for the office of kingly power, as in the well-known Homeric phrase, “the shepherd of the people.” The common use and application of such terms in reference to the governors of the Christian Church, necessarily implies authority in its proper sense and extent, and not in the limited meaning assigned to it by the Independents. 2. The precepts or instructions given to the rulers of the Church, in regard to the discharge of the duties of their office, are at variance with the Independent view of Church power. They are instructed not merely to “teach,” to “exhort,” to “beseech”—which might all be compatible with a power of advice, such as Independents restrict them to—but also in discharge of the proper functions of their office to “reprove” and “rebuke”—*ἐλεγχων, ἐπιτιμαων*.¹ 3. The terms of the exhortations and commands, addressed to the members of the Church in regard to the

Church or congregation. The practical result is, that the theory is utterly unworkable, and that the government is just a specimen of what is known in mechanics as “unstable equilibrium,” oscillating to and fro between a tyranny of the one and of the many. Let the “centre of gravity,” the preponderating weight of character and energy, lie with the minister, and the Independent system becomes a monarchy, more or less constitutional. Let the weight of influence lie with the deacons or managers, or with the people, and the Independent system becomes an oligarchy more or less close, or a democracy more or less turbulent. In short, if all have an equal right to govern, practically it is a mere chance how the balance shall adjust itself, and in whose hands the power shall ultimately be lodged. If indeed Dr. Davidson be correct in stating that an Independent pastor has a right to preside at all Church meetings, and to silence any speaker of whom he disapproves (*Eccles. Pol.* p. 274), this ministerial veto, vigorously used, might perhaps place the bulk of the power in the hands of the pastor. See Dr. King's remarks on this point, referred to above.

¹ 1 Tim. v. 20; 2 Tim. iv. 2; Tit. i. 9, 13, ii. 15.

measure of obedience to be rendered by them to the authority over them, forbids the interpretation put upon that authority by the Independents, as in every respect waiting upon the consent of the governed for its validity. The precepts laid upon them are such as these: "Obey them that have the rule over you;" *πειθεσθε*, a word which, although it may denote the obedience yielded to persuasion, also signifies the obedience owing to authority. "Submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account;"¹ *ὑπεικτε*, a military word, implying subjection of the most absolute kind. "I beseech you, that ye submit yourselves to such; and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth;"² *ὑποτασσησθε*, a term commonly employed to express the most entire and simple obedience. It is the same word which is used, for example, by the evangelist in speaking of our Lord's subjection to His human parents at Nazareth, and by the apostle in describing the obedience due to the civil magistrate.³ (4. We have instances and descriptions of the power—*ἐξουσια*—so to be administered by the rulers and so to be obeyed by the members of the Church; such as to leave no doubt that it was judicial and authoritative. "I verily, as absent in the body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."⁴)

Such names given to the rulers of the Church,—such exhortations in regard to their office addressed to them,—such precepts given to the members touching the obedience due to the office,—and such examples of the actual authority exercised as we find in Scripture, furnish a strong proof that Church power is a real power in the governors of the Christian society, and not a nominal one, dependent on the consent or concurrence of the governed. (Both the nature of a regular society in general, and the statements of Scripture in regard to the Christian Church in particular, go to repudiate the Independent views as to the measure and extent of Church power or authority.)

¹ Heb. xiii. 17.

³ Luke ii. 51; Rom. xiii. 1, 5.

² 1 Cor. xvi. 16.

⁴ 1 Cor. v. 3-5, 13.

II. So much, then, for the extent of Church power. The second subject to which our consideration was to be directed was the limits of it. After the repeated opportunities we have already had of indicating the restrictions that are put from various quarters on the use and administration of Church power, the very briefest reference will be sufficient to point out the limits of it. There are four different ways in which distinct and well-marked limits are set to the power of the Church.

1st. Church power is limited by the nature of it as distinctively and exclusively a spiritual power.

This first limitation excludes the possibility of the power of the Church being made use of in the way of Romish usurpation arrogating a right to a temporal or civil supremacy—following up ecclesiastical sentences with civil or semi-civil pains and penalties, such as bodily penances, pecuniary fines, or legal disabilities—and trampling under foot the political liberties and social rights of men. It still further excludes the Popish and semi-Popish doctrine of anything beyond a spiritual influence in ministers and ordinances, and a spiritual grace in the right use and observance of them; thus shutting out the *opus operatum* of the Church of Rome, the physical virtue which it attributes to ordinances, and no less shutting out the theory of a priestly charm in the "successors of the apostles," and sacramental grace in the ordinances dispensed by them, as held by High Churchmen of whatever communion.

2d. Church power is limited by the source of it, or by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, from whom it is derived.

This second limitation very clearly points to the character of the power vested in the office-bearers of the Church as entirely subordinate and ministerial, and bounded, as respects its authority and obligation, by the institution and rule of Him who has appointed it. It excludes the possibility of that power becoming an independent despotism or lordship in the hands of the rulers, and of their regarding it as if it were given for their own aggrandizement and exaltation, or to be used for the subjugation, by a spiritual tyranny, of the consciences and understandings of the other members of the Church. Because limited by the authority of Christ, that power can never become independent itself, or make the administrators of it independent. They are, in the strictest sense of the terms, the ministers or servants of Christ.

higher authority than that of the mere sufferance or permission of men, its power is to be used and administered among them. That power is a reality; it is given and it is exercised by warrant of God; it is a living force of ceaseless activity and vast energy, continually operating in the world; it is an element of Divine might ever at work in the midst of the earthly and lower forces by which human society is moved. And it is of no small importance that we understand the ends for which this power has been given, and to which it ought to be directed,—the design of its Divine Author in vesting the Church with an authority and prerogatives so unlike any to be found elsewhere on earth,—and the result intended to be wrought out by a mysterious and spiritual power so little akin to those of the world, and the operations and effects of which are so little to be calculated upon by mere worldly sagacity. The Church of Christ, and the power Christ has conferred on it, are elements introduced into the system of human affairs strangely alien to all others of an earthly kind, both in their origin and their character; and it is of moment to all parties distinctly to understand the aim and intention of such a force. What, then, is the purpose for which Church power has been instituted by God, and for which it ought to be employed among men? What are the end and design of it as regards the world, and as regards the Church itself?

I. As regards the world at large, the aim of Church power, and the end to be accomplished by it, are not direct, but indirect.

The power conferred on the Church by its Divine Head was bestowed, in the first instance, for the use and benefit of the Church itself, and can have only an indirect bearing on the world at large. It is limited in its object—at least primarily—to certain ends to be accomplished in regard to the Christian society; and does not, except as a secondary object, contemplate results to be attained beyond the limits of the society. This seems to be fairly implied in the general principle laid down by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Church at Corinth, when instructing that Church to exercise its power of discipline in excluding from its membership the incestuous person found within its pale. “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are

without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth.”¹ There is a general principle here laid down by the apostle in regard to Church power, drawing a line of marked distinction between those within the Church and the world without. In regard to those within the Church, the power of the Church was intended to take effect; so that with an offender who is called a brother, the Corinthians were not to keep company, nor so much as to eat. In regard to those without the Church, or the world at large, Church power was not intended to take effect; so that in regard to an offender, not a brother, but belonging to the world at large, no such restrictions were to be imposed or observed, and the Corinthians were not called to separate themselves in the same manner from him. In short, because a brother, and within the Church, it was necessary to deal with an offender by the authority of the Church; while it was not necessary so to deal with one equally an offender, but belonging to the world at large. And what is true, as intimated by the apostle, in the case of the exercise of Church power in the way of discipline, is true also generally of the exercise of Church power in any of its departments. The power of the Church of Christ is intended primarily for those that are within, not for those that are without: it bears only indirectly upon the world at large.

No doubt the Church has a most important mission in regard even to the world without. It is God's witness on earth, sent to testify with ceaseless voice for Him, and to be a visible and perpetual testimony for His cause, whether men will receive the testimony or reject it. The Christian Church, as regards the world without, is God's standing protest against its sin and in favour of Himself. But the grand and primary office of the Church is one bearing on the people of God; and its office towards the world at large is secondary and subordinate to that. Church power, in the first instance, and as its direct object, contemplates the end of the Church's benefit and edification; and only in a secondary sense has it any bearing on the world. In government and discipline, in framing and enforcing laws, in administering Sacraments, the power of the Church is confined to the Church, or to those that are within; and it is only in so far as is necessarily implied in discharging its office of a witness, or a protest, that Church power has any bearing upon the world, or

¹ 1 Cor. v. 11-13.

those that are without. As a witness, the Church declares the truth of God to the world; as a protest, it frames and exhibits a confession of its faith in opposition to the errors and unbelief of the world; but beyond that it does not go. "What have I to do to judge them that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?" In direct opposition to the Romish doctrine on the subject, it must be maintained that the power of the Church has no authority over, and no office to discharge towards, those beyond her communion, except the office of a witness for God. Popery, indeed, lays down a different scheme of Church power. The canons of the Council of Trent under the head of Baptism maintain the doctrine that all baptized persons, whether within the Church of Rome or without it, are properly subject to her power, in virtue of their being baptized, even although the baptism has not been administered by her hands.¹ Such a claim is plainly repugnant to the great Scripture principle that the office of the Church in relation to the world is that of a witness alone; and that it is only in so far as is necessary for the discharge of that duty that the power of the Church has any bearing upon those beyond her pale. As regards the world at large, the aim of Church power, and the end to be accomplished by it, are not direct, but indirect. It is for those within, not for those without, the Christian society.

II. The power of the Church has for its aim and end directly the general benefit and spiritual good of the Church as a body.

That this is the case is very explicitly announced by the Apostle Paul, when speaking of the authority vested in himself as an apostle and an extraordinary office-bearer in the Church: "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord has given me to edification, and not to destruction."² And what is true of the extraordinary and temporary office of the apostleship which Paul held, and of the power belonging to it, is also true of the permanent and standing office-bearers of the Christian society, and of the ordinary power which they are commissioned to wield. Such power is instituted for the interests and spiritual edification of the whole Church, and not for the advantage of the

¹ Concilii Trident. Canones et Decreta. Sess. vii. De Baptismo; Can. iv. viii. Catech. Pars i. Art. ix. 12.

² 2 Cor. x. 8, xiii. 10.

few who administer it. It is not to create a separate class, or to aggrandize a privileged order in the Christian society, that Church power is given and limited to a few, any more than it is to create a caste, or to benefit a particular order in the civil society, that political power is given and restricted to a few. In the case of the state, the ordinance of power established by God is an ordinance for good not to a small body, but to all within it. The distinction of ranks, the privileges of civil rule, the authority of government, the rights of power, exist not because of the ambitious desires or interests of those invested with office, but because of the necessity of such things to secure the blessings of order, and justice, and peace in the community at large. And so, in the case of the Church, the power which belongs to it exists for the moral and spiritual good of the whole body, and not for the creation of a priestly caste, or for the aggrandizement of a few at the expense of the many. Government exists in the Christian society for the interest as much of the governed as the governors. Office exists for the benefit no less of those who have it not, than of those who have. Power belongs to the state ecclesiastical, not for the ambition or aggrandizement of a Church order, but for the edification and well-being of those who have no place in the Church but as members. Authority is exercised and enforced within the Christian Church, not for the gain of a few, but for the spiritual good of the many. The Church of Christ knows of no spiritual order distinct from the order of Christians,—no priestly caste separated from all others by internal rights and prerogatives peculiar to itself,—no separate interest for the members of which alone power and privilege and authority exist,—no lordly rank, to whom belong mysterious authority and transcendental privileges unknown to the rest.

The Church of Christ confesses to the existence within it of no *clergy*, as in the Church of Rome, distinguished by indelible "character" and internal powers from the *laity* or the Christian people. The true *clergy* of the Church of Christ are, according to the original import of the word, the *κληρος*, the "lot," or "possession," or "heritage" of Christ,—the whole body of His called and chosen people.¹ And in nothing is the spirit of Rome more apparent than in that distinction which she has set up

¹ 1 Pet. v. 3; Col. i. 12.

between the clergy and the laity,—between a sacerdotal and profane caste,—between those to whom, according to her Church principles, the power of the Christian society inherently belongs, and those who are appointed to be its slaves or its victims. The very last thing intended by its Divine Head in the institution of office, and authority, and power in His Church, was the creation or aggrandizement of a separate interest or privileged class, who should inherently possess a right to place, and power, and honour, at the expense of the rest. And although, for the sake of order, and for the sake of order alone, some were set apart in the Christian society to office and for the purpose of administering the authority of its government, yet it must never be forgotten that such an arrangement was made not for their sakes, but for the sake of the whole; and that in virtue of being so appointed to administer the power and manage the affairs of the body of Christians, they become all the more the “ministers” or servants of the rest. The spiritual edification of the whole body of believers is the one end and aim of Church power. It knows of no object apart from this. It confesses to no aim of a private and exclusive kind, distinct from the universal good. It is not the gain of a few at the expense of the many. It is not the peculiar prerogative or the peculiar interest of a privileged and separate order, who claim to be the heirs of apostolic power by “apostolic succession.” “Not for that we have dominion,” said an apostle *not* by succession, “not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.” “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus *the Lord*, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

The direct design and end of Church power is the spiritual edification of the Church,—meaning by the word not a privileged class, but the whole body of the faithful, whatever place or name they may have in the Christian society. For this one object Church power in all its forms and exercises was instituted, and ought to be administered within the Christian society. We can see, indeed, in regard to every department of Church power, whether it regards doctrine, ordinance, or discipline, that it is subservient to this great end, and that it is fitted as well as intended to advance the spiritual interests of the society.

Take the case of the exercise of Church power in regard to doctrine, or the office of the Church authoritatively to deal with

Divine truth, and it is not difficult to see how it is fitted and designed to promote the spiritual edification of the whole body. Under reservation of an appeal to the Word of God itself, it is the office of the Church ministerially, but yet authoritatively, to declare the truth there revealed; publicly to preach the doctrine of Christ and His Gospel, according to her understanding of them; and in addition to this, when circumstances call upon her to perform the duty, to frame and exhibit to the world, and in opposition to its unbelief and error, a summary or confession of the articles of faith held by believers. This is, speaking generally, the office of Church power in regard to doctrine. In regard to the world without, the Church is a witness for God, and against its unbelief; in regard to her own members within the Church, she is a teacher ministerially to declare the truth of Christ, and publicly to explain His Gospel. And it is not difficult, I think, to see that these uses or acts of Church power are for the spiritual edification of the whole body of the Church, and are directly and greatly calculated to promote its spiritual good. An individual man, with the Bible in his hand, and interpreting the Bible for himself, will, under the blessing of God, find in the private perusal of the inspired volume what will build up his own soul in spiritual wisdom and understanding. But the private perusal of the Word is not to be compared, as an instrument of influence and spiritual power, to the public preaching of the Word by the Church, as the ordinance of God appointed for that end. “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but *especially* the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.”¹ The Church, in the exercise of this power, lifting up a witness for the truth, and emitting an authoritative protest against error,—the appointed teacher, appealing not to its own authority, but to that of its Master, for its words, and demanding audience and belief in the name of Christ for Christ’s own Gospel,—has been found in the experience of every age a spiritual power of mighty effect for the good and edification of the Christian society. Second to the Spirit, that witness of higher authority and more powerful efficacy still in declaring and testifying to the truth of God, the Church, in the exercise of its legitimate power as the public and visible teacher

¹ Shorter Catechism, Q. 89.

of doctrine, has been mighty through God both for the pulling down of the strongholds of spiritual error, and for the building up the body of believers in spiritual wisdom and edification.

Or take the case of the exercise of the Church's power in regard to ordinances and Sacraments; and it is not difficult to discern here, too, that it is designed and calculated to subserve in a very striking manner the edification of the Church. The power of ministering by Sacrament and ordinance to the spiritual advantage of the whole body of believers, is a most efficacious one. No doubt a man may be a Christian, alone and apart from the aids and advantages of social worship, and fellowship, and ordinances. It is a possible thing for a man to cherish and hide a solitary faith—a faith that is saving—within his own bosom, apart from those Divine helps and confirmations to faith which Church communion and Sacraments supply. But it is not less certain on that account, that a Christian doubles his Christianity by fellowship with other Christians; and that there is a blessing which cannot be enjoyed alone, nor unless shared at the same time with fellow-believers. In fellowship with the Church, and in the use of its ordinances, there is a spiritual influence experienced, which the Christian cannot enjoy by himself apart; and by the ministry of Sacrament and ordinance, the power of the Church is made subservient in a very marked and striking manner to the confirmation of the faith, the increase of the grace, the furtherance of the holiness, and the establishment of the obedience of believers. By its ministry of this spiritual provision, made by ordinance and Sacrament, for the help and advancement of its members, the Church becomes a living power to their souls of the strongest and most effectual kind; and day after day, as it administers Sacraments, and through them, as channels, communicates a grace and influence not its own, it works as an instrument of the most powerful description for the edification of the body of Christ.

Or once more, take the case of the exercise of Church power in regard to government and discipline; and it is not difficult to see that here, too, it tends directly and powerfully to advance the spiritual edification of the Church. The use and intent of the power of discipline intrusted to the Church are briefly and precisely expressed by the Apostle Paul, in speaking about the exclusion of the incestuous person from the fellowship of the Corinthian Church. He tells that Church "to deliver such an

one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." If discipline, as administered and enforced by the Church, in the use of the power committed to it, is intended "for the destruction of the flesh," and so must in one sense be painful, it is intended, by the help of that very severity, to accomplish the gracious and good purpose of "saving the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus." Its aim is a merciful one; and not the less so, that it is accomplished by means of a wholesome severity.¹ Its end is salvation; and not less certainly so, or rather all the more certainly so, that it is attained through the destruction of the flesh. Like all the other exercises of that power which Christ has committed to the hands of His Church, to be administered on behalf of His people, discipline is designed and calculated to promote its good. And when that power, severe but wholesome, is exercised in a right spirit, and by suitable means,—when the spiritual sword is wielded for protection and establishment of the Church against sin and spiritual offence, in the way not of tyranny but of tenderness,—it will carry healing and not death upon its edge. It is impossible to tell to what extent the spiritual power of discipline given to the Church may have contributed, as it unquestionably is intended, to repress transgression and to save transgressors—to bear back the inroad of offence and offenders—to guard the unstable and restore the fallen—to stir up Christians to diligence, and caution, and spiritual exertion—to confirm, and strengthen, and establish believers.² Whatever department or exercise of Church power may be considered, it will be found to be given and intended for the edification of the Church.

III. The power of the Church has for its aim and object *not* the destruction of the Church.

The emphatic and twice repeated expression of the Apostle Paul, when referring, on two separate occasions, to the use of his apostolical authority, has a twofold meaning. He tells the Corin-

¹ ["Vividæ disciplinæ severa misericordia."—CALVIN.]

² ["Quemadmodum salvifica Christi doctrina anima est Ecclesiæ, ita illi disciplina pro nervis est: quæ fit ut membra corporis suo quodque loco inter se cohereant. . . . Disciplina veluti frenum est, quo retineantur et domentur qui adversus Christi doctrinam ferociunt: vel tanquam stimulus, quo excitentur parum voluntarii: interdum etiam velut paterna ferula, quæ clementer et pro Spiritus Christi mansuetudine castigentur qui gravius lapsi sunt."—CALVIN, *Inst.* lib. iv. cap. xii. 1.]

thians that it was given to him by Christ "for edification." But he tells them also, and in the same breath, that it was given to him by Christ, "not for destruction." And the addition of this second expression was not a needless tautology, but, on the contrary, a most emphatic indication of how Church power may be employed, and a no less emphatic protest against its abuse. When abused, indeed, or turned away from its legitimate purpose, it must necessarily tend, not to the edification, but to the destruction of the body of Christ. Such abuses of Church power, to the injury and not the advantage of the Church, may be met with in different communions. But they are most markedly and flagrantly seen in the Church of Rome, the history of which is little else but the history of Church power, turned to the purposes not of spiritual edification, but of deadly wrong, and destruction to the dearest and most sacred rights and interests of its members. I do not allude so much at present to that civil supremacy over the persons, and properties, and temporal rights of men, which the Church of Rome has sought to engraft upon her spiritual authority. In this way, doubtless, her Church power has been used "for destruction" indirectly, through the aid of the civil. But I refer more especially to the direct spiritual injury and wrong done to the souls of men, by the use, or rather abuse, of the spiritual power, which, more than any done to the temporal rights and privileges of men—to their persons and properties—has made that apostate Church to be the fitting illustration of the apostle's warning against a Church power, used not for edification, but for destruction. There are rights not less inherent in man, and far more sacred, than the right of property or life. There is the right of liberty of thought and of private judgment,—the right which every man has on his own responsibility, and not another's, to ascertain and know for himself what God is, what God has said, and what duty God requires of him, His accountable creature. There are his rights of conscience, and more especially the right of judging for himself what is his duty and what his sin in reference to God, and of determining for himself what he shall believe as God's truth, and what reject as man's doctrine and commandment. There are the rights of his soul, and more especially the right to that salvation which his soul requires, and which is freely given him of God. These are rights intimately and inherently belonging to man's intellectual and moral and

spiritual nature, which are dearer and better to him than property or life; and these rights the Church of Rome, in the exercise of its ecclesiastical power, has rudely trampled on, or violently taken away. And the history of that Church tells on its every page, and in characters never to be effaced, that the spiritual power committed to it "for edification" has been turned "to the destruction" of the body of Christ.

First, Popery has turned the power of the Church to the purposes of destruction, by violently taking away or rudely disregarding the rights of man, viewed as a rational and intellectual being. The right of every man to think and to judge for himself, and on his own responsibility, as a rational creature, Popery has taken away from its victims; and above all, the right to know God directly and immediately, by what God has made known of Himself, the Church of Rome has denied, and by its ecclesiastical power interdicted to its slaves. Itself blind, and the leader of the blind, who have trusted it, the Church of Rome has "taken away the key of knowledge," lest men should exercise their right to know God, and see for themselves His revealed will. It has sealed up the Bible as a perilous book, and forbidden men to receive it, except through the interpretation and teaching of the Church; thus standing between men and the knowledge of God in the way that God has given that knowledge in His own word. It is the first-right of every human being, as a rational and intellectual creature, to understand God; because this was the very end for which he was made, and for which he lives. It was the distinctive purpose of his creation; and it is not only to degrade him from his place in creation, but to destroy his very character as a rational creature, to take from him by violence and wrong the right he has to know God in the way in which God has made Himself to be known. A power so employed as to rob man by force or fraud of this right, and to substitute the teaching of a fellow-creature for the Word of God addressed to his understanding, is a power exercised not for edification, but destruction.

Second, Popery has turned the power of the Church to the purposes of destruction, by forcibly taking away or insidiously destroying the rights of man, viewed as a moral and responsible being. The moral nature of man, as the seat of responsibility, can have no other master in the things of God than God Himself. He alone is Lord of the human conscience, and in its responsi-

bility to Him it claims to be free from the lordship and tyranny of a fellow-creature. The most solemn responsibility which conscience underlies is in judging for itself what is right and wrong, what is truth and error in reference to God, so that it may determine what it is to believe as His doctrine and commandment, and what disbelieve as the doctrine and commandment of men. It is the highest and most sacred action of conscience, and of man as a moral and responsible being, when he is thus brought immediately into contact with God, and into converse directly with God's Word, for the purpose of ascertaining for himself, upon the peril of his soul, what is truth that he may believe it, and what is duty that he may do it. And this right of conscience—this right of man as a moral and responsible creature—the Church of Rome has violently taken away, when in virtue of its spiritual power it pretends to dictate by an infallible authority what its victims are to believe, and demands at their hands in return an implicit faith in what it dictates. This is to destroy or to debauch the conscience, and to rob man by violence and injustice of the dearest right that is inherent in him as a moral and responsible being. To compel a man, by the exercise of an infallible authority, to believe what the Church believes, according to his conscience or against his conscience, is to destroy by force the moral nature of man in the highest form and exercise of it, as a judge within every man of truth and falsehood. The Church which claims such a right, and exercises such an authority, makes use of its spiritual power, not for edification, but for destruction.

Third, Popery has turned the power of the Church to the purposes of destruction, by violently taking away the rights of man as a spiritual being. The rights of his soul are to man the highest and dearest of all,—the right to embrace the Gospel which God has plainly revealed, and to share in the salvation which God has freely given. And most of all the Church of Rome has taken away this right from its victims, and violently robbed them of that which God has bestowed. Instead of the Gospel of God's love and power, it puts into men's hands "another gospel, which is yet not another" (*ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο*); and instead of the free and complete salvation to which every man that lives has received from God a right, Popery has substituted the lying cheats of its sacramental grace and priestly absolution, and has palmed upon its deceived and ruined victims the impos-

tures and tricks of indulgences and masses, of penances and the confessional. In its unhallowed claims to retain and remit sin,—to bind and loose the sinner,—to give or withhold grace,—to absolve or condemn at its will, the Church of Rome, in so far as it has been able to force its pretensions on its members, has to that extent succeeded in depriving them of their rights as sinners, given and guaranteed to them by God, to the enjoyment of His free grace and His great salvation: their *right* to embrace that Gospel, each man for his own soul, and to share in that salvation, each man for his own need; their *right*, without the intervention of church, or priest, or sacrament, to deal with a Saviour for His mercy upon His own terms, and in obedience to His own invitation. And shall not the blood of those souls slain by her violence and treachery be one day found in her skirts, and required at her hand, when God shall arise to vindicate against that apostate Church the rights of men taken away by force or by fraud,—those very rights which a Saviour died to purchase for them, and lives to bestow? Surely a Church power *so* exercised has been employed, not for edification, but for destruction.¹

¹ [Calvin, *Inst.* lib. iv. cap. viii. x. xi. *Jus Div. Reg. Eccles.* Part I. chap. vii. viii.]