

Confirmation A Witness for Obedience and Unity by Frederick
William Faber. (1838).

CONFIRMATION
A WITNESS
FOR OBEDIENCE AND UNITY.

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I will keep Thy ceremonies: O
forsake me not utterly.—Ps cxix. 15.

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CONFIRMATION A WITNESS FOR OBEDIENCE AND UNITY.

WHEN the providence of God was pleased to interpose among the judgments and miseries which came upon England, after the martyrdom of King Charles, of blessed memory, and the plague of rebellion and civil strife was stayed for a while, the Church was left in a distracted and unsettled condition. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the evils under which she laboured. Men's minds were loosened from every principle of allegiance and obedience to authority as a divine ordinance. All true and Christian notions of political and religious liberty were lost sight of. Faith had given way to mere opinion: the creed of the Church to the novel doctrines of schismatical teachers. Antiquity was regarded with suspicion, as the representative to the popular mind of an old and oppressive state of things. During the troubles, the nation had become almost infinitely divided and broken up into sects and factions, among which many of the old heresies had revived, and new extravagancies, no less heretical, were spread abroad. At such a season, it seemed almost mockery to talk of a rule of faith and a Church with full authority from God to divide the Word of Truth. She might have complained with Ezekiel, "Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" Now it was just at this crisis, that Bishop Taylor, one of the great lights which God set to shine in His Church during her affliction, called the attention of the country to the holy and ancient rite of Confirmation. It was not merely accidental, that he selected that particular time for such a subject. He was a Bishop of the Irish Church, and he addressed his treatise to the good duke of Ormonde, the king's representative in that land, very solemnly, and with an express declaration, that Confirmation was the pearl which the Church was now called upon to bring out of her treasures, in order to meet the wants and evils of those days. The primitive unction of Confirmation was the oil which was to be poured upon the uneasy waters, as though it were gifted with a heavenly power to quiet and allay the anger and tossing of the storm. Now, it may very easily be, that one period of

a nation's history may outwardly, and in its great historical features, be very unlike another period; and yet, all the while, be in reality very similar. Opposite things may have brought about the same results. Indifference may affect a Church just as violence would affect it; only it would be longer in doing its work. The want of an even and uniform activity or warmth or discipline, on the one side, and, on the other, occasional, partial, irregular, and not always obedient endeavours after a right state of things, may divide a Church, may loosen its bands, and make it feeble, just as effectually as wrong and robbery and violence. In the one case, the end is brought about by the sacrilege of her enemies, in the other, by the undutiful coldness of her sons. It may be well, therefore, to consider whether the evils, which, in Bishop Taylor's day, Confirmation was to remedy, do not exist in a measure now. If they do, a right view of Confirmation may afford us the help which he expected to derive from it then. It is true, that in his time the regular administration of this rite had been sadly interrupted; whereas, in our days, it is performed with all decent solemnity in every diocese throughout the land. But religious truths, as well rites as doctrines, have many meanings and many gifts, which they keep unfolding as they are wanted in the Church. She never shifts her ground in combating the world; but she is perpetually varying her attitude. And, as she turns, the sun falls here and there upon the precious stones, that are set so thickly in her priestly dress, and causes them to give a different colour, and to be seen under new aspects, while the depth and strength of their colours is, to our eyes, altering continually. Thus, the importance of particular portions of her Creed and Ritual keeps rising and falling, according as her warfare assumes a new character.

One striking feature of the Church, in those days, was the want of obedience to spiritual pastors and teachers. The same evil is apparent now. It is as actively pernicious as it was then. The "people are as they that strive with the priest." (Hos. iv. 4.) Now Confirmation was looked upon by Bishop Taylor as a means of "greatly endearing the episcopal *order*, to which (that I may use St. Jerome's words) if there be not attributed a more than common power and authority, there will be as many schisms as priests:" and

secondly, “as a means of endearing the persons of the prelates to their flocks, when the people shall be convinced that there is, or may be, if they please, a perpetual intercourse of blessings and love between them; when God by their holy hands refuses not to give to the people the earnest of an eternal inheritance, when by them He blesses: and that the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the communication of His Spirit, is conveyed to all *persons* capable of the grace, by the conduct, and on the hands and prayers of their Bishops.” So high and so intense was the faith of this man of God, that he did not hesitate to believe, that these great marvels might be wrought by one plain Catholic rite; albeit he saw around him a scene as dismal and dreary, as could well meet the eyes of a Christian Bishop: “Churches demolished, much of the revenues irrecoverably swallowed by sacrilege, and digested by an unavoidable impunity; religion infinitely divided, and parted into formidable sects; the people extremely ignorant, and wilful by inheritance; superstitiously irreligious, and incapable of reproof.” So firm was his belief in the powers and graces of the Church of Christ, and so mighty in operation did he think the least of her ceremonies, as carrying the blessing of God along with it, and the very presence of the Spirit, Who is with the Church to comfort her!

To these two blessings, which Bishop Taylor looked for in Confirmation, we may add two others, rising out of the former, and forced upon our notice by the wants of the times. The existence of different schools of religious opinion is, of course, a great evil. The truth can only be partially in any one of them. At least, it is unlikely it should exist entire anywhere short of the Church Catholic. Thus unity, as well of feeling as of acting, is grievously interfered with. It becomes nothing beyond a mere word, a phrase, full of history, but without any reality at present answering to it. Now Confirmation, by God’s blessing, gives us a Catholic way, not of our own devising, of restoring unity. In some measure, it may be considered as embodying the principle of unity. It brings every son and daughter of the Church in immediate contact with their Bishop, who is the type and symbol of Church unity, and the very representative of Christ. It refers to him as the proper fountain of all ministerial power, just as the ministers at Baptism admonish

the sponsors that the child must be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop, as though their ministrations were imperfect without him.

Secondly, as the rite of Confirmation is, amongst us, practised only in the Catholic Church, it multiplies the signs and badges which distinguish her from the Protestant sectarian bodies. This is of immense importance in these days. The lines that run between the Church and the world have grown, in many places, so faint, that they can scarcely be distinguished. If the visible character of the Church, as a positive institution, were more drawn out, if her peculiarities were more deeply worn into her, so that the marks of the Lord Jesus which she bears in her body could be easily recognized, she would be enabled to keep her sons more closely to her side; and, from her beauty and her grandeur, would be more likely to allure the wayward back into the fold. People want to see and to feel that there is a substantial difference between the Church of God and the motley multitude who follow her. It should be made to meet them at every turn. It is a judgment on us, that we have so far lost our first faith, as to require so much proof and so much convincing. But it is a mercy that we have that left amongst us, which can satisfy our needs, and witness against ourselves.

Let us consider Confirmation then, mainly in this point of view: its fitness for us just now, its ability to give us what we want; being, as it is, a primitive and legitimate channel, by which we may receive those blessings which a zealous but faithless generation might otherwise strive to attain, by means and ways which have not the blessing of God, and the sanction of His Church upon them. Catholic rites only become forms, when men have ceased to believe there is anything divine about them. They only become merely external, when men have killed their internal power by disbelieving that it is there. If we only dared to have faith, and of course it requires courage, the Church would be all activity and spirit; her very ceremonies would be alive and full of gifts, and sharper than any two-edged sword.

There are four points to be considered; the origin and antiquity of Confirmation, its connection with holy Baptism, the blessing which it conveys, and the ministers by whose hands that

blessing is conveyed.¹

1. *The origin and antiquity of Confirmation.* The Fathers of the Church were accustomed to look on the descent of the Holy Ghost upon our Lord at His baptism, to be the type of Confirmation. His custom also of blessing little children by the imposition of Hands, was regarded by the early Christians as a warrant for this rite. But the main passages of Holy Scripture upon which they rested, were the account of the Samaritan converts, in the Acts of the Apostles, whom St. Philip the Deacon had baptized, but who were confirmed by St. Peter and St. John; and the passage in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where St. Paul enumerates “the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands” among the foundations and principles of the doctrine of Christ. Confirmation was at the very least of apostolic institution, if it was not ordained by Christ himself. It obtained universally in every branch of the Church, a Catholic custom founded upon a Catholic tradition. St. Cyprian says, “this custom is also descended to us, that they who are baptized, might be brought by the rulers of the Church, and by our prayer and the imposition of hands may obtain the Holy Ghost, and be consummated with the signature of the Lord.” Tertullian also, who was earlier still, says, “the flesh is sealed that the soul may be guarded or defended, and the body is overshadowed by the imposition of hands, that the soul may be enlightened by the Holy Ghost.” Indeed, in St. Jerome’s account of this rite, we might almost imagine, we saw a description of the custom of modern times. “I do not deny that this is the custom of the Church, that when persons are baptized in lesser cities by priests and deacons, the Bishop uses to travel far, that he may lay hands on them for the invocation of the Holy Spirit.” Thus, then, we see this rite of Confirmation to claim for itself the example of our Saviour Christ, to be administered by the holy Apostles, and after them by their successors, the Bishops, throughout all ages of

¹ As Confirmation is a subject on which, for many reasons, a disclaimer of originality is requisite, it is as well to say that this tract is entirely put together from Bishop Taylor’s treatise on Confirmation, the xii. book of Bingham’s Antiquities, Wheatly on the Common Prayer, and the second volume of Palmer’s *Origines Liturgicæ*.

the world. This should lead us to respect it, and to make much of the Church, whose very rites derive a sacred character from their antiquity, far beyond what any political institution in the world can claim; rising, as this rite does, like an angel from our Saviour's feet, and coming among us with some portion of His unsearchable riches. We are too apt to forget that the treasures of the Church are often of this sort, showing us, by their origin, their antiquity, and their prevalence, which considering what they are, is nothing short of a miracle, that a Power mightier than themselves is linked with them, because of Whose presence they themselves should be revered. Each particular Church has undoubted right to decree its own ceremonies. But this does not extend to all which may be properly called ritual. There are some portions of her inheritance which she may not stir, some rites which it would be unsafe, if not unfaithful, to alter or remove on any ground; such, in short, as are in the fullest sense Catholic, and not merely parts of the ceremonial of particular Churches and liturgies, such as are of divine and apostolic-institution, not the later additions of provincial councils or holy Bishops; such as Confirmation, for example, the covering of women in the Churches because of the angel, and the like. Otherwise would Church ceremonies be like man's fashions. There would be an endless succession, an endless changing, old things fading away, and new ones rising in their place. But it is not so with the Church, even in her Ritual, and therefore that Ritual should be, to a thoughtful and serious mind, full of holy fearfulness and glory half-unveiled, leading men to "praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men."

2. *Its connection with Holy Baptism.* This is a difficult and intricate question. So far, however, as the teaching of antiquity goes, it seems that Confirmation is on the one hand distinct from Baptism, but not a separate sacrament, in the sense, at least, in which we call Baptism and the Holy Communion sacraments; while, on the other hand, it has a necessary and indissoluble connection with Baptism, though it is by no means to be regarded merely as a ceremony appended to that sacrament, a part of the Ritual of Baptism. It certainly presupposes Baptism. It has no

meaning without it. Still it has gifts of its own to convey, quite apart from those received at the Font. When the ancients speak of Baptism and Confirmation together, they seem to consider the one as giving innocence, the other as giving strength. Of course, innocence itself is strength, a safeguard and a power; and strength too strives to work its way into innocence. The gifts of God never lie far from each other. We cannot move one without disturbing several others. So it is in these rites, we cannot definitely divide them, as men would have us do in controversy, any more than we can separate justification and sanctification, though they may really be separable. So we cannot altogether exclude strength from the purity of Baptism, or innocence from the might of Confirmation. Still, with this caution, we may safely teach, with the Fathers, that Baptism confers innocence, and that strength comes of Confirmation. It may be well to quote some of the authorities adduced by Bishop Taylor. They are all from old writers, "It is true, Baptism is sufficient to them that are to die presently: but it is not enough for them that are still to live and to fight against their spiritual enemies." Another says, "In Baptism, the Holy Ghost giveth us his fulness, in order to innocence, but in Confirmation He yieldeth increase unto grace." A third says, "Although to them that die presently, the benefits of regeneration are sufficient, yet to them that live, the auxiliaries of Confirmation are necessary." Lastly, a fourth writer uses the following language; "The Baptism of water profits us, because it washes away the sins we have formally committed, if we repent of them. But it does not sanctify the soul, or precede the concupiscences of the heart and our evil thoughts, nor drive them back, nor repress our carnal desires.

But he therefore who is (only) so baptized, that he does not also receive the Holy Spirit, is baptized in his body, and his sins are pardoned; but in his mind, he is yet but a catechumen, for so it is written, 'He that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of His;' and therefore, afterward out of his flesh will germinate worse sins, because he hath not received the Holy Spirit conserving him (in his baptismal grace), but the house of his body is empty; wherefore that wicked spirit finding it swept with the doctrines of faith, as

with besoms, enters in, and in a sevenfold manner dwells there.” The language of the Church of England is very similar. In the order of Confirmation, the Bishop, in his first prayer, describes Baptism as a regeneration by water and the Holy Ghost, and a forgiveness of all sins; whereas, he prays that Confirmation may be a strengthening with the Holy Ghost the comforter, an increase of the manifold gifts of grace, such as the spirit of ghostly strength, and a filling the heart with the spirit of holy fear. In like manner, the first Prayer Book of King Edward VI. having said that Baptism is sufficient to salvation for such “as depart out of this life in their infancy,” goes on to say that, “when children come to that age, that partly by the frailty of their own flesh, partly by the assaults of the world and the devil, they begin to be in danger to fall into sundry kinds of sin, it is most meet that Confirmation be ministered to those that be baptized, that, by imposition of hands and prayer, they may receive strength and defence against all temptations to sin, and the assaults of the world and the devil.” Thus Bishop Taylor calls Baptism “a regeneration unto life,” and Confirmation “a strengthening unto battle.”

“So should thy champions, ere the strife,
By holy hands o’ershadowed kneel,
So, fearless for their charmed life,
Bear, to the end, thy Spirit’s seal.”

Surely, when we see Confirmation thus wedded to Holy Baptism, thus raised into high dignity in the Church of Christ, and growing up out of a sacrament, it should make us jealous of the gift we received therein. It should make us diligent in teaching those beneath our care how solemn a thing it is, how easily its grace is lost amid the temptings of the world, and that it is hard to be regained. They would think more of Confirmation, if we taught them to think more of holy Baptism.

3. But the connection of Confirmation with Baptism, leads us to the third point we were to consider—*the blessing which it conveys*. If we look into Church sacraments and rites, we shall find that they contain within them a sort of covenant, an unequal and imperfect one, yet, nevertheless, a covenant; something to be done

on our part, as well as something on the part of God. Thus, faith and repentance, and especially the giving of thanks, are our oblation at the Altar, as well as the gifts of Bread and Wine; there is a vow in Ordination, and penitence must make room in our hearts for the grace of Absolution. Not that these things give their virtue to the rites. They are required as a preparation. The consecrating power is with Christ, and is imparted by the Holy Ghost through the ministers of the Church. This is the meaning of the word "spiritual" in theology. It denotes the fulness, and presence, and benediction of the Spirit of God. It is not, as some think, opposed to real; rather it is that which puts religious things far above every thing else in the way of reality. In the modern sense it refers, as we make almost all things do, to ourselves; to our way of receiving or apprehending a divine truth. In the mouths of the fathers it refers to God's way of being in and with that truth, so as to fill it with the power and blessing of the Godhead. It means that the Holy Spirit is there with the consecrating power, He being, in the old liturgy, "the Witness of the Lord Jesus' Passion." Thus the spiritual presence of our Lord, in the Sacrifice of the Altar, is His real presence, Christ being made effectually there by the Holy Ghost, Who is the Comforter of the Church on earth, and through Whom she has access to the Father and the Son. This is one of the privileges which we have as members of the Body Mystical, as being looked at by God in and through His dear Son, that we are enabled to do anything which shall be worthy of being an offering unto the Holy Trinity. God puts it into our hearts to wish good wishes, and He gives us power to do what we wish to do, and yet when done, little as our part has been in the matter, He accepts it as our oblation, a faint and feeble shadow of the oblation on the Cross.

Now, if we look at the order of Confirmation according to the Church of England, the same thing is visible. We have a duty to do, as well as a grace to receive. We have to take upon ourselves our baptismal vow, with all solemnity in the presence of God and His congregation. This vow relates entirely to our Christian warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and therefore is not absolutely essential as a condition in order to our receiving the

gift of innocence in Baptism. So the Church does not deem it necessary to the Sacrament, seeing that in the private baptism of infants, wherein she would endeavour to render the service as short as possible, without, of course, omitting any one thing requisite to the Sacrament, we have only the naming of the child, the act of pouring water with the invocation of the Trinity, and a single prayer afterwards. But Christ has, in mercy, permitted His Church to “antedate our faith” in us. And this vow it is which we are called upon in Confirmation to ratify in our own persons, as well as to make profession of our faith. Thus, Confirmation finishes and consummates our Baptism. It gives completeness to what was done at our Baptism, but was waiting and looking out for a further fulfilment. What it wanted it meets with in Confirmation. It is satisfied there. Now it is scarcely necessary to prove, that we are very much confirmed and settled in this vow, and our faith much quickened by the Bishop’s prayers, and the laying on of his hands. So here is one blessing of Confirmation. We take a vow, which we know ourselves unable to fulfil; but we do it in faith. Blessing is waiting at the door: it has come a long way to meet us. The words of our promise are scarcely uttered, before, for our faith’s sake, God gives us power to fulfil it.

Yet this is far from being all. It is not, properly speaking, *the* gift of Confirmation. We receive therein the Holy Ghost, the “signature of the Lord.” We are sealed with the Spirit of promise. Now this will require a little explanation. That it is the doctrine of the Church we shall see at once, if we read the Bishop’s prayer; and here, as in so many other places, the Church Catholic in England is but the echo of antiquity. For it is curious to find the very words of that prayer used in an exhortation upon those words “He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, is God,” in a work which goes under the name of St. Ambrose, “Remember that thou hast received the spiritual signature; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and godliness, the spirit of holy fear; and do thou keep what thou hast received. God the Father hath sealed thee, Christ the Lord hath confirmed thee.” These words may very probably be taken from an old liturgy of the time, and well known to his

hearers. It would be very interesting to find that it was so; for, if it were, and the work in which it occurs were really by St. Ambrose, this prayer would be much older than it has been generally supposed. It has been called "at least as old as 494, but probably much more ancient." At all events, a similar prayer, pronounced while the Bishop held his hands aloft over the heads of those to be confirmed, is found in every ritual over the world; and the one in our Prayer-book has been used by English Bishops for above twelve hundred years. The language of St. Gregory is nearly the same: "We therefore call it a seal or signature, as being a guard and custody to us, and a sign of the Lord's dominion over us." Again, another Father says, "Call to thy remembrance the initiation in the holy mysteries, wherein the initiated, after renouncing the tyrant and confessing (Christ) the king, do receive the unction of the spiritual ointment, as it were a royal signature, perceiving by that unction, as in a shadow, the invisible grace of the Holy Ghost." It was called in old time, "the seal of the gift of the Spirit." Let us see what is said of this *seal* in Scripture: "Now He which stablisheth, or confirmeth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, Who hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Again, "In Whom, also, after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." Again: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption." Again: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this *seal*, The Lord knoweth them that are His." What the foundation was, we have seen out of the epistle to the Hebrews, and "the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands" were part of it: and that the Lord knoweth them that are His by the seal in their foreheads, we read both in Ezekiel and the Revelation.

This is the seal which is the gift of Confirmation. The treasures we received in our Baptism are now in danger. Hitherto, we have been children; careless and happy, for we were innocent. Our fountain was not sealed. Our garden was not closed. God has put us into the ark, but He has not shut us in. We have a liberty now, which we cannot have when the waters rise upon the earth,

and prevail greatly. Thoughts and feelings, sights and sounds, went in and out day and night. It was a time of peace. Where danger is not looked for, there is no suspicion. But things are altered now. The world is opening upon us, and war is being proclaimed. We do not see heaven so clearly as we did. It is fading off to a distance and deserting us. It is clouding over. Our old way of living is an unsafe way of living now. The Church set up within our bodies, the temple of the Holy Ghost of which St. Paul speaks, must be fashioned in all things after the model of the Church Universal. It must have gates and barriers, inclosures, vaults, and secret places, seals and signs, whose meaning none can read but they who have the cypher in their hearts, handwritings on its walls, whose hidden warnings are, to passers by, as mysterious as the Hand that wrote them was invisible. We must have all this in our bodies, souls, and spirits, or we shall fail in the day of battle. The kingdom of heaven must be within us. It will unfold itself there against the world, till it excludes it and thrusts it forth, and fills the whole man. This it is now beginning to do. We are henceforth to be like jealous householders. We come to distrust our own powers, our intellectual powers especially. Our enemy has many treacherous friends in that quarter of the city. Openly or covertly, the violence of a noisy anger or the stratagem of a disguised lust, are eager to rifle our treasures; and, if we are bereaved of them, we are indeed bereaved. We must have a strong man armed; and that strong man must be stronger than the world, the flesh, and the devil. His seal they cannot break. It may seem a little one and a frail one, for "weakness is aye heaven's might." But it has a mystery in it. None have power to break it but ourselves, and for us alas! nothing is more easy. So long as we do not touch it we are safe. No one else can touch it to harm it. For the strong man armed, is even the most Holy Comforter, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, and His Seal is set in Confirmation.

We cannot tell all which this Seal does for us. What we do know is that God's gifts have a depth and fulness, inexhaustible, without repentance, and to the bottom of which we can never come. It is not good to say too much on things of this sort. Only, strange as they may seem to many, it is well to carry the thoughts

of Bishop Taylor with us to a reverent and silent adoration of God's mercies in this matter. He is talking of the excellency of the Lord's Seal. He seems as if he would have said something more. But apparently he checks himself, and concludes thus: "I will not be so curious as to enter into a discourse of the philosophy of this, but I shall say, that they who are curious in the secrets of nature, and observe external signatures in stones, plants, fruits, and shells, of which naturalists make many observations and observe strange effects, and the more internal signatures in minerals and living bodies, of which chemists discourse strange secrets, may easily, if they please, consider that it is infinitely credible, that in higher essences, even in spirits, there may be signatures proportionable, wrought more immediately and to greater purposes by a Divine Hand. I only point at this, and so pass it over, as, it may be, fit for every man's consideration."

4. Lastly, we come to *the Ministers by whose hands this blessing is conveyed*. Hitherto we have been considering what Confirmation really is, and what it really does for us, in short, the theology of Confirmation. We have now to say a little of what we may make of it if we choose, namely, a witness for obedience and unity. It is needless to multiply authorities to show that this gift was only to be conveyed through the Bishops, the highest order in the Church. It will be enough to quote from a letter of Pope Innocent the First, who lived A.D. 402, and is called by St. Augustin the "blessed Innocent." "Concerning Confirmation of infants, it is clear, it is not lawful to be done by any other than by the Bishop: for the presbyters, although they be priests, yet have not the summit of episcopacy. But that these things are due to the Bishops, is shown, as well by ecclesiastical custom, as by what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, which says that Peter and John were sent to give the Holy Ghost to those already baptized."

The Bishops are the divinely appointed fountains of all spiritual grace and spiritual power. We are to reverence them with no common reverence as the true representatives of Christ, the visible heads of the churches upon earth, as He is the head of the Church, visible and invisible whether in heaven or on earth. They are put before us as symbols of unity. They keep the Church

together. It is by their office that it is not scattered and dispersed over hill and dale, like sheep that have no shepherds. The clergy see their Bishop in Ordinations and Visitations, and they, as well as the people, meet him at the Consecration of churches. They are bound, as a matter of law and discipline, to acknowledge his authority, and, in proportion to their humility, they seek from him ghostly counsel and friendly guidance in doubt and perplexity, ready to submit in many things to which they are not obliged, as being their elder brother in the Lord. But in Confirmation he is brought home to all the people. He is their father in Christ. Many a remote parish beholds him coming among them, rich in gifts and most like his Master, going about doing good. He is the successor of those Apostles whom Pope Gregory compares to the thick clouds in which God "bindeth up the waters, and the cloud is not rent under them." They, like clouds, "are sent forth here and there over the world, and they give rain with their words, and they send forth bright sparkles of light from their marvels." For a Bishop never travels in his diocese, but to scatter blessings over all, and to leave the peace of God and the benediction of the Trinity behind him. He cannot move about, but some of the precious ointment from his head is left upon the spot where he trod, fragrant with the sweetness of the Cross. Thus he enables us to realize Church unity, to bring it home to ourselves, to make it a natural and practical feeling, not a mere notion to hear of or talk about. A people without a Bishop are all the same as a family without a father. So long as the father lives, his hearth is a point of union; if not continually, yet at great Church festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, when sons and grandsons are wont to flock around their old sire, and learn all gentle lessons among the scenes of childhood, and go to their old parish church again, as if it were their Jerusalem, and receive the holy Communion all together at the same old altar, where, perchance, they knelt trembling by their mother's side, for the first time partakers of those holy mysteries. But when all this has passed away into the father's grave, then one brother is settled here and another there, with different cares and different pursuits. Each is becoming the head of a family himself, and is left to himself in the world. A churchman is never without a

father so long as he has a Bishop; and Confirmation is continually bringing this home to our very door, and endearing our spiritual father to us.

Then again, Confirmation is a witness to us of the authority of Bishops, as showing that certain great rites are reserved for them. And we may learn obedience to them from this. It is a valuable lesson to us, more valuable almost than we can imagine. We obey laws and political authorities from fear, at least in most cases. When we know that a broken law can avenge itself we avoid breaking it. Human enactments rely almost as much on the natural cowardice of man, by acting upon which they prevent crime, as they do upon their ability to punish it when committed. Even if we try, we cannot be sure that we obey laws from love to the authority imposing them. Civil authority is a hard and dry thing to love. Yet there are feelings in the heart, high and gentle ones, which are eager to obey from love; like new friends, impatient for some opportunity to make sacrifices for each other and show the strength of their loyalty. These feelings are of God. They have somewhat of heaven in their character. It is sad they should be shut up within ourselves. Now a spiritual authority has no power to avenge itself in this life, and what it may do hereafter is too uncertain and too far off to have much weight now. Except a Church should arm herself with tremendous secular power, as Rome did for example, she can only secure obedience out of the affection and docility of her children, and their deep persuasion that the presence of the Lord shines round about her. Moreover, the right of Bishops to be regarded as standing in the place of Christ can only be proved by much learning and difficult research. This most men cannot of course pretend to; so, if they receive it at all, they must receive it, as in reality they receive all other truth, on trust: and, if they refuse to receive it because they have not proved it, they must by the same rule reject all other religious doctrines which they have not proved for themselves; and this would include almost all their faith. For instance, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are proveable from holy Scripture; yet, if you put them to it, there are few who can so prove them, none who could have found them out if the Church had not showed the way; and they must believe

them, if they would be saved. Therefore, in honouring, obeying, and loving our Bishops, we are finding satisfaction for some of the most amiable feelings of our nature, tracing out the will of our Master in all His ordinances, and gradually forming within us the habit of obedience, one of the bravest as well as hardest of the Gospel virtues.

It is through the Bishop then that the gift of Confirmation is conveyed, and the Ritual of it is the laying on of hands. In patriarchal times a father's blessing used to be conveyed thereby, and even the right of inheritance to divine promises was altered and transferred by it. And fathers are a natural type of Bishops. The old patriarchs with their blessings have gone away, and Christian Bishops have come in their room. "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth." So in antiquity Tertullian talks of our "being cleansed by Baptismal Water, and disposed for the Holy Spirit, under the hand of the angel of the Church," the title given to Bishops in the Revelation of St. John. "Is it not lawful," he goes on, "for God by an instrument of His own, under holy hands to accord the heights and sublimity of the Spirit?" The sacredness of this Ritual will be at once acknowledged by a reader of the Bible. Whether it is natural (as men speak) to us, or is a remnant of what God may have taught us at the first, we cannot pretend to know. Still so it is, that all through holy Scripture among the patriarchs of old time, the priests of the house of Aaron, our Saviour Christ himself, and his Apostles after Him, this "overshadowing of hands" was practised as a solemn rite. So Moses was to stretch forth his hand over the sea to divide it. So Christ blessed little children, and oftentimes healed the sick. So the Apostles used it in Confirmation, Ordination, and the Unction of the Sick, spoken of by St. James. But innumerable passages will occur to every one, especially the one already quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews, where laying on of hands is part of what the Apostle calls the "foundation." Frivolous and trifling persons have thought light of this Ritual. When things are very common, we are inclined to think them not very deep. But, perhaps, such men would find it hard to say why it was so common in Scripture; and why they themselves, by a sort

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of natural inspiration, connect the idea of power and blessing with the act; why in courts and pageantries honour is conferred and homage paid by the hand; why in daily greetings, or reconciliations, men use their right hand, as a ritual, whereby to confer in a type the inward feelings of kindness and forgiveness. There is nothing in the nature of things why all this should be so; yet it is so. Let not men, therefore, ridicule the external rite, lest, perchance, in their worldly wisdom and cleverness, they grieve Him Who may have linked His inward grace thereto. All men fear where God is: let them at least be silent where He *may* be. We may conclude as we began, with Bishop Taylor: "It is easy for profane persons to deride these things, as they do all religion which is not conveyed to them by sense or natural demonstrations; but the economy of the Spirit and 'the things of God are spiritually discerned.' 'The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and no man knows whence it comes, and whither it goes,' and the operations are discerned by faith, and received by love and by obedience. 'Give me a Christian, and he will understand what I say.' But of this we are sure, that in all the times of Moses' law, while the synagogue was standing, and in all the days of Christianity, so long as men loved religion, and walked in the spirit, and minded the affairs of their souls, to have the prayers and the blessings of the fathers of the synagogue and the fathers of the Church, was esteemed no small part of their religion, and so they went to heaven."

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A PRAYER,
TO BE USED BY ALL MEN FOR THEIR BISHOPS.

(Out of the Order of Consecrating Bishops.)

MOST merciful Father, we beseech Thee to send down upon this Thy servant Thy heavenly blessing; and so endue him with Thy holy Spirit, that he, preaching Thy word, may not only be earnest to reprove, beseech and rebuke with all patience and doctrine; but also may be to such as believe a wholesome example, in word, in conversation, in love, in faith, in chastity, and in purity; that, faithfully fulfilling his course, at the latter day he may receive the crown of righteousness laid up by the Lord the righteous Judge, Who liveth and reigneth one God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, world without end. AMEN.

THE END.