

## Project Canterbury

## Popular Misconceptions of the Episcopal Church.

By William Reed Huntington.

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## Chapter IV. That It is Narrow and Exclusive.

IT is sometimes alleged in disparagement of the Episcopal Church that it is narrow and exclusive. The charge is a vague one and admits of a large variety of constructions. "Narrow" and "exclusive" are relative terms. They may be used in a bad sense, and again they may be used in a good sense; it depends upon the thing one happens to be describing. "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life," said Jesus Christ. Nobody, however "liberal" he may be, ventures to call in question that statement, ventures to deny that here, at least, is one sort of narrowness which is praiseworthy. Again, we find it written of the City of God, that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Here we have, in the plainest possible words, the laying down of a law of exclusion, but it is an exclusiveness which we all of us acknowledge to be just. So, then, we must know to what substantive these adjectives are to be prefixed before we adjudge them necessarily bad. When we hear a church called "narrow and exclusive," we need to be informed, before condemning it, wherein such church is narrow, and of what it is exclusive. The mere epithets, apart and of themselves, prove nothing. Liberality is a most attractive [45/46] characteristic. We should all of us like to be believed and to be called liberal. Only we must remember that there may be such a thing as winning this praise at too great a cost. A man does not prove himself to be freehearted simply by making free with whatever is within his reach. Giving away trust funds is not liberality, however much it may wear for the moment the look of it. "O, Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust," was an Apostle's advice to one of his successors. The young man may have been reckoned illiberal for following it, but he did right.

The accusation that the Episcopal Church is "narrow" probably has reference to its doctrine. What it means is that the Church, as a Church, is to blame for allowing itself to be tied up to certain fixed and unchangeable forms of faith in such a way that it cannot adapt itself to the shifting opinions of the times. The narrowness complained of is a dogmatic narrowness. The "exclusiveness," on the other hand, probably has reference rather to polity and discipline than to doctrine. Why do you insist on having people confirmed before you enroll them as communicants? Why cannot our ministers preach in your pulpits? These are the unspoken questions which, in most instances, are lying latent in the minds of those who express the opinion that the Episcopal Church is "exclusive." It will be well, therefore, to take up the two points in their order; first the narrowness, and after that the exclusiveness.

The thing that makes the Episcopal Church seem narrow with respect to doctrine is the exceeding tenacity with which it clings to certain articles of the faith which it accounts, whether rightly or wrongly, [46/47] to be the foundation stones of the Christian religion. There are in existence two short summaries of religious belief which, on the combined grounds of antiquity

and universality of reception, claim precedence of all other existing creeds. One of them is known popularly--as the Apostles' Creed, and the other as the Nicene Creed. The first of them is of unknown antiquity, being one of numerous similar creeds that enjoyed recognition in the primitive Church. The second of the two, the Nicene Creed, named from the famous Council of Nicaea, at which the greater portion of it was set forth, has been in use in its complete form for fifteen hundred years. Both of them may be found in the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Prayer Book, and they have also place in the Communion service.

These creeds, which in reality are simply an expansion of the formula of Baptism, simply an unfolding of the Christian name of the one God--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--the Episcopal Church holds, and holds with a firm grasp, because of its conviction that if they were to be thrown away, it would be exceedingly difficult to find anything to take their place. "But what of that?" some one remarks. "Why trouble ourselves to find anything to take their place? Is not the Bible enough? Why should we care for any creed but that?"

God forbid that I should speak slightly of the Bible. One may be well content to leave that sort of rhetoric to the "advanced thinkers" who slur the Book because of what it teaches, and to the promulgators of novel dogma who slur it because of what it teaches not. The one class find in it doctrines which are unpalatable, the other cannot find in it doctrines which [47/48] they would fain make palatable. Who can wonder that the two opposites should join hands in the endeavor to put the volume on the shelf? No, I have no wish to exalt the Creeds at the expense of the Scriptures; all my aim is to bring out as clearly as I may the important connection between the two. And here let me speak a word of caution. We are on perilous ground and must be exceedingly watchful bow we tread. This is just the spot where the Roman controversialist is wont to catch the unwary Protestant at a disadvantage and to throw him in the twinkling of an eye.

Once concede to the Romanist his own definition of the right of private judgment, and he easily makes Protestantism ridiculous. His, the Romanist's, caricature of the doctrine of private judgment is to this effect; namely, that every man, after having been taught to read, is to be sent to the Bible, without note or comment, with a view of finding for himself a religion. Moreover, he is to do this with the conviction that the Holy Spirit will assuredly guide him, without human help, to an absolute and accurate knowledge of all the truth. There is little difficulty in bringing out in bright colors the absurdity of such a notion as this. Picture to yourself an ignorant man, able to read, indeed, but very poorly qualified to think or judge, and then imagine such a one asking, out of an awakened conscience, that question of questions, "What shall I do to be saved?" and being given in reply a Bible, simply a Bible, with no suggestion, no help, no guidance whatsoever--simply a Bible, stamped on the cover, let us suppose, with the words, "Search the Scriptures." He is as likely to open at the Second [48/49] Book of Chronicles as anywhere else. There is as good a chance of his stumbling upon the dark paradoxes of Ecclesiastes, as there is of his finding joy and light in the green pastures of the four Gospels. Or, perhaps, he decides to begin at the beginning, and before he has plodded half way through the Old Testament he has given up in despair all hope of ever discovering how his soul is to be saved.

Is it not a libel upon our common sense, when we are told that this is what "the right of private judgment" means?

At any rate, this is not the view of the matter taken by the Church whose position with regard to Christian doctrine I am endeavoring to illustrate and defend. This Church does offer help to any one who desires to know in few words what the substance of the Faith really is. There is no attempt whatever to fetter private judgment. There is not a shadow of coercion, or of anything like it. "Search for yourself, and study for yourself," this Church says to a man, "just as much as ever you please; only consider this, whether, on the whole, it will not be wise for you, in your searching and in your studying, to take into account the fact that the labors of the great bulk of the wise and good of former times have brought them to a certain conclusion; namely, that in these few statements, which make up what we call the Creed, the essence of the Christian faith is to be found." In the story of Philip the Deacon, and the Ethiopian eunuch, nothing is more suggestive than the questions exchanged between the two men. The eunuch sitting in his chariot, on his way from Jerusalem, was reading the Book of Esaias. It was all new to him. Probably [49/50] he had purchased the parchment in the city he had just left, and so far as knowing what it all meant was concerned, was in much the same attitude of mind as the, modern seeker whose case we just now supposed. Philip's question, therefore, was very much to the point, for it ran thus: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" But equally to the point was the eunuch's prompt reply, "How can I, except some one should guide me?" The man was exercising the unquestioned right of private judgment in reading the book he had bought. Whoever should have attempted to take his copy of the prophet Esaias away from him by order of the chief priests would have been doing him an injustice. Still, did he not show a wisdom which was equal to his independence, when he not only did not refuse, but actually craved guidance? when he asked the Church in the person of Philip, one of its teachers, to give him such help as it could? The Anglican Church (and for lack of a better word I use the epithet "Anglican" to express a reality which is larger and less provincial than "Protestant Episcopal")--the Anglican Church recognizes the Bible as the great repository of religious truth, the armory of the weapons of the Spirit, the seed-plot of the spoken thoughts of God. This is said in so many words in the Sixth Article of Religion: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The Anglican Church, moreover, takes this ground without having at all lost sight of a point which Roman logicians are very fond of making, and [50/51] which too frequently disconcerts the Protestant mind unfamiliar with the thought--or, rather, the fact, that there was a Church before there was a Bible, and that the Proclamation was given to God's people before ever it was bound up in a Book. Protestants are apt to be startled by this reminder. They are so much accustomed to regard the Bible in its complete form as the sole and final court of appeal, they are so well satisfied with the formula, "The Bible and the Bible only, the religion of Protestants," that they forget the unquestionable fact that an Athenian citizen, for instance, who may have happened to be present on Mars Hill when Paul preached his famous sermon there, was just as much in possession of the inspired truth which the sermon contained as the other Athenian citizen who, twenty years later, or a hundred years later, read the same words written in manuscript, or as you and I, for that matter, reading it to-day out of our printed Bibles. Yes, there was a Church before there was a Bible; we need not be in the least degree afraid to concede so much as that. But be careful about the next step. For what is the next step? The next step is to ask us, Why, then, do you attend to the Book and not attend to the living voice of the Church by preference? Simply for this reason, and a very good reason it is. Note it carefully; it is all-important. Well-authenticated written evidence with regard to events long past--and the Christian religion, be it remembered, rests on events alleged to have taken place in

the far past--well-authenticated written evidence with regard to events long past is always, by competent judges, regarded as more trustworthy than hearsay evidence. Tradition, and that is what this boasted living voice [51/52] of the Church is supposed to have preserved for us--tradition is hearsay evidence; it has its value, but it is a value not to be compared with that of Scripture. "The written word," says the old proverb, "abides."

We begin now to see our way to the reasons for the narrowness of the Episcopal Church with reference to doctrine; we begin to see why such immense importance is attached to the primitive Creeds. They represent that basis of belief upon which the Christian Church was once substantially agreed. They interpret Scripture in the sense in which the bulk of devout and learned minds have interpreted it from the first. They are the epitome, the condensed essence of the Bible. They indicate the drift of the whole thing. They form, so to speak, a table of contents, an index of principal topics, a conspectus of Revelation. They enshrine, as in a temple built of precious stones, the God whom Christians worship, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So, then, the Church clings to the primitive Creeds, and will neither be frightened nor cajoled into parting with them. She is content to be laughed at on the right hand and on the left. On the left they come to her saying, "How narrow you are! Are you aware that all the old notions about religion are exploded? Are you acquainted with the fact that the argument from design is no longer tenable? Have you read the latest re-statement of the theory of evolution? And do you know that all intelligent people everywhere have given up even pretending to talk about a conscious Creator?" The Church's only reply is to go on repeating in the order of her worship, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." I said "her only reply"--no, that is not [52/53] quite right; she does not lack able defenders of the faith that is in her, and never did she possess more of them than to-day. I ought to have said her most effective reply, for certainly no reply to fretful demands for change is more effective than simple persistency in that which is heartily believed to be true and good. "In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength."

But then, again, they attack her from the right, and they say, "How narrow you are! That old creed is well enough; we too, believe it; you will find it in the Missal, all recognized and acknowledged in due form. But is it possible that no one has apprised you of the fact that the Creed has been enlarged? We are living in times of movement, and if you would keep up with the progress of the Faith you must be on the alert. One of our cardinals affirms that 'the appeal to antiquity is treason.' The theory of development, so valuable as a working hypothesis in the region of natural science, has been applied in our times to religion, and fresh articles of belief may be looked for with as much confidence as new inventions. The Church cannot be expected to remain content with old forms of faith any more than the world can be expected to rest satisfied with the coaches and canal-boats of our grandfathers' times. We acknowledge that in the year 1853 heaven was still open to those who entertained pious doubts as to the then undecided question of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin, but since 1854 heaven has been shut to such. In the year 1869 one who felt uncertain as to whether the Roman Pontiff, speaking *ex cathedra* upon matters of faith or morals, were infallible, might still cherish [53/54] the humble hope that he was at peace with God; but since the year 1870 such a one has been, by the voice of the Vatican Council, declared Anathema."

It is unnecessary to pursue this line of thought, and I should not have entered upon it but from a sense of duty. It is plain enough, without further illustration, why the Episcopal Church has

chosen in this matter of doctrine the "narrow" way. She may be right, she may be wrong, but she believes it to be the way that leadeth unto life. She believes that the giving up of the old faith means the ruin of society, and she is averse to seeing that old faith either evaporated by liberalism or amplified by Rome.

We turn to the question of "exclusiveness." Upon this branch of the subject it will be necessary to be more brief. We undertook, it will be remembered, to look at the alleged exclusiveness both in its bearings on admission to the Communion, and in its relation to the controversy about Holy Orders. A few words must suffice for each. And, first, admission to Holy Communion. It is the generally received opinion in the Episcopal Church that Baptism with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, by whomsoever administered, and at whatsoever age received, admits a person into the visible society denominated in the Creed "the Holy Catholic Church."

But it is a small thing to be admitted into a society unless one avails himself of the privileges of membership, and is careful to live up to the rules. Confirmation is the opportunity given to those who, in their infancy, were by the act of friends placed in this sacred society, to come forward, when they have reached years of discretion, and recognize the promises made [54/55] for them as their own. By so doing they are qualified to enter upon the full privileges of a membership which has been theirs from the outset. Presupposing, therefore, as it always does, the faithful carrying out of its own system, this Church lays it down as the rule binding upon its own people that none shall "be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." That this is a wholesome rule for a Church in which Baptism is believed to confer Church membership upon little children just as really as upon grown-up men and women, few will deny.

But now turn for a moment to the language of the Communion Office itself. How is the invitation worded? "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort." There is nothing very exclusive about that, save in so far as it is exclusive of sin and wickedness. But how are we to reconcile these two things, the largeness of the invitation, which would seem to be addressed to all who believe and have been baptized, and the express limitation imposed in another place as to admitting to the Holy Communion only those who have been confirmed?

There are various ways of harmonizing the two utterances, but perhaps it will be most satisfactory if I speak of that to which my own thought and observation have led me. [In explanation of the personal form which this paragraph bears, it is proper to state that the chapter originally did duty as a parochial lecture addressed to the author's own congregation. It has been thought best, on the whole, to let the language stand unaltered.] I have no right to speak for others. [55/56] However it may be elsewhere, here in this parish all baptized Christians, of whatever name or sect, who can with an honest conscience take part in a service worded as that of the Prayer Book is worded, are always welcome guests at the Table of the Lord. None has been "admitted to the Holy Communion" in the sense of having been recognized as a communicant of this Church until he has been confirmed; no names but those of confirmed persons appear upon the list of communicants in the parish register; but, on the other hand, no one to my knowledge was ever repelled from this altar rail on the score of not having confessed

faith in Christ crucified in the form prescribed by the Protestant Episcopal Church. Observe, I do not allege that this is the view of the matter taken by all Episcopal clergymen. I simply say that it is a permitted view, a view widely entertained, a view uniformly acted upon in this particular parish. Neither would I be understood as speaking harshly of those clergy who think otherwise, or of those parishes where a different usage prevails. Between carefulness to maintain the purity of a communion and the desire to vindicate its charitable comprehensiveness, it must always be difficult to draw the line. The administration of this parish may have erred in the latter interest, as the administration of other parishes may have erred in the former. Men will judge differently in such matters. My main desire at the present moment is simply to state the fact as it is.

Still fewer words will suffice for that other form of [56/57] alleged "exclusiveness," which shows itself in connection with the sacred ministry.

The Episcopal Church defines an ordained clergyman to be one who has been set apart by a bishop, with the laying on of hands and with prayer, for the ministry of God's Word and sacraments. These particular words and phrases are not quoted from any formulary; I am simply condensing in my own language what this Church says upon the subject. Observe, this Church does not say that there are no ministers but those so set apart; it simply defines the sort of ministry it intends within its own borders to recognize.

Now, then, putting aside for the moment all prejudice, all considerations of personal pique, and wounded feeling, and outraged sense of justice, and comparative estimates of the intellectual abilities and the devotional and moral worth of the several ministers of our acquaintance--putting aside all this, let us look for a moment at one undisputed historical fact. The fact is this, that five hundred years ago--and for our present purpose there is no occasion to go further back--five hundred years ago, the usage of recognizing as lawfully ordained clergymen only those who had been set apart by the authority of a bishop was universal throughout Christendom. At the time of the Reformation most of the Protestant communions, for reasons satisfactory to themselves, relinquished this usage. We, on the other hand, for reasons satisfactory to ourselves, chose to retain it. Wherein, then, lies the exclusiveness? It is others who have changed the custom, not we. We simply hold on to a feature of Church discipline which we believe to be essential to Christian unity. Why should those who have chosen [57/58] to let that feature slip, and have preferred to provide other methods of perpetuating the Christian ministry, blame us for holding to the way we have always held to? The Episcopal Church pronounces no judgment upon ordinations other than its own. It has no word of disparagement or rebuke for any ministry whatsoever that undertakes to set forth the truth of God, and to administer the things of the Kingdom. It quietly takes the ground that, in the midst of the multiplicity of sects, in the face of this seemingly infinite divisibility of Christendom, and in the face, too, of the widely spreading opinion that no ordination at all is as good as the best, if only one discovers in himself a genius for preaching, instead of trying to discriminate between ordinations, the best way is to follow the old rule, find fault with no one, and go straight forward. Is there anything so very unreasonable in an "exclusiveness" like this? It is not for us to show why we have adhered to, but rather for others to show why they have departed from, an ancient custom.

The truth is, the real spirit and temper of the Episcopal Church, so far from being exclusive, are markedly inclusive. No other reformed communion longs and prays and labors as she does for the unity of all who profess and call themselves Christians. These very features of her

organization, which give so many observers from without an impression of her exclusiveness, are really the outgrowth of an intense desire to bring about reconciliation and reunion among the scattered sheep of Christ's flock.

If the Episcopal Church seems to worship and legislate as if there were no other denomination of Christians in existence, it is not from bitterness, or wrath, [58/59] or envy, or jealousy, or pride; least of all from any inability to recognize, or failure to appreciate, the innumerable instances of ministerial devotion, ability, and success beyond her own borders; but simply because nothing can persuade her that Jesus Christ meant that there should be more than one Church, and she feels bound to speak and act, to teach and to administer on that basis.

She may be all wrong. Her house may have been builded on the sand. God knows. But principles she has, and convictions, and by them she will stand or fall.

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