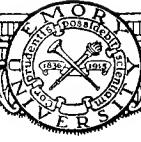


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PASTORAL LETTER

FROM THE

Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church

TO THE

CLERGY AND LAITY

OF THE



Church in the Confederate States

OF AMERICA.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE GENERAL COUNCIL,

IN ST PAUL'S CHURCH, AUGUSTA,

Saturday, Nov. 22d, 1862.



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AUGUSTA, GA.:
Steam Power Press Chronicle & Sentinel
1862

PASTORAL LETTER.

At your request, brethren of the Clergy and Laity, we conclude the session of our First General Council by presenting to you and reading in your presence a Pastoral Letter, addressed to the members of the Protestant Episcopal Church scattered throughout the Confederate States. By the mighty power of the Holy Ghost we have been permitted to bring our deliberations to a close in a spirit of harmony and peace which augurs well for the future welfare of our branch of the Church Catholic; and our first duty is to thank Him who has promised to be with His Church to the end of the world, for His presence with us during our consultations, and for the happy conclusion to which He has brought our sacred labors.

Seldom has any Council assembled in the Church of Christ under circumstances needing His presence more urgently than this which is now about to submit its conclusions to the judgment of the Universal Church. Forced by the providence of God to separate ourselves from the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, — a Church with whose doctrine, discipline and worship we are in entire harmony, and with whose action, up to the time of that separation, we were abundantly satisfied—at a moment when civil strife had dipped its foot in blood, and cruel war was desolating our homes and firesides, we required a double measure of grace to preserve the accustomed moderation of the Church in the arrangement of our organic law, in the adjustment of our code of canons, but above all, in the preservation, without change, of those rich treasures of doctrine and worship which have come to us enshrined in our Book of Common Prayer. Cut off like-

wise from all communication with our sister Churches of the world, we have been compelled to act without any interchange of opinion even with our Mother Church, and alone and unaided to arrange for ourselves the organization under which we should do our part in carrying on to their consummation the purposes of God in Christ Jesus. We trust that the Spirit of Christ has indeed so directed, sanctified and governed us in our work, that we shall be approved by all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth, and who are earnest in preparing the world for His coming in glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.

The Constitution of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States, under which we have been exercising our legislative functions, is the same as that of the Church from which we have been providentially separated, save that we have introduced into it a germ of expansion which was wanting in the old constitution. This is found in the permission which is granted to existing Dioceses to form themselves by subdivision into Provinces, and by this process gradually to reduce our immense Dioceses into Episcopal Sees, more like those which, in primitive times, covered the territories of the Roman Empire. It is at present but a germ, and may lie, for many years, without expansion, but being there, it gives promise, in the future, of a more close and constant Episcopal supervision than is possible under our present arrangement.

The Canon law, which has been adopted during our present session, is altogether in its spirit, and almost in its letter, identical with that under which we have hitherto prospered. We have simplified it in some respects, and have made it more clear and plain in many of its requirements; but no changes have been introduced which have altered either its tone or character. It is the same moderate, just and equal body of Ecclesiastical Law by which the Church has been governed on this continent since her reception from the Church of England of the treasures of an apostolic ministry and a liturgical form.

The Prayer Book we have left untouched in every particular save where a change of our civil government and the formation of a new nation have made alteration essentially requisite. Three words comprise all the amendment which has been deemed necessary in the present emergency, for we have felt unwilling, in the existing confusion of affairs, to lay rash hands upon a Book, consecrated by the use of ages, and hallowed by associations the most sacred and precious. We give you back your Book of Common Prayer the same as you have entrusted it to us, believing that if it has slight defects, their removal had better be the gradual work of experience than the hasty action of a body convened almost upon the outskirts of a camp.

Besides this actual legislation which we now submit to you, our assembling together has given us a view of the condition of the Church throughout the Confederate States which renders it our duty to speak to you as Chief Pastors over the flock of Christ, reminding you of the peculiar encouragements which surround us, specifying the points towards which our efforts, as a Christian Church, should be directed, and pointing out the deficiencies which require instant correction and amendment. No moment seems so propitious for the performance of this duty, as that in which we are beginning a new life in the Church, and are preparing to stamp ourselves upon the world for good or for evil.

Our highest encouragement is derived from the fact that we hold the sacred trust of the Faith once delivered to the saints, and that we hold it in connexion with a ministry whose succession from Christ and His Apostles is undoubted, and with a form of worship simple and pure yet sublime and scriptural. These are not gifts to make a boast of, but to use for the glory of God and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Far from filling us with vain glory, their possession should humble us to the dust, unless we approve ourselves faithful stewards of such inestimable treasures. To whom much has been committed, from him will much be required, and it remains for us to prove whether we

have deserved so spiritual an inheritance. But possessing them, we may rightfully feel that we enter upon our warfare with the world, the flesh and the devil, having all the strength that Divine Truth and a Divine Commission can give us. We can press on without any doubts resting upon our hearts as to the truth which we are teaching, as to the validity of the sacraments which we are administering, or as to the authority of the orders which we are transmitting. Upon all these points we are secure, and we can go forward offering to all men, with boldness and confidence, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the saints. Whatever hindrances we may meet, or whatever contradiction of men we may encounter, we can rest assured that truth will finally prevail, and that God will set His Son upon His holy hill of Zion.

Our next source of encouragement is that we enter upon our work with our Dioceses fully organized, and with the means which Christ has instituted in His Church well distributed throughout the Confederate States. When we remember the very different auspices under which the venerated Fathers of the American Church began their work, and mark how It has grown and prospered, we should indeed take courage and feel no fear for the future. In their case all their ecclesiastical arrangements had to be organized; in our case we find these arrangements all ready to our hand, and with the seal of a happy experience stamped upon them. In their case every prejudice of the land was strong against them. In our case we go forward with the leading minds of our new Republic cheering us on by their communion with us, and with no prejudications to overcome, save those which arise from a lack of acquaintance with our doctrine and worship. In their case they were indeed few and separated far from one another in their work upon the walls of Zion. In our case we are comparatively well compacted, extending in an unbroken chain of Dioceses from the Potomac to the confines of the Republic. Despite all these disadvantages, "the little one

became a thousand and the small one a strong nation," and shall we despond? If we be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, our God will not forsake us, but will "lengthen our cords and stretch forth the curtains of our habitations." In visible token of this fact, we have already, since our organization, added to the House of Bishops the Rt. Rev. Dr. Wilmer as Bishop of Alabama, and received into communion with the Church the Diocese of Arkansas.

Another source of encouragement is that there has been no division in the Church in the Confederate States. Believing, with a wonderful unanimity, that the providence of God had guided our footsteps, and for His own inscrutable purposes, had forced us into a separate organization, there has been nothing to embarrass us in the preliminary movements which have conducted us to our present position. With one mind and with one heart we have entered upon this blessed work, and we stand together this day a band of brothers, one in faith, one in hope, one in charity. There may be among us, as there always must be, minute differences of opinion and feeling, but there is nothing to hinder our keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. We are all satisfied that we are walking in the path of duty, and, that the light of God's countenance has been wonderfully lifted up upon us. He has comforted us in our darkest hours, and has not permitted our hearts to faint in the day of adversity.

These striking encouragements vouchsafed to us from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, should fill our hearts with earnest devotedness, and should lead us even now to inquire, "Lord, what wilt thou have us to do?" And the answer to this question will lead us, your Chief Pastors, to specify the points towards which our efforts, as a Christian Church, should be especially directed.

Christ has founded His Church upon love—for God is Love. It is the highest of all Christian graces. "And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three, but the greatest of these is Charity." Charity! not mere alms-giving.

which is only one of its manifestations, but Love ! Christian Love ! As Christ our Lord loved the world so divinely that he was satisfied to suffer all things for its redemption, so does He command us to love one another and to be ready to do all things for each other's salvation. This was His especial commandment: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." And this is truly not only the new commandment, but the summary of all the commandments. The whole Gospel is redolent with it, with a broad, comprehensive, all-embracing love, appointed, like Aaron's rod, to swallow up all the other Christian graces, and to manifest the spiritual glory of God in Christ. A Church without love ! What could you augur of a Church of God without Faith, or a Church of Christ without Hope ? But Love is a higher grace than either Faith or Hope, and its absence from a Church is just the absence of the very life-blood from the body.

Our first duty, therefore, as the children of God, is to send forth from this Council our greetings of love to the Churches of God all the world over. We greet them in Christ, and rejoice that they are partakers with us of all the grace which is treasured up in Him. We lay down to-day before the altar of the Crucified all our burdens of sin, and offer our prayers for the Church Militant upon earth. Whatever may be their aspect towards us politically, we cannot forget that they rejoice with us "in the one Lord, the one Faith, the one Baptism, the one God, and Father of all," and we wish them Godspeed in all the sacred ministries of the Church. Nothing but love is consonant with the exhibition of Christ's love which is manifested in His Church, and any note of man's bitterness, except against sin, would be a sound of discord mingling with the sweet harmonies of earth and heaven. We rejoice in this golden chord which binds us together in Christ our Redeemer, and like the ladder which Jacob saw in vision, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it, may it ever be the channel along which shall flash the Christian greetings of the children of God.

But while we send forth this love to the whole Church militant upon earth, let us not forget that special love is due by us towards those of our own household. To us have been committed the treasures of the Church, and those of our own kindred and lineage, who have sprung from our loins both naturally and spiritually, who are now united with us in a sacred conflict for the dearest rights of man, ask us for the bread of life. They pray us for that which we are commanded to give, the Gospel of the grace of God. They put in no claim for any thing worldly—for any thing alien from the mission of the Church. Their petition is that we will fulfil the very purpose of our institution, and give them the means of grace. Every claim which man can have upon his fellow-man they have upon us, and having these claims they ask only for the Church. They pray us not to let them perish in the wilderness; not to permit them to be cut off from the sweet communion of the Church. “If,” says the Apostle, speaking of christian professors, and alluding to mere earthly things, “any provide not for his own, and especially for them of his own House, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel;” what shall we say of that Church which shall not provide for its own children? How can it hope to be watered itself with gracious rain from Heaven, when it hoards up for itself the river of life, which is ordained to flow through its channels of grace?

Many of the States of this Confederacy are Missionary ground. The population is sparse and scattered; the children of the Church are few and far between; the Priests of the Lord can reach them only after great labor and privation. Hitherto has their scanty subsistence been eked out from the common treasury of our united Church. Cut off from that recourse by our political action, in which they have heartily acquiesced, they turn to us and pray us to do at least as much for them, as we have been accustomed to do for the Church from which they have been separated by a civil necessity. We can do what they ask, and we ought

cheerfully to do it. Unless we take care that the Gospel is sent to these isolated children of the Church, who will heed their cry? They have no Church to cry to, but the Church which we now represent, and they cast themselves upon us in full faith, that we will do our whole duty towards them. They are one with us in faith, in care, in suffering; they are bearing like evils with those which disturb us, and they have no worship to cheer and support them, no Gospel to preach to them patience and long-suffering. For Christ's sake they pray that they may be given at least a Mother's bosom to die upon.

Voices of supplication come to us also from the distant shores of Africa and the East, but only their echo reaches us from the throne of grace. The policy of man has shut out those utterances from us. How it can help their cause to separate the children of God from one another, He only knows, but we can hear them when we kneel in prayer, and commune with their Spirits through the Spirit of Christ. But God is perchance intending, through these inscrutable measures, to shut us up to that great work which He has placed at our very doors, and which is, next to her own expansion, the Church's greatest work in these Confederate States. The religious instruction of the negroes has been thrust upon us in such a wonderful manner that we must be blind not to perceive that not only our spiritual but our national life is wrapped up in their welfare. With them we stand or fall, and God will not permit us to be separated in interest or in fortune.

The time has come when the Church should press more urgently than she has hitherto done upon her laity, the solemn fact, that the slaves of the South are not merely so much property, but are a sacred trust committed to us, as a people, to be prepared for the work which God may have for them to do, in the future. While under this tutelage He freely gives to us their labor, but expects us to give back to them that religious and moral instruction which is to

elevate them in the scale of Being. And while inculcating this truth, the Church must offer more freely her ministrations for their benefit and improvement. Her laity must set the example of readiness to fulfil their duty towards these people, and her clergy must strip themselves of pride and fastidiousness and indolence, and rush, with the zeal of martyrs, to this labor of love. The teachings of the Church are those which best suit a people passing from ignorance to civilization, because while it represses all fanaticism, it fastens upon the memory the great facts of our religion, and through its objective worship attracts and enchains them. So far from relaxing, in their case, the forms of the Church, good will be permanently done to them just in proportion as we teach them through their senses and their affections. If subjected to the teachings of a bald spiritualism, they will find food for their senses and their child-like fancies in superstitious observances of their own, leading too often to crime and licentiousness.

It is likewise the duty of the Church to press upon the masters of the country their obligation, as Christian men, so to arrange this institution as not to necessitate the violation of those sacred relations which God has created and which man cannot, consistently with Christian duty, annul. The systems of labor which prevail in Europe and which are, in many respects, more severe than ours, are so arranged as to prevent all necessity for the separation of parents and children and of husbands and wives, and a very little care upon our part, would rid the system upon which we are about to plant our national life, of these unchristian features. It belongs, especially, to the Episcopal Church to urge a proper teaching upon this subject, for in her fold and in her congregations are found a very large proportion of the great slaveholders of the country. We rejoice to be enabled to say that the public sentiment is rapidly becoming sound upon this subject, and that the Legislatures of several of the Confederate States have already taken steps towards

this consummation. Hitherto have we been hindered by the pressure of abolitionism; now that we have thrown off from us that hateful and infidel pestilence, we should prove to the world that we are faithful to our trust and the Church should lead the hosts of the Lord in this work of justice and of mercy.

Another duty, which, for the present, devolves upon the Church, is an oversight of the children of God, as they lie without religion and without Christian care in the camps and hospitals of our Government. Far be it from us to say that there has been no Christian supervision of our soldiers, and we cheerfully concede all praise and thanks to those who have done their duty through danger and privation; but we must affirm that there is still a great lack of service on the Church's part in this connexion. From whatever cause it has arisen, whether from the scarcity of clergymen, or from unwillingness to bear the hardships of the soldiers' life, we are obliged to acknowledge that we have been unable to find men who were willing to answer this call and to take their places, not as soldiers fighting for their country, but as soldiers fighting for the victory of Christ over sin and death. In the opinion of the House of Bishops, no position is more suited, at this moment, to the true spirit of Christ and His Church, than that of a faithful minister of the grace of God and of the Sacraments of the Church to the soldiers in the field, or in the hospital; and we would urge it upon those ministers who have been exiled from their parishes, to enter upon this work as their present duty, trusting for support to Him who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

The most striking deficiency in the Church's work which we perceive in looking at the Church's life, is a lack of zeal in spreading the influences of the Church through her services and Sacraments. Our ministry has become too local and sedentary, too well satisfied to sit down and do the work which it has undertaken to do, and overlooking the

fields white for the harvest which are spread out all around them, and which cannot be cultivated save through their agency. Every well established congregation should consider itself as a centre of Missionary work, and should encourage its pastor to extend his usefulness beyond its own limits, and while he is a Priest to them, to be, in some measure a Missionary to all about him. As long as the selfish idea is indulged, that a minister is tied down to a local congregation and has no business to work around him, the Church must languish or increase but slowly. Missionaries cannot be furnished for every village and neighborhood, and they must remain uncared for by the Church, unless the settled clergy will make up their minds to extend the sphere of their operations beyond the narrow limits of their own immediate cures.

Another deficiency which requires amendment, is the little spiritual intercourse which takes place among the Clergy in their work for the Church. Each man works in his sphere, but for the most part he gives nothing to his brother clergyman, and receives nothing from him in return. When our Lord sent forth his Apostles, He sent them two by two for the evident purpose that they should support, strengthen and comfort each other. The spirit of this action is very much overlooked in the Church, and the Clergy are weakened by it. While the House of Bishops would not specify any mode by which this defect should be remedied, it would recommend to the Clergy a more free, spiritual intercourse, a more frequent interchange of clerical services, greater communion in prayer and in counsel. Many a despondent heart would thus be cheered, and many a weak brother would be comforted and strengthened.

Another deficiency which requires amendment, is the little spiritual help which is given to the Clergy by the Laity. We have no reference now to the temporal support of the Clergy, although we might well dwell upon that, but to the spiritual help which a Christian Laity might give to the Clergy. In reading the Acts of the Apostles, we find

many illustrations of this truth, and we perceive how the greatest of the Apostles was not above the help of his yoke-fellows in the Gospel. There are many ways in which spiritual and earnest Laymen can help their Clergy in the work of the Church, and under their guidance and direction, can become valuable Missionaries of Christ, even while unordained. It requires sacrifice and self-denial, but we must all remember that we are not our own, but are bought with a price, and belong to Christ, body, soul and spirit.

But over and above all these special deficiencies, looms up that greatest of all deficiencies, the lack of the Holy Spirit in and with our Churches. Because of the degree to which spiritual influences have been abused in our land, we have been tempted to run into the other extreme, and to forget that we are living under what the Apostle calls the dispensation of the Spirit, and that the Church's work must derive all its power from His presence. Our danger is to merge the Holy Ghost into the means of grace, and overlook the important fact that He is a personal agent, acting indeed through those means, but not necessarily tied to them. Our Saviour said: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit." And as with the individual, so with the Church. The Holy Spirit will be in the Church, if His presence is kept there by an acknowledgement of His power, by a sense of His necessity, by a constant prayer for His presence; but the addresses to the Churches in Asia Minor instruct us to be watchful over ourselves, and to hold fast by Him, who is the representative of Christ upon earth, while He is interceding and advocating for us in Heaven. Let the Church and her Ministers always bear in mind, that the growth of the Church, and the vitality of the Church are "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," saith the Lord.

And now it only remains for us to bid you, one and all,

an affectionate farewell. We cannot but remember that when we last separated from you, there stood among us two venerated brethren, dearly beloved in the Lord, who have since entered into their rest. When we parted we knew it must be so, but we could not foresee where the hand of Death would fall. And now again we know, that separating once more for the like space of time, we shall not all meet again. Whose shall be the summons? Well for us that the curtain of God's providence hides this knowledge from us, teaching us the lesson of Christian truth, that we must all watch and be sober, because we know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh. May God's gracious Providence guide you in safety to your homes, and preserve them from the desolations of war. And should we not be permitted to battle together any more for Christ in the Church militant, may we be deemed worthy to be members of the Church triumphant, where with prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints and angels, we may ascribe honor and glory, dominion and praise to Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb, forever!

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