

## XXXII.

**Apostles To-Day?**

"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are ye not my work in the Lord?"—1 *Cor. ix. 1.*

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We may not take leave of the apostolate without a last look at the circle of its members. It is a *closed* circle; and every effort to reopen it tends to efface a characteristic of the New Covenant.

And yet the effort is being made again and again. We see it in Rome's apostolic succession; in the Ethical view gradually effacing the boundary-line between the apostles and believers; and in its boldest and most concrete form among the Irvingites.<sup>8</sup>

The latter assert not only that the Lord gave to His Church a college of apostles in the beginning, but that He has now called a body of apostles in His Church to prepare His people for the coming.

However, this position can not be very successfully supported. Neither in the discourses of Christ, nor in the epistles of the apostles, nor in the Apocalypse, do we find the least intimation of such an event. The end of all things is repeatedly spoken of. The New Testament frequently rehearses the events and signs that must precede the Lord's return. They are recorded so minutely that some even say that the exact date can be fixed. And yet, among all these prophecies, we fail to discover the slightest sign of a subsequent apostolate. In the panorama of the things to come there is literally no room for it.

Nor have the results realized the expectations of these brethren. Their apostolate has been a great disappointment. It has accomplished almost nothing. It has come and gone without leaving a trace. We do not deny that some of these men have done wonderful things; but be it noticed, in the first place, that the signs wrought were far below those performed by the apostles; second, that a man like Pastor Blumhardt has also wrought signs that greatly deserve to be noticed; third, that the Roman Catholic Church sometimes offers signs that are not pretended nor artificial; lastly, that the Lord has warned us in His Word that signs shall be wrought by men who are not His own.

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Moreover, let us not forget that the apostles of the Irvingites completely lack the marks of the apostolate. These were: (1) a call directly from the King of the Church; (2) a peculiar qualification of the Holy Spirit making them infallible in the service of the Church. These men lack both marks. They tell us, indeed, of a call come to them by the mouth of prophets, but this is to little or no purpose, for a call from a prophet is not equal to one directly from Christ, and again the name "prophet" is exceedingly misleading. The word prophet has, on the sacred page, a wide application, and occurs in both a *limited* and a *general* sense. The

8 The Irvingites are known in England and America as the Catholic Apostolic Church.—Trans.

former involves the revelation of a knowledge that mere illumination does not afford; while the latter applies to men speaking in holy ecstasy to the praise of God. We concede that prophesying, in the general sense, is an enduring charisma of the Church; for which reason the reformers of the sixteenth century attempted to revive this office. If the Irvingites, therefore, believe that in their circles the prophetic activity has been revived, we will not dispute it; altho we can not say that the reports of their prophesying have had a very overwhelming effect upon us. However, let it be granted that the gift has been restored; but even then we ask: What do you gain by it? For there is not the slightest proof that these prophets and prophetesses are like their predecessors in the Old Testament. The unrevealed will of God has not been revealed to them. If prophets at all, then their prophesying is merely a speaking to the praise of God in a state of spiritual ecstasy.

The uselessness of an appeal to such prophets for the support of this new apostolate is evident. It is merely the effort to support an unsupported apostolate by an equally unsupported prophetism.

Nor should it be forgotten that the labors of these so-called apostles have not carried out their own program. They have failed to exert any perceptible influence upon the course of events. The institutions founded by them have in no respect surpassed the many new church organizations witnessed by this century. They have established no new principle; their labors have manifested no new power. Whatever they have done lacks the stamp of a heavenly origin. And nearly all these new apostles have died not like the genuine twelve on cross or stake, but on their own beds surrounded by their friends and admirers.

However, this is not all. The name of apostle may be taken (1) in the sense of being called directly by Jesus as an ambassador for God, or (2) in a general sense, denoting every man sent by Jesus into His vineyard; for the word *apostle* means one that is sent. In [Acts xiv. 14](#) Barnabas is called an apostle: not because he belonged to their number, but merely to indicate that he was sent out by the Lord as His missionary or ambassador. In [Acts xiii. 1, 2](#) Barnabas is mentioned before Saul, who is not even called by his apostolic name; which shows that this call of the Holy Spirit bore only a temporary character, having in view only this special mission. For this reason the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One sent of the Father, the great Missionary come to this world, the Ambassador of God to His Church, is called Apostle: "Wherefore, holy brethren, . . . consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus" ([Heb. iii. 1](#)).

If the Irvingites had called the great reformers of the sixteenth century, or some prominent churchleaders of the present time, apostles, there could have been no great objection. But they did not mean this. They claim that these new apostles shall stand before the Church in a peculiar character, on the same plane with the first apostles, altho differently employed. And this can not be conceded. It would be in direct opposition to the apostolic declaration of [1 Cor. iv. 9](#): "For I think that God hath set us forth as the *last* apostles, as it were appointed



unto death" (see Dutch translation). How could St. Paul speak of the *last* apostles, if it were God's plan after eighteen centuries to send other twelve apostles into the world?

In view of this positive word of the Holy Spirit, we direct all those that come into contact with the Irvingites to what the Scripture says concerning them that call themselves apostles, and are not: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ." And the Lord Jesus testifies to the church at Ephesus: "I know that thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not."

The notion that false apostles must be a sort of incarnate devils applies in no wise to the calm, respectable, and venerable men frequently seen in the circles of the Irvingites. But apart from this absurd notion, and considering that the false prophets of the Old Testament so closely resembled the true ones that at times even the people of God were deceived by them, we can understand that the false apostles of St. John's day could be detected only by a higher spiritual discernment: and that the pretended apostles of the nineteenth century, who by their similarity to the genuine twelve blinded the eyes of the superficial, could be detected only by the touchstone of the Word of God. And that Word declares that the twelve of St. Paul's day were the *last* apostles, which settles the matter of this pretended apostolate.

This error of the Irvingites is therefore not so very innocent. It is easy to explain how it originated. The wretched and deplorable state of the Church must necessarily give rise to a number of sects. And we heartily acknowledge that the Irvingites have sent forth many warnings and well-deserved rebukes to our superficial and divided Church. But these good offices by no means justify the doing of things condemned by the Word of God; and those who have allowed themselves to be carried away by their teachings will sooner or later experience their fatal result. It is already manifest that this movement, which started among us under the pretext of uniting a divided church by gathering together the Lord's people, has accomplished little more than to add another to the already large number of sects, thus robbing the Church of Christ of excellent powers that now are being wasted.

That the apostolate was a closed circle, and not a flexible theory, is evident from [Acts i. 25](#): "Lord, show of these two, the one whom Thou hast chosen to take the place of this ministry and apostleship"; and again from St. Paul's word ([Rom. i. 5](#)): "By whom we have received grace and apostleship"; and again ([1 Cor. ix. 2](#)): "For the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord"; and lastly from [Gal. ii. 8](#): "For He that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision, wrought for me also unto the Gentiles." And again it is evident from the fact that the apostles always appear as the twelve; and from their being specially appointed and installed by Jesus breathing upon them the official gift of the Holy Spirit; and from the exceptional power and gifts that were connected with the apostolate. And it is especially



from its conspicuous place in the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that the apostolate obtains its definite character. For the Holy Scripture teaches that the apostles shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and also that the New Jerusalem has "twelve foundations upon which are written the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb." (*Rev. xii. 14*)

St. Paul offers us in his own person the most convincing proof that the apostolate was a closed college. If it had not been, the question whether he was an apostle or not could never have caused contention. Yet a large part of the Church refused to acknowledge his apostleship. He did not belong to the twelve; he had not walked with Jesus; how could he be a witness? It was against this seriously meant contention that St. Paul repeatedly lifted up his voice with such energy and animation. This fact is the key to the right understanding of his epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians. They glow with holy jealousy for the reality of his apostleship; for he was deeply convinced that he was an apostle as well as St. Peter and the others. Not by virtue of personal merit; in himself he was not worthy to be called an apostle—*1 Cor. xv. 9*; but no sooner is his office assailed than he arouses himself like a lion, for this touched the honor of his Master, who had appeared unto him in the way to Damascus; not, as is commonly said, to, *convert* him—for this is not *Christ's* work, but that of the *Holy Spirit*—but to appoint him an apostle in that Church which he was persecuting.

As to the question, how the addition of St. Paul to the twelve is consistent with that number, we are convinced that not the name of Matthias, but that of St. Paul is written upon the foundations of the New Jerusalem with those of the others; and that not Matthias, but St. Paul shall sit down to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. As one of the tribes of Israel was replaced by two others, so in regard to the apostolate; for Simeon, who fell out, Manasseh and Ephraim were substituted, and Judas was replaced by Matthias and Paul.

We would not imply that the apostles erred in electing Matthias to fill the vacancy occasioned by the suicide of Judas. On the contrary, the completion of the apostolic number could not be delayed until the conversion of St. Paul. The vacancy had to be filled immediately. But it may be said that when the disciples chose Matthias they had too small a conception of the goodness of their Lord. They supposed that for Judas they would receive a Matthias, and behold, Jesus gave them a Paul. As to the former, the Scripture mentions his election and no more. Yet even tho to the Church of later times the apostolate without St. Paul is unthinkable, and tho it allowed his person the first place among the apostles and his writings highest in authority among the Scriptures of the New Testament, to the person of Matthias the election to the apostolate must have brought highest honor. The apostolate stands so high that the fact of having been identified with it, even temporarily, imparts greater luster to a man's name than a royal crown.

**Ninth Chapter.**

**THE HOLY SCRIPTURES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.**

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