

# THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XXVI.—NO. 3.

---

JULY, MDCCCLXXV.

---

## ARTICLE I.

### THE DEACON'S OFFICE IN THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“BY INTRUSTING ALL PECUNIARY MATTERS INTO THE HANDS OF MEN ORDAINED UNDER SOLEMN SANCTIONS FOR THE PURPOSE, OUR SPIRITUAL COURTS WOULD SOON CEASE TO BE WHAT THEY ARE TO AN ALARMING EXTENT AT PRESENT, MERE CORPORATIONS FOR SECULAR” [FINANCIAL?] “BUSINESS. . . BOARDS COMBINE WHAT GOD HAS SEPARATED, THE PURSE AND THE KEYS.”—*Thornwell's Works*, Vol. IV., page 155.

It richly deserves to be reckoned among the blessings which a merciful providence designs bringing out of the tribulations of the past fifteen years, that the thoughts of our Church have been more and more turned to what has been happily styled “The Financial System of Jesus Christ.” Our difficulties have scarcely been less than those of the Free Church party at the memorable crisis of the disruption in 1843. Like our Scottish brethren, we were cut off as in a moment from the benefits of monetary endowments and organised schemes of Church work. And it remains to this hour a grievance suffered at the hands of our former associates, that they have held fast to every dollar of the common property which, for reasons of convenience, had been chiefly invested in the large commercial centres at the North. We retained, for the most part, our Church edifices, and the few manses attached to them. But as the South became occupied by Federal garrisons, the strong arm of the military was invoked to

## ARTICLE V.

ORDINATION, WITH THE LAYING ON OF THE  
HANDS OF THE PRESBYTERY.

The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy not to neglect a certain *χάρισμα* or *gift* which came to him by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. Now Timothy was an evangelist, which office is always an extraordinary one, but in his case was very especially extraordinary, seeing that prophecy had pointed him out as chosen and called of God. And yet, all extraordinary as was the call and the whole case of Timothy, we find, nevertheless, that he is ordained by the Presbytery with the imposition of their hands! The question which we have to propose, then, is, What is this thing of ordination with the imposition of hands?

I. The Congregationalists make very little of it. The main point, according to their system—perhaps we should rather say the *only* point—being election by the people. It is quite natural they should disparage ordination as the act of officers, since they place the government of the Church so entirely in the hands of the people. It would, of course, not consist with Congregationalism to make much of the officers, or of any action in which they are prominent.

But Rome runs to the other extreme, making too much of ordination. So far from its being with them an affair of the people, it is not even an affair of the officers of the Church, but is an act always of *one man* alone—the bishop. Rome also makes it a sacrament. And she holds that it imprints always an indelible mark on the man who receives it, of which he never can get rid. The Romish theory likewise teaches that the Holy Spirit is conferred necessarily and always in ordination, quite irrespective of the moral character of the man, and that this gift of the Holy Ghost makes the ordained to be a priest, and invests him with supernatural grace. He offers a true sacrifice to God, and makes a real atonement for the sins of men, every time that he performs

the mass. And this character once impressed, never can be taken from the man—once a priest, always a priest.

Prelatists also hold ordination to be a ministerial—that is, a *clerical*—act purely, and also the work of one man—the bishop. They also allow the bishop to say to the ordained, Receive thou the Holy Ghost. They also call their ministers priests, and likewise *clergy*. We would not charge on all of them the Romish ideas of ordination, but certainly they all do use Romish expressions on this subject.

But even many who are called Presbyterian also seem to look on ordination as a *quasi* sacrament, and to hold, in some sense, that it impresses an indelible character. “Once a minister,” say these so-called Presbyterians, “always a minister;” there shall never be allowed any demission of the office; there shall be no way of one’s getting out of the ministry, except by death or deposition. Such Presbyterians resemble Rome and the Prelatists, in making ordination a *ministerial* act. Squinting at apostolic succession, “no man (say they) can give an office which he does not hold himself;” and so they object to ruling elders laying on hands in the ordination of the minister. No man, forsooth, can give an office which he does not hold himself, as though it takes a President of the United States, and not merely the Chief Justice, to inaugurate the President; as though the dead king must inaugurate his successor; as though coronation is not always by the Pope or the archbishop; as though Moses, who inducted Aaron into office, had necessarily himself been high priest before!

In the safe middle between these extremes, (where truth is always found,) stands the true Presbyterian doctrine of ordination. We follow Scripture, and make ordination not the act of the people directly, but only through their representatives; and yet, on the other hand, not the act of ministers, as such, much less of one minister, officially exalted, contrary to the Scriptures, above his brethren, but the act of the Presbytery. “With the laying on of the hands of *the Presbytery*,” says the apostle to Timothy. The Scripture teaches us to unite together the people’s election, and the setting apart by representatives of the people. Both these elements enter essentially into a scriptural ordination.

What is a Presbytery? It is an eldership; that is, a body of elders or of presbyters. Well, what is an elder or presbyter? He is a ruler or a bishop, that is an *overseer*, (*ἐπίσκοπος*, *episcopus*, *biscop*,) of the flock. The presbyter or bishop is not necessarily a preacher. Preaching is one thing, and ruling the church is another thing; although the two works or offices do possess certain very close relations; for the preacher necessarily rules, on a grand scale, in the very act of preaching the all-controlling Word, while the ruler or bishop of the Church necessarily teaches, whenever, in his ruling, he applies the same enlightening truth of God. But presbyters are not always preachers, and the business of presbyters, *as such*, and of *the Presbytery*, is ruling, and not preaching. So, then, ordination being of the Presbytery, *as such*, it is not of the ministry, but of the ruling elders—it is not a ministerial act, but an act of government. It admits a man publicly and officially into church office, which of course is an act of the rulers of the church. In a free commonwealth, such as the Church is, it would never do for a *caste* like that of the preachers, to have the power of appointing or ordaining all the church officers. Such a power can be safely or properly lodged only with the representatives of the people, viz., the presbyters of two classes in a lawful Presbytery assembled.

Ordination being, then, of the Presbytery, it cannot be in any sense a sacrament; for the sacraments are not committed to the rulers or representatives of the people, *qua* rulers or representatives, but are to be administered only by ministers of the Word. It communicates no supernatural grace, coming down in regular transmission through clerical hands from the very apostles. There is nothing mysterious in ordination. It is not a *charm*; although on the other hand it is not a *mere form*. It has a significance and it has a history. We get it from the apostles, and they took it from the Old Testament Church. It means dedication, consecration, setting apart, acknowledgment, recognition, inauguration. Done by the Lord's appointment and authority, through and by his Church, it is done by himself. It devotes a man to a certain service for life. It lays him on the altar, as belonging to Christ and the Church in this particular work. Of course, it signifies

also acceptance of him by the Lord and his Church as thus consecrated, and accordingly it vouchsafes to him support and help and comfort and grace and success. Surely, surely, the admission of any man to church office by the Lord's authority who established the office and appointed the mode of induction into it, surely this can be no empty form, but there are involved on the one side very solemn duties, and on the other side very gracious aids and supports.

In the case of an ordination to the gospel ministry, the solemnity of the duty involved becomes absolutely terrific. What a tremendous burden that is which the ordained man consents to have bound upon his shoulders—the care of souls! He becomes willingly responsible, in a certain just and proper and fearful sense responsible, for the salvation or perdition of immortal spirits of men. He agrees to take the charge of so many souls, and to answer to Christ for them at the last day. Oh, awful ministry! How can any poor sinner assume an office awakening so much dread? Is it any wonder that good men of old, called by the Church to this so alarming work, would run away, would endeavor to hide, and so escape, crying out, when discovered and brought forth from their concealment, "*Nolo episcopari, Nolo episcopari*"—*I don't wish to be made a bishop, I cannot assume the care of souls!* Is it any wonder we should maintain that no man must ever *volunteer* absolutely to enter this service, but every true minister be called directly of the Holy Ghost, the call being primarily a call from God himself, and the Church only attesting and seconding that call? Is it any wonder that every true-hearted, humble-minded, modest, generous, noble, unselfish, God-fearing, Church-loving man, whenever called to this awful ministry he finds himself standing upon the terrific threshold of this divine office, is, and needs must be, full of fears as he looks forward to the task then being committed to him, and will find himself casting wishful glances around him, to discover if he may not yet escape the dread obligations that are impending? Show us a man that is absolutely without all such fears, and we will show you one whom the Spirit never moved to aspire to this office. On the contrary, show us the man who trembles under the terrors

of the great commission, and though impelled by secret motivations within, yet feels his utter incompetency and unworthiness to undertake the work, and we will show you one that wears, patent to every eye but his own; the seal and certificate of the Holy Ghost that God both calls and anoints him to preach the gospel. We hazard the assertion, that this will be found (allowing something necessarily for differences of mental and moral constitution,) an invariable and a safe rule of judgment, both for the man and for his counsellors. Would to God that there was apparent in many of our candidates more of the shrinkings of a modest, humble, reverential spirit, and that our Presbyteries would more diligently inquire for these marks and signs of a veritable call to the ministry!

II. But let us go into a more particular examination of the Scripture authority for ordinations by the Church. We shall find it in Mark ii. 13, 14, where we read how our Lord first calls and then ordains the twelve apostles; in Acts xiii. 3, where evangelists or missionaries to the heathen outsiders are ordained with imposition of hands by the Presbytery of Antioch; and also in 1 Tim. iv. 14, where Timothy is in like manner ordained a missionary or evangelist, with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery; in Acts xiv. 23, where Paul and Barnabas ordain elders in every church, who must, of course, have been ruling elders rather than preachers, for a plurality of rulers was needful, but only a single preacher to each little church; and also in Titus i. 5, where Paul tells the evangelist (who had the needful extraordinary power,) to establish an eldership or presbytery in every city; and finally, in Acts vi. 6, where the apostles ordained, with the laying on of their hands, seven deacons to minister to the Gentile believers.

That the gospel ministry is an office divinely instituted, into which suitable men are to be inducted by the Church from age to age, appears also from the official titles which set it forth in the word. These titles indicate that the office is permanent. They are called in Scripture pastors or shepherds, rulers, bishops or overseers, stewards, angels or messengers, heralds, and ambassadors. The works and duties signified by these titles are as need-

ful now, and will be to the end, as needful for the Church's edification and enlargement, as they were at the beginning. Moreover, every one of these titles is significant of such office as no man may ever assume to himself. The shepherd must needs be appointed by the Lord of the flock; the ruler in the Church by its Head; the steward of the mysteries of God by him who reveals those mysteries; the herald or ambassador by the King himself. But ordinarily, the King and Head of the Church acts through and by her as his agent on the earth. And so now as of old, and down to the very end, men are to be set apart by the Church with divine authority to the gospel ministry. This is what ordination means: the men whom our Lord calls to preach, must be set apart with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. And it is Christ himself who calls on his people to reverence and highly esteem and submit to and obey in the Lord such as are thus consecrated and set apart; Christ himself it is who requires his people to communicate to such all good things required by them, because so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel shall live of the gospel.

Still further, the ordinance of the gospel ministry may be maintained to be a permanent, divine institute, from—

1. The apostolic commission, where the Lord says to the first ministers of the Word, "Go ye into all the world, and preach;" and "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end."

2. The Lord's giving pastors and teachers to edify his body till we all come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

3. His declaration that the gospel of the kingdom is to be preached to all nations, down to the end.

4. From the preaching of the gospel being God's wisdom and power, God's ways and means of saving men.

5. And from Paul's charge to Timothy, that what he had himself learned from him, the same he must commit to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also.

III. This will suffice to set forth the authority for ordination with the imposition of hands of the Presbytery. And now the question arises, Is ordination always the same thing, or are there

different kinds of ordination, as when a session or a presbytery perform it, or as when a deacon or an elder or a preacher is ordained? The question is not difficult, and the answer is plain and easy. The diaconate differs from the presbyterate, and the work of the two kinds of elders differs, and the ordaining bodies are also different. Yet ordination in all these cases is the same thing. It is to be always the act of a court of Jesus Christ; always by imposition of hands; and always to some definite church office and work.

This plainly appears from what has been already set forth. Ordination is not a sacrament, and does not belong to ministers as such. It would be totally subversive of the representative system of church government revealed in the Scriptures, if a separate class of men like ministers, standing necessarily by themselves in sundry important particulars, and constantly liable, as all church history shows, to grow to be lords of Christ's heritage, should have committed to them as such, the appointment or the induction into office of any church officers. Ordination must needs be by presbyters, and not preachers—ordained preachers being, however, always themselves presbyters. Nor may one presbyter ever ordain any man. That would be Prelacy, which carries us at once half way to Rome. According to the New Testament system, no one man can ever do any act of church rule.

Ordination, therefore, is always by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. It follows that our Book is defective in Chap. XIII., Sec. IV., where it says, "The minister shall proceed to set apart the candidate by prayer to the office of ruling elder or deacon, as the case may be." How can a minister alone ordain anybody? How could one presbyter do it? It requires the representatives of the people, assembled in a lawful church court. Paul and Barnabas ordained not one elder, but *elders*, in every church; a plurality of elders are necessary for every act of church rule, for the Church is a free commonwealth, governed by her representatives. Outside the regular church state, a single evangelist, being an extraordinary officer, has all the powers of a Presbytery in full; the system possesses all needful elas-



ticity. But where duly organised, the Church is to be governed by her "congregational, presbyterial, synodical assemblies." The whole college of the apostles ordained the seven deacons, and shall one ordinary minister now assume to set men apart to such an office? Yes, and they ordained those deacons with the imposition of their hands; and is it now to be held too much for the hands of one ordinary minister to be laid upon them? But if deacons must needs be ordained with the imposition of hands now as in apostolic times, *a fortiori* elders are entitled to the same measure of respect. But our Form of Government inconsistently prescribes that the minister alone shall ordain these officers, and that by prayer only, without the imposition of hands. *Inconsistently*, we say, for this does not consist with the most fundamental principles of our system; it is prelatic. Nor does it consist with the clear provisions of the Book in Chap. XV., Sec. XIV., on the ordination of the minister, where it is distinctly prescribed that the ruling elders shall act their proper part as presbyters. If they can lay on hands in Presbytery assembled, and that upon the head of the highest church officer, why can they not, in session assembled, still act as presbyters, and lay hands on deacons and elders? Are not all our courts, in their own nature, exactly the same thing, viz., bodies of presbyters? The difference which our Constitution (not the Scripture,) makes between Session, Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly, dividing out to each one its proper share of the government of the Church, is not that difference one of the mere *circumstances* left to human discretion? It involves no principle of the revealed system; it constitutes no substantive part of the government. The courts, in their own nature, are all precisely the same thing, each being naturally as competent as the other for every work. But we put the ordination of the minister for the sake of convenience and propriety, into the hands of the *classical* Presbytery, while that of elders and deacons is committed to the *parochial* Presbytery, that is, the Session. But never could our system, fairly apprehended and applied, commit the ordination of either church officer to the minister. Who but the members of the court of which the candidate for the elder-

ship is to become a member, should have the induction of him into office? And if they are competent to induct an elder into his office, why are they not also competent to induct the deacon? What is the minister in any session except simply that member of the body who presides? Surely he does not wield all the powers of the body, and surely they ought not to be put under his feet.

There is but one view, so far as we can see, which might justify the language of our Book. Make the minister the mere agent of the session in their ordination of their new colleague, and the language of the Book may be defended as Presbyterian; just as in the case of the minister it would be a perfectly regular ordination with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, to have five, or three, or even one man appointed by the body, if necessity or convenience demanded this, to lay on hands upon that present occasion in its behalf. But who ever heard of a session ordering the minister to proceed with the laying on of hands on its behalf?

To that eminent Presbyterian authority, Dr. Samuel Miller, of Princeton Seminary, it was a matter of astonishment that our Book should be so inconsistent here; and in his work on the Ruling Elder he laments this inconsistency, as not admitting any defence. But he says the explanation is, that at first they conceived of the ruling elder as a temporary officer, and accordingly regarded it as incongruous to ordain these and the more permanent teaching elders with the same rite. We hope we may be pardoned for our apparent presumption in saying that we conceive we can suggest a better explanation than this of our revered teacher.

But is not this just what, from the nature of the case must always be expected to happen? In questions of church government, as in many other departments, how can it be possible that the first inquirers shall draw always the safest conclusions? Continually we find men arguing that such and such a view must needs be the right one, because the Church of Scotland, for example, held that view. But in matters of revelation like this, have we not a divine standard of appeal? And is it not quite

possible for a subsequent age to develop out of the Scripture principles a better understanding of what is revealed, than men at some earlier period enjoyed? Nay, is it not absolutely certain, that such a better understanding has often been attained as the ages have rolled on? Accordingly, it by no means follows, that a given view is sustained by the Revelation, because that great teacher, John Calvin, for example, held the same, although his judgment is always so much to be respected. So, too, it by no means follows that the men who made the First Book of Discipline of the Scottish Kirk knew better what the Scriptures teach about church discipline, than the men who drew up the Second Book, twenty years later. And it cannot be asserted with any safety, that that Second Book, because older, contains, therefore, a better Presbyterianism than what our fathers produced in 1787; nor yet that the statements of those fathers, as to the ordination of elders and deacons, are a juster exhibition of the principles of our divinely revealed system than Dr. Miller's, who came so long after them; nor yet that the venerable Princeton Professor had necessarily a better apprehension of all such matters than any one now living can pretend to; nor that we, who are the true *ancients* in this case, shall not one day have successors after us, able to improve on our views. From age to age, does not God's word stand the one arbiter of all questions relating to the Church? No revision do we want of the Confession of Faith, (which some in the Northern Church have lately proposed,) because the men *are not*, as we believe, who can improve upon its statements, except, possibly, on one or two secondary points. But confessedly our Form of Government is in many things grievously defective. Manifestly, for example, as to the evangelist and as to the deacon, the Church has outgrown that Form. But the Church has not outgrown, and never can outgrow, the perfect word of God. We have outgrown the Scotch Kirk, whether of the one or of the other of her two Books of Discipline. We have outgrown the Book our fathers made in 1787. We have outgrown Dr. Miller, and can, on some points, correct and improve on the conceptions he formed. The simple reason is, that we have in our hands the divine word, and with the help of

all these our revered and trusted predecessors, who stood fast in their day against Romish, Prelatic, and Independent errors, we can go to the Word for ourselves, and thence derive light which our wisest fathers did not see. "Thy testimonies are wonderful;" "thy commandment is exceeding broad."

The suggestion offered by the venerable Princeton Doctor, as to the way our Book came to be so inconsistent touching the ordination of elders and deacons, is in the right direction, as we believe, but it does not go far enough. We venture to add to it some statements. In 1560, when Knox and others drew up the First Book of Discipline, their notion was that imposition of hands was a mere relic of Papacy, and therefore they would none of it. But by 1580 they had learned better; and so Melville and others provided expressly in the Second Book for the imposition of hands in every ordination, as being scriptural, and therefore proper. In this case, however, it proved, as it always must, a much easier thing to correct an erroneous doctrine than to reform an erroneous practice. Gradually they got to ordaining ministers with the laying on of hands; but as to the elders and deacons, they could not get the practice right. Nor have we ourselves yet got it right every where throughout our Church. The trouble is, that our American fathers just followed the Scotch grandfathers in their unscriptural practice, and in many parts of the Presbyterian Church in this new world, we are just following our fathers in the same; although we can hardly fail to see that wherever this is done, a little Presbyterian prelate rises up and exhibits himself in the Moderator of the Session, who makes deacons and elders in a way he considers better than what the apostles practised.

As illustrating the difficulty of reforming the wrong practice that was begun in 1560, Calderwood, who lived during the period that followed the Second Book of Discipline, (1575-1650,) says in his *Altare Damascenum*, (p. 689,) that so late as his time, many even of the ministers were ordained without the imposition of hands! He also declares that elders have precisely the same right to it as ministers.

There is a further suggestion which may help to explain the

manifest inconsistency Dr. Miller points out. When, in 1787, our fathers undertook the revision of the very imperfect Westminster standard of church government, they could find there no provision for the ordination of ruling elders. In fact, the Second Book of Discipline, which is so far superior as a Presbyterian symbol, does not contain any. This defect, therefore, our fathers must needs remedy, and so they proceed to prepare, *de novo*, a chapter on the ordination of such officers. In making it, they clearly perceived the necessity there was for providing some way in which this office might, in certain cases, be demitted without censure. But this was a step they could not conceive of, (as many amongst us now cannot conceive of it,) in reference to the minister; for, "once a minister, always a minister." Accordingly, therefore, they make a broad distinction between the two ordinations, by prescribing that the one shall be with the laying on of the hands of a Presbytery, and the other shall not!

IV. And now we proceed to the next point, and consider the paradox, that whilst ordination is always the same, yet for ministers of the Word there are two different ordinations. In the one case, a man is ordained to the pastorate; in the other, he is ordained to be an evangelist or missionary to frontier and destitute settlements in his own country, or else to foreign lands. Besides these two ordinations—two, and yet one—our Book, following the Scripture, knows none else.

In all ages of the Church, and in all portions of it, *sine titulo* ordinations have been condemned. Let us explain the origin and meaning of this term. In the fourth century we meet with two kinds of Churches: 1. The *martyrion*, that is, the church edifice built at the place (outside, generally, of the habitations of men) where some martyr laid down his life; and to this building the people would repair annually to pay honor to the memory of the faithful witness, which custom tended to the worship of the saints. 2. The *titulus*, or parish church, where the people attended for worship continually. Ordination *with a title*, was that which took place when a man was called to the charge of some *titulus*, with a pledge of the needful support, which sometimes was furnished by the people, and sometimes was derived from endow-

ments to which that church had a title. Ordination *without a title* (*sine titulo*) was what the Council of Chalcedon called "absolute," and which it strenuously forbade; they were ordinations without any place of service officially assigned to the ordained, or any provision for his support. Calvin says this decree was most useful, for two reasons: first, that the Church might not be burdened with superfluous expense; and secondly, that ordained ministers might understand that they had received not a mere honorary office, but were set apart to a labor they were bound to perform. There are two points to be guarded with care: men are not to obtrude themselves into churches without a call, and the people are not to have the labors of a minister without providing for his support. Both these are amply protected in the form of a call furnished in our Book. The man is to be approved by the people, after an adequate trial of him, (he also trying them at the same time,) and they are earnestly to call him to be their pastor; but they must evince the sincerity and the earnestness of their desire for his labors, by the competent support they promise him. We all know the law of demand and supply. Whenever cotton or any other product is in demand, the price offered for it will rise. Whenever the price is low, it is said at once, There is no demand. If a people really wish for a certain minister's labors, they will offer him a fair support. Where a competent salary is not promised, it is idle to say there is any real demand for that minister's labors. Presbyteries, therefore, which do not wish to burden the Church and the ministry with superfluous men, having no real title to be ordained, should always look sharply at the promise of support made by a people. Except through the Presbytery, the minister cannot receive the call; and if put by them into his hand approvingly, it is signified, of course, that they find it in order, and such as it is proper should be given him. But can a *call to starve* ever be orderly and proper, such as a church may give and a Presbytery approve? Many are the complaints that the ministry are not duly supported. The fault lies in part at the door of Presbytery. Let the body refuse to sanction every call which does not pledge a just and adequate *title* to the pastorate, which does not furnish fair and full evidence

that the labors of the called man are truly in demand by that congregation.

But if the point of the minister's support enters essentially into the question of a *titulus* to be ordained, so likewise does the other point, of the people's having no man obtruded upon them without their own free choice and preference. And the necessity of free choice by the people is not simply that their taste and predilections may have due consideration; it draws deeper far than this. Our whole grand representative system stands or falls with this necessity. Unless the people choose the man, (we speak, of course, only of the settled church state,) he will not be *their representative*, and cannot sit in the church courts. Ordained ministers are and must be as truly representatives of the people as ruling elders. These latter are "properly," that is, *distinctively, simply, solely*, "representatives;" but ministers are not *simply* representatives, but that and something more. We must have in all our assemblies which rule, both the classes of rulers; and if the representative or *ruling* authority of the ministry is denied, our system is absolutely subverted and destroyed. Now, in the settled church state, no man can become a representative of the people, except by his being called to rule over them in the pastorate.

V. But what necessity is there at all for this ordination with the imposition of hands? For, may not any man and every man who belongs to Jesus, stand up and speak for him? Of course he may, and he must. But is there not a manifest and most wide difference between official and unofficial speaking for Jesus? The Lord himself has appointed that there shall be a class of men set free from worldly cares and avocations, and devoted to this very work. These are his ambassadors, carrying the key of doctrine and also the key of discipline, and opening and shutting therewith the kingdom of heaven. It is for these men to preach authoritatively, and to be ordained and set apart to that office; whilst at the same time every Christian ought to speak for his Master and the souls of men, as he finds opportunity. Yet let him not obtrude himself as having official authority, when he has had no call of God and his Church.

But what is to be thought and said of the modern lay evangelists, preaching now in London and in Berlin and in various cities of America? Are they to be held to be ministers of the gospel, or mere unauthorised private Christians? Do they speak for Jesus officially or unofficially?

It is a safe principle that the Church must acknowledge all whom God acknowledges, and honor every one as God honors him. Now, what does the lay evangelist referred to claim for his mission and work? Does he regard himself as only a *layman*, talking for Jesus without any special commission and authority given him by his Lord? Well, then, we will so receive and acknowledge him. But does he claim to be sent of the Lord, though not *of men* or *by men*, with extraordinary authority, commissioned to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and rule like an apostle in and over the Church? Well, then, we must inquire, Does he show the signs of any such extraordinary commission? If so, we will reverently acknowledge him to be what he claims. If the Holy Ghost manifestly acknowledges, accompanies, and employs his preaching, we will not dare to set ourselves against him. The Lord has always raised up, and will raise up, extraordinary agents of his own, according to the necessities of the Church. This is the clear doctrine of Calvin and of Holy Writ. God is our Sovereign Head, and is not to be tied to any class of agencies as though he were dependent on them. But our right and our duty is to try all these claimants by the Word. The Spirit cannot be with any who positively contradict the Word. To the law, then, and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them. We must not believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

It would seem to follow, that the Lord may, without any dishonor to his own ordinances, so long established and so generally employed by him, see fit to send forth new agencies at his sovereign pleasure. There never should be any comparison drawn by any between the ordinary and the extraordinary commissioners of the Almighty. For, in the first place, both are the Lord's



instruments, and all the glory and honor are his. But, in the second place, no mortal man is competent to make such a comparison. Suppose the eminently successful men who are now shaking Great Britain with their gospel trumpet's sound, should be blessed to convert ten thousand souls; it would be wondrous and glorious success. But who can say that it would be a greater or as great a work as a few ordinary ministers and elders led our Church in doing, when, in 1837, the tide of New School heresy was rolled back, and the blessed doctrines of grace got a fresh testimony to their truth and their preciousness? If theology be corrupted, if the Church be debauched, may not the evil be greater through its wide and lasting influences than though ten thousand souls were lost? May not, therefore, the honest, faithful, unknown men who keep the Church from being thus fatally injured, or restore her, with God's blessing, when so damaged—may not these obscure servants of the Lord honor him more, and better serve his people, than these eminently successful preachers, whom all the world is wondering after? The truth simply is, that the ordinary and the extraordinary are not comparable—they are different things, and for different purposes, and in different spheres, and we have no common measure which can be applied to both.

VI. But what significance or value is there in the imposition of hands? Just the same, it has been well said, as belongs to the lifting of the hands in public prayer. We practise it, not for any inherent efficacy in it, but because the apostles practised it. So long as no one contravenes the right of a presbytery, as distinguished from a prelatie bishop, to employ it; or the right of a ruling elder, as distinguished from a teaching elder, to take part in it; or the right of elders and deacons to be ordained, as well as preachers, with this simple scriptural rite—so long we could have no particular zeal regarding it. But it is because great and important questions of church government turn on this simple matter, that it assumes such grave consequence, and excites such profound interest.

VII. And who, then, are to lay on hands in the ordination of all church officers? Our Book, speaking of the first office in the

Church, both for dignity and usefulness, says it is *the Presbytery*. Well, the Presbytery consists of the two classes of presbyters. In every ordination of a minister, both classes deliberated, and both acted together throughout all the precedent steps. Why not, then, both act together in this last step, which constitutes nothing else than a simple and beautifully significant rite descending to us from those who founded the Church? To deny their right to take part here is popish, for it makes a new sacrament of that which is none.

VIII. But ought there to be allowed any such thing as the demission of church office? Well, can those who admit to church office, claim infallibility? The Session which ordains a new deacon or elder, the Presbytery which ordains a new bishop or presbyter, does it pretend that it cannot err as to the title of the candidate? Two other parties have coöperated with the Presbytery in bringing this result to pass—the church which called, and the candidate who was called. Both these expressed a judgment as well as the Presbytery; and the concurrence of these three elements was understood as evincing the truth of God's call to the man. But is either the individual church or the individual man incapable of mistake? Now, if all these three parties are fallible, and if, in fact, mistakes have often been, and no doubt constantly are, made by all three in this matter of ordination to church office, ought there not to be some mode provided in our Book for rectifying such a mistake, without the necessity of imposing an undeserved censure on any party? All acted conscientiously and in the fear of God. Why not provide, with all proper safeguards, that where no disciplinable offence has taken place, there may be a simple, honest, definite acknowledgment of the error, publicly made and put on record?