



**BOARDMAN
ON THE
MINISTRY**

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THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

NOT A

PRIESTHOOD:

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSIONS OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, IN NASHVILLE, TENN., ON
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BY THE

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“THIS IS A TRUE SAYING: IF A MAN DESIRE THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP, HE DESIRETH A GOOD WORK.”—1 TIM. iii. 1.

WHOLE libraries have been written on the thesis propounded in this sentence—“the office of a Bishop.” The controversy respecting it involves the very nature, as well as the constitution of the Christian Ministry. On both these points, conflicting and incompatible theories have long divided the Church. A full discussion of these theories would be quite impracticable within the limits of an ordinary discourse; but the general subject may properly engage

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our attention on an occasion like the present.

There are two leading theories on the nature, and two on the constitution, of the Ministry. Waiving the consideration of the latter of these topics, except in a very cursory way, the doctrine held by our own Church, and by most of the Protestant churches, concerning the former, is, that the Ministry has been constituted to feed, and, in conjunction with the representatives of the people, to govern the Church; that its chief functions are, to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, together with the exercise of discipline; and that "its power is wholly moral, or spiritual, and *that* only ministerial or declarative."*

* Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, Chap. VIII.

According to the other view, the Christian Ministry is a *Priesthood*. The radical idea of Priesthood is that of mediation between God and man. A priest is "one who stands as a mediator between God and the people, and brings them to God by virtue of certain ceremonial acts which he performs for them, and which they could not perform for themselves without profanation, because they are at a distance from God, and cannot, in their own persons, venture to approach towards him." The leading function of the Levitical priests, was, to offer sacrifices. "For every high-priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God," is set apart to transact with God on behalf of men, and for their good, "that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin." The whole structure of the Mosaic system was designed to

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impress the chosen people with a profound sense of the Divine majesty and purity, and of the essential turpitude of sin. Every part of its complicated ritual admonished them that they could have no friendly intercourse with a holy God, except through a mediator. Aaron and his sons were the constituted media of communication between them and the Deity. The endless infractions of the theocratic code, of which they were perpetually guilty, could be expiated only through the intervention of the priest. Nor was it for the purposes of atonement and intercession simply, that his agency must be invoked. It was no less indispensable in all their civil and martial transactions; in their battles and in their journeys; in their husbandry and in their trafficking; in their public assemblies, and in the familiar routine of domestic life. Everywhere,

on opening the Old Testament, we see the priest standing before the altar — at once, the most urgent necessity, and the most expressive epitome, of the system.

Rome has transferred this element, the very heart and core of the Mosaic dispensation, into the new economy. *The priesthood is perpetuated* in the Christian Church. And since a priesthood implies the offering of sacrifice, she has transmuted the simplest of rites, the Lord's Supper, into the veritable and ever-recurring sacrifice of the Son of God; and challenges for her "priests," the prerogative of absolving transgressors from the penalty of the Divine law. "If any one shall say, (so she has ordained,) that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood, or that there is no power in it of consecrating and offering the very body

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and blood of the Lord, and of remitting and retaining sins, but only an office of the bare ministry of preaching the gospel; or, that those who do not preach the gospel are not priests, let him be *anathema*.”* They stand where the Aaronic priests stood, between God and man. There can be no acceptable approach to God except through them; no pardon, except through their impetration and the sacrifice of the mass. Whoever would be reconciled to God, whoever would be cleansed from sin, whoever would receive an answer to his prayers, whoever would triumph over death, must invoke the mediation of the priest. The sacrifice he presents and the sacraments he administers, are clothed with an efficacy which meets every want and provides for every exigency of our moral nature. And no

* Council of Trent, Session XXIII.

one need fear for the result, who is willing to confide the whole business of his salvation to his priest.

The germs of this system are to be detected in the Church at a very early period. "Whilst the least probability remained, that Jerusalem might, at one time or other, again rear its head from the dust, the Christian teachers and elders assumed to themselves no titles or distinctions, at least none but the most modest and humble ones. But when the fate of that glorious city had been finally sealed by Hadrian, and not the most distant hope could any longer be entertained by the Jews of seeing their ancient government re-established, these same pastors and ministers, for the most part, conceived a wish to have it believed by their flocks that they themselves had succeeded to the rights of the Jewish priesthood. The bishops,

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therefore, made it their business thenceforward, to inculcate the notion that they were invested with a character resembling that of the great high-priest of the Jews, and were consequently possessed of all those rights which had been recognised as belonging to the Jewish pontiff. The functions of the ordinary Jewish priests, were, in like manner, stated to have devolved, though under a more perfect form, on the *presbyters* of the Christian Church; and, finally, the *deacons* were placed on a parallel with the *Levites*, or inferior ministers of the temple."*

These distinctions, originating in the ambition of the ecclesiastics, and stimulated by the reproaches cast alike by Jews and pagans upon the *simplicity* of the Christian ritual, gradually assumed more and more of the sacerdotal

* Mosheim's Commentaries.

type, until, at length, the clergy set up the monstrous assumption of exclusive mediatorship between heaven and earth, and the Church was loaded with the brilliant but galling chains of a Levitical bondage.

The grossness of this system might seem sufficient to repel any intelligent and serious reader of the New Testament; and yet, the radical principle which pervades it, has been adopted and elaborately vindicated by large numbers of so-called Protestant prelates and clergymen, on both sides of the Atlantic. Like Rome, they make the ministry a "priesthood;" and present to the world the anomaly of a sacerdotal Christianity. The house of God is a "temple," with its "altar" and its "sacrifice;" and they are the hierophants who celebrate its "mysteries." They constitute, with the priesthood

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of the other hierarchies, the only legitimate channel of spiritual communion between this world and heaven. If one would worship God, he must wait upon their ministrations; for they alone have free access to the mercy-seat. If he would be pardoned, forgiveness comes only through their intervention. If he would obtain renewing and sanctifying grace, he must receive the sacraments at their hands. For, they only have "the gift of the Holy Ghost;" they are the stewards of the Church — the depository of Divine grace; and this grace, it is their prerogative to dispense in baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Eucharist, of course, is a "sacrifice;" and they are empowered to pronounce an authoritative absolution upon all in whose behalf they "offer" it.

Without enlarging on the details of

this system, it must be apparent that there are no powers exercised by any set of men, of whatever nation or country, paramount to those which are challenged for this pretended priesthood. They claim, in effect, to be the vicegerents of the Deity. They are, in a sense, the arbiters of our destiny. The keys have been placed in their custody; and our salvation or perdition is suspended upon their using one or the other of them as they may see fit.

We have a right to demand, that an order of men who arrogate to themselves prerogatives like these, shall produce the clearest possible credentials; that nothing shall be wanting to authenticate their commission in the most unequivocal manner; and that they shall be able to show us, in that volume to which they and we appeal as the charter of the Church, the statute which creates

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their order, and defines its powers, its functions, and its ceremonial. The Levitical priests could do this. No inconsiderable portion of the last four books of the Pentateuch is devoted to them. For every jot and tittle of their system, from the august rites of the great day of atonement, down to the very fringe of their robes and the pins of the tabernacle, they could produce a "Thus saith the Lord." And from men who claim to have been armed with loftier powers than were ever conferred upon the sons of Aaron, the world cannot be expected to put up with a less authoritative warrant.

What, then, must be thought of these soaring pretensions, when it is stated, that, not only is there no decree creating such an order, to be found, but that the New Testament does not contain *one word* about an official human priest-

hood in the Christian Church. To estimate the force of this omission, it must be considered, that down to the period of the Saviour's ascension, a religion without a priesthood was a novelty unheard of among mankind* — as, indeed, with the solitary exception of Christianity, (I am speaking, it will be understood, of an earthly priesthood,) it is unknown to this day. What would the gorgeous mythology of Greece, or that of Rome, have been, without the priest and the sacrifice? Abstract the sacerdotal element, and what would remain of Buddhism, of Lamaism, or of any of the countless forms of idolatry with which the earth is cursed? In each and all of these cases, the principle is not so much an adjunct of the system as the system itself; not the mere anatomy, but nerves, arteries,

* Dr. Whately has suggested this thought.

muscles, everything. And this was as true of Judaism as it is of the false religions. It would scarcely savour of extravagance, to say, that men trained as the apostles had been, could not, except through a special baptism of the Spirit, have conceived of a religion without a human priesthood. There was no sentiment more sacredly enshrined in their national *cultus*, no lesson set forth with greater solemnity in their daily worship, than that the intervention of the priest was indispensable to their coming acceptably into the presence of God. With such power had this conviction entrenched itself in the popular mind, so completely were all their mental habits and associations transfused with the ancient leaven, that the Jewish converts resisted to the utmost, the doctrine that Christianity was to annul and supersede their own ritual.

In the view of facts like these, it is a most remarkable and significant circumstance, that in passing from the Old Testament to the New, we should leave behind the whole vocabulary of terms proper to a sacerdotal system. The writers seem no longer to be Jews. The faith of which they are the accredited historians and expositors, knows no PRIEST except JESUS OF NAZARETH, no sacrifice except the "Lamb of God," no Mediator except Him "who ever liveth to make intercession for us." His people are styled "a holy priesthood;" and are said to offer up "spiritual sacrifices." But the terms "priest" and "sacrifice" are not once applied in the New Testament, to Christian ministers, as such, and their official functions.

It has, indeed, been claimed that there is a single passage which constitutes an exception to this remark, to

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wit: Rom xv. 16. "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering (*ἰερουργεῖν*), the gospel of God, that the offering (*προσφορά*), of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." Here, we are told, the apostle describes himself as "*ministering as a priest* the gospel of God, that the *sacrificing* of the Gentiles might be acceptable." That he *compares* himself to the Jewish priests, is certain, but that he makes himself a priest in the Christian Church, is an interpretation which requires the "offering up of the Gentiles" to be taken as a literal "sacrifice"—for which no one has yet contended. The whole phraseology is figurative, and in the circumstances of the writer of the Epistle, equally natural and expressive. Dr. Whitby's comment on the verse is as follows: "Here is a plain allusion to

the Jewish sacrifices offered by the priest, and sanctified or made acceptable and savory by the *Libamen* offered with it: for he compares himself, in the preaching of the gospel, to the priest, *sacris operanti*, conversant about his sacrifice, to prepare, and fit it to be offered. The Gentiles dedicated by him to the service of God, are his sacrifice, or oblation; the Holy Spirit is the *Libamen* poured on this sacrifice, by which they are sanctified and rendered acceptable to God.”

It has been further argued, that the New Testament recognises the Christian ministry as a priesthood, since they are entrusted with “the power of the keys,” which is explained to mean “the power of forgiving sin.” To this it is a sufficient reply, that whatever the power of binding and loosing may denote, the efficacious remission of sin

is not a sacerdotal, but a judicial, function. We need not, therefore, stop to enquire whether the right of absolution appertains to the Christian ministry; for even if they had that right, (which they certainly have not, in the Romish sense of the term,) it would not prove them to be priests.

Had it been the design of the Saviour to perpetuate the ancient priesthood, or to institute a new order of priests in his Church, he could not have failed to announce it in sending forth his apostles. But neither in the mission of the seventy, nor in the first or second mission of the twelve, have we the least intimation of such a purpose. Rarely has our globe been the theatre of a more imposing ceremonial than that with which Aaron and his successors were consecrated to the Jewish priesthood. God himself was pleased to prescribe every

part of the service, down to the fabric, the form, and the decorations of their vestments; and on the appointed day, in the presence of the assembled millions of Israel, they were inducted into office. The time would fail me to describe this august solemnity—the investiture of the high-priest with his gorgeous *insignia*, the anointing with oil, the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, the ram of consecration, the sprinkling of blood, the seven days and nights of seclusion in the tabernacle, and the series of sacrifices which followed, for the priests and the people. On these details we cannot dwell. But contrast with this stately pageant the corresponding transaction under the new economy, the inauguration of the *Christian* ministry. No concourse of awe-struck and admiring spectators meets us here; no ephod nor mitre, no tem-

ple nor altar, no smoking holocaust nor fragrant incense. The sacerdotal paraphernalia all disappear; and in place thereof, a spectacle presents itself, the sublime simplicity of which symbolizes the essential diversity between the preliminary and the final dispensation. The Saviour of the world, about to ascend to heaven, calls his eleven apostles around him, and bids them "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And these men, anointed with the Spirit, went forth to their work.* Clad in their ordinary vestments, and disencumbered of all Levitical implements, they addressed themselves to their mission as men who were "not ashamed of the

* Stratten's "*Book of the Priesthood*" has a fine passage on this topic.

gospel of Christ." "Beginning at Jerusalem," with such energy did they wield the sword of the Spirit, that at the close of their first day's labours, three thousand converts stood up to testify that Jesus of Nazareth, whom their rulers "had taken and with wicked hands had crucified and slain," was, indeed, their promised Messiah — "THE MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER, THE PRINCE OF PEACE." This resplendent victory achieved, they scattered abroad through all the circumjacent regions, sowing broad-cast the seed of the incorruptible word. They erected no altars. They consecrated no priests. They offered no sacrifices. They bade no Israelite go up to Jerusalem to worship. No utterance fell from their lips about the sanctity of the temple, or the efficacy of its rites. Spurning the swaddling-bands of the old economy, they neither con-

fined their ministrations to "holy places," nor restricted them to the chosen people. They preached, indifferently, in the synagogues and in the streets, in prisons and in palaces, in the desert and on the strand, to the Macedonian women by the river-side at Philippi, and to the sages of Athens on the crest of the Areopagus. And so far from offering *themselves* as "mediators" with God, to replace the now abrogated priesthood of the house of Aaron, there was nothing they repelled with such instinctive horror, as any attempt to exalt them to this dignity or to pay them sacerdotal homage. (See Acts iii. 12; x. 25, 26; xiv. 11-18.) They constantly proclaimed, that he who planted was *nothing*, and he who watered, *nothing*; and that to trust in them or their ministrations, was to dishonour their Master. Their one grand, absorb-

ing, delightful theme, was "JESUS CHRIST AND HE CRUCIFIED." Their only aim was so to exalt the Saviour of the world, that they and their gifts and miracles should be lost sight of. Jesus Christ as the only PRIEST, the only ALTAR, the only SACRIFICE, the only INTERCESSOR, of the new dispensation — this was the burden of their teachings, in all lands and with people of every faith and every school of philosophy. Addressing themselves to the universal necessity of the race, they hastened from city to city, and from province to province, crying, "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD." The slumbering nations were stirred by the unwonted sound to their lowest depths; and the victory of Pentecost, repeated in different and distant lands, authenticated the doctrine as divine, and confounded those who would have

impeached the one exclusive, unchangeable, and efficacious Priesthood of Jesus Christ in the New Testament Church.

We appeal, then, to the entire structure of the New Testament, and especially to the absence of all sacerdotal terms and titles as applied to the office-bearers in the Church, as our first argument to prove that the CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS NOT A PRIESTHOOD.

Our second argument has just been hinted. The doctrine of an official human priesthood in the Church, *is in a high degree derogatory to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only priest of the new dispensation.*

No one imbued with a becoming reverence for the Deity, would permit himself to disparage the Levitical economy. That economy was impressed with the wisdom and goodness which mark all the Divine institutions. Not

only was the sacerdotal element which pervaded it, in harmony with its general theocratic character, but it was indispensable to the fulfilment of its ends, as a preliminary and typical dispensation. Its priesthood was a real priesthood, and, within the prescribed sphere, their rites had a genuine efficacy — *because* they pointed to the great High-Priest and the true sacrifice.

But what place is there for an earthly priesthood *now*? The antitype has appeared. The victim has been slain. The High-Priest, heralded by the long succession of Aaronic priests, and by all the sacrifices which smoked on Patriarchal and Jewish altars, during the lapse of forty centuries, has died for his people, and risen again, and now intercedes for and reigns over them. What room is there for another priest? What remains for a priest to do? What

powers can he exercise, what offices can he perform, without invading CHRIST'S prerogative and impugning the perfection of his Priesthood?

This is the unanswerable argument of the apostle, in resisting the Levitical tendencies of the Hebrew converts, and the proud assumptions of the priests who still clung to the ancient ritual. In opposition to their conceits, he contrasts with the number and succession of the Jewish priests, and the frequency, variety, and mere ceremonial value of their offerings, the glorious High-Priest of the Gospel, his Divinity, his holiness, his immutability, his immortality, the efficacy of his sacrifice and the prevalence of his intercession. And he shows, with a massive logic impregnable to all cavillers, that the Priesthood of Christ had superseded the priesthood of Aaron, and that it was

impossible to amalgamate the sacerdotal ritualism of the temple, with the free worship of the Christian sanctuary.

His great argument on this subject must be too familiar to this venerable Assembly, to make specific quotations necessary. If that argument was conclusive as against Levitical zealots, it is no less conclusive as against the innovators of later times, who would turn our sanctuaries into "temples," reconstruct the decayed altars of Judaism, thrust the ministry of reconciliation into the place of the one Mediator between God and man, and bring back upon the Church the dimness and the uncertainty and the fearfulness of her childhood, in place of the effulgence which streams down upon her from the full-orbed glories of her meridian sun. For what less than this has been done

by the Papal and Oriental hierarchies? And what less are those semi-papists aiming at, who would unprotestantize the churches of the Reformation, by transmuting the ministry into a sacerdotal order, and clothing them with the attributes of an official mediatorship between their fellow-sinners and the Creator?—"Brethren, we are *not* children of the bond-woman, but of the free. Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

In the third place, the Scriptures exclude this theory, by teaching *that men may come to Christ and be accepted by him, without the intervention of any human mediator.**

In the mouths of professed Protestants, who hold the sacerdotal theory

* See *Bib. Repertory*, vol. xvii. 52.

of the ministry in its mildest form, it means, "ministerial intervention that sins may be forgiven."* This, it is alleged, is "the essence of priesthood;" and this is declared to be indispensable under the present economy. If it were simply designed to teach, by this language, that in the ordinary administration of his government over the Church, God is pleased to employ the agency of the ministry in bringing men into a state of salvation, there would be no room for controversy. But this is not the idea. It is intended that the Christian ministry occupy a position analogous to that of the Aaronic priests: that like the latter, God has constituted them a sacred *caste* to stand between himself and our race; that he has made it obligatory upon all men to ap-

* See Bishop Whittingham's "*Two Discourses on the Priesthood in the Church.*"

proach him *through them*; that he will accept the worship of a sinner only as *they* present it, and that however humble, penitent and devout may be his spirit, he has no more ground to expect forgiveness and renewal, so long as he refuses to avail himself of their mediation, than a Jew would have had to expect his sin-offering to be accepted, who, instead of bringing his victim to the priest, sacrificed it with his own hand upon his own altar. *This* is the doctrine. And if it be not clearly "another gospel," it will at least be difficult to show how the fundamental truths of the gospel can coalesce with it.

That man is unworthy in himself to come before God, is a truth which all religions recognize. He must approach him through a Mediator. Christianity meets this necessity of his lapsed condition, by providing a Mediator; one

whose mysterious constitution and wonderful experience invest him with all the qualifications requisite for this exalted office. But the scheme we are examining, superinduces upon this principle, another which is unknown to the gospel, and, if carried out, subversive of it. It claims that we can approach the Mediator himself, only through *another* mediator; that this second mediator is as essential to present our worship to the first, as the first is to present it to the Father; and that as the Father will accept those only who come to him in the name of Christ, so Christ will receive only those who come to *him* through the intervention of a human priest. The bare statement of this flagrant heresy must revolt any intelligent auditory not already steeped in Romish errors. One is at a loss how to stigmatize it; whether as more

derogatory to the Saviour, or more discouraging and tyrannical towards man. To exhibit in detail its contrariety to the whole scope and tenor of the New Testament, would call for a recital of a large part of the volume. When we examine the four Evangelists, we constantly find the Saviour inviting sinners to come directly to Him. When we turn to the book of Acts and the Epistles, we hear the Apostles, with one voice, addressing people of all tongues and nations, repeating the same lesson: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Never do they say, "Come to *us* and we will obtain forgiveness for you." If the Apostle had said, (observes Augustine), "These things have I written unto you, that you should not sin, but if any man sin you have me for a mediator, and I, by

my prayer, obtain pardon for your sins, as, in a certain place, Parmenian placed the bishop to be a mediator between the people and God; what good and faithful Christian could abide him? Who would behold him as an Apostle of Christ, and not as an anti-Christ."

Intercessory prayer is undoubtedly one of the duties of the ministry. But it is no less a duty common to all Christians. The command is, "Pray one for another." And while the apostles are earnest in praying for their converts, they are importunate in desiring their converts to pray for them. It were as reasonable, therefore, to argue that the *people* must interpose to give effect to the prayers of the ministry, as to pretend that the ministry are the only authorized medium through which the people can approach God.

This so-called priesthood must come

to God through the advocacy of Jesus Christ; their own application is to the Mediator. Why should not the laity do the same? Why may they not as well make their suit directly to Christ as to a human priest? Is the latter more benevolent, more pitiful, more willing to hear them, better able to help them? The bare suggestion were impious. It is the glory of the Christian dispensation, that it brings God *near* to us. The veil of the temple has been rent, and the holy of holies laid open. In place of that awful shrine, to which the high-priest alone was admitted, and even he only once a year, and with rites adapted to strike terror through all hearts, the infinite One has stooped to our weaknesses, and manifested Himself in the flesh. Assuming our nature into an indissoluble union with his own, he dwelt among us,

shared in our toils, fought with our temptations, drank of the cup of our sorrows, associated with the humblest of the race, bore with their infirmities, healed their diseases, wept with them in their afflictions, and allowed no measure of degradation or depravity to exclude them from his sympathy. During the whole of his public ministry "he went about doing good." The common people, long accustomed to the contempt of the Scribes and Pharisees, and to the tyranny of their Romish task-masters, "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." They were not used to kindness. Still less were they used to a teacher, who could not only abate or remove their bodily sufferings, but go down into the lowest depths of their experience, and supply the restless craving of their moral and sentient na-

ture for some satisfying good. They gathered around him, therefore, wherever he went. They followed him to the mountain and the desert. They even intruded upon his hours of sacred retirement and needful repose. And he bore with it all. He requited their importunity with miracles of mercy, and ceased not to counsel and comfort them, until he sealed his love for them with his death.

This is the Saviour who, as we are now told, can be approached only through an earthly priesthood! Men who claim to be "successors of the apostles" in office and prerogative, arrogate a power which the apostles themselves would not have dared to assume. Think of the twelve interposing themselves between their Master and one of these groups of anxious and suffering Israelites, and saying to them, "What will

you? If you have any request to prefer to him, it must be done through us. Be it healing, pardon, instruction, whatever you desire, *we* must present the application, or he will not heed it." Were a passage like this found in any portion of the New Testament, the very instinct of every reader of the sacred volume would pronounce it a vulgar and profane interpolation. There was a single occasion on which some of the apostles did undertake, not to do a thing so audacious as this, but to prevent a company of parents from bringing their children to Christ; and the manner in which he resented and reproved their officiousness, supplies one of the earliest and sweetest lessons we learn about the Saviour: "*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" Can he feel it as a

less indignity to himself, that the men he has appointed to feed and govern his flock, should thrust themselves in between Him and their fellow-sinners, and say to them, "You cannot come to Christ, nor will he forgive and accept you, unless *we* present your repentance and your prayers, and intercede for you?"

Let no one say that this is to disparage the functions of the ministry and the ordinances of the Church. Those ordinances are means of grace, and it is through the labours of the ministry that men are usually led to Christ. But what we protest against is, the Levitical notion that the ministers of the gospel are official mediators between God and man, through whom alone there can be any access to the Deity. We brand this dogma as contravening the express teachings of the New Testa-

ment, which invites and requires men to look directly to Christ for the pardon of sin and all other blessings.

The validity of this argument will further appear when it is considered that the sacerdotal theory of the Christian ministry *is subversive of all true views of the nature and design of the Church.*

It has been repeatedly intimated that the doctrine of an official human priesthood in the Church, is interlaced with a corresponding hypothesis as to the nature and functions of the Church itself. The Church, according to this system, is a Hierarchy. It consists of a single society, (now unhappily in a somewhat divided state,) placed under the government of Diocesan Bishops, who derive their authority from Christ, through an unbroken prelatical succession. These bishops, indeed, with the

inferior clergy, properly *constitute* the Church — the *people* being a mere appendage to the ministry. For the doctrine that the clergy are a priesthood, carries with it the prerogative of exclusive mediation. But to assume to be the only mediators between God and the *Church*, would have been too glaring a usurpation of Christ's office, to be ventured upon in the early stage of this heresy. The *Church*, however, might mediate between God and the *people*, and so the clergy gradually transformed their "order" into "the Church." To this Church are confided the gifts of salvation. It stands in the place, and is clothed with the authority of Christ, as his Vicar. It is the storehouse of grace, and this grace it communicates through the sacraments, which must be duly administered by sacerdotal hands. In baptism, sinners

are regenerated, and by the eucharist, in which the faithful partake of the real body and blood of Christ, they have their forgiveness sealed to them. Non-prelatical societies form no part of the Church, but are schismatical organizations; and no one who declines the jurisdiction of the hierarchy, can have any scriptural evidence that he is in the way of salvation.

The priesthood being the stewards of the grace deposited in this "storehouse," they dispense it exclusively through the sacraments. "We have almost embraced the doctrine," says a writer of this school, "that God conveys grace only through the instrumentality of the mental energies, *i. e.* through faith, prayer, active spiritual contemplations, or, *what is called* 'communion with God,' in contradiction to the primitive view, according to which the church

and her sacraments are the ordained and direct means of conveying to the soul what is in itself supernatural and unseen.”* “These powers of the church,” another eminent apologist of the system has observed, “are very great — they are even awful; if not conferred by God, they are blasphemously assumed by man. The power of communicating to man the divine nature itself, of bringing down the Deity from heaven, of infusing the Spirit into the souls of miserable mortals — this, which is nothing more than the every-day promise of the church, every time that the priest stands at the font or ministers at the altar — is so awful and so tremendous, that we scarcely dare to read it, except in familiar words which scarcely touch the ear.” †

* Oxford Tracts, Vol. II., Preface.

† Professor Sewell.

“Awful and tremendous” these powers are; and we agree with the writer, that “if not conferred by God, they are blasphemously assumed by man.” — That the scheme is one which first converts the church into a lordly and oppressive hierarchy, and then puts it in Christ’s place, must be too apparent to require argument. “It is to confound the means of grace with the Author of grace; to worship the thing made and dishonour the Maker. It is to array against Christ the instrumentality which he has established against Satan.”* And all this is the legitimate result of the dogma, that the Christian ministry is a priesthood.

For if the ministry be a priesthood, having special access to God, the accredited intercessors of the laity, and

* The Bishop of Chester, now Archbishop of Canterbury.

the sole dispensers of salvation, the tree has but yielded its proper fruit. It was the gradual assumption of these prerogatives which issued in the establishment of that great anti-Christian corporation, whose usurpations and crimes make up so large a portion of the history of the civilized world, for the last twelve centuries. The same spirit in England forged the chains of the Puritans, and in Scotland shed the blood of the Covenanters like water. In this country it has displayed itself in the glorification of the "Church" at the expense of her Divine Head, in a growing sycophancy on the part of many of the subordinate clergy towards their Bishops, and in refusing to recognize as veritable members of Christ's mystical body, Churches imbued with Christ's Spirit, and laden with those fruits of holiness which are the only incontestable marks

of His presence. These are the natural, not to say the unavoidable, fruits of a system, which teaches that the few hundred prelatically ordained ministers in the United States, are the only channel through which the twenty-five millions of people who make up this nation, can have any "covenanted" access to God. Just in proportion as these extravagant pretensions come to be acquiesced in, will the experience of past ages be repeated; and petty Hildebrands and Lauds will appear, not, happily, in *this* country, to dethrone rulers and *empillory* heretics, but to hurl opprobrious epithets at Churches which give palpable demonstration that the Spirit of God dwells in them.

I repeat it: ambition and imperiousness on the part of the clergy, the multiplication of rites and ceremonies, the substitution of a sacramental for a spi-

ritual religion, and the progressive deterioration of the Church in all its attributes, are but the logical development of that noxious germ, that the ministry is a sacerdotal order: and they may suffice as so many illustrations of the sentiment, that this theory is subversive of all true views of the nature and design of the Church. "The whole system (I quote the language of the able and eloquent Bishop of the Diocese of Ohio), is one of Church instead of Christ, priest instead of gospel, concealment of truth instead of manifestation of truth, ignorant superstition instead of enlightened faith, bondage where we are promised liberty — all tending directly to load us with whatever is odious in the worst meaning of priestcraft, in place of the free, affectionate, enlarging, elevating, and cheerful liberty of a child of God."*

* Bishop M'Ilvaine's *Charge*, 1843.

It follows from all that has been said, and is urged as another prime objection to this sacerdotal theory, that *it is fraught with ruin to the souls of men.*

The allegation that the tendency of this system is to make men depend upon the priest for salvation, will be met with a volley of caveats and disclaimers. "Nothing of this sort," we shall be told, "is inculcated or encouraged: all are admonished that the offices of the clergy cannot avail to their benefit, without their own faith and repentance." — This may be said with perfect sincerity. But it is the actual tendency of the system with which we are now dealing: and in this view, it presents, as we contend, this pregnant issue, to wit: the religion of the priest *or* the religion of the sinner.

It has been justly observed that "mankind have an innate propensity,

as to other errors, so to that of endeavouring to serve God by proxy; to commit to some distinct order of men the care of their religious concerns, in the same manner as they confide the care of their bodily health to the physician, and of their legal transactions to the lawyer; deeming it sufficient to follow implicitly their directions without attempting themselves to become acquainted with the *mysteries* of medicine or of law. Even thus are they willing and desirous that others should study and should understand the mysterious doctrines of religion in their stead; should practise in their stead some more exalted kind of piety and virtue; and should offer prayers and sacrifices on their behalf, both in their life-time and after their death. . . . Hence, the gradual transformation of the Christian minister, the presbyter, into the sacri-

ficing priest, the ἱερεὺς (in Latin, “sacerdos,” as the Romans call theirs), of the Jewish and Pagan religions.”*

Human nature is the same in all countries and communions. Everywhere it is more or less infected with this craving after a vicarious religion: and the sacerdotal theory, however it may be mollified and disguised, meets its requisitions. For even in the mitigated form in which it is now propounded to the Protestant world, this scheme converts Christianity, as we have shown, into a sacramental system. In the New Testament, the *word* of God is made the chief instrument in the conversion and sanctification of men. The *great* function assigned to the Apostles, and to the ministers appointed to succeed them, was “not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

* Archbishop Whately: “*Errors of Romanism.*”

And divine *truth* is uniformly recognized as the principal means through which the Almighty Spirit recovers men from their apostacy and prepares them for heaven.

The scheme we are examining reverses this order, and substitutes the *sacraments* for the word. The preaching of the gospel is systematically disparaged. The pulpit is thrust into a corner, to give place to the communion-table, now transformed into an "altar." The gifts of grace are deposited in baptism and the Lord's Supper; and it is only by receiving these ordinances at the hands of the duly authorized *priesthood*, that sinners can be regenerated and made partakers of a true faith. What sound the pulpit utters, or whether any sound at all, is of little moment; the whole interest of "priest" and people being concentrated, where, if the

theory be well founded, it certainly should be, upon the font and the "altar."

Let the clergy refine upon the terms they apply to these ordinances as they choose: the actual impression made upon the popular mind will be, that the sacraments are invested with a sort of intrinsic efficacy which insures the renewal and justification of those who partake of them.

When Charles II., was dying, his brother James surreptitiously brought into the room Father Huddleston, a Benedictine monk. "Sire," said he to the king, "this good man once saved your life; [at the battle of Worcester,] he now comes *to save your soul.*" Charles faintly answered, "He is welcome." Huddleston went through his part better than had been expected. He knelt by the bed, listened to the con-

profession, pronounced the absolution, and administered extreme unction. He asked if the king wished to receive the Lord's Supper.—“Surely,” said Charles, “if I am not unworthy.”—The host was brought in. Charles feebly strove to rise and kneel before it. The priest bade him lie still; and assured him, that God would accept the humiliation of the body. The king found so much difficulty in swallowing the bread, that it was necessary to open the door and to procure a glass of water. This rite ended, the monk held up a crucifix before the penitent, charged him to fix his last thoughts on the sufferings of the Redeemer, and withdrew.*

This scene might well supply the theme for an extended discourse. But the one aspect of it with which we are

* See Macaulay, and the “*Pictorial History of England.*”

now concerned, is, that the monk was brought to the expiring voluptuary to "save his soul," and that he as readily gave himself up into his hands to be saved by him. Charles went through the form of a confession: but beyond this, he had nothing to do. The whole work of his salvation was effected, *if effected at all*, by the priest. And thus, one of the most shameless sensualists who ever sat on the British throne, surrounded at the very moment by his whole harem of concubines, was dismissed into the world of spirits, with the feeling, that the manipulations and benisons of a friar had cleansed his leprous soul and made him meet to appear before a holy God!

If this be an extreme case, it is only because the rank and the vices of Charles make it so. Wherever a sacerdotal system is established, the

sentiment will prevail, that the priest can "save the soul." There will be a disposition to look to the priest, instead of looking to Christ; a superstitious reliance upon the sacraments; a feeling that, to receive baptism and the eucharist from the hands of an ecclesiastic in the line of the "succession," is *somehow* to secure the remission of sin and the favour of heaven. Undoubtedly these ordinances are of very great value. They are channels through which God is accustomed to communicate grace to the hearts of his people. And every believer knows what comfort and strength may be derived from a penitent and devout attendance upon them. But the sacerdotal system, practically and as regards the masses of the people, puts the priest and the sacraments in the place of the true Mediator. Multitudes come to them, it is to be feared,

like the royal libertine just mentioned, with a blind faith, expecting to be saved, as the Hindoos and all Pagans do, through the *opus operatum* of rites which the priest celebrates *for* them; and utterly uninstructed in the real grounds of a sinner's justification before God. We do not hesitate, therefore, to urge it as a capital objection to the system, that it is adapted to mislead men in the matter of their salvation, and destroy them eternally.

Such are some of the grounds on which we discard the heresy of an official human priesthood in the Christian Church. This dogma *is at variance with the whole structure of the New Testament, and is especially disproved by the absence of all sacerdotal terms and titles, as applied to the ministers of the gospel.*

It is in a high degree derogatory to

the one perfect and unchangeable Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It contravenes the emphatic teaching of the Scriptures, that every sinner is authorized to come directly to Christ for pardon, without the intervention of any earthly mediator.

It is subversive of all true views of the nature and design of the Church.

And it is fraught with ruin to the souls of men.

In denying that the Christian ministry is a priesthood, we surrender nothing of the honour which properly belongs to it, and make no compromise of its chartered rights and privileges. We do not for one moment give place to those persons who, going off to the opposite extreme, maintain that Christ has instituted no permanent *ministry* in the Church, and made no provision for the orderly induction of men into

this office. For, not to advert to other elements of proof, we cannot understand how an apostle should have written three epistles for the express purpose of defining the office and functions of a "Bishop," if no such office was created.

What the office is, is a question on which the Christian world has been divided, from a period a little subsequent to the apostolic age until now. As already stated, the theories respecting the form or *constitution* of the ministry, are as conflicting as those which pertain to its nature. There is, however, at the present time, a very general and very significant concurrence of sentiment in the different branches of the Church, as to the import of the New Testament utterances, in all that it says on the subject of "Bishops." Even those who contend for a prelati-

cal order in the Church, concede that *their* bishops are not the bishops mentioned in the inspired writings. "The name bishop," says the late Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, in his tract on this subject, "which now designates the highest grade of the ministry, is not appropriated to that office in Scripture. That name is there given to the middle order, or presbyters: and ALL that we read in the New Testament concerning bishops, (including, of course, the words 'overseers' and 'oversight,' which have the same derivation,) is to be regarded as pertaining to that middle grade." The great mass of the Reformed churches—including, too, the best of the English Reformers—not only adopted this view as to the rank of the scriptural "bishop," but contended that this order, styled indifferently by the sacred penmen, "bishops" and "presby-

ters," was the highest, and indeed the only, grade of ministers instituted by Christ as a *permanent* order in the Church. The leading arguments in support of this view, must be familiar to every intelligent Presbyterian, and the time forbids me to go into the discussion of the topic here. Let it suffice to know, that when the apostle says, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," he refers to that office which *we* all recognize as the chief office in the Church—to the bishop of a single congregation, not to a diocesan bishop.

Why the office he mentions is a "GOOD WORK," might be shown by numerous cogent arguments. Most of these, however, must be omitted; and all should be, were it not that some may suppose, that the tendency of this discourse, so far, has been to depreciate

the sacred office, and divest it of powers which really belong to it. But there is no occasion for any sensitiveness on this point. Nothing can damage the ministry so much as the usurpation of prerogatives and functions to which it has no valid claim. It is the lordly pretensions of an ambitious "priesthood," which brings the ministry into disrepute, and fills churches with formalists and hypocrites. By far other means than these, must the ministry conciliate the respect and confidence of the world. Viewed in its scriptural nature, and as fulfilling its prescribed mission, "the office of a bishop" is one of pre-eminent honour—in the highest and best sense of the terms, "a GOOD WORK."

In the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, we are presented with the brightest display of the Divine perfections, which has been made to the in-

telligent universe. The CHURCH, which is the fruit of the Redeemer's sufferings, has been, from the period of Adam's apostasy, the great object of regard to the angelic hosts, and to Jehovah himself. Not only is there no earthly institution which rivals it in this view, but all human affairs, from the rise and overthrow of dynasties, to the familiar incidents in every household history, are to be made tributary to its welfare, and subservient to its ultimate triumph. God has linked his own glory with its destiny, and ordained it as the means by which his manifold wisdom shall be made known to principalities and powers in heavenly places. To the MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION, He has committed the chief earthly agency in working out for the Church this sublime mission. They are its principal officers, to whom he has delegated, in

common with the Christian people, the actual oversight and government of its affairs. And to them is confided that ministration of his word and ordinances, by which he has chosen mainly to enlarge and perpetuate it. Without granting them any peculiar and exclusive access to his throne; without constituting them mediators between Himself and their fellow-men; without investing them with the least efficiency in themselves, or tying the gifts of his grace indissolubly to their functions; without giving them power so much as to "make one hair white or black," much less to effect a sacerdotal expiation or absolution in behalf of a single sinner, he has nevertheless placed them in his Church as under-shepherds, and honoured them as his prime instruments in conveying pardon and deliverance to a ruined race.

They are his *pastors*, to “seek that which is lost, to strengthen the diseased, to heal the sick, to bring back again that which was driven away.” They are his *stewards*, “faithful and wise,” to dispense the inexhaustible provisions of his house to his ransomed family. They are his *watchmen*, to warn the slumbering city of impending danger; his *labourers*, to tend the harvest and gather it into his garners; his *ambassadors*, to negotiate a peace with a revolted race; his *master-builders*, to carry forward, with living stones, the temple of the Lord, until at length the top-stone shall be laid with shoutings of “Grace, Grace, unto it.” — Is there any other office clothed with functions at once so beneficent and so exalted as these? which brings worms of the dust into a more sacred and intimate relation to the Deity? or which is more

legibly inscribed with that most honourable and sublime of all legends, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST; ON EARTH, PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN?"

For, consider, on the latter of these topics, whether there is any office more vitally connected with *the well being of our race*, than that of a "bishop" or *pastor*. His vocation is *to do good*. Doing good is not with him (I mean according to the spirit of his commission), an incidental and contingent thing; it is his business — his "*work*," — the very end for which he is made a "bishop." He is called to the god-like service of scattering blessings all around his pathway through life,—not blessings of his own, but handfuls of priceless gifts which it would degrade, to compare them with rubies and diamonds; and these he throws broad-cast, "without money and without price,"

among the thoughtless, the abandoned, and the lost. The ministry of such a man in a community is like a fountain in a desert—like the sun in the heavens. Healthful influences radiate from it in every direction. Whatever is evil, it helps to eradicate or restrain; whatever is good it fosters and augments. It not only assists the wandering in finding the way to heaven, but it tells with a benign though silent power, upon every social and secular interest. Its influence distils like the dew. Too subtle to be traced by any eye but that of Omniscience, it permeates the tangled thicket of human sympathies, passions, cares and contests, and, with a wondrous vitality, nurtures all pure emotions, quickens the germs of virtuous feeling, and imperceptibly spreads over the crude and repulsive mass, a garniture of celestial flowers beautiful enough

for angels to stop and look upon, and redolent of heaven. This is not fiction, but sober reality. For wherever there is a faithful ministry, these salutary changes are going forward. And the annals of the last eighteen hundred years may be confidently appealed to in proof of the position, that such a ministry is not merely the potent auxiliary, but the harbinger and instrument, of all true social progress; and that just in proportion as a people enjoy and appreciate its labours, do they advance in the arts and appliances of a refined civilization. Nor this alone. Its chief benefits are not those which meet the eye, as we contrast the school-houses and churches, the ships and factories, the grain-clad fields and smiling hamlets, the happy homes and peaceful populations of a free, Protestant land, with the ignorance, brutality and

wretchedness which overspread a pagan country. Its highest and richest blessings are *invisible*. They are the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. The prison doors opened to them that were bound, the blind restored to sight, the dead made alive, rebels pardoned, aliens brought back to God, apostates changed into sons, earth and heaven reconciled, hell vanquished, angels rejoicing, and all things hastening forward to that glorious consummation, when the Saviour of the world, crowned with his many crowns, shall come to "present his Church to himself, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish," —*these* are the munificent results which it has pleased God to connect with the labours of a sound and evangelical ministry. And when we contemplate them, remembering especially that it will take

eternity to disclose their real grandeur; and that we cannot, in our present imperfect state, grasp the issues involved even in the salvation of a single soul, we feel that the office which is clothed with the chief instrumental agency in bringing about these results, well deserves to be signalized as "a good work;" and that meekly and worthily to bear it, were a greater honour than to wear a diadem.

I omit the remaining topics proper to this branch of the subject, and hasten to conclude this too protracted discourse, by stating two or three only of the various reflections suggested by the discussion with which we have been occupied.

1. We are admonished of *the danger of innovating upon Christ's institutions.*

Our Saviour appointed twelve men,

to whom subsequently he added another, as his Apostles. The apostolic office being temporary, (as can be shown by ample evidence,) they appointed, under the authority with which they were clothed, other officers as permanent rulers and teachers of the Church. The principal of these was the presbyter or *bishop*. The bishops were of equal rank; their power was simply ministerial and declarative; and they were sent forth, not to offer sacrifices, but to preach the gospel.

Scarcely were the Apostles laid in their graves, before contests for the pre-eminence arose among these bishops. As those who held the metropolitan and other influential churches, succeeded in subjecting their obscurer brethren to their control, the theory was by degrees invented and propagated that the ministry had been established with

“three orders,” instead of one. Nor did the encroachment upon the primitive polity stop with this change in its external form. A “priesthood” could wield more *power* than a “ministry.” The Levitical scheme was, therefore, re-enacted; and the ministry stood before the world a *sacerdotal* order, armed with plenary authority as the priests of the Most High God, and charged, provisionally, with the salvation or perdition of the race.

The introduction of this element into the Church could not fail to tell with disastrous effect upon its character. There is no peculiarity of the apostolic church more marked than its *simplicity*. Simple in its organization, simple in its sacraments, simple in its worship, simple in the whole cast and tone of its ministrations, its Doric plainness and dignity were in striking contrast with

the gorgeous ceremonial of the temple. But this attribute could not cohere with a sacerdotal system. The embryo priests, therefore, addressed themselves to the work of *reform*. And with such vigour have their successors carried forward the work, that the Church they have made, is as unlike the Church organized by the Apostles, as this latter was unlike the Church of the Theocracy. The simplest of institutes has been transformed into a gigantic hierarchy, the complexity and magnificence of whose outward structure is in startling contrast with the spiritual penury of its interior — a sphere of crystals enclosing a lump of clay.

Let not the lesson be lost upon the present generation. These disastrous results can all be traced back to apparently trivial deviations from the apostolic teaching and order, in the primi-

tive Church. Like two brooks which have contiguous sources, the false and the true imperceptibly diverged from each other, until their respective currents came to be established in precisely opposite directions. And it behoves all churches to consider that their purity and safety lie, under God, in a scrupulous adherence, as well in government and worship as in doctrine, to the canons of the New Testament. Innovations conceded, in the first instance, to a fastidious or perverted popular taste, may come, after a while, like the obsolete rites revived in the second century, to be challenged as of Divine appointment. And a Church which forsook its Lord to make his religion more palatable to the world, may find itself, in the end, indissolubly wedded to the world and repudiated by its Lord. "The Lord is with you while ye be

with him : and if ye seek him, he will be found of you : but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.”

2. It is evident that *the ruling elder-ship and the laity in general, have a vital interest in preserving the integrity and purity of the ministry.*

The ministry was instituted, not for the ease or aggrandizement of those who might be appointed to discharge its functions, but for the glory of God and the good of mankind. And as no other office may compare with it for usefulness, when kept within its legitimate sphere, so there is none which, debased and prostituted, is so fruitful of mischief. Spurning the petty tyranny of the dungeon and the stake, this agency is one which deals out damnation to men's souls. It may even be doubted whether, confining the remark to Christendom, any single instrumentality has

consigned more victims to perdition, than that of incompetent, faithless, and heretical ministers.

Your concern, therefore, in the character of the ministry, is direct and profound. It is of the last moment to you, that it be orthodox, pure, intelligent, faithful. And you have a deep stake in understanding what its nature and authority are; what it was ordained to do in the matter of your salvation, and what it *cannot* do. It behoves you to know that we have no sacerdotal powers; that the sacraments we administer have no inherent efficacy to wash away your sins and insure your justification; that there is no atonement for you but in the blood of the cross, and no absolution but that which God pronounces; that neither by ceremonial expurgation nor official intercession, can we shield you from the curse of the law; that you

are to rely upon the messages we deliver only in so far as you find them in harmony with the Scriptures; that our whole office is to stand like John the Baptist, and cry, "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD;" and that if you do not look in penitence and faith to the Lamb of God, you may spend a lifetime in attending upon the pompous rites of a Roman cathedral, or in listening to the most eloquent discourses from a Protestant pulpit, and go down at length to a deeper hell than Sodom and Gomorrah.

These things it is meet you should know, and ponder with all the seriousness which befits such momentous themes. And if a ministry should rise up and gainsay these truths, and arrogate the powers here disclaimed, and invite you to trust for the remission of your sins and the cleansing of your hearts, to rites they will perform for you,

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and, in a word, propose to take your salvation into their hands, then consider well whether you are to countenance these sacerdotal empirics, and throw away your souls on the preposterous assumption that you can repent and believe, and be regenerated and saved, by proxy!

Surely, to be indifferent to the ministry, either as regards its alleged powers, or its qualifications, is to betray your own highest interests. What the essential qualifications of the office are, the apostle has set forth in the Epistles to those young Evangelists, Timothy and Titus; and his exposition may be supplemented from the other books of the New Testament. Bishop Ken has shown himself a skilful limner in bringing together these various features as constituting the portrait of a true bishop or pastor:—

“Give me the priest* these graces shall possess :
Of an ambassador, the first address ;
A father’s tenderness ; a shepherd’s care ;
A leader’s courage, which the cross can bear ;
A ruler’s awe ; a watchman’s wakeful eye ;
A pilot’s skill the helm in storms to ply ;
A fisher’s patience, and a labourer’s toil ;
A guide’s dexterity to disembroil ;
A prophet’s inspiration from above ;
A teacher’s knowledge, and a Saviour’s love.”

These are the gifts to be desired in a pastor. It would be going too far to say that no one should assume the office who comes short of this standard in any particular. But it is the right and duty of the laity, and of the eldership as their representatives, to insist that the ministry shall at least possess the general character here delineated. This reasonable requisition will best insure the fidelity of your pastors, and your own spiritual comfort and edification.

3. Finally, the subject with which

* Used in the sense of presbyter.

we have been occupied, has its *lessons, both of instruction and of encouragement, for our beloved Church.*

It is our privilege, my Fathers and Brethren, to belong to a Church which has always guarded, with jealous care, both the regal and the sacerdotal prerogatives of her Divine Head. In her loyalty to the State, she has uniformly inculcated upon her members the duty of rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. But she has resisted all attempts of the civil magistracy to usurp the power of the keys, or to impugn, in whatever way, the supremacy of Christ in his own spiritual kingdom.

With no less energy has she asserted the one perfect, exclusive, and unchangeable PRIESTHOOD of her Redeemer. In all her confessions and symbols has she protested against the doctrine of an earthly mediatorship between God and

man; and with no uncertain sound, have her pulpits vindicated the honours of the Great High Priest of our Profession, whether as usurped by Papal, by Oriental, or by so-called Protestant ecclesiastics.

In the faithful maintenance of these two fundamental principles, it has been given to some of our sister churches in Europe, in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer* for his sake. They have "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment," and of death itself; yet, have they "not counted their lives dear unto them, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Inheriting their apostolic faith and order, and emulating their devotion to Him who sits, "a Priest upon his throne,"

on the holy hill of Zion, our Church has, like them, enjoyed, in an eminent degree, the gracious presence and protection of her Lord. He brought it here in its feebleness. He cast out the heathen and planted it. He prepared room before it, and caused it to take deep root; and it filled the land. The hills are covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof are like the goodly cedars. She has sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Upon no other church of our age has God bestowed so rich a heritage; to none has he confided a loftier mission. The largest Presbyterian body in the world, covering an expanse of territory which assimilates our General Assembly to Congress itself, as a national convocation, supplied with a thoroughly educated and evangelical ministry, endowed with the amplest resources of every kind, and with a noble

equipment of benevolent agencies for developing and applying these resources in the most effective manner — where should our *gratitude* find a limit, or who shall define the measure of our responsibility?

Let us not forget, in the interchange of our grateful congratulations, that prosperity like this is fraught with *danger* as well to churches as to individuals. Through the abounding goodness of God, we are a united body; not only homogeneous in faith and polity, but substantially agreed in the principles and plans upon which our high trust shall be administered. Let it be the care of this venerable Court, to foster the sentiments of conciliation and Christian affection, which now pervade and cement our great constituency. Let us discountenance whatever may tend to “cause divisions and offences” amongst us, as we would the introduction of

false doctrine. Let us cherish a profound and abiding sense of our absolute dependence upon God for every blessing. And let us never forget that the true glory of the Church consists, not in her wealth and her numbers, in the pomp of her ministrations and the splendor of her outward triumphs, but in her bearing **THE IMAGE OF HER LORD**, and reflecting the beauty of his **HOLINESS**.

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Thus may our beloved Church be perpetuated, as a sacred bond of union to our national confederacy; as an impregnable bulwark against the aggressions of philosophic scepticism and social demoralization; as an intrepid witness to the glorious sovereignty and sole Priesthood of Jesus Christ; and as an humble but faithful instrument in the hands of her risen Lord, for preaching the gospel to every creature.



