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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT
A sermon...March 22, 1870.

by

W. C. Dana

With a report to Presbytery,

by

John Forrest.



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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CHARLESTON UNION PRESBYTERY,

MARCH 22, 1870.

By ^{William} W. C. ^{Coombes} DANA,

PASTOR OF THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

WITH A

REPORT TO PRESBYTERY,

By JOHN FORREST, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

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SERMON.

1 COR. xii, 28.—“ And God hath set some in the Church: first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

This is the only passage in the New Testament that declares certain officers to be in the Church, and their relative rank settled, by Divine appointment. The Apostle here not only tells us that “ God hath set some in the Church,” but also tells us in what order he hath set them.

They are set in three classes. The first class comprehends all ministers of the Gospel, and no others. In this class are three orders or ranks: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, *teachers*; this last term designating all uninspired official teachers, in distinction from apostles and prophets, who were inspired ministers of the Word.

Separated from this first class by the words “ after that,” is a second class—the workers of miracles. This honor is done to the Gospel of Christ, that even its uninspired ministers rank above the workers of miracles. For miracles but attest the Christian doctrine as divine; while the doctrine itself is “ the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” “ And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

After this second class, and separated from it by the word “ then,” is this third class: “ gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues;” the offices being put, by metonymy, for the officers, “ helps” for helpers, “ governments” for governors or directors.

In the context the officers are named again, and in the same order: “ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”

Here is the same consecution of offices, only that helps and governments are omitted ; perhaps because these useful offices, pertaining, the one to the charities, the other to the general good order and government of the Church, were less attractive to worldly ambition, less fitted to stimulate to a jealous rivalry, than the more brilliant gifts of "healing," and of speaking with "divers kinds of tongues." For the aim of the Apostle in the entire passage is to teach, that, as in the Church we have not all "the same office"—cannot all do every thing—each should be faithful to his own duties without encroaching on those of another, and all should harmoniously co-operate in one holy work, never to be desecrated by personal ambition and vain glory.

In expressly affirming certain offices to be in the Church in a definite gradation of rank, our text stands alone. Two others, however, bear a close relation to it. One is Eph. iv, 11 : "He gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers." Here the order is the same : first, apostles ; secondly, prophets ; and then "evangelists, and pastors and teachers," answering to the generic term "teachers" in our text. But with these ministers of the Word the enumeration stops. In the other passage, however, (Rom. xii, 6-8,) there is given, incidentally, a list of church officers that includes the helps and governments. And here we find a similar gradation. Apostles being omitted, (the writer not needing to allude to himself,) there are, first, prophets ; and then the generic "teachers" represented by ministers, teachers, and exhorters ; and, "after that," are the "helps," ("he that giveth" and "he that showeth mercy,") between which subdivisions of the helpers is interposed "he that ruleth," corresponding to the designation "governments." This harmonizes with the grouping together of the helps and governments in the third class, whilst, in the first, apostles, prophets, and teachers, are separated each from the other, by the words "first, secondarily, thirdly."

As apostles and prophets are not now in the Church, we have (omitting these and other officers restricted to its earliest period) its "ordinary and perpetual officers," viz : first, teachers—ministers of the gospel—forming one class ; and, "after that,"

“helps and governments”—“understood by a great part of the Protestant Reformed Churches” to correspond to deacons and elders.

Presbyterians see in our text exactly their classification of church officers: first, ministers; “after that,” deacons and elders. Here are indicated the two cardinal principles of Presbyterianism; the official equality of ministers, and the office of ruling elder, distinct from that of teacher.

As respects these its foundation-principles, Presbyterianism has not wavered in the slightest degree for more than three hundred years. In the Form of government adopted by the Protestant Church of France, when its First National Synod met in Paris, May 25th, 1559; in the “Second Book of Discipline,” agreed upon in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1578; in all the *generically* Presbyterian Churches of Continental Europe, (the Dutch Reformed, the Lutheran, and others that recognize the official equality of ministers, and the distinctively Presbyterian office of ruling elder;) in the Form of government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, adopted in 1788, Presbyterianism is one and the same as to these characteristic principles. Through all these centuries it has remained unchanged in essentials; as said the National Synod of France in 1572: “Our Church Discipline, as it hath been all along to this very day observed and practiced among us, so also shall it be for the future, without any change or innovation in it, as being grounded upon God’s Word.”

The Scripture warrant for the Presbyterian office of ruling elder is clear and express in our text, and in Rom. xii, 8; where “governments” and “he that ruleth,” plainly designate a church ruler who is not a teacher. One other text seems (to the reader of the English Bible) still more obviously to sanction the office of ruling elder, and would do so as decisively, were it not that those called “elders” (presbyters) in the New Testament, were usually (some say, always) *ministers*. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” (1 Tim. v, 17.) Were these elders that ruled well, but did not “*labor* in the word and doctrine,” the same as the “governments” of

our text? If so, there is here another Scripture testimony to the Presbyterian office of ruling elder.

But there is this difficulty. "Elders" are twice called "bishops." (Acts xx, 28, in the Greek; Titus i, 5, 7.) But bishops are "teachers." They must be "apt to teach;" "able by sound doctrine (teaching) both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (1 Tim. iii, 2; Titus i, 9.) Accordingly our standards, in common with those of *all* churches, make the bishop a teacher. But if all bishops are teachers, and all presbyters are bishops, then all presbyters are teachers. Then presbyters that did not "*labor* in the word and doctrine," were still "teachers," not merely "governments."

The answer to this is, that "presbyters" here is to be taken in its generic sense, as when Apostles call themselves presbyters, (1 Pet. v, 1; and John, 2d and 3d Ep.,) and hence may include the two distinct classes, teachers and governments.

It must be admitted, however, that the presbyters referred to as not laboring in the Word and doctrine, differed from our ruling elders in this essential particular—that their work, whatever it was, so fully occupied their time as to entitle them to *maintenance*; "honor" here, as elsewhere, meaning *remuneration*, as the next verse shows.

The sure and immovable foundation of the ruling elder's office is in our text and Romans xii, 8. So the Second Book of Discipline put it nearly three hundred years ago: "*We call those elders whom the Apostles called presidents or governors,*" ("he that ruleth or presideth, and governments.") *Our* Form of government founds the office on our text first, with 1 Tim., v, 17, added; it being assumed that "governments" are referred to. It speaks of these "representatives of the people" as "*usually styled* ruling elders;" it nowhere calls them *presbyters*. The Confession of Faith terms them "church governors." Calvin calls them "elders of the people." In the Westminster Assembly, they were sometimes designated, as now in the Church of Scotland, as "lay elders." The essential point is this: If we have in our churches officers corresponding to the "governments" of our text, for these officers—whether called church governors, ruling elders, or lay elders—we have a clear and indisputable

Divine warrant. Now, as matter of fact, for three centuries the Presbyterian standards have uniformly placed the ruling elder, where "God hath set governments," as holding an office essentially distinct from that of "teachers." And it has always been claimed as the peculiar excellence of Presbyterianism, that it has a *distinct class* of church officers, associated with ministers, for the government of the Church.

A doctrine opposite to this, and involving most radical changes in our church government, is now urgently pressed on the Southern Church. As we cannot more clearly show what Presbyterianism is, than by showing what it is not, we will state what this new doctrine is, and what changes it involves; and then inquire what foundation there is for it in the Word of God.

I. What is this doctrine? It is, that "teachers and governments," (ministers and elders,) hold the *same office*, are of equal rank, and equally *bishops and pastors*. Hence, one who has been ordained an elder, needs no other ordination to make him a minister. Hence elders should impose hands at the ordination of a minister, as he is ordained only to the office which they hold. The highest office in the church is that of ruling elder, of which "the work of the ministry" may, or may not, be an *adjunct*.

One thing is clear. If this doctrine be true, the Apostle Paul was greatly in error. For, instead of putting "governments" in the first class—to whose office teaching may, or may not, be an appendage—he puts "teachers" in the first class and "governments" in the third; and he says that "God hath set" them there. And he says, (Rom. xii,) that "he that teacheth," and "he that ruleth," have "not the same office."

II. What changes in our church government does the new doctrine involve? These are not apparent to the uninitiated reader of the proposed "Book of Church Order," that being constructed on the principle of making the new look as like the old as possible. But if that Book were—as every book of laws should be—clear, concise, and unequivocal, the doctrine on which it is based, and the changes (as yet but partially avowed) which that doctrine logically necessitates, would be set forth thus:

“There are (not three, but) only *two* classes of church officers, viz.: 1st. Ruling elders. 2d. Deacons. All elders hold the same office and rank—the highest in the Church—and are equally bishops and pastors; whether they preach or do not preach. Ministers of the Gospel are not a distinct class of officers in the church; preaching and administering the sacraments is but a function of the ruling elder’s office. Elders are not ‘representatives’ of churches, sitting in presbytery only when delegated; they are permanent members of the presbytery, equally with ministers, and equally entitled to the office of Moderator. They can constitute a *quorum*, and ordain ministers, though no minister be present. Like ministers, they should be ordained by, and amenable only to, the presbytery. Elders being *presbyters* equally with ministers, the presbytery, of course, consists of all the ministers and *all the elders* within a certain district.”

Let us dwell for a moment on this last logical consequent of the new doctrine, (acknowledged as such in the S. P. Review of last October.) The Synod of this State counts eighty-eight ministers and one hundred and forty-five churches. Allowing five elders to each church, there will be seven hundred and twenty-five elders, beside the ministers—in all, eight hundred and thirteen. It follows that every church in this Synod has, beside the pastor and elders of its choice, eight hundred rulers, not of its choice; whose ruling, moreover, under the new system lately inaugurated, is entirely *arbitrary*, controlled by neither law nor precedent.

The thought arises, whether, if our church government *must* be revolutionized, it might not be more advantageous to have *one* ruler, instead of these eight hundred. Would it not be better to have *one* highly educated and generally known and trusted bishop, instead of this crowd of strange bishops? As the Presbyterian standards recognize none as bishops who are not ministers of the Gospel, it would certainly be a less deviation from Presbyterianism to have one clerical bishop, than to have seven hundred lay bishops.

Further, if elders are bishops, equally with ministers, ought they not to be equally educated for their office? Is it not repugnant to common sense that, to hold the *same office*, one

must study seven years, and, for life, give up all secular employment, and another study not one day, and give up no secular employment?

Again, ought not "these presbyters," (as the new Book denominates 'elders,) equally with ministers, to "give their whole time to that work for which they were solemnly set apart," (as did the presbyters of 1 Tim., v. 17,) and ought they not, like them, to be fully compensated for their work?

And then this further inquiry arises: Are our Southern churches so unusually poor in Christian character and rich in worldly goods, that they need, and can afford, such extensive and costly ruling?

If this new system is Presbyterianism, it follows that there never yet has been a Presbyterian Church in the world. For such church government as this never existed anywhere.

But if Presbyterianism is (not a notion in the mind, but) a fact, written in the records of centuries, are the patrons of this new system Presbyterians? Their doctrine roots up the foundation principles of Presbyterianism. For the parity of ministers, it substitutes the parity of ministers and elders; for the Presbyterian ruling elder, it substitutes a church officer that—not answering, either to the "teachers" that "God hath set" in the first class, or to the "governments" that He hath set in the third—is clearly a *nondescript*, without Scriptural sanction or *status* of any sort. And the changes which this doctrine logically necessitates, (and for the gradual introduction of which the new Book specially provides,) create a church government such as never existed in the world, under the name of Presbyterian, or, indeed, under any other name.

III. What support does this doctrine derive from the Scriptures?

Never did so vast a superstructure rest on a foundation so narrow and so frail. It is all built on *one* text—*one* word in that text—a new *meaning* given to that *one* word—and that meaning plainly *false*, unless the Apostle Paul has twice contradicted himself.

The one text is 1 Tim. v, 17: "Let the elders that rule well," &c. The one word is "elders," (presbyters;) and the new

meaning given to that word, is, that it necessarily *specifies one class* of church officers, and that the highest; and that class, "governments"—ruling elders.

All Presbyterian standards that cite this text as supporting the office of ruling elder, take *presbyters* here as *generic*, including the two distinct classes, "teachers" and "governments."

Put the new doctrine in the syllogistic form, and it will stand thus :

"All who are called presbyters in the New Testament, hold the same rank and office ; ministers and elders are called presbyters in the New Testament ; therefore, ministers and elders hold the same rank and office."

But the Apostle puts ministers in the first class, and elders in the third, and also says that they "have not the same office."

Further, the first proposition is plainly untrue ; for apostles call themselves presbyters ; and the second is not true, unless 1 Tim. v, 17 refers to "governments;" which is doubtful.

Here, then, as the foundation of a new system of church government, we have a syllogism, of which the first premise is certainly false, the second, not certainly true, and the conclusion, twice contradicted by the Apostle Paul.

May we not then say that this new doctrine is "twice dead, plucked up by the roots?"

Because in Philip. i, and 1 Tim. iii, bishops are named, and no mention is made of governments, it is *inferred* that "bishops" *must include* "governments." But in Titus, and in *seven* passages in the Acts, elders are named, and no mention is made of deacons. May it then be *inferred* that "elders" *must include* deacons? This would sweep away the entire foundation of the new doctrine, which is the *assumption* that "presbyter" necessarily specifies but *one* office in the Church, and that the highest.

Thus is this new doctrine plainly bereft of all support from the Scriptures. This, certainly, every one can understand ; the presbyters (1 Tim. v, 17) that did not "*labor in the Word*," were either teachers or governments ; if teachers, they ranked with teachers, in the first class ; if governments, they ranked with governments, in the third class. And to say that they

were *governments*, and still in the first class, is to flatly contradict our text.

The *old* doctrine, that of *all* Presbyterian standards, is that in all the church judicatories there meet together *two* distinct classes of church officers—"teachers" and "governments." The *new* doctrine is, that in these judicatories, there is but *one* class, "governments," of whose *office* teaching is but a *function*.

The case may be thus summed up: It is *affirmed* that ministers and elders are both called *presbyters*, and hence *inferred* that they *must* be equal in rank and office. But the Apostle says that *they are not*.

We now publicly call on the authors of the new Book to prove, if they can, that it is not based solely on an *illogical inference of theirs*, which *directly contradicts* the Apostle Paul's *plain and unequivocal declaration*.

Their new *doctrine* is founded on *one equivocal word*, ("presbyters" in 1 Tim. v, 17.) By this *they* say the Apostle *meant* that "he that teacheth" and "he that ruleth" have "the same office." But *he* says (Rom. xii) that he *meant no such thing*.

Their new *practice* is founded on *one equivocal word*, ("members" in chapter xv of the Form of Government.) By this *they* say that the framers of the Constitution *meant* that *elders should ordain ministers*. But the last survivor of those framers testified in 1843 that they *meant no such thing*.

Two equivocal words, with a *new and plainly false meaning* put upon each—what a foundation is this for a church government, proposed as a substitute for the Presbyterianism of three centuries!

The ordination of ministers by elders is a *public profession of faith* in the new doctrine that both hold the same office. Hence the zeal to introduce this most radical innovation in practice. But will not all men agree, that to put upon words in a *Constitution* a meaning contrary to the *known intent* of its framers, is an error of no common magnitude?

This doctrine was vehemently urged (by Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge) on the whole Old School Church, and by them decisively rejected, a quarter of a century ago. Why it is resuscitated now, and by what methods it is sought to reverse the judgment of

the Southern Presbyteries against it two years since, we will not here inquire. In justice to the elders in our Church, it should be stated that this movement did not originate with them; and, if opinions are to be reckoned, not by number, but by weight, it has not their sanction. Of those who hold this time-honored office, associated in our earliest memories with sound judgment and high moral worth, could it be expected that they should *approve* what dishonors the Presbyterianism of three centuries? Whatever currency the new *doctrine* (of which the recent *practice* of *elders ordaining ministers* is a logical consequent,) has gained with elders, and with the younger ministers in this section of the Church, is largely due to the fact, that, under the guidance to which they are subjected, they scarcely know that there is any other doctrine as to church government, than that which they have been so sedulously taught. Two illustrations of this are quite at hand. One is, that of the Statement lately issued by this presbytery, not one line has gained admission to either of the three Presbyterian newspapers nearest us. The other is supplied by the latest and most logical advocate of the new system. He says: "Is there any positive proof from Scripture that the elder who ministers in the Word holds an office of different and higher rank from the elder who rules only? The writer can find none."

Does he not read his Bible? Or is 1 Cor. xii, 28 not to be found in it?

Most important is it to observe that our text assigns the relative rank, not so much of persons holding certain offices, as of the offices themselves. And here we reach the radical and pernicious error of this new system. It gives to mere ruling in the Church a rank and prominence that reverses the order which God has established.

There is a ruling, inseparable from the pastoral and teaching office: "Obey them that have the rule over you, for they *watch for your souls*." "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have *spoken unto you the Word of God*." "Know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you." (Heb. xiii, 7, 17; 1 Thess. v, 12.) The ruling here referred to is plainly that of "pastors and teach-

ers"—spiritual guidance, the application of Christ's rules. But the ruling which the new system so unscripturally exalts and aggrandizes, is that mere ruling—that positive government—which, though needful and provided for in the Church, is at best but the will of man, and always liable to transcend just limits.

Observe the logical development of the new doctrine in the new church government, proposed in the Book of Order. By the *omission* of xii, 6, of the constitution, the ruling of the General Assembly is left without a limit. And how few may exercise this unlimited power, and how opposite their ruling may be to the judgment of the Church, is well illustrated by this fact, that, two years since, the General Assembly's full endorsement was procured for this Book, which the presbyteries afterwards so unanimously rejected.

Still more ominous than even the omnipotence of the General Assembly, is the power given by this Book to the casual majority in every presbytery, by simple vote, to unsettle pastors, and disfranchise, and even depose, ministers. Thus, every half year, the question is to come up anew, who shall be permitted still to continue pastors? who still to vote in presbytery? who, even, to continue to be ministers? What illimitable agitation and scheming, discord and despotism does this provide for!

The distinctive feature of the new system is its removal of constitutional restraint on the *will of the majority*, which is often, in its last analysis, the will of *one man*. And it is worthy to be considered whether so much power, given to a few, who may have a special taste for ruling, does not as effectually subvert Presbyterian parity, as popery itself. Need we cite any other proof of this than the fact, that this new Book, which some have been for years so strenuously laboring to impose on the Church, expressly provides, that every minister who cannot conscientiously approve it, shall be expelled from the Church!

One evil effect of this system is already but too manifest. Peace-loving men, seeing how penal a thing it is to oppose the dominant will, are strongly tempted to surrender the right of

private judgment, to suppress the promptings of manly independence and generous love of truth, and, shutting their eyes, to go with the majority. Thus, in our ecclesiastical assemblages, the conservative sentiment of the Church has little or no utterance.

Ruling in the Church, if strictly subjected to the constitution, is, necessarily, a very limited and subordinate thing. Hence, to accommodate the new prominence given to ruling, it must have some new scope, must expatiate in a hitherto unknown sphere; in the true spirit of that radicalism which is an unsightly monster in the State, (how much more so in the Church!) it must uproot settled law and constitutional precedent.

Accordingly, there has been among us of late, a most remarkable development of the *gift of ruling*. First, the General Assembly *rules* that no one of our ministers can lawfully be pastor of "a church of another denomination." Next, a *small* minority of Charleston Presbytery, assuming this new "constitutional rule" to be law—which it is not if the constitution (xii, 6) is in force—assumes also to interpret it as applying to isolated *Presbyterian* churches; and officially notifies four of our pastors that they are guilty of "an infraction of our standards;" (one of them through nearly half a century!) Thus our standards are *made* to mean what they never meant before, and an *ex post facto* law convicts of malefaction.

Next, the Synod almost unanimously sanctions this; refusing, with but one dissenting vote, even to defer action till next year.

The Synod thus declares its *will*, that the liberal Presbyterianism that has existed in this city and vicinity for fifty years, shall be no longer tolerated; that it shall give place to a sectarianism the most rigid and intense.

The Synod also decreed (as does the new Book, page 12) that *hereafter*, in every church, the *presbytery* may dissolve the pastoral relation whenever they please, without the consent of either pastor or congregation.

The Synod also decreed, in effect, (as does the new Book, page 11,) that *hereafter*, the *presbytery* may *disfranchise*, at

pleasure, all ministers that do not "give their *whole time* to the work of the ministry." (Compare Acts xx, 34.) Did the Apostle Paul give his "whole time to the work of the ministry?"

The Synod also, in effect, decided that "the presbytery," empowered thus to *vote away* the most sacred rights secured by the Constitution to every minister and to every church, is, not a majority of the whole, but the majority of *those present*, though these may be, *in all*, but *four* out of *sixteen* presbyters!

This unprecedented and revolutionary action of the Synod forced on us this question: Shall the *will* of this Synod, or the Constitution of the Church, be our law?

This question we have answered—by *action*, not words. *Power* is not to be met by *words*. We do not *argue* with the east wind. We do not *remonstrate* with a locomotive rushing along the track. We simply get out of their way.

So have we done who revived the Charleston Union Presbytery. Leaving the Synod's revolutionary path unobstructed, we simply remain in resolved adherence to the Presbyterianism which they have deserted. *They* have severed the connection between us; for a Constitution that no longer binds them, no longer binds us to them. When it shall be their will to reinstate the Constitution as the supreme law; when it shall please them to return to that Presbyterianism which, founded on the Word of God, has been settled in the church standards for three hundred years; then there may be a union which is not possible now.

We have never heard any reason assigned for this radical revolution, except that some desire a strong government, a strict Presbyterianism.

Do they know what this is? We will adduce a specimen of it from the Book of Discipline of the Protestant Church of France. It reads as follows:

"A pastor or elder breaking the Church's union, or stirring up contention about any point of doctrine, or of the *discipline* which he had subscribed, shall be **SUSPENDED** from his office."*

* Bingham's works, vol. ix, page 250. These brethren that ignore constitutional rights, and vote away the *status* of pastors, what would *their status* be under strict Presbyterianism?

The latest argument for the new Book is, that it will be a wall of partition between us and the Northern Church. But if the Presbyterianism of three centuries is "grounded on God's Word," shall Bible principles be sacrificed to policy? And is that a *wise policy* that disunites the Southern Church?

"Let all things be done decently and in order." This apostolic injunction cannot be obeyed, except where Constitutions are held sacred and inviolable, and settled rule takes the place of lawless will.

Finally, there is yet one thing higher and greater than any *form* of church government. That is its *spirit*. What that should be, the Word of God leaves in no doubt. Most remarkable is it, that the only two passages in the New Testament that specify the officers of the Church, and their relative rank, are both but incidental and tributary to that great Christian teaching,—that, however diverse their offices and gifts, all who are in Christ's Church are members of one body, of which one cannot say to another, "I have no need of you;" that, not the pressure of despotic rule, but the coherence of mutual affection, is the true cement, the "perfect bond" of union; and that "charity," "love without dissimulation," is "more excellent" than even the best gifts.

Let this Christian teaching be written on all hearts. Then will there be no usurped power, no worldly ambition, no political strategy, in the house of God; as out of place there, as were the tables of those money-changers that our Lord scourged out of the temple. Then will all live together in peace, breathing one spirit, yielding to one sacred impulse—the pure and hallowed desire to serve Christ, and extend his empire over mankind.

NOTE TO PAGE 11.

When the assertion was *first* made, that the framers of our Constitution *intended* that elders should impose hands at the ordination of ministers, one of those framers still survived. As that assertion re-appears in the Southern Presbyterian Review of last October, we reproduce his letter :

“ PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 25th, 1844.

“ MY DEAR SIR: Your communication of the date of yesterday is before me. Without repeating your questions, I will answer them numerically :

“ 1. I was a member of the Synod of 1788, which ratified the Constitution of our Church, and am the only member of that Synod who is now in life.

“ 2. I never heard a suggestion from any member of that body, that the directory for ordination should be altered, so as to admit elders to impose hands in a minister's ordination.

“ 3. I never heard of ruling elders imposing hands in ordination, before the adoption of the Constitution of our Church.

“ 4. The imposition of hands in ordination by ruling elders is, with me, a perfect novelty. I never heard of it, or thought of it, till it was advocated by Dr. Robert Breckenridge. If he did not first start the subject, I cannot tell who did.

“ Very sincerely and affectionately yours,
ASHBEL GREEN.

“ REV. DR. JOHN MACLEAN.”

Even without this decisive testimony, it is plain that, in the Form of Ordination, “ members of the Presbytery,” who use the language, “ take part of this *ministry* with us,” are *ministers* only. *Ministers alone* are, in *three* other places, designated by the phrase “ members of the Presbytery ;” (Form of Government, x, 9 ; xv, 12 ; xvi, 6 ;) and in the Book of Discipline, chap. v, the *ministers* of a Presbytery are spoken of as being “ *all its members.*” The reason of this is obvious. Ministers are the only *permanent* “ members of the Presbytery.” “ All the ministers within a certain district ” are *ex officio* members of the Presbytery ; whilst no elder is a member except when *delegated*. Hence “ members of Presbytery ” may designate its *permanent* members only, or it may include the delegated members also. The *connection* is to determine the signification ; and what could be more decisive than the words, “ take part of this *ministry* with us ?”

On this point, Rev. Dr. Maclean, of Princeton, wrote as follows: ("Letters on the Elder Question," 1844:)

"It has also been urged, that in the old Scottish form, as found in Pardovan, the words are, 'all the ministers of the Presbytery take the person ordained by the right hand,' etc., and that in our Form of Government the word *members* was substituted for the very purpose of allowing ruling elders to give the right hand of fellowship. But was not precisely the same change made in the case of the person who is appointed to recite to the people the proceedings of the Presbytery preparatory to the ordination? In Steuart the language is 'the *minister* from the pulpit,' etc. In our Form of Government, the words are, 'The same or another *member* shall briefly recite from the pulpit.' In making this change was there any purpose to authorize a ruling elder to perform this part of the ordination service and to make the ordaining prayer? The fact is that the framers of our constitution frequently use the term *members* as synonymous with *ministers*, and that they were accustomed to speak of the laying on of the hands of the ministers as the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery; and to account for the change in the terms requires no such violent hypothesis as the one above-mentioned, viz., that the word *members* was substituted for *ministers*, for the purpose of enabling ruling elders to exercise what Dr. Breckenridge insists is their right and duty in relation to the imposition of hands, in the ordination of ministers."

That three *ministers* make a quorum of Presbytery was settled as far back as A. D. 1601. "This Assembly judgeth, that three pastors shall make up the quorum of a Colloquy, and that all acts done by these three shall be reputed lawful and valid, yea, even to the suspension of ministers." See Quick's Synodicon, vol. i, page 221.

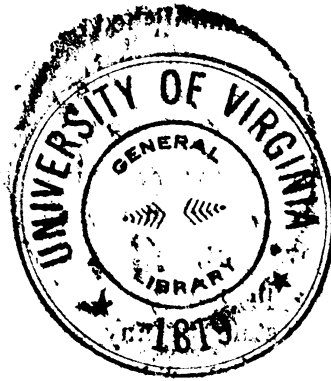
How decisive was the rejection of the new doctrine by the whole Old School Presbyterian Church of the United States, appears on page 43 of Baird's Digest:

"Resolved, That it is the judgment of this General Assembly, that neither the Constitution nor the practice of our Church authorizes Ruling Elders to impose hands in the ordination of Ministers. Yeas, 138; nays, 9. Non liquet, 1; excused, 2. [Minutes of General Assembly, 1843, page 183.]

The Charleston Union Presbytery has no *direct* interest in the fate of the new Book. Were we capable of preferring

policy to principle, we should desire its adoption, as tending to add to our number. But our principles bind us to maintain truth, and to yield such aid as we can to those who are in a position to successfully oppose error. To arrest the revolution in *this Synod* is hopeless. The new government is here already grafted on the old Form. As was proved at Beech Island, *construction* is as potent as "revision," to subvert constitutional rights. If the new Book is defeated, the present Form will still be *construed* in this Synod to suit the new doctrine.

That there will ultimately be a reaction from this, we cannot doubt. Radicalism, in the State, may be reckless of everything but its own will; but, in the Church, it cannot quite reach to that point. For all good men feel that here we have a revealed law, and that questions of church government are to be decided, not by the capricious will of majorities, but by a fair, unbiassed interpretation of the Word of God.



ABSTRACT OF REPORT.

The Report, of which the following is an abstract, alludes, first, to the ecclesiastical action which has led to the re-organization of Charleston Union Presbytery. It cites the *affirmative* answer given by the last General Assembly to this overture: "Is it contrary to our standards for one of our ministers to remain the permanent supply to a church of another denomination?" and shows this decision to be hasty, ill-advised, without knowledge of the circumstances, and savoring of arbitrary power because arrived at without due investigation as to the *status* and character of the parties concerned—or of the Churches; two of which are Presbyterian, one, French Protestant, and one, Congregational.

When the ministers of these several churches were received into the Presbytery, no stipulation was made with any of them, that they should endeavor to draw, each his particular congregation, to the Presbytery. An equitable investigation, on the part of the Assembly, would have proved such arrangement impracticable; and, at any rate, their congregations were entitled to think and choose for themselves.

For these reasons, the decision of the Assembly was unwise, unjust, and arbitrary; holding, as it does, ministers responsible for what they had not undertaken; and, if they had undertaken, could not have accomplished; and then stripping them of their rights as presbyters, because of their non-fulfilment of obligations never incurred.

The Report further states, that this subject was entertained, and a decision pronounced upon it by the Assembly, at an *unseasonable time*; when the Church was undergoing a revolutionary movement, by attempts on a large scale to effect a change of its principles and laws; and when it was plainly impossible to state to any congregation, approached with a view to annexation, what was the type of its Presbyterianism, and what the obligations consequent upon such annexation. The inference from all which is, that the Assembly, for want of due inquiry, and from neglect of sending for the

parties interested, who alone could give testimony to be relied on, made a hasty and despotic decision, compromising the rights, privileges, and standing of the ministers so conditioned.

The Report proceeds to show, that the Presbytery that met at Beech Island, (including but four ministers,) were not unwilling instruments in carrying into effect the decision of the Assembly.

The Assembly's decree is by that body sent by letter to the several pastors, and they are informed that they are in conflict with their duties to the Church, while continuing to preach the Word of Life to Christians who do not recognize the Presbytery as their spiritual rulers.

Each minister is urged to lay the matter before his session and congregation. In the face of his own convictions and remonstrances, that the Assembly, the Synod, the Presbytery, have departed from the standards of the Church, he is urged to become the agent of proposing that connection which he disapproves.

Nothing was left for such ministers but to leave the brethren to their own course. This determination was shared in by those who felt that the course pursued by the Assembly and Synod, and by the Presbytery that met at Beech Island, was unjust and despotic.

As presbyters we fall back on the constitutional government and laws of that Book, which for ages has held the Presbyterian Church in unity and peace, rejecting all the innovations of the new Book of Order, under the sanction of which these and similar acts of arbitrary power may be perpetrated. For the *immediate* cause of action on our part, is but one of a series of contemplated changes, subversive of those principles which, sanctioned by the Word of God, were set forth, at the Reformation, for the government of the Church, by such men as Calvin, and others of like stamp of character and learning—set forth, in clear outline and concise diction, in the laws of the French Huguenot Church, and in the First and Second Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland; and, finally, after years of deliberation, republished as the Scripture plan by the Westminster Assembly.

Calvin, in his Institutes, Lib. iv, c. 5, says: "In calling

those who govern in the Church, indiscriminately, bishops, presbyters, pastors, and ministers, I have followed the example of the Scriptures, which use these terms without distinction, for they give the title bishop to all who are invested with the ministry of the Word." Having proved this from Titus i, 5; Phil. i, 1; Acts xx, 17, he adds: "It is to be observed that we have hitherto spoken only of those offices which are concerned in the ministry of the Word; nor does Paul mention any other in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, which we have cited. But in Rom. xii, 7, and 1 Cor. xii, 28, he enumerates others, as powers, gifts of healing, etc., etc. Two of these are permanent offices, government, and care of the poor. Governors I suppose to have been Elders (*seniores*) chosen from among the people, who presided with the bishops over the correction of manners and the exercise of discipline."

This leads to the consideration of the following passage, to be found on the 25th page of the "Book of Church Order:"

"The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly, together with the principles of church order contained in the formularies of government, discipline and worship, are accepted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States as standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation both to faith and practice."

So we are referred to the Westminster Book of Law and Order, as the standard of the new Book of Order.

We have compared these Books, and we find a direct antagonism between them in very many essential particulars. And this leads to the expression of an unmitigated wonder and amazement, that a book of church law, concocted with the design of changing the whole character of the government, and the character and functions of the governors, from the pre-established plan for ages—and which was intended to inaugurate a new order of things in the Presbyterian Church—should thus claim the sanction of that old system which condemns its innovations.

The Report then cites *verbatim* many of the definitions, laws, and institutions, regarding the Church, its ministers, and ruling elders, contained in the Book of the Westminster Assembly, setting them over against those of the new Book, showing their

irreconcilable difference—referring principally to the laws on ordination of ministers and of ruling elders—to the *quorum* question, etc.

The Report closes with the inference, drawn from this comparison, that the systems of these two Books of government and order are essentially different—that they cannot both have place and authority in the same Church—that, so introduced, they must become the source of endless difficulties, strifes and divisions.

Of these Books, the one was introduced, backed by the Scriptures and the highest antiquity; approved by the Churches of the Reformation; unchanged to this day in the Presbyterian Churches of Europe; reproduced in this country almost in identical form; with a preface laying down principles of liberty favorable to good government. The other is a revision, a reconstruction, involving overthrow of the constitution and laws known in past ages to the Presbyterian Church; unsettling existing established relations between pastors and ruling elders; giving to the latter an undefined power they never did in any Presbyterian Church possess, and which we are persuaded they of themselves never desiderated, or could exercise with propriety.

The new Book is presented, uncertified by proof texts from the Scriptures; and without the “Preliminary Principles” of the present Constitution—so highly prized by every friend of liberty of conscience. Thus, in a “Book of Church Order,” which has been for years pressed on the churches, many times revised and *re-written*, and *three times* put in print, the Bible and Protestantism are quite ignored!

The Westminster Book has all the marks and characters that draw our confidence, which the other has not.

The Westminster Book has enjoyed the respect and obedience of all the churches, because it vouchsafes liberty of conscience—consistently with a wise and temperate government of the Christian Church; against the arbitrary power of irresponsible majorities, as well as securing from the operation of *ex post facto* laws.

We adhere to Scriptural Presbyterianism—the plan of Church government sanctioned by the Word of God, and by the wisdom of ages.

THE OFFICE OF RULING ELDER.

“ Calvin taught that there were two classes of officers, the one who both ruled and preached, and to whom the Scriptures give the titles, bishops, presbyters, pastors, ministers ; and the other called ‘ governments,’ who were *seniores ex plebe delecti*, Elders chosen from the people, to join with the former class in the government of the Church. This is precisely the system of our Book, in which the title Bishop or Presbyter is never given to any but ministers of the Word. It is not from the ambiguous title Elder, but from the authoritative definitions of the nature and duties of the office, given in our standards, that we are to deduce the powers of the Ruling Elder. Elders are declared to be the ‘ representatives of the people.’

“ The opposite theory concerning this office is inconsistent with our standards and subversive of Presbyterianism. By teaching that ministers and elders are of the same order, it merges into one, offices which our Constitution and the Word of God declare to be distinct. The doctrine of our standards is simple and consistent. Ruling Elders are not bishops or ministers ; they are not presbyters in the same sense as preachers are, but governors, ‘ representatives of the people,’ appointed to take part with ministers in the government of the church. This view puts great honor on the office and establishes its divine right. The opposite doctrine, by making elders bishops makes them of divine right ministers of the Word and Sacraments, as well as *ordainers*, and thus subverts our whole system of government.” [The Elder Question.]