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I. REGENERATION, REAL, NOT FIGURATIVE.

THERE are doubtless those who think that in a discussion of regeneration nothing new can be said that is true, and nothing true that is new. However this may be, it is certain that opinions differ widely, and that much confusion prevails. It is not our purpose to review the variant and widely diverse opinions which are held on this subject. That were a profitless task. We propose to study the subject anew from the standpoint of the Scriptures, and to compare the conclusion reached with the view generally accepted as orthodox. What is that view?

A very few years ago a report was made to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., by a committee appointed to revise *The Confession*. In that report the following words were found: "The act of regeneration wherein being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit he is enabled to answer God's call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it." Had this been approved, new matter would have been added to *The Confession*. This report teaches that the act of regeneration enables the subject to believe on Christ. That this is the commonly accepted view a few citations from Doctors R. L. Dabney and A. A. Hodge may be allowed to show. Dr. Dabney in his *Syllabus and Notes* (Student's Edition, Part II., p. 85) says under the caption "Regeneration properly defined," "we prove that regeneration is not a mere change of human purpose, occurring in view of motive; but a supernatural renovation of the dispositions which determine the moral purpose and of the understanding, in the apprehension of moral and spiritual truth." Says Dr. A. A. Hodge in his *Outlines*: "In the new creation God

## VII. THE ELDER IN HIS ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONS.

By the subject, "The Elder in His Ecclesiastical Relations," I understand the ruling elder's relation to the church, and that means the church in all its history. The very statement of the subject authorizes me to claim that the elder is so related to the church that he is not a layman, but is an ecclesiastic.

He is historically an ecclesiastic.

The church began in the patriarchal family, and when Jacob and his sons, driven by famine, accepted the invitation of the lost child and went into Egypt, the church was a patriarchal church, and it went into Egypt as a family. Two hundred years later it came out of that land of captivity and of servitude a nation of more than a million souls, but nevertheless the church as well as a nation.

We read that there were in those times, elders of Egypt, elders of Midian, elders of Moab, elders of Gilead, elders of Gilgal. All men that have yet been born require government for security and good order, and it was reasonable that the church of God, as it then existed, should, by divine direction, have taken for itself a form of government somewhat like that which it found in the peoples about them. So it was that the early Christian church patterned its form after the form of government of the empire in which it found itself placed, and it became a prelatie church. But when the church came out of Egypt, the elders of Israel, were not only those who sat in the gates to hear and decide disputes among the people, but they were veritable ecclesiastics, exercising ecclesiastical functions and duties, and these prerogatives they continued to exercise, in Canaan in the time of the judges, who were less real judges than were the elders, and in the time of the kings, until the church went into Babylonian captivity, and beside the rivers of Babylon, the ecclesiastical relation of the elders continued to be, and when the seventy years of exile had passed, the

elder came back with the church into Canaan to continue his functions. In post-exilic and pre-Christian times he had his place in the synagogue and in its service. Then came the missionary period, when the apostles carried the new gospel into other lands, destined to become the most fruitful soil in which to plant the new religion, and they took this officer, in name and churchly character as old as the Jewish nation itself, and placed him conspicuously in the front as the one officer mentioned in the Scripture by whom the church existed, and so he continued in the period of the early Christian church, as he had been in the Jewish, an ecclesiastic. I am not prepared to admit that in the dark period when the apostolic church became so generally prelatie, he wholly disappeared, but this thing I do aver, that when the Reformation swept Switzerland, as it swept Germany and also Britain, one of the first thoughts in the organization of a church in Geneva was of the elder. The Book of Order of the English Church in Geneva, being that from which John Knox took his pattern for the church of Scotland, had its bench of elders, and the idea then was, as it now is, that the church could exist without the minister, but never without the elder, and that is in law and in fact the Presbyterian idea. It has seemed strange to me that the fact has been so overlooked in what has been said and written of the coming of the Puritan settlement of New England, that it was the Presbyterian exodus. I have seen in many an unpublished church record in old New England towns, as well as in the local histories of those small colonies, the fact, most interesting to me, that those churches had their elders. It may be asked why then call them Presbyterians, since they had no presbyteries, but it must be remembered that every session of a church is a small presbytery, and as those little colonies into which the early New England settlers came, almost always were at odds with each other, we find each colony so jealous of its civil status, and so unwilling to acknowledge any civil authority outside its bounds, that it was not strange they recognized the words of the Lord, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," as not meaning simply the payment of tribute money, but as teaching patriotism, complete loyalty to civil authority. Congregationalism or the government

of the masses by the mass was the accident of those civil relations.

The elder is also by ordination and by vows an ecclesiastic.

Although often called a layman, he certainly in nothing resembles a layman, save that he lives, not by the gospel, but lives as a layman lives. The same vows are required of the elder as are required of the minister. The same spirit and character is the scriptural description of what each should be. Each is ordained by the presbytery. Keep in mind that the session is a small presbytery. In the elder's ordination all members of the presbytery, as the Scripture prescribes, take part, while in these later times, by several strange and illogical and unscriptural decisions of the higher church courts in this country, the minister is ordained by only a part of the presbytery instead of by the whole.

The elder is also by the nature of the office an ecclesiastic.

Temporal officers of almost every name and kind are elected and set apart for a term, and when the term has ended they cease to be such officers. Not so with this churchly officer, the elder. He is ordained and set apart like other church officers, for life. That innovations have sometimes been permitted, as to the exercising of the functions of the office and providing for what is called the rotary system or the term service, proves nothing. The church suffers this as God did another wretched practice, because of the hardness of the hearts of those who practice it. It is unscriptural and offends our sense of the rightness of the thing. How would it sound to you Presbyterians to hire your minister by the year as you do your clerks and your cooks, and as the rotary system sometimes does with your elders? Does it make you respect the office when some thus strip it of its character?

If the minister is an ecclesiastic, so, also, the elder.

There are those who draw a distinction between what is called the ruling elder and what is called the teaching elder. I understand that many claim that Princeton, for the last fifty years, has always held this distinction, though there are some graduates of Princeton, not within the recent past, who will not concede that even Princeton has always so taught, but we may offset against Princeton and its Hodge, Columbia and its Thornwell, who

always held, with many other scholars, that there was no such distinction, and that the ruling elder and teaching elder were both the same officer, each assigned to the performance of a different function in the church, each function belonging alike to both. I fail to find in my reading of the Scripture, or my digging in the original, any scriptural authority for any such distinction. It seems to me that the ruling elder and the teaching elder are one officer. We are accustomed to prepare by special education different men for the discharge of different functions, different branches of one profession, different specialties. Some men train the muscles and some the intellect. No one questions but that either man, all other things being equal, is competent to the work of the other, if he were trained or exercised for it. So it seems to me the only difference in this matter of the elder, is that the teaching elder is a specialist in his line, educated and exercised to it, and hence not a different man, a different officer, but by his training better qualified to exercise that function of teaching, and that fact is the fact recognized by the church.

The ruling elder is necessary to our church system.

Other churches than ours are Calvinistic in doctrine, so that not doctrine alone distinguishes our church from others, but among all the churches this one great distinguishing feature marks us, we must have the eldership, or we are not a church. He most surely is an ecclesiastic. His relation to the church is that of a spiritual officer, an ecclesiastic, not a layman. Without the ruling elder there cannot be a Presbyterian Church. As I have said before, that church may be without a minister, but cannot be a church without an elder. That he is called a ruling elder, and that he is a ruler within the church, does not militate against his ecclesiastical character. No organization can exist without cohesion, and to have cohesion, in the nature of things, there must be government, and what more natural than that the government of the Presbyterian Church should be committed to those spiritual officers, who distinguish it in fact from every other church on earth. That the elder is a ruler does not make him a lord over God's heritage. He is a ruler for the purpose for which the church was established.



God governs all he has created. We never think ourselves deprived of any of our liberty by reason of any of God's laws. Nothing conduces as much to actual liberty as the liberty, the power, to do the right. We are taught that a state of sin is a state of servitude, and not of liberty. The truth shall make you free. What greater liberty is there than in the obedience to the law which you love, and the liberty to do that which you love to do. We all love the Presbyterian Church. We all love, or ought to love, its laws. If we do, we shall find the rule of a Presbyterian elder designed to secure harmony in the church and holiness of life to the church members, and appointed and exercised to bring us into the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

Some will ask if he be an ecclesiastic, how is it that he is not placed in the public service of the sanctuary? And I ask, why not? One rainy night in Glasgow I entered into the Old Barony church. The pastor, Marshall Lang, was in the accustomed place within the railing in one corner of the church. There was a reading desk in the centre aisle. The exercises were opened and conducted by the pastor to the Scripture lesson, when without invitation or notice, and as if according to the regular order of things in that place, an aged, white-haired elder arose from his place in the pew, proceeded to the reading desk, opened the holy volume to an Old Testament passage, read it as a first lesson with a voice so sweet and tender that it took my heart. He closed the book, a psalm was sung, again he went to the desk, and again opened the book and read a passage from the New Testament with an unction that told me that he knew and felt and loved the words he read.

If God has given to one in our congregation a voice that is music, an unction that comes of acquaintance with the Scripture, and of love for it, the use of which man and which voice will adorn our sanctuary service, and make it attractive, and popular, and helpful, and worshipful, and that voice and that unction belong to an ordained elder, he is not out of place taking part in that service with his gifts.

The elder as an ecclesiastic, also is in the church a representative.

He is a presbyter, and as such he represents the people. By

a peculiarity of our Presbyterian system as it is modified in America, the minister sitting in presbytery represents the minister only. No voice of his, no vote of his, represents the people he serves. He was on the church roll a member of the church, and when ordained to the ministry you dropped him from the roll and wrote the word "ordained" against his name, and he no longer belonged to your church, but became a member of presbytery. He goes to presbytery because he is a member of presbytery, and not because he is the pastor. But not so the elder, for he represents the church. He performs, as presbyter, a high duty, greater than any minister who sits beside him. The elder not being present, the interests he represents must go without its representative.

It is said that the elder is not made more of at presbytery because his attendance is not to be relied on. If you appreciate the fact that you are the only representative of your church, will you not attend on every occasion and devote yourself as thoroughly to the interests of the church you represent as in other matters you devote yourself to temporal interests which you represent? Do you honor God by making light or little of these duties as a presbyter?

There is sometimes more talk in the church about rotation in office than there is in Cæsar's service. The man who serves Cæsar best and most faithfully and most efficiently is generally the man who has the largest experience in Cæsar's business. It is all very well to rotate elders in sending them to presbytery, that, as they say, each man may get his hand in, but the minister is there, and he does not rotate, and his influence and power are measured by the regularity of his attendance and his acquaintance with all the things which presbytery does. Brethren, leave the inexperienced, to learn the way of things, until the time comes to require his services as such, but learn wisdom from Cæsar; when you have a presbyter who faithfully represents your church, whose experience makes him more valuable than his fellows, keep him there at that particular work, where he can serve better than his fellows.

And this elder of whom we speak is also a bishop.

A bishop is an overseer and overlooker wherever you find that name in any church. It always was one of the functions of the elder wherever he is found, early or late in history. The modern elder is, or ought to be, a bishop in fact, not with priestly robes or any regalia to be a badge of office, but with the description of the Scripture to be his password and his commission; not to open gates and pay bills, but to have a real oversight over the flock, to know them all by name and by feature, and where they live, so that the reserved roll of absentees and the unknown shall be small indeed; to comfort in trouble those who need comfort, and their names are many; not to put off supervision upon the pastor, but to do a share himself of the bishop's office, and each to know himself that which, when a church becomes pastorless, has gone away with the ministerial bishop. The consecrating to office is not the episcopal function. The episcopal office and function is, and always was, oversight. I think I remember an Episcopal brother, perhaps a bishop, who saw the point and advanced the idea, till then unheard of by his church, that the Episcopal bishop was not so by apostolic succession only, but by succession from those who exercised episcopal authority in the Jewish church prior to the Christian era. After a discussion of the Historic Episcopate, extending over nearly ten years past, we have gotten no nearer church unity than we were before, but the ecclesiastical flirtation has happily been brought to a close, and we may, in our church, pursue the work God has given us to do, and we may follow the light our good Episcopal brother saw and found, that the Historic Episcopate is not in succession from the apostles only, but also from a more venerable source, from elders who have exercised their ecclesiastical relations and function in the church of God ever since it came out of Egypt.

Brethren, you of the eldership are the true Historic Episcopate. You solve the quadrilateral riddle.

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