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## METHODS OF CITY EVANGELIZATION.

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WE approach a most interesting and perplexing subject. It is the problem of "City Evangelization," and the methods of conducting this important work. In discussing the subject we are at once aware of the fact that methods are only a means to an end. The thing aimed at is the evangelization of a city, and various methods are employed in order that this result may be secured. Methods are of no value in and of themselves; they are of value only for what they accomplish. The best methods are the methods which secure the most satisfactory results. The selection of methods will depend upon the conditions which prevail. Sometimes one method will be employed to accomplish a certain result, and sometimes another method to accomplish the same result. The conditions were different; the first method was better at one time, and the second method at another time. Methods vary; the problem which requires the methods for its solution remains unchanged.

It is not well, therefore, to be wedded to method, unless we are willing to invite failure. There are people who adore method; who have one way for doing a certain work, and only one way. If it cannot be done in that one way, it must not be done at all. Their method may have been very successful at a certain time; it may have great antiquity as its commendation; it may have been employed by many very good and very wise men; it may have nothing objectionable in its principle of action; but it may not be the best method for accomplishing results at the present time; and if this is true, it ought to be discarded and a better method employed.

Let us take an illustration drawn from the subject under

## THE RULING ELDER.

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WE derive our name, Presbyterian, from our form of government. The most distinctive feature of this government is the prominence given to the ruling elder. It is doubtful, however, whether there is any one thing in the Presbyterian system in reference to which there is more vagueness of opinion. "What is the ruling elder?" This question was sprung on the Pan-Presbyterian Council, at its meeting in Philadelphia in 1880. This Council represented the highest scholarship of the Presbyterian world; and one might have supposed that such a question as that, touching the crowning characteristic of every church in the Council, would find a prompt and easy solution. There was no reluctance to attempt a solution. Responses to the question came thick and fast—came from men of high degree and low degree; but only to disclose the fact that the question was a poser. No two answers agreed, and many disclosed views that were irreconcilably different. Whereupon a committee was appointed, to whom the question was committed, with four years to deliberate on it, and then return answer to the Council at its next meeting. Accordingly, at the meeting of the Council in Belfast, 1884, this committee reported as follows:

"Touching the office and functions of the eldership, at least three distinct theories are entertained.

"(1) That while the New Testament recognizes but one order of presbyters, in it there are two degrees, or classes, known as *teaching elders* and *ruling elders*. In accordance with this theory are the remarks in *Hill's View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland* (pp. 37, 38). 'In teaching, in dispensing the sacraments, in presiding over public worship, and in the private functions by which he ministers to the comfort, the instruction and the improvement of the people committed to his care, a pastor acts within his own parish according to his discretion;

and for the discharge of all the duties of the pastoral office he is accountable only to the Presbytery from whom he received the charge of the parish. But in everything which concerns what is called discipline—the exercise of that jurisdiction over the people with which the office-bearers are conceived to be invested—he is assisted by lay-elders. They are laymen in this respect, that they have no right to teach, or to dispense the sacraments; and on this account they form an office in the Presbyterian Church inferior in rank and power to that of pastor. Their peculiar business is expressed by the term, ruling elders.’

“(2) A second theory, contended for by Principal Campbell in his treatise on the eldership, and by others also, is that there is no warrant in Scripture for the office of the eldership as it exists in the Presbyterian Church; that the ‘ruling elder’ is not, and is not designed to be, a counterpart of the New Testament elder; in other words, that he is not a presbyter, but only a layman chosen to represent the laity in the church courts, and permitted to assist in the government of the church.

“(3) A third theory is that advanced by Professor Withrow, and those who hold with him, that the modern elder is intended to be, and should be, recognized as a copy of the scriptural ‘presbyter.’ Those who take this position hold that ‘in everything except in training, and the consequences of training, the elder is the very same as the minister.’ This view is based on the fact that the terms ‘overseer’ or ‘bishop,’ ‘presbyter’ and ‘elder,’ are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament. It is consistent with this theory to argue the absolute parity of ministers and elders, conceding to all ‘presbyters’ equal rights to teach (if they can), to rule, to administer the sacraments, to take part in the ordination of ministers, and to preside in church courts.”

This report was based on returns from twenty different Presbyterian churches: six from the churches of Great Britain and Ireland; six from the United States of America; four from the continent of Europe, and four from the colonies of Great Britain. The committee gives us the further information that from the returns placed in their hands, “it appears that the practice generally followed in the Presbyterian churches of the present time is in accordance with the first-named theory,

namely, that while the functions of teaching and ruling both normally belong to presbyters, yet the Scriptures countenance a distribution of these duties among them, making it the special duty of some to rule and of others to teach."

Could anything illustrate more strikingly the utter confusion in which this subject is enveloped than the facts brought to notice in this report? Chaotic is hardly too strong a word to express the state of mind which exists throughout the whole family of Presbyterian churches in regard to the office of ruling elder. "At least three distinct views"—the implication is that there may be more than three. After four years of study and research, the committee were by no means sure that they had caught up with all the distinct views. Without effort, we can mention two other distinct views: one is that of the Westminster Assembly; and the other is that of Dr. James H. Thornwell, which is more or less perfectly embodied in the polity of the Southern Presbyterian Church. While there were many in the Westminster Assembly who were prepared to adopt Theory No. (1), others there were who were not willing to go further than Theory No. (2). The view actually adopted was a compromise between those two, but clearly distinct from either. The Assembly claimed expressly a scriptural warrant for the office, but did not claim that it was identical with the scriptural presbyter. They sought for scriptural warrant mainly in the Old Testament, making use of only two proof-texts from the New Testament, and these the vague texts—Rom. xii. 6-8; 1 Cor. xii. 28—texts that make no mention of presbyter or bishop. Dr. Thornwell held the view that the ruling elder is the presbyter of Scripture, and that all presbyters are of the same order; but he, further, held that ruling is the sole function of the eldership; that no presbyter is *ex-officio* a teacher, or preacher. He allowed the terms, "teaching elders" and "ruling elders," merely for convenience sake, but says: "The distinction, however, is not strictly accurate. The eldership, as such, never includes teaching; this is always a superadded function, and it is not in consequence of his presbyterial authority that an elder preaches." According to Dr. Thornwell, the preaching office is entirely separate and distinct from that of presbyter, or bishop. This view finds expression in our Book of Church Order, wherein three offices are defined, namely, that of ministers of the Word,

of ruling elders, and of deacons. Ministers of the Word hold two of these offices; they preach in virtue of one, and rule in virtue of the other.

“At least three *distinct* views.” The committee did not undertake to enumerate the *indistinct* views. To do this they would have needed more than four years. Had they undertaken this enumeration, they must have mentioned in the category their own views. For example, they tell us that “the practice generally followed in the Presbyterian churches of the present time is in accordance with the first-named theory, namely”—and then, in defining this theory, they give us an admirable exposition of Theory No. (3)—“while the functions of teaching and ruling both normally belong to presbyters, yet the Scriptures countenance a distribution of these duties among them, making it the special duty of some to rule and of others to teach.” This is precisely what Dr. Withrow, and those who hold with him, teach; and precisely what is denied in the first-named theory. The committee selected Dr. Hill’s exposition of the distinction which the Scripture makes between the teaching elders and ruling elders; and in that exposition, Dr. Hill says the ruling elders “are laymen in this respect, they have no right to teach.” This is very different from saying that teaching is one of their “normal functions.”

These two contradictory expositions, which the committee give us of the first-named theory, suggest what is perhaps the chief source of difficulty—it is in carrying out consistently in practice any theory which we may adopt. Those who adopt any one of the various theories named, except that advocated by Dr. Withrow, agree in debarring the ruling elder from preaching the Word and administering the sacraments; but beyond this, they fall into confusion. Some churches require him to take part in the ordination of ministers, others forbid this; some permit him to moderate a church court, others do not; some elect him to office for life, others for a definite term; some deem him essential to the quorum of a court, others do not. The apparently hopeless confusion, which surrounds the office as indicated by the divergent views and practices of the various Presbyterian churches, is shadowed forth by the committee, whose report we have been considering, in the words with which they close their discussion: “Whatever views are entertained

respecting the authority upon which the eldership is established, it is a fact that there is an order of office-bearers in the Presbyterian Church, rightly or wrongly called elders—a very numerous order—computed to number not less than one hundred thousand.” Is not this remarkable, that the able committee, after years of patient consideration of the subject, were able to certify to only one fact, namely, “there is an order of office-bearers in the Presbyterian Church, rightly or wrongly called elders”? They cannot say upon what authority this order is founded, nor whether or not it is rightly named.

It is little to the credit of the Presbyterian Church that it must speak in such doubtful and even despairing terms about the warrant and the nature of that office, which, it is sometimes said, constitutes “the glory of the Presbyterian Church.” It seems that we are no nearer an agreement now than when the Westminster Assembly met. In that body there were but three distinct views; and these were certainly not more divergent than the different views held to-day. Of the more than eighty churches in the great Presbyterian family, probably there is not one in which there is uniformity of opinion as to the nature and warrant of the office. Further, could uniformity touching these points be found, probably there would not be uniformity of opinion as to the way in which the theory of the office is to be realized in practice. To illustrate, take our Southern Presbyterian Church. We are not agreed among ourselves as to the theory of the office; nor are we agreed as to the metes and bounds within which the theory which we are trying to work should be given practical effect. Our Book of Church Order was adopted in 1879. Immediately Presbyteries began to overture the General Assembly to take steps to change the provisions of the Book touching the eldership. In five years, the constitution was amended three times; four years later it was amended again; five years later, another amendment; and six years later, yet another. Several overtures have gone up to the Assembly asking for further changes, showing that the Book is still far from satisfactory. Moreover, different Assemblies have given contradictory interpretations of the Book as respects the power of the ruling elder. All of which shows that within our own communion there is much confusion in respect to both theory and practice. Our church is to be commended for its restlessness,

and its persistent efforts to reach a scriptural solution of the difficulties, and a solid basis of agreement. It is not fettered by traditional views and practices, nor is it restrained by an excessive conservatism. It has been moving all the while in the direction of magnifying the office, and narrowing the difference between the teaching and the ruling elder. When our Form of Government was adopted, in 1879, its provisions touching the ruling elder and his duties were based upon a certain theory of the office. The changes which have since been made were due to demonstrated defects either in the theory, or in the manner of its expression, or in both. It is not easy, if indeed it is possible, to gather from the Book just precisely what the theory was to which the Constitution endeavored to give expression. Unquestionably Dr. Thornwell's views had a moulding effect; but it is easy to show that his views were by no means perfectly embodied. He was very emphatic in declaring that in the New Testament the same titles are given to all the presbyters; the same functions are assigned to all; and the same qualifications are demanded of all. All elders are presbyters, bishops, pastors; all are enjoined to "take heed to all the flock, to feed the church of God"; all are required to be "apt to teach." It is true that Dr. Thornwell taught that some of the elders were preachers, but this did not produce an official distinction between them and the other presbyters. Here is a church in which there is one elder who is a lawyer, another who is a doctor, and another who is a merchant. This does not mean that there are three different kinds of elders in this church—there is but one kind. Precisely so, the fact that some elders preach does not make of them a different kind of elder. Hence, whatever the Bible says about any elders, it says about all elders. When it speaks about preachers, it is speaking about an entirely different class of officers. That this view of the New Testament presbyter is not adequately embodied in our Book is evident at a glance. We have taken nearly all the New Testament titles and restricted them to the minister of the Word. "The person who fills this office has in Scripture different titles expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed bishop. As he feeds them with spiritual food, he is termed pastor. As he serves Christ in the church, he is termed minister. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an

example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and kingdom of Christ, he is termed presbyter or elder." Such is the language of the Book touching the office of minister of the Word. According to Dr. Thornwell, not one single one of these titles is given to him because he is a minister of the Word, but because he is an elder; and he should share these titles with all other elders. But when we turn to the office of ruling elder in our Book, we find him honored with none of the foregoing titles. Again, the Book usurps for the ministers of the Word the qualifications which Paul lays down for bishops, *i. e.*, according to Thornwell, for all elders.

It is evident that Thornwell's theory of the eldership is not consistently carried out in our Book. It is, further, evident that the theory of the Westminster Assembly lingered in the mind of the church and had something to do in shaping the language of our Book.

"As there were in the church, under the law, elders of the people for the government thereof, so, in the gospel church, Christ has furnished others besides the ministers of the Word with gifts and commission to govern when called thereunto, which officers are entitled ruling elders." This is the reserved and cautious language of those in the Westminster Assembly who felt constrained to seek a middle course between the Erastians and Independents, who denied all scriptural warrant for the office of ruling elder, and the Scotch Commissioners, who warmly advocated the "presbyter theory." If we really believe that the ruling elder is the presbyter, the bishop, the pastor, of the New Testament, we might do well to leave such a timid statement of the warrant and nature of the office behind us.

In treating of the minister of the Word, our Book teaches that it is his duty, as pastor, "to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word." If this be a true definition of the pastoral office, then we cannot admit that ruling elders are pastors, unless we go further and blot out all distinction between preachers and elders: Dr. Thornwell asserts that every elder is a pastor, and that it is his divinely appointed duty "to feed the church," but he tries to evade the force of the term as implying a ministry of teaching. He is candid enough to admit, however, that the word pastor "expresses the general idea of guidance and authority, and may refer either to the instruc-



tions of a teacher, or the directions and government of a ruler."

Our object in showing the contrariety between Thornwell and our Book is merely to make evident that the framers of our Constitution were not dominated by his influence. Neither were they tied back close and hard to the Westminster divines; for while they use the vague language of those eminent worthies in defining the office of ruling elder, they go far beyond them in the functions which they assign to the office. Whatever theory may have been professed by those who gave us our fundamental law, the history of our church since the law was adopted demonstrates conclusively that the theory, as embodied, has signally failed to give satisfaction. Notwithstanding the changes that have been made, all designed to render the office more effective, there is still much dissatisfaction. It is felt that our great body of ruling elders—pious, intelligent, capable men, many of them men of great ability—are not the power for good which they ought to be. The church is not reaping the benefit which it should from their sanctified talents. It is felt that one reason for this failure is that we have not yet hit on the true scriptural theory of the office. We are groping for it, pushing out a little in this direction and that, and trying to find just the adjustment which will secure the long hoped for results. As already intimated, the tendency is to approximate the functions of the ruling elder to those of the teaching elder. Every change has shortened perceptibly the distance between these two classes; and the changes asked for by some of the Presbyteries and not granted by the Assembly have looked to the same end. Manifestly, if our church continues to hold on its course, it will ultimately reach the conclusion that elders are not only all of the same order, but also of the same class. What, then, would become of 1 Tim. v. 17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine"? We should have very little trouble with this, for the reason that distinguished exegetes, like Lightfoot, have already furnished us good authority for interpreting this verse to mean a distribution of duties based upon difference not of office, but of gifts—what all might lawfully do, is assigned to those best fitted. With this one verse out of the way, we should have easy sailing. All the rest of the New Testament would

be in our favor. This one verse is absolutely the only hint of a separation of presbyters into two classes. Other Scriptures give them all the same names, charge them with the same duties, and lay down for all the same qualifications. It would simplify matters much if we could use all these Scriptures in defining the duties, not of a part of our presbyters, but of the whole body.

What would be the effect on our practice? Would we not have to lower the standard of ministerial education, or send all our elders to the seminary? Would we not be embarrassed with our riches, having a plurality of preachers in every congregation? Let it be borne in mind that the theory is not that all presbyters must preach, but that all may preach. Probably the result would be that described by Dr. Dabney: "Would not difference of gifts, of popularity and of taste, soon throw the preaching work wholly into the hands of one or two? Would not the good brother who was slow of speech, and whose rising usually helped to empty the church of hearers, while he saw it crowded whenever his more fluent brother presbyter preached, be irresistibly impelled to give up public preaching, and limit himself to the functions of rule and inspection, in performing which he was useful, happy and respectable?" Dr. Dabney's object is to discredit the theory that preaching was a legitimate function of all the elders. We would soon find, he suggests, that the "plurality of preaching elders would slide into the Presbyterian usage, one or two of the best qualified doing the preaching, and the rest the ruling." Surely it is no discrediting of the theory to show that the practical outcome would be substantially the Presbyterian usage. This rather commends it to us. The public preaching would still be done by those best qualified to do it. If a church had no one among its elders well fitted by gifts and education, it would send off for some one specially educated for the work, and settle him among them. There would still be need for our theological seminaries, and still we should have numbers of those "desiring the office of a bishop" availing themselves of all the educational advantages which we could furnish.

Would there be any gain to the church by resolving all the elders into one class? It has already been suggested that we should have more Scriptures from which to draw instruction and motive in dealing with the office. If all the Presbyterian

churches would adopt this theory, it would not then be possible to convert a Pan-Presbyterian Council into a Babel of voices by propounding the question, "What is the ruling elder?" Possibly there would be a gain in one or two other directions.

1. For one thing, we should be done with trying to distinguish between the public expounding of the Scripture, which the ruling elder may properly do, and official preaching. It has been a severe tax on the feebler minds of the church to see the ground of this distinction. Some think that Scripture exposition given in front of the pulpit is unofficial, while that given in the sacred desk is official. Hence, the elder may hold forth to any extent, provided he does not go into the pulpit.

2. For another thing, we should not have to forbid an elder's pronouncing the benediction, lest he wound weak consciences. One of our Presbyteries made a worthy effort to supply some of its vacant churches with public worship by sending elders to minister to them. At the next regular meeting of Presbytery, complaint was brought forward that some of these elders had been guilty of closing the service with the benediction.

3. For yet another thing, feeble churches afflicted with long vacancies in the pulpit would not have the added affliction of doing without the administration of the sacraments. In sections of the country where churches are far apart, and preachers are scarce, it is no uncommon thing for Christian people to be deprived for a year at a time of both sacraments. It would be a great gain if each church, however feeble, provided it had in it an elder, could enjoy all the means of grace which Christ has ordained.

It is not worth while to enumerate other benefits, for the church may never put itself in a position to enjoy them. But probably the number is growing of those who doubt whether or not 1 Tim. v. 17 has not been overworked.