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I. THE LATEST INFIDELITY.

A REPLY TO INGERSOLL'S POSITIONS.

THE phase of infidelity most current among those who do not profess to accept the gospel is marked by two qualities: It is aggressive, and it is extreme. It refuses to stop short of that last result, blank atheism, or, at least, blank agnosticism, from which even the skepticism of previous ages recoiled with abhorrence. This ultraism of the present adversaries is in one aspect very shocking; but in another it is promising. They are practically teaching the world that conclusion, on which James Mills justified his atheism, that when once a man's sense rejects the gospel theory, he finds no stopping place between that rejection and atheism; because, as Bishop Butler has forever established, every difficulty which besets the old gospel plan equally embarrasses the deistic plan. This disclosure is useful. Our atheists are teaching people that there is no decent middle ground for them to stand on; but the voice of nature and conscience never permits decent people to stand long on the ground of atheism. This outrages both head and heart too horribly. Were a son to insist, contrary to sufficient evidence of the fact, upon denying and discarding the very existence of his father, we see plainly enough how his position involves every phase of filial transgression, because it involves the absolute neglect of every filial duty. The position may involve, in the form of a sin of omission, the crime of parricide. The atheist discards the very existence of his heavenly Father; so, unless he has justified his denial by sound evidence, he includes in that

V. THE TITHE SYSTEM.

THE methods of supporting the Christian church have been reduced to three: (1), Voluntary offerings; (2), Competent maintenance; and (3), Tithes and offerings.

The theory of *voluntary offerings* apparently construes the church of Christ as a dependent, and conditions its existence and prosperity upon the largeheartedness and benevolence of its friends. But the church of Christ is the most magnificent creation of God in the earth. It is a spiritual kingdom, which is in the world, but not of the world. It has Jesus Christ, "the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," as its crowned and sceptred Potentate. It has a mediatorial throne, which can command, for ecclesiastical purposes, the throne of nature and the throne of grace. It has the honest promise of the Almighty God that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Upon its stability, progress, and final triumph depend the salvation of the elect, the honor of Christ, and the glory of God. Now, to condition these guaranteed results, which are to both God and man of such vast significance, upon the caprices of popular charity, demands the clearest proof to save it from being preposterous. Is the church of Christ, as dear to him as the apple of his eye, in the establishment of which the Triune God took formal counsel, and which is solemnly charged with the evangelization of the world, to be viewed as a penniless beggar, sitting by the wayside, asking an alms of the passer-by, and thankfully receiving every pittance that may be cast into its empty palm? If its Divine Lord has created it under these humiliating conditions and required it thus to plead for its life, we shall humbly bow to his most holy will, while we wonder that the successor to *David's* throne should make fickle charity the financial principle of his magnificent government; and our wonder will be the more increased when we understand that the very Head of this glorious kingdom has announced this as one of the principles of his admin-

istration, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." The theory of almsgiving changes this maxim of Christ into, "The laborer is worthy of *charity*." To our view, the change dooms the theory, and with the pernicious theory goes all of that offensive phraseology which stigmatizes and embarrasses ministers and church workers with the epithet of *beggars* as often as they are compelled to appeal for money. Nor will this representation of this voluntary system be affected by the consideration that the church is superlatively deserving of all it receives, for in that case the contributions would be but a charity worthily bestowed. Nor will this representation of the free-will system be affected by the consideration that Christ has commanded these offerings, for in that case the offerings are but a charity commanded.

The theory of *competent maintenance* is the theory of the Church of Rome, and is to be seriously suspected on account of its friend. According to it, the church does not depend upon charity for its necessary revenue, but possesses a divine right to so much of the people's property as is needed to afford the church a competent maintenance while it is fulfilling its mission in the world. Rome itself is the judge of the amount required to make a competent maintenance, and if this amount is not voluntarily surrendered, ecclesiastical authority may collect it by anathema or civil power. But this theory puts the people's property where the Romish system puts the people themselves—in the hands of Rome—and right faithfully has the apostasy applied the theory to fleece the people! Under this system, to corrupt the church, is to make it an organized power of extortion. It is biblically obvious that God never thus placed his people's property at the mercy of ecclesiastics.

The other theory is that of *tithes and offerings*, which we know, beyond all doubt, at least once had God's approval. This theory, on the one hand, insures the church of Christ against the contingencies of a pauper's support, and, on the other, it protects the people against the exorbitance of a selfish priesthood.

These are the three initial methods of church support. Under the first, Protestants are *begging*; under the second, Romanists are *extorting*; under the third, the church once *thrived*.

That the church of Christ has a divine right to a support, and that every individual is bound to contribute to that support, all men admit. But the vexatious question is, *How much?* Tender consciences ask the question. Men who desire to come up to the full measure of duty ask it. Men who hear burning appeals from the pulpit—appeals that are made to their love for God and man, to their consciences, to the languishing causes of benevolence—ask it. The theory of voluntary contributions refers it to the judgment of the *individual* alone, and answers, As much as you feel inclined to bestow upon your Lord. The theory of competent maintenance refers it to the judgment of the *church*, and answers, As much as the ecclesiastics exact. The theory of tithes refers it to the judgment of *God*, and answers, At least one-tenth of the increase. The tithe system has at least the safest tribunal.

Under Moses the tithe system received three special modifications to adapt it to the peculiar features of that economy of which he was, under God, the instrumentary founder. To advocate any of these special features of the system would be to Judaize. But to advocate that *substantial* part of the system which is adapted to the essential and permanent features of all ecclesiasticism, and which is older than Mosaism, and which survives the accidental modifications of all dispensations, is not to Judaize, but to advocate that which is not distinctively Judaic. *We contend for no distinctive Mosaic features of the system.*

Moses ordained three tithes. (1), The Levitical tithe, which was designed to support the tribe of Levi.¹ (2), The Sanctuary tithe, which was laid up at home, and designed to defray the expenses of the family in attending the three annual feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Having ordained the feasts, God further ordained this second tithe as expense-money, that all might be left without excuse in this matter.² (3), The Poor tithe, which was laid up at home twice in seven years, and disbursed at discretion as charity.³ The *third* was a special Mosaic arrangement, and has disappeared with the temporary elements of that dispensation; the principle of charitableness remains, but we do

¹ Num. xviii. 20-24. ² Deut. xiv. 23-27; xii. 5-22. ³ Deut. xiv. 28, 29; xxvi. 12-15.

not find that any other biblical writers besides Moses prescribed this method of practicing this grace, and so we make no contention for it. The *second* was the festival tithe, and as the gospel has dispensed with these festivals, the very reason for its existence has disappeared. The special Mosaic feature in the *first* tithe was *its exclusive assignation to the tribe of Levi*; and, as the gospel has dispensed with the Levitical priesthood, this feature of the first tithe has also passed away. All the duties of public religion were assigned to the tribe of Levi, hence the propriety of assigning all the ecclesiastical revenue to this tribe. But under the gospel, ministers have not succeeded to all the functions of this tribe, that is, they are not exclusively charged with *all* the duties of religion; hence they cannot properly succeed to all the revenue raised by tithing. The comparison fully drawn up is as follows: Under the Old Testament all tithes were designed as a revenue to support God's kingdom, and as under Moses the Levites were the only officers of that spiritual kingdom, they received the tithes and disbursed them in the discharge of their duties; so under the New Testament all tithes are designed as a revenue to defray the expenses of God's kingdom in the world, but, as preachers are not the only workers entitled to remuneration, they do not receive all the tithes. Under both Testaments the purpose of tithes is the same, namely, to defray the legitimate expenses of God's kingdom in this world. But if at any time, and for any reason, tithes should be inadequate to meet the expenses of this kingdom, economically administered, God's people are required to make free-will offerings, measuring these offerings by the emergency of the cause, their ability to make contributions, and their love for their Master. The amount of such offerings is to be defined by the discretion and love of the individual.

But the inherent justice of the tithe system has been assailed in these words: "The tithe, or any other fixed, arbitrary proportion or percentage, *would be unequal*, and, therefore, *unjust in its operation* on different individuals, *and on the same individual at different times.*"¹ If this allegation be true, we are estopped from writing another word in favor of a system which is inherently against

¹ *Christian Observer*, Sept. 4, 1889.

God's nature, and by the prescription of which the church would wrong its members. We lay down the following propositions as proof of the fact that the tithe system does not intrinsically and necessarily contravene the principles of unchangeable righteousness:

1. God is the absolute owner of the land, and as such is fairly entitled to exact rent of all its occupants. Man, on the other hand, is, under God, a tenant of the soil (all men directly or indirectly draw their living from the land), and as such is under a righteous obligation to pay rent if the land-owner charges it.

2. God is the absolute ruler of the world and all them that dwell therein, and as such he has a right to levy and collect a tax for the support of that government which he has founded and administers in the interest of his subjects. Men, on the other hand, are not sovereigns, but subjects and beneficiaries of God's government, and as such they are under a righteous obligation to pay the tax which the throne assesses. At least this must be admitted as long as men administer their civil governments.

3. Since God is the owner of "the world and the fulness thereof," it follows that all that men call their own is theirs by divine gift, or by divine loan. If property is man's by divine gift, the giver had the right to impose conditions and make reservations; if a loan, he had the right to require interest of the borrowers. The equity of this proposition will endure as long as the present views of the world may last.

4. As a matter of fact, God was the author of this system under the Mosaic economy; but if it had been inherently unjust and unequal, *God* could not have been its author under any economy.

5. The tithe law and the Sabbath law are analogues. If one is unequal and unjust because it fixes a definite proportion of one's substance, the other must be unequal and unjust because it fixes a definite proportion of one's time. No other conclusion can follow.

Now, with a feeling that the tithe system is not barred by its intrinsic nature, we turn away from all preliminary questions to the argument for the perpetuity of the *substantial part* of the system; and that argument will endeavor to show that this has been God's system under all dispensations and at all periods of

the church's history—that it has been in all ages God's uniform method of raising the revenue necessary for the administration of his kingdom on earth.

I. *The tithe system was in force under the Patriarchal dispensation, and dates back in antiquity to the flood, and probably to Adam himself.*

When Abraham returned from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and his allies at Shaveh, "Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."¹ We invite attention to the following comments upon this case:

1. Abraham recognized an old custom, and did not initiate a new one. This is seen "between the lines" in the whole record of the case, and in the very form of the language. "And he (Abraham) gave him (Melchizedek) tithes of all." From a literary point of view, such a statement would be shockingly abrupt if there had been no precedent custom of tithe paying.

2. Whoever this Melchizedek was, historically considered, he was unmistakably a "priest of the most high God," and Abraham was a worshipper of the God whose priest Melchizedek was. Abraham having taken spoils in his conquest of the kings of the valley, gave a tithe of them to Melchizedek. Why? Was it because Melchizedek had been engaged in the battle, and the tenth was his earned proportion of the booty? The record does not remotely hint such a thing. Was it because Abraham and Melchizedek were personal friends, and the tenth was a present from friend to friend? There is no intimation that the two had ever met before. Was it because Melchizedek was the priest of the most high God, upon whose altar Abraham laid the tenth as an offering in obedience to a recognized and standing custom of the religion of the day? One cannot read Genesis and Hebrews without feeling the need of ingenious argument to deliver his mind from this impression.

¹ Gen. xiv. 17-24; Heb. vii. 1-10.

3. Melchizedek was not only a priest, but he was also a type of Christ;¹ and at the time of this tithing Abraham had the Israelitish race in his loins. If the church under the typical dispensation paid tithes to the typical priest, the church under the antitypical dispensation ought to pay tithes to the antitypical priest, unless divine authority has changed the economy; and the *onus probandi* of such a change devolves upon those who deny the present binding force of tithes. At any rate, the church under the economy of types recognized the tithe system four centuries before Moses was born.

Again, the antiquity of the tithe system is proved by the fact that Jacob, centuries before Israel ever camped at the base of Sinai, vowed that he would give God the tenth if he would prosper him; a duty which he seems to have been neglecting in his greed for wealth. "Of all thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."² "The question has been raised, to whom Jacob, when making his vow, meant to *pay tithes* from all those things which he owed to the protection and blessing of God. By the law tithes were given to the priests, and through them to God. But as in the family of the patriarchs there was no special priesthood, but themselves discharged such duties, this circumstance has been deemed an objection to the authenticity of the narrative. . . We rather suppose that the words imply that he meant therewith to erect the promised house of God, to preserve and maintain it, and to discharge the expenses of the worship connected with the worship there."³ The incident at least proves this much: There was a worship in those early days, and it was sustained by tithes.

Again, the testimonies may be multiplied almost indefinitely to prove the antiquity and universality of this custom of sustaining religion by tithes.

Keil and Delitzsch: "Giving the tenth was the practical acknowledgment of the divine priesthood of Melchizedek; for the tenth was, *according to the general custom*, the offering presented to the Deity."⁴

Hengstenberg: "The offering of tithes belonged to the external

¹ Heb. vii. 1-11. ² Gen. xxviii. 22. ³ Kurtz: *Hist. Old Cov.*, Vol. I., p. 311.

⁴ On Gen. xiv. 17-24.

worship of God. That these, if not prevailing before the Mosaic time, did at least exist, is evident not merely from the circumstance that Jacob made a vow to give them to God, but also because Moses, in his regulations respecting the second tithes, speaks of them as already customary before his time. . . . Clearly, therefore, they were not established by Moses, but only recognized. . . . What had originally been a voluntary act of love to individuals, had by degrees become an established custom.”¹

Encyclopedia Britannica: “This precept, written down in the seventh century B. C., is plainly no innovation, but rests on older usage. (Gen. xxviii. 22; Amos iv. 4.) . . . But however inexactly it may often have been paid, the proportion of one part in ten seems to have been accepted in many ancient nations as the normal measure of sacred tribute paid from the gains of husbandry, trade, or even war.”²

American Cyclopaedia: “This tax seems to have been of patriarchal origin, and existed in many of the nations of antiquity.”³

Cruden: “The most barbarous nations, and the heathen Greeks and Romans, out of a principle of religion common to all men, have often dedicated their tithes to their gods. Some have made it a standing obligation, others have done it upon particular occasions, and by the impulse of a transient devotion. Laertius says, that when Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens, wrote to Solon, to persuade him to return to Athens, he tells him, ‘that every one there pays the tithe of his goods for the offering of sacrifices to the gods.’ Pliny says, that the Arabian merchants who trade in spices durst not sell any till they had paid the tenth to their god Sabis. And Plutarch, in more places than one, mentions a custom of the Romans, of offering to Hercules the tithe of what they took from their enemies.”⁴

The Presbytery of Charleston at its spring session, in 1889, had a report on the subject of tithes from a committee which it had previously appointed to investigate the subject. It cites a great many authorities for the position that the tithe system was far older than Moses, and was practiced by almost every nation of antiquity in support of their religions. We quote the conclusion

¹ *Kingdom of God*, Vol. I., p. 231. ² *Art. Tithes*. ³ *Art. on Tithes*.

⁴ *Concordance: Tithe*.

of that report, which was written by Rev. G. A. Blackburn, of Columbia, S. C., with regret that our lack of space compels us to condense what it says:

“From the citations above, it appears that tithes were anciently paid by nearly all the world. In considering these proofs, several things worthy of consideration are presented:

“1. That all the nations of the earth gave to their gods according to a fixed proportion, and that, too, when there seems to be no reason why men should give in proportion, rather than in amounts, without regard to proportion. . . .

“2. That they all gave in the same proportion—the tenth—a proportion which has nothing peculiar or striking about it that would cause men to select it, rather than a fifth or twentieth. . . .

“3. That heathen peoples maintained for centuries an ordinance which continually operated against the covetousness and selfishness of the human heart. . . .

“4. That the origin of the tithe among the heathen antedates the earliest human history; history finds tithing not only existing, but existing as a venerable custom. The Greek writers claim that it was practiced in their country B. C. 1500. The Romans say they had it B. C. 1200. It was certainly an ancient custom in Phœnicia B. C. 946. . . .

“5. That the ancients understood the tithe to be of divine appointment; they claim to have received it from their gods. . . .

“The question now recurs, Whence came this custom? To suppose that so many nations, so widely scattered, all happened to give in proportion, and all happened to hit upon the same proportion, when there was nothing in the nature of the case to lead them to select it, is a supposition too violent for belief. To say they borrowed it from the Jews would be equally absurd, because the heathen were acquainted with the tithe before the world began to feel the influence of the Jewish economy. . . .

“We are then forced, in order to find the origin of tithes, to go back to some period when all the nations could have derived it from one source. No such period can be found since the confusion of tongues at Babel. And as the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth all alike paid tithes, we cannot reasonably suppose the custom to have been originated later than Noah.”

We now supplement the report's reasoning with this: Abraham certainly paid tithes, not as one who inaugurated a custom, but as one who recognized an existing institution. Abraham was born 1946 after the creation of the world, and Noah died in 2066 after the creation; these two were contemporaries one hundred and twenty years. Noah and Methuselah were contemporaries six hundred years beyond the flood. And Methuselah and Adam were contemporaries two hundred and forty-three years. Abraham to Noah to Methuselah to Adam—it is very probable that the custom of giving one-tenth of the increase is as hoary as the custom of giving one-seventh of the time.

II. *The tithe system prevailed under the Mosaic dispensation, and did not pass away with the distinctive and special features of that economy.*

That the system prevailed from Moses to Malachi needs no proof, because it is universally confessed; but that it vanished with that economy many allege, and argument to the contrary must be made.

1. That system, which was operated by Abraham more than four hundred years before the Exodus, cannot be Mosaic in its origin; cannot be a special feature of the Jewish dispensation; cannot have faded away merely because that economy has changed. The *Mosaic modifications* of the system have become extinct; but it is grossly illegitimate to reason that the system itself, which was not Mosaic, disappeared, *ipso facto*, because Mosaism disappeared. Moses received the sabbatic law from the patriarchs, and gave it special determinations under his administration. So did he with the law of the tithe. The argument that carries away the tithe system in the wreck of Mosaism carries down the Sabbath law also. They are exact analogues.

2. The tithe system was not a creation of Jewish civil law, so as to end with the ending of that form of government, because it was not enacted by Moses as a civil lawgiver;¹ because it was not operated to raise a civil revenue;² because its income was paid to the Levites as compensation for religious service;³ because God challenged the proceeds of the system as holy unto himself;⁴ because the civil government did not force the payment of tithes.

3. The system was not a creation of Jewish ceremonialism, so as to pass away with the temporary forms of that economy: (1), Because it antedated all Jewish ritualism. (2), Because no provision was made for purging away any ceremonial uncleanness that might be contracted by the non-payment of tithes. The guilt was moral.⁵ (3), Because there was nothing in the gospel typified by tithes under the law. Everything that belonged to the ritual was typical. If tithes were typical of Christian liberality, the antitype ought at least to match the type.

¹ Num. xviii. 20-24.

² 1 Sam. viii. 10-18.

³ Num. xviii. 20-24.

⁴ Lev. xxvii. 30.

⁵ Mal. iii. 8.

4. It could not have passed away as a positive institute created for the occasion of that dispensation: (1), Because it was not instituted for the emergencies of that special time; (2), Because the occasion exists to-day which existed then, namely, the support of religion.

5. The tithe system was applied to sustain the worship of the synagogue. "After the exile, these prescripts (tithes), as the Mosaic law in general, were enforced with the greatest strictness, and from the synagogue the whole arrangement (of tithing) was transferred to the church."¹ "Erected out of the common funds or free-gifts of the community, it had also to be supported by taxes and donations."² "It is, moreover, well known that the early Christian churches were entirely organized after the pattern of the synagogues."³ The synagogues were perhaps coëval with the temple, but in a more crude and unpretentious form than they assumed after the Babylonish exile under Ezra and Nehemiah. These men were inspired. They did not dare to transfer any part of worship which was distinctive of the temple to the synagogue; but the tithe system was applied to support the synagogue worship, and was therefore general to religion and not special and temporary.

6. It is an indisputable principle of jurisprudence that a law, once having been enacted, abides in force until it expires by limitation, by repeal, or is in some way legislated out of existence. The tithe law was once on the divine statute-book. That all confess. It has not expired by limitation, for there is as much occasion for the law to-day as when it was first formed. If it has been repealed, where is the annulling act? If it has been legislated out of existence, where is the legislation? The burden of proof is on those who deny that it is binding to-day.

Our argument has brought us down to the New Testament, over a period of four thousand years, and we have found that during those centuries the tithe system was the system of God. It now carries the weight of a venerable presumption for all future time.

III. *The tithe system was endorsed by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament.*

¹ Schaff-Herzog Ency., *Tithes*.

² Internat. Cyclo., *Synagogue*.

³ *Ibid.*

1. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ye pay tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."¹ Luke uses parallel language.² In this passage our Lord does not pronounce a woe upon the scribes and Pharisees because of their strict observance of the tithe law, but because of their glaring neglect of the weightier matters of the moral and religious law of God. They are not blamed for what they did, but for what they did not do. "They did right to pay tithes to the utmost. But, with all this attention to smallest matters, they neglected things of more importance."³ "In conclusion, it may be remarked that the Lord did not repudiate the exact observance of the precepts of the law. In harmony with Matt. v. 19, the Saviour approves of the careful fulfilment even of those commandments in the Old Testament which appear unimportant."⁴ "That there might be no misunderstanding, as if he meant to say faithfulness in *little things* is not necessary, Christ has put between these sayings these words: *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*"⁵ "What you *have neglected* you ought to have *done*, and at the same time not *have neglected* what you are in *the habit of doing*, the former being of paramount importance; the subordinate matter, viz., your painful attention to tithes, is not superseded by the higher duties, but only kept in its proper place."⁶ Thus it is perfectly clear that the tithe system received the endorsement of Christ.

But it will be objected that it received his endorsement for the scribes and Pharisees and all who lived under the Mosaic economy. But lay by the side of the "woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites!" this tremendous utterance of the Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall

¹ Matt. xxiii. 23.² Luke xi. 42.³ Jacobus, *in loc.*⁴ Olshausen, *in loc.*⁵ Stier, *in loc.*⁶ Meyer, *in loc.*

teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹ If this passage does not fortify and perpetuate that tithe law which Christ approved, it must be for some one of the following reasons: because it was a mere accidental of the Jewish economy, or because it was a feature of the Jewish ceremonialism, or because it was a positive institute of the Jewish polity, or because it has been "fulfilled." But if the foregoing argument has any validity and consistency, it has been proved that the tithe system was in no way distinctively *Jewish*; and to affirm that it has been "fulfilled" is to affirm that the church to-day has no need of a revenue.

But it may be alleged that the passage in Matt. v. 17-19 has reference alone to the precepts in the moral law and to the doctrines in the prophets, and as the tithe law is a positive precept, this passage is not pertinent. In reply, we affirm that, just as the sabbatic law is a positive-moral precept, so the tithe law is a positive-moral precept; and if the passage is available for service in the Sabbath contest, it is likewise available in the tithe contest.

But further, when Christ came in contact with the popular views concerning the law of murder, the law of divorce, the law of swearing, the law of retaliation, the law of good neighborhood, all of which he treated in this sermon, he promptly corrected them and vigorously expressed his disapproval; but when he encountered the law of the tithe, he as promptly put his endorsement upon it: "*These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*"

Again, if our Lord did not intend by these words, "these ought ye to have done," to fix the tenth as the minimum of Christian liberality, then what did he mean? Did he use this language to enhance his indictment of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees? That cannot be, because it is the language of commendation. Did he mean to tell his hearers that it was their duty to observe this Mosaic law? No, because this was the very point upon which

¹ Matt. v. 17-19.

they stickled. Did he mean to admit that the scribes and Pharisees were right in their tithe-paying? Of course; but does this exhaust the meaning? If so, it is wonderful that he did not so much as hint here, or anywhere throughout all the history and teaching he left behind him, the new law of liberality which should supersede the old. Calvin's comment is: "*Tithes*, which Christ places inferior to *judgment* and *mercy*, were a part of divine worship"¹—a permanent part, less significant than inward piety and the great matters of judgment, mercy and faith, but still important. The question of church support cannot rise paramount to the question of conversion, but it must be conceded its proper value.

2. "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."²

Rev. A. W. Miller, D. D., LL. D., in discussing this passage, says: "The altar had a large revenue. Tithes and other offerings belonged to it. And the priests did partake with it, did live of it, as a matter of right; else there had been no certain, settled maintenance. But there are no priests now under the New Testament. Hence the propriety of a New Testament statute for ministers of the gospel. And here we have the ordinance: The Lord hath ordained. What? That they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. (*Ἐκ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου*. 'Ex, from, out of, out of the gospel's treasury.) How? Even so—ὁῦτω—in the same way. *Ad hunc modum*.—(Scapula.) *Hoc modo, ad hunc modum, hac ratione*.—(Schleusner.) In the same manner, or like manner.—(Parkhurst.) In the same way that priests lived of the altar. What revenue, then, has the gospel? A revenue similar to that of the temple. Else it is not *even so*, as the apostle makes the comparison. But the revenue of the temple consisted, in the first place, of tithes, and, in the second place, of free-will offerings. Now, if the gospel has none but the last, how is it *even so* as the temple? If the priests of the temple were sure of a tenth, and much more, and the ministers of the gospel not sure of a hundredth or thousandth part, or of any part at all, how is their pro-

¹ *In loc.*

² 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14.

vision *even so* as that of the priests of the temple? Did the Lord *ordain* that every man should pay what he pleased? But law that imposes no obligation is not law. Then the *Lord's ordaining* amounts to nothing—as it has practically amounted to nothing in the case of hundreds of half-starved ministers of the gospel. The Lord, then, ordained tithes to the altar, and nothing to the gospel! How, then, did the Lord *ordain* a maintenance for the ministers of the gospel, *EVEN so* as for the ministers of the altar? There is no coherence, no comparison, no argument, no good sense, to be made out of this passage, unless we admit that the Lord has *ordained* tithes under the gospel as well as under the law. In the apostle's days there was no dispute as to whether tithes were to be paid. Nor could there be any at any time; for to Christ, the first after the order of Melchizedek, tithes were ever to be paid, for he ever liveth to receive them. The only dispute that could be was, to whom shall they be paid?"¹ This exposition is as lucid as it is masterly.

3. "And verily they that are the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth."² "Melchizedek is shown to have been a representation of Christ. He was a prophet, for he saw that Abraham had the promises. He was also both a priest and a king, as the Scriptures affirm. His priesthood, like that of Christ, was without beginning or ending. Without doubt he was the most perfect image of the Son of God given in the Old Testament. Abraham is shown to have been the representative of the church. He is called the father of the faithful; he had the promises which belong to the church; and at that time he had in his loins the whole Jewish Church. These two representative characters meet. He who was the representation of Christ gave to Abraham bread and wine, and blessed

¹ *North Carolina Presbyterian*, July 13, 1887.

² Heb. vii. 5-8.

him. He who represented the church gave to Melchizedek tithes of all. Every point in this transaction has a meaning. It was a photograph of gospel times. Everything here affirmed of Melchizedek must be affirmed of Christ, and everything here affirmed of Abraham must be affirmed of the church; otherwise the representation is faulty, and the whole incident loses its significance. If, therefore, in anticipation, the church paid, and Christ received, tithes, now that Christ has come we cannot withhold them.

Again argues the apostle: The Levitical priesthood has passed away, having as a type been fulfilled in One who was after the order of Melchizedek. If, then, we say that the tithe which belonged to Levi has passed away, it will only establish the tithe which belongs to the priesthood of Melchizedek, for that priesthood still abides, and under it the worshipper paid tithes as well as under that of Levi. This also agrees with the words of the apostle: *And here men that die receive tithes, but there he receiveth them of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.* How does Melchizedek live and receive tithes except in Christ? The only answer to this question is that the priesthood of Melchizedek is here identified with the priesthood of Christ, and if Christ's priesthood was once a tithe-receiving priesthood, it is still a tithe-receiving priesthood, for it is an unchangeable one, seeing the priest ever liveth."¹

4. Appeal is not unfrequently made, with great confidence, to 1 Cor. xvi. 2, as a passage furnishing the apostolic method of support and showing the abrogation of the tithe system. That verse reads: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." But it is a canon of biblical hermeneutics, as it is indeed a law of universal interpretation, *that no passage shall be construed except in the light of its own context*; and an examination of the context of this text will show that Paul was providing for a special free-will offering for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and was not inaugurating a new system of ecclesiastical support. He was at Ephesus when he wrote this epistle, and on his way to Corinth.² At the very time of this tour the saints at

¹ Report to Charleston Presbytery, 1889. ² Hodge: 1 Cor., Introduct., pp. 11, 12.

Jerusalem were suffering great hardships, and everywhere the apostle was raising funds for their relief.¹ "For some reason, not now to be certainly ascertained, poverty prevailed in Jerusalem among the believers more than in any other part of the church. Almost all the special exhortations to provide for the poor, in Paul's epistles, have primary reference to the poor in Jerusalem. He had exhorted the churches of Galatia to make a collection for their relief, and then those of Macedonia, and he now addresses the Corinthians on the subject. It is a very common opinion that the poverty of the Christians in Jerusalem arose from the community of goods introduced among them at the beginning, an error which arose from an excess of love over knowledge."² Departing from the Lord's system, in excess of zeal, they brought personal distress upon themselves, even as the departures from that system to-day, in excess of covetousness, has brought distress upon the church. But it is perfectly patent that in the passage under consideration the apostle was raising alms for an emergency, and not providing a perpetual precedent for all church support in its quiet and normal condition. (1), He distinctly specifies the object of the charity—the *poor saints at Jerusalem*.³ (2), He as distinctly specifies his reason for having it laid up ready for him before he came—that *there be no gatherings when I come*.⁴ He had a multitude of matters to attend to; he asked that this one be disposed of against his coming. (3), He distinctly notified them that what they gave would be carried to Jerusalem by himself, or men of their own appointment.⁵ He asked them to contribute as liberally as their prosperity would allow. Now, the argument based upon this passage may be thrown into the following form: Whatever Paul ordered the Corinthian church to do on that occasion, the Christian church is directed to do to-day on similar occasions; Paul directed the Corinthian church to give alms to their poor brethren at Jerusalem, therefore the Christian church is directed to give alms to their brethren in times of suffering and emergency. But it is thoroughly illegitimate to reason from this *special collec-*

¹ Acts xix. 21; xxiv. 17; Rom. xv. 25, 26.

² Hodge: 1 Cor., p. 361.

³ 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

⁵ 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4.

tion to meet an emergency to the settled financial policy of the church for its normal and stated wants.

Rev. John W. Pratt, D. D., says: "This passage has been grievously misunderstood and made to teach the propriety of Sunday morning collections in church for the support of the gospel, whereas it was Paul's direction how to provide in a special emergency alms for the suffering saints in Jerusalem, so as to avoid taking up a collection when he should come to preach to them."¹ "It is clear the whole passage teaches the duty of systematic laying aside of your earnings *at home* in order that you may be able to contribute to the poor saints as often as their necessities require, without resorting to collections in the church assemblies, when one would give by impulse, or caprice, or accident, or give nothing at all."²

IV. *The tithe system prevailed in the early Christian church.*

Bingham says: "It is generally agreed by learned men that the ancients accounted tithes to be due by divine right. Bellarmine, indeed, and Rivet, and Mr. Selden, place them upon another foot. But our learned Bishop Andrews and Bishop Carleton, who wrote before Mr. Selden, and Bishop Montague and Tillesly, who wrote in answer to him, not to mention many others who have written since, have clearly proved that the ancients believed the law about tithes not to be merely a ceremonial or political command, but of moral and perpetual obligation."³ Bingham, in the chapter which he devotes to this subject, quotes as in favor of his view: Origen, A. D. 185; Jerome, A. D. 340; Augustine, A. D. 353; Chrysostom, A. D. 347. The report to Charleston Presbytery, already quoted, cites from Comber on Tithes the following: Irenæus, A. D. 115; Cyprian, A. D. 200; Ambrose, A. D. 340; Isidore of Pelusium, about A. D. 370; and the Councils of Tours, 567, Macon, 585, Rouen, 650, and Metz, 756.

The Encyclopedia Britannica: "Tithes were generally regarded up to the seventeenth century as existing, *jure divino*, and as having been payable to the support of the church ever since the earliest days of Christianity." And much that has been written against the tithe system has been written against it *as it was prac-*

¹ Sermons, p. 245. ² *Ibid*, p. 247. ³ Christian Antiquities, Vol. II., pp. 176-182.

ticed in the Middle and Dark Ages. It was the civil enactments on the subject and the offensive tithing-man that stirred resistance and resentment. In every age of the church, the Mosaic not excepted, down to the Middle and Dark Ages, conscience and religion were the only tithe-collectors; and so should it always be. "Long before the eighth century payment of tithes was enjoined by ecclesiastical writers and by councils of the church; but the earliest authentic example of anything like a law of the state enforcing payment appears to occur in the Capitularies of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century."¹

American Cyclopedia: "The early Christian church adopted voluntarily the custom of consecrating to religious purposes a tenth of the income, it being admitted that first-fruits and tithes were not of divine precept in the new law, but held that the obligation of supporting the ministers of religion is of divine origin;" that is, "the new law" did not give to the civil government any divine right to form and enforce any tithe laws.

International Cyclopedia: "This provision for the clergy passed at a very early period from the Jewish into the Christian church, and indeed the same or some analogous appropriation has been traced in the other ancient religions. . . . By some the claim was held to be of divine law; by others of human institution; but in the gradual progress of relaxation it came to pass that the right thus established solely for the church began to be usurped for themselves and for purely secular uses by nobles or other powerful laymen."

Dr. Otto Mejer, Professor of Canon Law in Göttingen, says in the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia: "In the earliest times the Christian church was able to defray its expenses for liturgical purposes, for the care of the poor, etc., from the voluntary offerings of its members, consisting of wine, bread, oil, incense, and fruits. The Jewish custom of presenting first-fruit was very early adopted; and in the time of Tertullian (d. 215) contributions of money—monthly, annual or occasional—are mentioned. In the time of Jerome (d. 420) and Augustine (d. 430), tithes began to be intro-

¹ Ency. Brit., Art. *Tithes*.

duced; and from the close of the seventh century they were quite generally established.”¹

In these opinions the historians, Kurtz, Neander, Hallam, and Charles Hardiwick, concur.

Now, we make the following resumé of our argument: The tithe system prevailed, and those who practiced it were blessed of God, under the patriarchal dispensation; it was formally enacted, and those who practiced it were greatly blessed of God, under the Mosaic dispensation; it was carried over from the Old Testament by Christ and his apostles, and formally endorsed by them; it prevailed in the early Christian church, ere the pall of the Dark Ages had settled upon the world, and even through those ages it prevailed, greatly abused however; therefore it is not for the *progressiveness* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to proscribe the system, and cause the church of Christ to take her seat upon the door-step as a dependent beggar, thankfully to receive such charity as men may be pleased to put in her empty palm!

While this article was in preparation, the following reasons against the tithe system appeared in the columns of a weekly journal. They outline the opposition argument: “1. There is no authority for it in the New Testament. 2. It violates Christian liberality. 3. There is not the least allusion to tithing in any of the New Testament passages on the duty of giving. 4. The origin and history of tithing in modern times are against it. 5. The scholarship of the church is against it. 6. The good sense of the church, as seen in her legislation, is against it. 7. The tithe, or any other fixed, arbitrary proportion or percentage, *would be unequal*, and therefore *unjust in its operation* on different individuals, and on the same individual at different times. 8. The arguments in support of the tithe as binding now, are all inconsequent. Each is a *non sequiter*. 9. The view that would enforce the law of the tithe as binding now is almost always held in connection with inadmissible and often whimsical interpretations of the sacred Scriptures, which would seem to discredit its advocates as teachers of the word of God, at least so far as tithing is concerned.”²

We are willing for the case to go to the jury—the church.

R. A. WEBB.

¹ Art., *Eccl. Taxation*. ² *Christian Observer*, Sept 4, 11, 1889.