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A DISCOURSE

ON

ORDINATION

AND

CHURCH POLITY;

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN,

THAT THE ARROGANT ASSUMPTIONS OF HIGH-CHURCHISM ARE INCONSISTENT WITH SCRIPTURE, WITH REASON, AND WITH FACTS.

BY

REV. WASHINGTON BAIRD,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ST. MARY'S, GA.

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The following discourse was, in October, 1843, delivered by the author to his own congregation, without the intention of its ever going farther. The same subject was afterwards assigned as a Presbyterial exercise; and as such, the same discourse was, with but little variation, delivered before the Presbytery of Georgia, at its annual session in Darien, April 6, 1844.

It is now, in compliance with the wishes of many who heard it in Darien, laid before the public.

St. Mary's, Ga., *April* 26, 1844

INTRODUCTION.

Having been requested by my esteemed friend and relative, the author of the following discourse, to write something in the shape of an introduction to it, I do so with great pleasure.

As the note on a preceding page sufficiently states the circumstances that have led to the publication of the sermon which follows, it is not necessary that I should speak of them. A few words, however, respecting the subject discussed, and the manner in which it is here treated, may not be out of place.

No well-informed man can be ignorant of the fact that a wonderful change is gradually taking place in the Christian world. This great movement had its origin in the Reformation accomplished, or rather commenced, in the sixteenth century, by Luther, Calvin, and their coädjutors. That astonishing moral revolution, however great its blessings, was far from emancipating the Church of Christ from all the thraldom in which she had so long been held. The Reformers did, indeed, bring back to the world the knowledge of the true way of salvation;—in other words, the glorious doctrine of *Justification by Faith*.

But still many evils remained in connexion with the Church, even in those countries in which the Reformation exerted its happiest influences. As to some of these, the Reformers had not the light necessary to effect their removal; as to others, they had not the power; and as to some others, they had neither the light nor the power.

In every country the Reformation left the Church *a slave of the State*;—an evil whose perfection, if not its origin, is to be sought for in the politico-ecclesiastical despotism which the Pontiffs of Rome, affecting to be the successors of Peter, but in reality aiming to be the successors of the Cæsars, toiled for centuries to found. In some countries, the gold of essential Truth was allowed to be too much encrusted with the dross of papal errors. In a still greater number, too many of the forms of worship which Rome had with infinite pains instituted and consecrated, were retained, with slight modifications.

Whilst in some, the doctrine of an uninterrupted succession in the ministry, of an order of men who were ordained by those who stood in a line unbroken from the Apostles themselves—one of the most dangerous of all the cunningly devised heresies of Rome, because it leads to almost all others—was allowed to nestle in the Reformed Churches, and insinuate its poisonous influence throughout their most vital parts.

But, blessed be God, the Reformation has not ceased. Through the progress, first of civil, and then of religious liberty, in Protestant countries, and the increasing dissemination of the Sacred Scriptures, the way has been opened for their more thorough regeneration; whilst the same primary causes are now active in the commencement of a mighty movement in Roman Catholic nations.

The Protestant Churches of Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and these United States, are filled with the din of discussions of one sort or another. In some cases, the Church is striving to emancipate herself from the fetters of the State; in some, Truth is struggling with damnable errors which had crept into the Church chiefly through her unhallowed connexion with the State; whilst in others, Spiritual Religion and Formalism are engaged in a deadly struggle.

But we need fear nothing in relation to the final result. Good will grow out of this great contest between Truth and Error. The Church will become more free, and Truth will be left more unfettered for its conflicts with error of every sort; nor is its triumph for a moment to be despaired of.

In the discourse which follows, the true position, as it seems to me, has been taken. The call to preach the Gospel must come from Christ alone. All that His Church, or people, can do, is to ascertain, by all proper means, who are thus called. This they must do by a careful examination of the evidences which each man who claims to be called from on high, furnishes in his spirit, his life, and his endowments, for the work which the ministry is appointed to perform. If the Church finds that, as far as man can judge, the call is real, and proceeds from the Holy Ghost, its task is a very simple one: it consists in setting apart the person in question to the work of the ministry. And whether this "setting apart," or "induction," or "ordination," or whatever else it may be called, be performed by the imposition of hands, or by some other mode, is a very immaterial question. In certain cases it was done by the Apostles through the imposition of

hands, probably, however, in some connexion with the imparting of the power to perform miracles. And the same mode of "consecrating," or "setting apart," has been in all ages of the Church that which has been most pursued.

Nor do I think that it is at all an essential point that this "setting apart," or "ordination," should be done by a bishop, or a presbytery, or by a council, or by an individual Church. But what *is* essential is, that it should be done by some known and properly recognized authority, so that the Churches and the world may know that the person who comes to them as a minister of Christ, is really such, so far as man can judge.

This, it seems to me, is the view which reason and common sense should take of the call to preach the Gospel. It comes from God alone. There is a call that comes from men; but it is that which a Church or congregation gives to a man whom the proper authority in the Church has considered as called of God, and set apart to the work, to become their pastor. But who does not see that this is a totally different thing from the real call from on high to preach the Gospel? Many a man has thus been called whom God never called.

How greatly it is to be deplored, that all the various Protestant denominations do not come to a view of this subject which is at once so simple, so harmonizing in its influence, and which would lead to that mutual respect for each other's conscientious opinions which constitutes the only true basis of all sincere fellowship between the several branches of the Christian family.

Mr. Faber, who, in one of his late works,* in which he triumphantly meets Bossuet on his own four famous propositions in relation to the true Church, and proves that the Reformation Churches are connected with those of the Apostolic age, through the Albigenses and Waldenses, gives it as his opinion that "it may perhaps endanger the whole system of Apostolical Succession, if we too rigidly insist upon the absolute necessity of a transmission through the medium of bishops *exclusively*."† Mr. F. is a distinguished minister in the Established Church of England, a thorough Episcopalian, but he is entirely evangelical. I concur fully with him in the opinion just quoted. Indeed, I should like to see the man who can *establish* an unbroken succession in the clergy, whether through recognized and

* *An Inquiry into the History and Theology of the Vallenses and Albigenses;* published in London, in 1838.

† *An Inquiry, etc.* pp. 553, 554.

accredited popes, bishops, or presbyters, from the Apostles down to our times.

That there never was a time, even in the darkest ages of Christianity, in which there were no true churches of Christ, distinctly organized, and firmly maintaining the "Truth as it is in Jesus," I think is most assuredly true. Mr. Faber has proved this, and deserves the thanks of all Protestants for it. Nor was there ever a time when there were not faithful ministers to preach the Gospel to those churches. Christ, who promised to be ever with His Church, and that the gates of Hell should not prevail against her, raised them up and called them by His Spirit and grace. All this can be proved. But it cannot be proved that these men were ordained by men who were themselves ordained by those who could trace their ordination back in an unbroken line of bishops or presbyters to the Apostles, as some affirm; and even if it could, what would it amount to?

I wonder that good men—for there are many such who advocate it—can hold to such a doctrine, when they cannot but see the dangerous influence which it has exerted, and does still exert, on such a vast majority of those who maintain it; especially, when they see as unequivocal proof as man can have, that Christ recognizes and blesses churches whom they repudiate and disown! *By their fruits ye shall know them*, says our Saviour. And judging by this only true rule, it really seems to me unaccountable that good men can hold on to a mere figment of Romanism, and come to conclusions so opposed by facts which daily present themselves to their observation, as well as by common sense.

In conclusion, I would most respectfully recommend the treatise which follows, to the attentive perusal of those who take an interest in this subject. It embodies a train of sound reasoning expressed in a Christian spirit, which, I think, can hardly fail to produce a good impression. May God guide His people into the discovery of the truth, wherever it may lie; and may He also keep them from being so much engrossed with these controversies as to neglect the great work which He calls them to perform—that of building up His Kingdom in the world.

R. BAIRD.

New York, June 20th, 1844.

DISCOURSE.

ROMANS xiii. 1, 2.—Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

PSALM xxv. 14.—The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 15.—That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

SINCE the first promulgation of the Gospel, there never has been a time in which the Church has been wholly free from contention and strife. The Apostles themselves preached the word "with much contention." "These that have turned the world upside down have come hither also," was the cry. Great opposition was made to their doctrine and their modes of church organization. Both the rabble and the rulers beset and persecuted them. At times they were forbidden "to speak at all, or teach in the name of Jesus." To the docrine of Christ crucified, men were every where opposed. Hence the bitterest prejudices were excited against the preachers of His Gospel. "And these do all contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another king, one Jesus," may be taken as a fair example. Thus, from the world fierce and varied opposition was continually made.

And as to the Church itself, many of the parables and the declarations of our Saviour, in regard to its mixed character, and the difficulties which would arise in it, were soon verified. No sooner was the Gospel preached abroad, than the kingdom of heaven, "like a net cast into the sea, gathered of every kind." And though all that believed were of one heart, and one mind—so far as essential doctrines were concerned—yet each had his prepossessions and his prejudices; and in regard to *externals* there was great diversity of sentiment. With the wheat were mingled also the tares. Along with the true children of the kingdom were gathered in also the self-deceived and the deceiver. And how could the blind see? Those who did not receive Christ—how could they approve of his laws, or comprehend the things of the Spirit? Soon there were those who preached Moses in the Church. They troubled the brethren, and said, "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them; and having failed to quiet them, they determined that certain of their number "should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question." Even in that assembly there was "much disputing," before the matter was settled. So, too, in most of the other churches. Much Judaism and paganism was blended with the true Christian doctrine, and the apostolic usages. "Some indeed preached Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will." As many leaders as there were, so many sects were there. "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ," was their cry. "It has been declared unto me, that there are contentions among you," said the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. At Galatia there were those who would "pervert the gospel of Christ," and through them the Galatians were bewitched, or led away, as if by enchantment, that

they "should not obey the truth." Writing to Titus, the Apostle declares that "there were many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision." And he commands him to "avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."

Much the same state of things has ever since existed. The objects of contention and the grounds of controversy may have been changed, but its spirit has lived. It lives still, and in its fiery fierceness it is spreading desolation over the Church. And it is not a little remarkable that now, in the nineteenth century, "foolish questions" and "endless genealogies," not unlike those pronounced by the Apostle in his day "unprofitable and vain," have been again revived, and are still distracting the churches. They may not be strivings about the law, or reckonings of descent from Levi, or Judah, or any other line of patriarchs, but that which is more futile and less susceptible of settlement, upon any proper evidence, viz., the true line of descent, and the unbroken succession of the ministerial office from the time of the Apostles; and, as a consequence from these, the validity or invalidity of the ordinances, as administered by men in those respective lines.

I need hardly remark that, in regard to these points, there are three principal classes, or divisions in the Church—the Papal, the Episcopal, and the Presbyterian. I say *three*, for this last appellation is usually applied to all the sects which dissent from the former two. The Papal maintains that the office of headship, with all its power and sacredness, was committed to St. Peter; that from him it has been transmitted, in an unbroken succession, through the line of approved popes, down to the present day; and that, separate from that line of transmission, there is no authorized ministry, —no valid ordinances—and no salvation! The Episcopal

denies the headship of Peter, rejects the order of popes, maintains that the true succession is through the order of diocesan bishops, from the several Apostles, who all had equal rank and power, and that said bishops only have the right to ordain. A legitimate consequence from these premises would be that, aside from this line, there can be no authorized ministry; no valid ordinances; and—except perchance through the uncovenanted mercies of God—no salvation: though it is a matter of thankfulness that only the more rigid, and, I trust, by far the smaller portion of that denomination, are disposed to carry matters to that issue. The Presbyterian rejects the headship of Peter and the order of popes; denies that diocesan bishops are of apostolic origin; consequently, denies that the clerical office is transmissible only through them; maintains that the apostolic office ceased with the demise of the originally appointed Apostles; that from the first there was entire official equality among the clergy; consequently, that through the ordinary ministry, and not through either popes or bishops, is the ministerial office conveyed.

The main points, you then perceive, with each of these sects, are:

1st. To prove from Scripture and early Church history that *theirs* is the true apostolic order; and 2d. That an unbroken line of descent can be traced from the Apostles down to the present time.

About these points they have been for ages contending, and it seems questionable whether the strife is yet more than fairly begun. Now, while I would be far from asserting that *no importance* should be attached to these points; far from maintaining that there is no room for *preference*, either as to doctrines or order in these different denominations, I *do* assert that entirely too much stress has been laid upon their supposed primitive order and unbroken descent; that making

ministerial existence and validity of ordinances depend upon these, is at once unscriptural and absurd; consequently, to denounce and unchurch each other, as the prevalent custom is, for difference of opinion on these points, is not only an unchristian and unfraternal course, but, as it contravenes the right of private judgment, it is at war with the most cherished spirit of our age and country in all other matters. The existence of such a spirit, and the pursuit of such a course, are exceedingly to be deplored, because of the contentions by which they distract the Church; the withering blight which they send over the spirit of piety; their contracting power over the expansive charity of the Gospel; their tendency to make every thing of externals and non-essentials, and sink Christian character and the fruits of righteousness into nothing. "Try the spirits," is the Scripture's command. "Trace the genealogy," is the modern rule. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," said the Saviour. "Judge them by the lines of succession, and their mode of inducting into the ministerial office," is now the command; and, "if they are not precisely of this stamp or that—do not come up perfectly to our own notions of things—let them be rejected." I deal in no fables. In every part of our land, contention precisely of this cast is rife, and just such a course as is now described is pursued. The consequences, too, are wofully apparent. The best and the ablest men of the age, those whom Christ has owned and blest as his most faithful servants, are not only excluded from the pulpits of those who make the succession essential, but reproach is cast upon them; the confidence of the community in them is impaired, and thus their usefulness greatly diminished.* "Brethren, these things ought not so to

* See Bishop Ives's Catechism, in which even *negroes* and *children*, for whom it is chiefly intended, are taught that none have a right to preach and administer the sacraments, *except those who have been ordained by a bishop!* A low descent, and a dark omen surely!

be." And in order to counteract this spirit and this course of conduct, I propose to show:

1st. That no particular form of Church organization has been established, as essential to the existence of a Church.

2d. That it is the ministerial *office* that is sacred and unchangeable, and not any particular mode of inducting into it.

3d. That therefore an unbroken line of succession, from the time of the Apostles, is not essential to the existence of a divinely authorized ministry and valid ordinances.

Much light will be thrown upon all these points by a consideration of the several portions of Scripture selected as texts. That the organization of a Christian church in the world is of divine appointment, and that it had, at first, a particular form of organization, are facts conceded by all denominations. But just so it is in regard to the government of the world. The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. He is head over all. But men, under Him, are the administrators of His government. "The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." But although God has ordained that there shall be *government*, and not *anarchy* through the world; consequently, that *some* form of government must exist; yet He has not ordained, nor has He established, any particular form of government. This is perfectly certain:

1st. From the fact that no particular form is prescribed in His Word, according to which men are required to govern themselves. And,

2d. The text embraces all kinds of government, and puts them all upon an equal footing.

The powers that be, are, without any exception, declared to be of God; "for *there is no power but of God.*" And so will it be to the end of time. Change their form as men will, in accordance with changing times; found them anew, or

remodel them, either at the dictate of the soundest wisdom, or the greatest caprice, nay, even of the most unhallowed ambition—still governments are of God, and men can never throw off the obligation to obey them. We are not to go back to the origin of a government for proofs of its legitimacy, nor do we in its *character* find our obligation to obey it. "While the Bible," says Dr. Chalmers, "defines the duty of the subject, it does not define the nature or composition of the government to which that duty is owing. It does not say that we should be subject to the powers which were rightly originated, or have been rightly constituted, but, subject to the powers that be. It is not the kind or character of any government, but the existence of it, which invests it with its claim on our obedience; or, at least, which determines for us the duty of subjection." There is then much truth in the maxim, "The voice of the people is the voice of God!" Not that it is a voice always of righteousness, but of power. Even wicked men are His sword; and so are governments, whatever be their character. "For there is *no* power but of God." Hence the fearful threatening in the text against those who resist the power, that is, the ordinance of God. They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

But just so all analogy teaches us it is with the organization of the Christian Church. It is in vain for any to say that the Church is a *sacred* institution, and therefore the parallel will not hold. It is freely admitted that the Church is sacred, in contradistinction from organizations that are purely *secular;* still it is a *community*—a *social compact;* and therefore must be founded upon the same essential principles, and have inherent in it the same self-regulating and self-perpetuating powers that belong to all other well constituted organizations. Besides, did not God ordain the *secular* powers—all of them that be? And has He done *more* than ordain

the powers that be in the Church? In *that* respect—and it is the only one we are now considering—the former would seem to be just as sacred as the latter. And, as was said in regard to secular governments, precisely so it was with the organization of the Church.

Some particular form must be adopted, and one was adopted; and its very adoption and recognition made it, for the time that then was, the authoritative government of the Church. But there is no express command that either that particular form, or any other particular one, should invariably, and in all ages and countries, be adopted and rigidly adhered to. So obscurely, indeed, is the form which was adopted shadowed forth in the Scriptures, that, as already said, it has been seriously questioned by the best of men, and it is still the chief bone of contention among them, what even *the chief features* of that organization were. Some maintain that it was Congregational, some that it was Presbyterian, some that it was Episcopal, and some that it was Papal. The *fact* which I now state, and, that men are conscientious in these differences, no man can deny. But can it admit of a rational doubt, whether, if any one particular form had been essential to the existence of the Church; and had it been the divine intention to visit with damnation—as some men now do—all those who depart from that essential form, we should have been, by the merciful Author of our salvation, thus left *without any clearly defined model?* In that respect how vastly does the Christian Church come short of the Jewish! In looking therefore at that organization, we derive a most important inference in regard to the Christian Church. We know that the Jewish ecclesiastical polity was intended to continue coëval with their separate existence as a nation; and no departure from its original institution was to be at all allowed. But there *every thing* was clearly and minutely

defined and prescribed. The fact then that in the Christian Church no particular form of Church organization, or order, has, either in its full proportions or with any apparent intention, been set forth; nay, the *withholding* of an account which we should so naturally expect to find inserted, at least by some of the Apostles, of their mode or modes of Church organization and order; I cannot but regard as perfectly conclusive that churches, in after times, were to be left like governments of the world to their own discretion in all these matters. It should also be considered that, even if we did know precisely what form of Church organization was at first adopted, yet, unless we had some express instruction to that effect, it would by no means follow that that was to be the form in all other ages and countries, and in all the changes of circumstances adopted and observed. We know that a very extraordinary state of things then existed. The Gospel was to be carried abroad through all the world; churches were to be planted and nurtured under varied and powerful opposition; government was also to be exercised over those newly formed bodies, composed as they generally were of the most discordant materials. To meet this state of things, extraordinary powers and extraordinary offices were given. For God did "set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." And in another list we find added to these, "evangelists and pastors;" but ALL "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That the Apostles were divinely inspired, were guided into all the truth, and directed in every duty, no one will question; consequently, we must suppose that they adopted the most suitable organizations and measures for the times and the state of things in which they lived. But we are not divinely taught how

much, or what parts of those organizations and measures were to be adopted and employed in after ages, and in different states of things. The Holy Ghost, we know, has not seen fit to continue those miraculous powers and gifts which were deemed necessary at the opening of the Gospel dispensation. The state of things, it would seem, does not require them. Who then are they that tell us, that every part of the ancient *polity* of the Church is now essential to its existence? The Apostles, in their wisdom, met the then existing state of things as it required; but, as already said, they have nowhere commanded that the same organizations and arrangements should in all other states of things be continued. Civil governments we know do accommodate themselves to the changing states of things. They meet emergencies, create or annul offices, contract or enlarge the powers of those in office, and bind their subjects under severer restrictions, or give greater enlargement and liberty, as the different states of things seem to admit or require; and all this without at all changing their fundamental principles, or departing from the ends of their institution: nay, in this very flexibility of their character their chief glory and efficiency consist.

And I would ask, if all reason does not teach that an ecclesiastical polity, intended for all nations under the whole heaven, and that in all ages of the world, should possess to some extent the same flexibility, and pursue something of the same wisely appliant course?—never changing its spirit—never forgetting its end—firm in its loyalty to its true and only recognized Head; but ever employing that wisdom which is profitable to direct, in the application of its principles, and the modes of its operation, to the various changes which God himself introduces by his own providential sway? I know that the cry of "schism" and "diversity" will here be raised; but I care not for it. Give us any thing else but the

"*oneness*" which certain past ages have witnessed! True religion is in the spirit, and not in the letter. The regard that is paid to externals is often the bane of the Church. Coërcive attempts at unity have often produced the widest divisions. But I have no fears for the Church—none at least on this score—about which many are so tremulous. "God is in the midst of her." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." In this promise unshaken I would rest. No miraculous powers—no new revelations are to be expected; but there are enlightening views, guiding impulses, given to those who sincerely desire and earnestly seek to know what the will of the Lord is. And hence the Church is said to be "the pillar and ground of the truth." Not that it is the *source* of truth, or may make laws and decrees above the Word of God, or aside from it; but His true Church, His own people who fear Him, with whom His secret is, and to whom He shows His covenant, are like a pillar on which His truth is engraved—like a ground or resting-place where it ever resides. Holding on then to the Head, and filled with the Spirit of her divine Master; aiming also at the ends of her great commission—the evangelization of the world, the conversion of souls, and "the edifying of the body of Christ"—no fears need be entertained for the Church. From the Truth, as it is in Jesus, and from the order which is in accordance with the divine will, she will not depart. She will be kept in them, and they will be kept in her. The powers that be, in her will be ordained of God; and the ordinances, as administered by her appointed officers, by whatever names they may be called, will have the attendant sanction and blessing of Christ. No man then may ask, "By what authority do ye these things, and who gave you this authority"? Those who are doing the works—the appointed works of the only rightful Head of the Church,

actuated evidently by the spirit which He imparts, and proceeding according to their own clear convictions of duty, as His Word and providential dealings seem to set it forth—no man may call down fire from heaven upon them, because they walk not with him! We know not that the Apostles always pursued precisely the same course in either founding churches, ordaining ministers, administering the ordinances, or exercising discipline. There are many things, indeed, which lead us to believe, that in the performance of all these duties, the mode varied with the variation of time, place, and circumstances. There were "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;" there were "differences of administrations, but the same Lord;" and there were "diversities of operations," but it was "the same Lord" that wrought "all in them all." Besides, it is the *office* or *power* of discharging ministerial duties, and *not any particular mode of inducting into that office, or conferring that power*, that is ordained of God. This was before asserted, and for proof of this declaration we need go no farther than the texts before us. "The *powers* that be," in civil governments, "are ordained of God;" but not a word is said about the order of investment. No particular form of investment has been established by divine appointment; neither have the nations of the world agreed upon any form or process, which shall be necessary to give validity to official acts. The modes of inducting into office are almost as various as the nations of the world are numerous, and they often change among the same people. And yet *one of these is just as valid as another*. Whether by the anointing oil of a priest of the Lord—whether by a convention of sovereigns—whether by the appointed committee, or the solitary beadle of a republican people—whether by the mummeries of a pagan priest, or an Indian council—the act is, in respect of validity, precisely the same. The *offices* of law-making, of judging, and

of executing laws, are ordained of God. The people are to determine the mode of inducting men into these several offices. And whatever mode either the people at large or the existing constituted authorities agree upon, receives the divine sanction. This is the doctrine of the text, the clear, the settled truth of God! And, as to wise men, I make the appeal, whether the parallel is not perfect, *in that respect*, between the Church and the State; nay, I shall prove to you, by incontrovertible evidence, that such is the case.

The ministerial *office* is of divine appointment. Christ, the Head of the Church, instituted it. The ordinances also, in the Church, are divinely appointed; but the inducting of men into that office, and empowering them to discharge its duties, is entirely a separate thing. This too, as in civil governments, is to be done by men; but no particular channel of communication, or mode of investment, has been either divinely appointed, or been uniformly adopted. Christ Himself invested His eleven Apostles with official authority *by word* simply, without any manual application. Matthias was inducted into the same office simply by the casting of the lot by the other disciples. The Apostle Paul, if he had any human investment at all, it appears to have been only through the devout man Ananias. Paul inducted Timothy into office by the joint imposition of his own hands with those of the presbytery. And a moment's consideration will show that any one form or mode of induction, or as it is usually called *ordination*, provided it be done with due solemnity, and with the sanction of the ministry and the people of God, *is just as valid as another*. The Church neither creates the office, nor appoints the ordinances, nor internally qualifies for the discharge of ministerial duty. All this is done (if the last of these be done at all) by the authoritative appointment of Christ and the gracious influence of His Spirit. No Protestant will

maintain that any inherent grace or spiritual qualification is imparted in the act of ordination, from those who ordain. But if not—what in effect is the act of ordination but this: *The opening of the door of the ministerial office to that particular individual, and barring it against all others who have not gone through that agreed-upon form?* Much mist and confusion have been thrown over this rite; and many superstitious notions have always prevailed in regard to it. But if it amounts to any thing more than what has just been stated, I cannot discover what it is. There is no charm about it; it is an act of order—an orderly inducting into an office already existing, divinely appointed, and which it is the duty of the Church, in some manner, and according to some definitely settled form, to fill. What the form is cannot be of any importance whatever, provided it be understood that no one is to be recognized as a minister in that particular denomination until he has, by the persons agreed upon to discharge that duty, been introduced into that office by that form. Neither can it matter at all by whom, in the Church, the rite is performed, whether by the church members at large, the deacons or elders, or those of the ministerial order, provided it be determined by *whom* it shall be done, and that arrangement be adhered to. The main object is to guard the sacred office from desecration by the intrusion of improper persons, to open the door to suitable persons, and guard it against unsuitable. But this done, (and it may be done as well in one way as another,) it can be of no consequence whatever in what way or by whom the act of ordination is performed. This is not only the inevitable conclusion at which we must arrive from the texts before us; but the doctrine is every where *proved* by incontestable facts. Among the several branches of the Christian Church, the modes of inducting into the sacred office are almost as various as are those branches. That

which would be in form in one denomination, would be out of form in another. The act is performed also among them by different grades or orders of persons. In some it is done by the *laity*—in others by the common clergy—in others by the bishops and other clergy—and in others by the bishops alone. And yet each of these is, at least in their own particular denomination, a proper and valid mode of ordination. There is a glorious diversity among men. Their views, their feelings, their opinions, their modes of doing whatever is theirs to do, all differ. But this very diversity among the lively stones of which the great spiritual edifice is built—does it not heighten the beauty of that edifice—each difference exhibiting a new phase of the divine beauty and glory? It is certain at least that this diversity excludes none from the divine favor. "The secret of the Lord is with them,"—all of them—"that fear Him; He will show them His covenant;" will dwell with them according to the different casts of their minds; will, according to their ability, make known the great body of His truth; and will, through them, by the diversities of His Spirit's operations, accomplish His whole will, do all His pleasure, in the ordering of His kingdom here. All that hold the Head, are Christ's members. And as of individuals, so of sections or branches of His Church. All have not the same office—are not destined to perform the same functions in the same way; but all are needful, all are useful, all are animated and nourished by the One Great Indwelling Spirit. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there He is in the midst. Oh, what a boon—one of preciousness itself—is this promise to all the branches of His great family! Christ walks among the golden candlesticks—and there are many of them! And are they *golden*?—that is enough. Of the form, the artificer, and the manner of structure, He makes no account. "The Father seeketh such as worship Him in

spirit and in truth." We know not that He seeks, admires, or loves any thing else, in or about His churches, save the homage of their spirits—the devotion of their hearts. It is a fact beyond all contradiction, that Christ is ever with His own people—with them *all;* and that without any respect to names or descent, to modes of church organization, or official investment. He *does* own as His ministers those who are faithful, and true, and zealous, *in all denominations*—making them honored instruments of converting souls, and of edifying His people through the word and ordinances by them administered. And there is no higher evidence than this. It is the witness of God Himself. The Apostle Paul referred to it in his own case as conclusive: "The seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord."

But in view of an array of Scripture declarations like these; in view of all the accompanying sanctions of reason; in view of innumerable facts, which no man may controvert, that in *all* the branches of His Church the powers that be are ordained of God; that there is *no power* but of God; that all those lines of separate affiliation have *authority from God;* that the several different modes of ordination have His sanction; that He *does* bless His own people, and His own ordinances to them; does prosper the work of His faithful servants, to whatever family of Church-connection they belong—in view, I say, of all this, what becomes of all the modern vaporing about the preservation and the regular transmission of apostolical authority through one particular order of men? What of all the boasting of an unbroken line of genealogical connection to primitive times? What of the prating about the residence of validity of office and of ordinances with those only who choose to reckon themselves of apostolical lineage? And what of all the holy recoiling from others, as "separatists" and "intruders"—"without an authorized church"—

"without a ministry," "without ordinances," and "without salvation!" "My soul, come not thou into their secret." No! give me the charity which recognizes, yea, meets in cordial embrace, the whole family of Christ!

My friends, I will not characterize, as I might, the spirit and the course above described. I simply refer you to the verity of the Apostle's declaration, that all these questions and contentions about genealogies are "foolish," "unprofitable, and vain." They are *foolish*, because of the preposterous idea that any such lineage can now be traced. I say *preposterous*, for so it must appear, if we reflect upon the irregularities and corruptions which we know existed in many of the Apostolic churches; the spreading of almost utter oblivion over the first century after the Apostles, from which scarcely a trace of uncontested history has come down to us; then the thick darkness which settled upon the whole christianized world, and the seas of corruption that rolled over the Church in the middle ages; the venality of office which has often prevailed; the migration of men from distant and unknown parts, who became founders of churches, and aided in the ordination of ministers. These, together with the different modes of ordination, which have at different times prevailed; all these being considered, no man is able at this distance of time to prove that in *any line* of descent, whether through popes, bishops, or the common clergy, the Apostolical mode (even if that could be fully ascertained) has not been, in some instance departed from, and consequently the line broken! No satisfactory *proof* can be had of any such unbroken line of connection any where existing, and all *probability* is against its existence.

Such contentions are also "*unprofitable and vain.*" For even if such connection were made out, it could entitle to no higher claims to validity than those possess who, for con-

science sake, have separated from it. There is such a thing as God's once approved heritage being rejected from being His people; and those who before were not a people substituted in their stead. Forms are nothing with God. It is they who do His will that are His acceptable servants. Besides, it is a great mistake to suppose that the existence of *any* ministerial order is identical with the existence of the Church, of the ministerial office, and of the ordinances of Christ's appointment. It is not so. Every minister might be struck from existence, and there would remain the family of God, His own appointed ordinances; and the ministerial offices, though vacated, still existing. The Church is, in the nature of things, first in order, then the ministry. They invert the order of nature and pervert the truth of God, who would have the Church made for the ministry, and not the ministry for the Church; would have the existence of the Church, indeed, depend upon the existence of the ministry—nay, upon *one particular order in the ministry!* Addressing the Christians at Corinth, the Apostle says, "Now *ye* are the body of Christ, and members in particular." He moreover declares that *in the Church* God did set some Apostles, prophets, teachers, &c.; and that, not to lord it over God's heritage, but "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." I hold then that no truth is more clear, from the whole tenor of Scripture and from the nature of things, than this: that in the above supposed case of the vacated ministerial office, it would be entirely competent for God's people, assembled with His Spirit, and the presence of Christ among them, to fill that office from one of their own number; and that such would be a perfectly valid investment. The *filling* of that office has, from the first, been of human performance, and so it ever must be. As in civil governments, precisely so in the Church. There may be

severances and beginnings anew. It is but a short time since "We the People" threw off the yoke of Great Britain, and constituted the government under which we live; and yet it is as much ordained of God as if it had a succession unbroken from the days of Adam down to the present! So it is the *act* and the *sanction* of the Church that gives existence and form to ecclesiastical government. Hers is no suicidal charter. Driven into the wilderness, she would bear with her her self-perpetuating power. She ordains her own rulers, and may do it in any circumstances and in any way. For we have seen that it can be of no consequence whether ordination be performed by the whole body of the people in person, or through accredited officers, to whose acts they give their approving assent. I utterly deny the dogma, that only those in office can make valid appointments to office. It is true, that a man cannot *impart* that which he does not possess. But I deny that a minister's office is his to impart, or that he does impart it at all to others. No; he retains it still. And in the act of ordination he only, as an accredited agent for that purpose, inducts others into the office intended; whether it be that in which he himself is, or one below or one above it. Who crowns the King of England? Who inaugurates the Governors of our states and the Chief Magistrate of our nation? Is it one in a higher office? one in an equal or in a lower? And does he in any of these cases impart his *own* office to the individual whom he inducts into office?

Thus it is we establish upon an immovable basis that particular church organization to which we belong; and thus it is—and not from the tracing of endless genealogies—that we refute, beyond the possibility of cavil, all the charges of want of authority in our ministry and validity in the ordinances when administered by us. But while we do this, nothing is farther from our spirit or intention than to denounce

those who differ from us, preferring other modes of organization. Nay, in the very substratum of our own vindication, you perceive how broad a basis is laid for the full recognition and the cordial embrace of all other branches of the Church, who hold Jesus Christ as the Head.

And here I cannot refrain from the remark that our highly valued and long approved standards, often termed "*illiberal*," by men who have overlooked their true character, are, in all this matter, wholly with us. The venerable men who framed these standards declare, that they "consider the rights of private judgment, *in all matters that respect religion, as* UNIVERSAL AND UNALIENABLE." And while *they believed* Presbyterianism to be the true scriptural organization, yet they also believed "that there are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. And in all these they think it the duty, both of private Christians and societies, to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other." They lay down no forms, therefore, as essential to the existence of a church or to validity of ordinances. They unchurch no denomination. Nay, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, they declare that "every church, or union, or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as *the whole system of its external government which Christ hath appointed.*" Here then is the full and true spirit of the Gospel, uttered in full unison with our own views.

"The kingdom of God is within you," said Christ to His disciples. It does not then consist in forms and external rites. And an Apostle has said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ,

is acceptable to God, and approved of men." And however much in externals we may differ from others, most cordially would we utter the benedictive prayer of the Apostle: "Grace be with *all them* that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." We believe Presbyterianism to be of primitive and Apostolic origin; but far be it from us to say that therefore it is exclusively of divine right—the only true Christian polity. Nay, in our own settled principles, we make the broadest admission that others may be of equal authority and as much approved of God. We believe thus, and we claim, and we shall never give up the right to, the free exercise of our own judgment; but the same right which we claim for ourselves, we most freely accord to others. Nay, we repudiate and condemn that arrogance which says, "We are the people, and wisdom will die with us;" which plumes its own sect on its infallibility, and scouts the pretensions of all others to correctness of opinion and practice.

We love Presbyterianism; but still we would not make that or any other "ism" the chief good, the one thing needful. Christ and the promotion of His cause, in whatever way it be done, we would love infinitely better. We prefer Presbyterianism to any other organization, because we believe it to be in full accordance with Scripture—sanctioned also in its whole structure and bearing by the clearest dictates of reason and experience, as that which combines the greatest efficiency with the greatest liberty and simplicity—as being thoroughly Republican both in its forms and its spirit; and, therefore, as best suited to the age and country in which we live; as being at once removed from the commotions of popular tumult, and yet guarded against the possibility of clerical domination; as fitted to secure strict supervision and thorough exercise of discipline, and yet effectually guarding the rights of the humblest of all its adherents. And yet we do

not expect to have all others see with our eyes; nor would we, without their full approval, have them come into our measures. It is our settled belief that the existence of different denominations is beneficial to the cause of religion. Men do not all think alike—they never will do so. Widely different are their views of both truth and duty. But how can two walk together, except they be agreed? Their being classed together according to their opinions and characteristics, is the most natural and effectual means of securing peace and cordial co-operation in the great business of building up Christ's kingdom. There is no reason why different denominations should ever cross each other's paths. Who has made each a judge of the others? Let them keep each within their own lines—going on in their own way to heaven—showing to each other all good fidelity and kindness. Acting thus, aside from the noble emulation that must exist, and the numerous checks and balances by which Religion would be kept pure and order preserved, the world itself would be greatly benefited, and Zion's borders enlarged, by the existence of different denominations. There are many men who never would unite in church-fellowship with the Presbyterians—many never would with the Methodists—many never with the Baptists—many never with the Episcopalians. And so of many other sects. But let all exist; then all men can have their favorite choice, and all are left without an excuse. Said a sensible and pious man once, in response to these views, "Yes; I have always remarked that a tree which has but one branch bears very little fruit!"

Let every man then be fully persuaded in his own mind; and such course as his own conscience most approves let him pursue; and the blessing of God be with him! We claim no pre-eminence—desire none. Our wishes are simply to be let alone, to be allowed an equal footing with others in

the great family of church organizations—*unanathematized, unreproached*—nay, with the good will and fraternal regards of our brethren, to be allowed, in our own way, to serve our common Lord in the great field of the world.

And will you, my friends, suffer, in conclusion, the exhortation of the Apostle on these points? "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," knowing that "the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Built, as ye believe ye are, upon a sure, and safe, and desirable foundation, let no one unsettle your views or disturb your minds. Aim at godly living—at lives of usefulness. Avoid "foolish questions" and "contentions" about externals, for they are "unprofitable and vain." Leave controversy to others. Its tendency is to eat out the spirit of piety, rather than to implant or improve it. "Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you" all. Amen!