

THE
CHRISTIAN SYSTEM,
IN REFERENCE TO THE
UNION OF CHRISTIANS,
AND A
RESTORATION
OF
PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY,
AS PLEAD IN THE
CURRENT REFORMATION

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

I. "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints for *the work of the ministry*, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," &c. For the setting up of the Christian institution officers extraordinary were needed. So was it in the Jewish, and so is it every institution, human and divine. But when an institution is set up, it only requires an ordinary ministry or administration of its affairs. All the extraordinary gifts vouchsafed to Moses, and to the Apostles and Prophets of the gospel institution, ceased when these institutions were fully developed and established. Still a regular and constant ministry was needed among the Jews, and is yet needed among the Christians; and both of these by divine authority.

II. Natural gifts for a natural state of things, and supernatural gifts for a supernatural state of things, are, in the wisdom of both God and man, apposite and needful. Hence, even in the apostolic age, there were officers without, as well as with, miraculous endowments. "Having, then, gifts differing according to the office, or grace that is given to us--if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the measure of our faith; or ministry, let us attend on our ministering; he that teacheth, on teaching; he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that distributeth, with simplicity; he that ruleth, [80] with diligence." God has therefore conferred various gifts on the church for the effectual administration of its affairs. He has placed in it "*helps and governments*," as well as Apostles and Prophets.

III. The standing and immutable ministry of the Christian community is composed of Bishops, Deacons, and Evangelists. Of each of these is but one order, though possessing great diversities of gifts. There have been bishops, deacons, and evangelists, with both ordinary and extraordinary gifts. Still the office is now, and ever was, the same. In ancient times official and unofficial persons sometimes possessed miraculous gifts. Those in high office were also generally of those most eminently gifted with extraordinary powers. Superficial readers have, therefore, sometimes concluded that, inasmuch as bishops, deacons and especially evangelists, frequently possessed these manifestations of the Holy Spirit, with the ceasing of those gifts, the offices themselves also expired. This is a great mistake. Officers there must be while there are offices, or services to be performed. So long as the human system needs sight, hearing, and feeling, there will be eyes, ears, and hands. So long also as the Christian body is an organized body, having many services to perform, it must have organs or officers by which to enjoy itself and operate on society.

IV. There are, indeed, necessarily as many offices in ever body as there are services to be performed to it, or by it. This is the root and reason of all the offices in all the universe of God. Our planet needs diverse celestial services to be performed to it. Hence, the sun, moon, and stars are celestial officers ministering to it. The eye, the ear, the tongue, the hand, the foot, are, for the same reason, officers in the human body, essentially serving it in its vital interests and enjoyments; and by means of these organs, it performs important functions to other bodies.

V. Experience, as well as observation, has taught us that "practice makes perfect," and that "whatever is every person's business is no person's business." Hence arose the custom among men of communicating certain offices to particular individuals. The philosophy of such elections and ordinances is found in the fact, that special services are best performed by special organs or agents, whose special province and duty is to attend to them.

VI. As the Christian system is a perfect system, it wisely provides for its own perpetuity and prosperity by creating [81] all necessary offices and filling them with suitable persons. We have said these offices are three, and of perpetual, because of necessary existence. *Bishops*, whose office it is to preside over, to instruct, and to edify the community--to feed the church of the Lord with knowledge and understanding--and to watch for their souls as those that must give account to the Lord at his appearing and his kingdom, compose the first class. *Deacons*, or servants--whether called treasurers, almoners, stewards, door-keepers, or messengers, constitute the second. For the term *deacon* originally included all public servants whatever, though now most commonly confined to one or two classes; and improperly, no doubt, to those only who attend to the mere temporal interests of the community. They are distinguished persons, called and commissioned by the church, (and consequently are always responsible to it,) to serve in any of these capacities. Evangelists, however, though a class of public functionaries created by the church, do not serve it directly; but are by it sent out into the world, and constitute the third class of functionaries belonging to the Christian system.

VII. As there is more scrupulosity on some minds concerning the third class of Evangelists, than concerning either Bishops or Deacons, we shall take occasion to speak more explicitly and fully upon the nature and necessity, as well as upon the authority of this office. Evangelists, as the term indicates, are persons devoted to the preaching of the word, to the making of converts, and the planting of churches. It is, indeed, found but three times in the New Covenant; but the verb from which it comes--viz. to *evangelize*, is in some of its branches found almost sixty times in that volume. "To evangelize" and "to do the work of an evangelist" are phrases of equal import, and indicate the same duties, rights, and privileges.

VIII. Among the offices which were comprehended in the apostleship, none required more varied endowments than that of the Evangelist. The gift of tongues was amongst the qualifications necessary to those who, after the ascension, first undertook this work. But the qualifications for this office, so far as the gift of tongues or the knowledge of language is concerned, are not immutably fixed. It depends upon the field of labor which the Evangelist is to occupy, whether he must speak on language or more. His work is to proclaim the word intelligibly and persuasively--to [82] immerse all the believers, or converts of his ministry--and to plant and organize churches wherever he may have occasion; and then teach them to keep the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.

IX. Take, for example, the sketch given us by Luke of the labors of Philip the Evangelist, one of the first who wore that designation. One of the seven ministers of the Jerusalem church, after his diaconate was vacated by the dispersion of that community, he commenced his evangelical labors. He turned his face towards Samaria, and preached and baptized amongst the Samaritans: for, we are told, when the Samaritans believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women. He also converted the Ethiopian Eunuch; and then, passing from Azotus, he "preached *in all the cities* till he came to Cesarea," where he afterwards resided. The next notice we have of him is found in [Acts xxi. 8](#). "We," says Luke, "who were of Paul's company, departed, and came into Cesarea, and entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven, and abode with him. He had four virgin daughters that did prophesy." Evident, then, it is that he obtained the title *Evangelist* from his itinerant labors in the gospel and in the converting of men. His possession of the gift of the Holy Spirit was no more peculiar to him as an evangelist, than as deacon of the church in Jerusalem; for while in the diaconate of that church he seems to have been as full of the Holy Spirit as when visiting all the cities from Azotus to Cesarea.

X. Convening converts into societies, and organizing them into worshipping assemblies, are inseparably connected with the right of converting them. Casually, in his letters to Timothy, Paul seems to define the work of an Evangelist. He says, "Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching; endure affliction; *do the*

work of an Evangelist; fulfil thy ministry." "Let no man despise thy youth. Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, [or cultivate and exercise the office conferred upon thee,] according to prophecy--by the laying on the hands of the presbytery or eldership." "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all: take heed to thyself and to thy teaching; continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear [83] thee."¹ This seems to be the office of an Evangelist which the Lord gave the church after his ascension.

XI. Setting things in order in the churches--the committing the same office to faithful men, who shall be able to instruct others--the ordaining of elders, and a general superintendence of the affairs of churches, seem to have been also lodged in the hands of Timothy and Titus as agents of the Apostles. How far these works are yet necessary, and how far the superintendence of them may be safely lodged in the hands of select Evangelists as *respects infant communities*, may be, with many a question of dubious interpretation. But that Evangelists are to separate into communities their own converts, teach and superintend them till they are in a condition to take care of themselves, is unquestionably a part of the office of an Evangelist as praying, or preaching, or baptizing.

XII. But we shall be asked, 'Is not preaching and baptizing, and even teaching, the common privilege of all disciples, as they have opportunity?' And we also ask in answer, 'Is it not the privilege of all fathers to teach their own children, and to preside over their own families?' But who will thence infer, that all fathers are teachers and presidents, does not more shock common sense, than he who infers that all disciples, as such, are evangelists, pastors, and teachers, because we concede that in certain cases it is the privilege of all citizens of Christ's kingdom to preach, baptize, and teach. Every citizen of Christ's kingdom has, in virtue of his citizenship, equal rights, privileges and immunities. So has every citizen of the United States. Yet all citizens are not legislators, magistrates, judges, governors, &c. Before any community, civil or religious, is organized, every man has equal rights to do what seemeth good in his own eyes. But when organized, and persons appointed to office, then whatever rights, duties, privileges are conferred on particular persons, cannot of right belong to those who have transferred them; any more than a person cannot both give and keep the same thing.

XIII. But there are some duties and privileges we cannot wholly communicate to others. Parents cannot wholly transfer the education of their children to others; neither can a master transfer all his duties to a steward or overseer. No more can the citizens of Christ's kingdom wholly transfer their duties to preach and teach Christ. To enlighten the [84] ignorant, to persuade the unbelieving, to exhort the disobedient when they fall in our way and we have the ability or the opportunity, is an intransferable duty. Even the church of Rome, with all her clerical pride, commands and authorizes *lay baptism*, when a Priest is not convenient. A Christian is by profession a preacher of truth and righteousness, both by precept and example. *He may of right preach, baptize, and dispense the supper, as well as pray for all men, when circumstances demand it.* This concession does not, however, either dispense with the necessity of having evangelists, bishops, and deacons; not, having them, does it authorize any individual to assume to do what has been given in charge to them. Liberty without licentiousness, and government without tyranny, is the true genius of the Christian institution.

XIV. While, then, the Christian system allows every man "as he has received a gift to minister as a good steward of the manifold grace of God," it makes provision for choosing and setting apart qualified persons for all its peculiar services, necessary to its own edification and comfort, as well as to its usefulness in the world. It provides for its own perpetuity and its growth in the wisest and most practical manner. Its whole wisdom consists in four points:--1st. It establishes the necessary offices for its perpetuity and growth. 2d. It selects the best-qualified persons for those offices. 3d. It consecrates or sets those persons apart to those offices. 4th. It commands them to give themselves

wholly to the work, that their improvement may keep pace with the growth of the body, and be apparent to all. Can any person point out an imperfection in this plan?--!

XV. All its officers, whether for its services at home or abroad, when fully proved, are to be formally and solemnly set apart by the imposition of the hands of the presbytery or eldership of the church. The whole community chooses--the seniors ordain. *This is the apostolic tradition.* Let those unacquainted with the volume examine the apostolic law and usage; [Acts vi. 2-6](#). So the Christian system in its elections and ordinations began. *It is immutable.* Therefore this system obtains in all cases. The qualifications for any office are always founded in the nature of the office. They are generally detailed, but not always, because the *work to be done* is the best guide in ascertaining the qualifications of the doer of it.

XVI. We say the seniors of elders always ordain. Popery [85] says, 'None but those on whom the apostolic hands have been laid can of right ordain.' *Such an idea is not in the Christian system.* The seniors always lay on hands, whether hands have been laid on them or not. This is true Protestantism. Better still, it is true Bibleism. *Nay, it is the Christian System.* The Apostles laid on hands because *seniors*, and not because *apostles*. This is the jet of a controversy of fifteen hundred years' standing. It has been very generally, almost universally misstated and overlooked. Protestants are as much Papists in this, as the Papists are Protestants in disowning Protestantism. It is assumed by Romanists, and conceded by Protestants, that "*holy hands*" are official hands by a *jure Divino*. They are sometimes, but not always. But *Christian elders*, (for I do not mean mere old men,) who have long walked in the ways of the Lord, have holy hands, and much more power with and from the Lord, than ever dwelt in any pontiff or pretended vicar of Christ, in twelve hundred and sixty years.

XVII. In proof that seniors lay on hands, we appeal to the fact, [Acts vi.](#), for the Apostles were the oldest converts in Jerusalem. We appeal also to the fact that the presbytery or eldership laid hands on Timothy, and gave him the gift or office of an evangelist. And are there two rules of ordination in one system! Paul and Barnabas, though *Apostles*, were themselves ordained by the church of Antioch by its presbytery. Consequently, *seniors in Christ, as such*, can, of divine warrant, lay hands on any persons, for any office to which the church has elected them. It must be done also by prayer and fasting. See [Acts vi. 6; xiii. 3; xiv. 23](#).

XVIII. Persons may be juniors in years and seniors in Christ. Timothy, says Paul, "*lay hands suddenly on no man.*" This implies that the ordained were juniors in the Lord; and until they had attained some character and standing as seniors, (even Timothy himself,) were not to consent to their ordination. Perhaps it may be necessary to say that classic presbytery and the presbytery of a single church are very different institutions. The Apostles ordained *elders* (a presbytery) in every church. They did not make young men old, but set apart those that were seniors in the Lord to the office of overseers. They did not make juniors *seniors*, but they made elders *bishops*.

XIX. The community, the church, the multitude of the faithful, are the fountain of official power. This power descends from the body itself--not from its servants. Servants [86] made by servants are servants of servants; and such are all the clergy of the Man of Sin. But the body of Christ, under him as its head, animated and led by his spirit, is the fountain and spring of all official power and privilege. How much surer and purer is ecclesiastic authority thus derived from Christ the head, immediately through his body, than when derived through a long, doubtful, corrupt dynasty of bishops or pontiffs! The church is the mother of all the sons and priests of God; and to look for authority to her servants or creatures, as do all sorts of Papists, whether Catholic or Protestant, is to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator--a species of idolatry worthy only of the darkest night of the darkest day of the dark ages.

XX. But the church needs messengers for special occasions--not only her stated deacons and ministers, but ministers extraordinary. These too are selected by the church or churches in a given district, and *commissioned by their letters*. They are not consecrated by imposition of hands, but *approved by letters* from the community. Are we asked for authority? We produce it with pleasure. [1 Cor. xvi. 3.](#), is just to the point: "And," says Paul to the saints in Corinth, "when I come *whomsoever you shall approve by letters*, them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem." This is the apostolic usage in such cases. In the second epistle Paul says, "We have sent Titus the brother (Luke, we opine) whose praise is in the gospel, (written by him,) throughout all the churches--who was also *chosen by the churches* to travel with us this bounty," &c.

XXI. The Christian system demands for its perpetuity and for its prosperity at home and abroad, bishops, deacons, and evangelists. Its bishops teach, preside, and execute the laws of Christ in all its convocations. The deacons, a large and diverse class of functionaries, composed of stewards, treasurers, almoners, door-keepers, &c., as the case may require, wait continually upon its various services. Its evangelists, possessed of proper qualifications, ordained and consecrated to the work of the Lord in converting sinners and planting churches, by a presbytery, or a board of seniors competent to the prudent discharge of the duty, are constantly engaged in multiplying its members. These ministers of the word are commanded to be wholly engrossed in this work, and consequently to be fully sustained by their brethren in it. They are held responsible to all the holy [87] brethren, and to the Lord at his appearing and his kingdom, for the faithful discharge of that sacred trust confided in them.

XXII. What an efficient institution is that over which Christ presides, when well understood and fully carried out in all its details! With its bishops and deacons at home, and its evangelists abroad, wholly devoted to the faithful discharge of their respective trusts; men of experience, faith, piety, morality, full of zeal, energy, benevolence, co-operating with all similar institutions, supported by the prayers and free-will offerings of all the united people, having the love of God in their hearts, and heaven in their eye, what may they not achieve of glory to God, of good to men, and honor to themselves! Of such an army of the faith, in full operation and concert, it might indeed be asked, "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners!"

¹ [1 Timothy iv.](#) [2 Timothy iv.](#) [84]