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HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

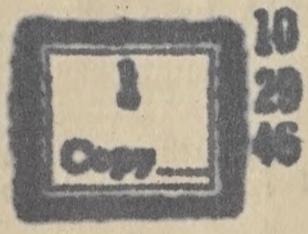
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administration of baptism to all infants for whom it is desired disregards the only grounds on which infants have the right to be baptized at all.

The REV. PROF. JONATHAN EDWARDS, D. D., LL. D., of Danville, Ky., read the following on

CHURCH DISCIPLINE: ITS PROVINCE AND USE.

In the following paper a few remarks will be offered to the Council on the subject of Church Discipline: its Province and its Use. The statements will be general, with but little discussion of particular points or questions.

At the outset a few explications—mere truisms, indeed—may be allowed by way of definition.

Discipline, in general, is the practical application of law. Law is here considered in its relation to individuals—not classes nor masses—and may include order and instruction.

Discipline pertains to a state of pupilage. Whoever is in any sense a disciple is amenable to discipline.

Discipline presupposes government; that is, an acknowledged supremacy, regal or popular, as the case may be, and derives from it both its dignity and its type. It is one of the functions of government, representing, however, not so much its majesty as its mercy.

In its relation to law, discipline indicates, not the penalty, but the educating power and righteousness of the precept. Its stringency is not punitive but corrective and preventive. Even excommunication, as Calvin says, is not anathema.

Government without discipline, if this be conceivable, is majesty only in name, a mere vamping pretense without assimilative or executive force, and without the power to do good.

Law, apart from discipline, if this be conceivable, is theory without practice, advice without urgency or illustration.

Discipline without government is plastic force without a model; without law it is tyranny and unreasonable caprice.

Thus government, law, and discipline are inseparable. They imply each other. Their interests are common. Whatever interferes with the due exercise of discipline militates against the dignity and the beneficence of both government and law. Whoever undervalues, neglects, or is recreant to discipline is in so far injurious to government and law, and unfaithful to the obligations of good citizenship. Discipline is the duty and the hope of all who would enjoy the benefits of society and of instruction.

Discipline is of necessity inherent in every association or organization authorized among men, especially those which exist by divine warrant, viz.: the Family, the State, and the Church. In each of these great institutions the ends sought to be attained are substantially the same, viz.: unity, assimilation, and peace. To each, discipline is a law of very life; without it each would lose its value, even if, for

all that is normal and beneficent, it did not perish from the earth. The case in regard to the church is very clear indeed. The church is a family and also a state; and shares with all families and states the right and need of discipline. But, in addition, discipline has been committed to her by her loving Lord and Redeemer. She is specially commissioned and endowed for its exercise. Discipline is her special duty, the token and the measure of her love to God and man, to truth and peace. To be lax and inefficient in this is to be unfaithful to her spouse and untrue to her mission, and is the sure token that her candlestick is soon to be removed. All the history of recreant churches which have been disowned and forsaken of God and all the warnings to the seven churches of Asia have equal reference to neglected discipline.

The points thus far made are, briefly, that discipline is inseparable from the idea of a church; that it is necessary to the continued existence of the church, and that it is the church's special, solemn duty, a form of homage and worship to her Lord.

The ends for which discipline is to be exercised are "the removal of offences; the vindication of the honor of Christ; the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church; and also the benefit of the offender himself." Dis. I. 2.

For the accomplishment of these ends the Church is endowed with a two-fold power, that of rank and that of jurisdiction.

The power of rank, as here used, is general or special, according as discovered in the membership or in the ministry. An eminence attaches to every member of the Church of Christ. All are kings—all are priests. This their Royal Priesthood is available for purposes of discipline. Hence, they are found looking, "every man not on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. ii. 4); "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God" (Heb. xii. 15); "exhorting one another" (Heb. x. 25); "able also to admonish one another" (Rom. xv. 14).

There is also, and more ostensible, a power of rank belonging to the office of the ministry which is effective in discipline. They bear the title (Bishop) which implies official and continued oversight. They are justly held responsible for spiritual declension and disorder (Ezek. xxxiv.; Rev. ii. 2). Their ministrations are all, directly or indirectly, disciplinary. Alike in the casual interview, the pastoral visit, the sermon is the element of discipline discernible.

For the purposes of this paper no further mention need be made of these general and special forms of the power of rank, save to remark that every church-member and every minister should bear in mind the influence and the responsibility of their rank and office, their "high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Formal discipline, in Presbyterian polity, or actual process, as it is termed, is in each congregation referred to the session, otherwise called the Parochial Presbytery, a kind of standing organization for the purpose; and it is carefully ordered that in the composition of

this body the dignity of both the membership and the ministry should be united. Here begins and thus is constructed the power of jurisdiction. The session is the primary church court. As to constituent elements all others are like it, and the power of jurisdiction which resides in them all is based upon this double foundation, and is exercised with a double, concurrent right. Conversely, this secures to every subject of discipline the right to be tried by a plurality of judges, and these representing all the orders in the Church. Experience has shown that this is in the interests of both liberty and equity.

The right of an accused church-member to complain or appeal under a sense of grievance or injustice is, of course, sacred. The unity of the Church and the vital relations which subsist between the members, as set forth in 1 Corinthians xii. 12, 14, 27, render this, in the abstract, unquestionable. The exercise of the right, however, is limited by the patience of the Church and the claims of other questions, not to speak of the restriction arising from denominational divisions. The peculiarities in the matter and form of appeal and complaint severally are not essential. They are largely matters of usage in different countries, and, provided the end be attained of effectuating an adequate representation of the case to the higher courts and to larger districts of the Church, they may be allowed to vary.

The province of discipline includes only what is overt, but extends to both words and deeds, example and influence. Words, that is, doctrinal sentiments, must tally with "the form of sound words." The proximate standard of orthodoxy among Presbyterians is, of course, the Confession of Faith and Catechisms; that which is ultimate and controlling is Holy Scripture. The Confession of Faith is accepted and used as a true extract of Scripture, formally applicable to cases as they arise. It is not an open question, among Presbyterians, what is truth. The ministers have, without exception, underwritten the Westminster standards as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. For them—for their conscience and for their office—these are truth. Deviation from this system of doctrine is heresy, and this is matter for discipline. Heresy is distraction to the Church. It involves alienation of affection, conflict of sentiment, division of effort. It is a great and ruinous evil—and a great sin as well. It indicates decline in personal piety. It is, in its pride of opinion, largely of the nature of rebellion against God and the truth. It argues dishonesty. It is no less than dishonest to continue one's name in subscription to a creed which one no longer accepts, and to receive from a church rewards of place or of pay for service, when such service does not include the defence of her Confession of Faith, and when it is not rendered "heartily as to the Lord." Heresy is to be proceeded against with discipline on the basis of its unsoundness, its injuriousness, and its dishonesty, all which are in contravention of ordination engagements.

Of course, no one expects that there ever will or can be absolute unanimity in sentiment or uniformity of statement; and, of course, this paper does not propose to visit with inquisitorial severity mere

discrepancies with the standards in thought or word. There always will be special cases to be treated specially and indulgently. There are men of genius whose eccentricities demand that they should be measurably a law unto themselves. There are venturesome men who, pushing in all directions, like the ram in the prophet's vision, strain the formulas of orthodoxy to their utmost tension. There are men of sprightly fancy and affluent diction who disdain the plain, homely words of Scripture and of the Confession. There are men who have picked up something like a Brazilian or Cape May pebble, and finding it susceptible of some polish and sparkle, mistake it for a gem of the first water, and are ever pointing out how defective and how impracticable is the original circlet of truth worn by the Church in that it did not from the beginning include their jewel, and does not now receive it, on the same strand with the others. There are men who have a great deal of human nature in their composition. Like the man in the old Latin play, nothing human is ever alien to them. They elevate to the highest position the several achievements of the reason. They exaggerate human philosophy, human science, human legends and traditions. If, between such parties and the Confession of Faith there be some occasional friction or even jostling, they may yet be borne with. Their peculiarities do not necessarily infer heresy, and, while they tax patience, they also furnish amusement, and at least save the Church from stagnation.

Of course, as these terms indicate, discipline for heresy is confined mainly to the ministry. Whatever crudity or even error of opinion may obtain among private members of the Church, is construed and is provided against as an imperfect discipleship. What is needed for them is, simply, better instruction. If, as is sometimes, though rarely, the case, a private member must be disciplined concerning his opinions, it must be rather with reference to that arrogant restlessness in the diffusion of error which disturbs the peace of the Church than to the error itself. Private members are not properly called upon to subscribe any formulas of doctrine, but merely to profess such as connect with the essentials of personal experience and discipleship.

Conduct, too, falls within the province of discipline. Not only immoralities, but improprieties are to be corrected. The drift of each one's life and example, the general character of one's association and influence, are to be reached and regulated by Christian principle. "The doctrine of God our Saviour" is to be adorned "in all things." Men are known by their company. Christian men define their position as in Psalms cxix. 63, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." And it was no impertinent challenge with which Peter was assailed (Acts xi. 3), "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

Discipline must not be hasty. Both the dignity and the deliberation proper to such a solemn transaction forbid haste. Justice to the accused party requires that ample time be allowed for traversing both the indictment and the testimony. Time is also required for the case to gain a certain amount of definiteness and notoriety, and secure—

what is very important—the concurrent judgment of the people. In default of available evidence, the church must wait—and may wait in faith. In all such instances the Head of the Church is holding the case in his own hands.

All offences are not to be disposed of in the same manner. There is a legitimate distinction to be drawn between private and public offences, and there are two sorts of each of these. A private offence may be so called either because known to but few persons, or because it is personal and committed against an individual. A public offence may be such, either because known to many or because committed against a public person, a family, a state, or a church. Personal offences are to be first referred to the power of rank for adjustment, and, failing this, to the power of jurisdiction, *vide* Luke xvii. 3, 4: “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him.” Matt. xviii. 15–17: “Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church. But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” Public offences, of whatever sort, are to be referred to the power of jurisdiction only.

As to the great regulative principle in the administration of discipline, some valuable remarks of Augustine, cited by Calvin, “Institutes,” Book IV., chapter xii., section 11, are here in place:

“All pious order and method of ecclesiastical discipline ought constantly to regard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; which the apostle commands to be kept by mutual forbearance; and without the preservation of which, the medicine of chastisement is not only superfluous, but even becomes pernicious, and consequently is no longer a medicine.”

Again: “He who attentively considers these things neither neglects severity of discipline for the preservation of unity, nor breaks the bond of fellowship by an intemperance of correction.”

He concludes with Cyprian: “Let a man, therefore, in mercy correct what he can; what he cannot, let him patiently bear and affectionately lament.”

If, therefore, discipline honestly prosecuted fail, as it sometimes does, at once to remove a scandal, or to purge an offence; if the people suspect that the church courts use too little diligence in the correction of evil; or if the ministers feel that in a given case prudence has grievously restricted power, it does not follow that church discipline is useless, or that the Church is corrupt, or that anything better can be done or gained by withdrawing from her communion. It follows only that the Lord reigns, and that, in the case supposed, he has not yet revealed his arm or declared his counsel.

Of the restoration of those who "bring forth fruits meet for repentance;" of discipline as a special means of grace to those by whom it is administered, and of discipline as a transaction of peculiar solemnity, it would unduly lengthen this paper to speak.

The aim of discipline has already been stated. This indicates its adaptation, and this, again, its use. By the blessing of Christ and the working of his Spirit, it accomplishes its object. It promotes unity, order, and peace. It makes real to the consciousness of individual members, and manifest to the view of the world, that the church is one in interest, sympathy, and duty. It constrains the membership "to walk by the same rule . . . to mind the same thing." It straightens the ranks of the moving sacramental host, furbishes anew their weapons, and quickens their march. It gives note of alarm as to the nearness and subtlety of error and sin, and makes life and duty more serious. It assimilates the church membership to one another, to the Spirit of Christ, and to the laws of his spiritual kingdom. It promotes a healthful mutual subordination, and an intelligent public spirit in church affairs.

Discipline has many evils and hindrances to contend with—some of which may now be considered.

1. Not a little of its moral value is lost for want of such interdenominational comity as establishes the discipline of each in the consent of all. There is a sad lack of formal comity between the denominations; but little recognition of either each other's ordination or discipline. Indeed, many of these bodies exist in a state of reciprocal censure, not to say excommunication, each refusing to hold with the others either correspondence or communion. Upon the general subject thus presented, it may be remarked:

(1.) The existence of distinct denominations in the Church of Christ is probably unavoidable. The development of other new ones may yet be looked for.

(2.) The existence of these denominations is not in itself a sin; the evil and inconvenience of their separateness may be reduced to a minimum; and the rise of new denominations may be anticipated without fear or regret. If those churches which are of the same family as to government could, by mutual agreement and without surrendering their distinct organizations and autonomies, be grouped together for general aggressive church work, this would go far to relieve the difficulty of the case. There would then be, in Protestant Christendom, three groups of churches (the Congregational, the Prelatic, and the Presbyterian)—among which denominational strife and the nullification of each other's discipline had ceased; while between the groups it might not be difficult to establish relations of at least respectful Christian recognition and correspondence. Then, should new denominations arise, the necessary general consent might be secured for their being ranged severally, in fraternal, co-operative relations with the group to which they belong—much as in this country territories develop into and by act of Congress are admitted as integral States of the Union.

(3.) As to our own Presbyterian group of Churches, there need be no waste of either wisdom or words. This Council is not called upon to consider the right or the reason to be of any of these. But it is conceived to be no violation of propriety if this paper suggest to each and to all representatively present, Sirs, ye are brethren. The peculiarities which ye profess and prefer sufficiently explain your being apart, but the discipline which formally debars you from either co-operation or communion is both unlovely and unwise. "Come now, and let us reason together." Holding the same symbols of faith and order, have ye not reached a period in your history, a stage in your growth, when ye can fully and heartily recognize your mutual piety and Presbyterianism? Cannot the walls of partition now or soon be taken down? "When shall it once be?"

Possibly the suggestion is premature—possibly even romantic—but the fact remains that, for want of such comity, discipline suffers. The standard of both orthodoxy and order is unsettled and uncertain.

2. Another hindrance to discipline in the Church is a double misapprehension concerning it—partly, that it arises in some occasional exigency of the Church—partly, that it is measured by the controlling interests of the Church. These vague notions restrain all concerned from the due exercise of discipline as though it were a personal quarrel occasioning disturbance. It is difficult to secure a just appreciation of discipline except—*First*—it be referred to the kingly office of Christ. Jesus reigns, and king is his title of office. He is not merely eminent or supereminent and all-excelling, as Agamemnon was king of men. He is not merely one who deserves to be a king, or one who may or shall one day be a king. He is king, and his kingly office is as really and as constantly needed in man's redemption as his offices of prophet, to cure human ignorance, or of priest, to atone for human guilt. Church discipline does not arise upon occasion. It is a permanent institution, a divine ordinance, the token of Christ's kingly, as preaching is the token of his prophetic presence.

Second—to the Church, not as a mere society whose controlling policy is ever varying, but as a true kingdom, correlative to Christ's kingly office. It is not the invention of men. It does not stand in their consent. It is an organization both great and strong, and discipline in the Church is but the voice of "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus." "It must needs be that offences come," but it were an unwise negligence to be surprised at their coming, and it were unfaithfulness alike to Christ and to his people not to deal with them. Discipline is not a disturbance of the peace of the Church. Offences are disturbances—discipline is the Church's attempt to restore and to keep peace.

3. Church discipline suffers, as do all governmental institutions, from human insubordination and perverseness. Still do men arise after the order of Diotrefes, who love to have the pre-eminence. Still does fierce and fiendish communism speak evil of dignities. These cooperate to bring discredit upon discipline and to hinder its processes. More mischievous than either of these, and more difficult to cope with, is rationalism. Rationalism is all for progress, and claims for

its several innovations and changes that they are simply steps of progress—this being used as the synonym for improvement. Discipline is represented as absurd old-fogyism, unfriendly to human improvement. Rationalism makes loud pretensions to liberalism. It repudiates Church bigotry; it denounces spiritual tyranny. It exalts to infallibility the reason of man, while discipline is again caricatured as an usurpation. It is enough to reply to charges like these, that discipline in the Church is not that undue exercise of power which is tyranny—not that unreasonable adherence to obsolete tenets which is bigotry—nor that stupid persisting that “the thing which hath been is that which shall be,” which is (perhaps) old-fogyism. The questions raised by rationalism do not connect directly nor only with Church discipline, but involve the entire Christian system of both doctrine and order. The conservatism of the Church is conceded. It is proper that with such a scheme of truth in her hands for preservation and for publication she should be slow to sanction innovations in either forms or formulas. The presumption is always against novelties in religion. The true is not new—the new is probably not true nor right nor good. Yet there is nothing herein to restrain progress or to punish free thought. That advancing civilization of which the Church is the author may be allowed to suggest, here and there, a grace of manner, of rhetoric or of art. Advancing science may be allowed to suggest some deeper meaning, some richer interpretation for words, idioms, incidents. There may be variations in religion, even as there are in music; but those of religion, like those of music, must still preserve and must indicate the original theme, the key and the leading note of each measure. There has always been that elasticity in religion which kept pace with advancing science and civilization. The scientific allusions of Scripture are not displaced by the latest discoveries. It is possible that both Job and David knew less of material nature than many a modern scientist, yet there is nothing in their writings to betray either ignorance or error.

It may not be amiss to remark further, that a class of difficulties in actual process might be prevented by a better study of canon and ecclesiastical law, and a careful avoidance of complication with the forms of civil law. And with this we close.

The REV. JOHN H. A. BOMBERGER, D. D., of Collegeville, Pa., read the following paper on

REGENERATION.

The subject now soliciting consideration may seem, at first view, to intrude itself rather abruptly and illogically upon the notice of the Alliance just at this time. A little reflection, however, may reverse this impression. It may not, indeed, come in as opportunely and forcibly as Paul's inspired and marvellously fitting parenthesis in that master-piece of heavenly logic, the Epistle to the Romans. It wholly shrinks from any such pretension. And yet, if, amidst our just admiration of many of the papers which have thus far intensely