

Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter.

VOL. XXVII.

MAY, 1889.

No. 5.

ORIGINAL.

THE FEMALE DEACON.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON THE ARGUMENT OF SYNOD'S COMMITTEE.

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I, for one, was not satisfied that after time enough to mature their arguments, the committee have proved their case. The effort is great but the proof is small. The proof is in the inverse ratio to the effort. The reading of the report made me think of Virgil's line about Polyphemus: "*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.*" Indulging in some freedom of translation to adapt it to the present case, I would render it thus: "A horrible monster, huge in form without any point." The attempt to understand it calls up another classical line, "*Exegi monumentum ære perennius,*" which the student translated, "I have eaten a monument harder than brass;" and the professor remarked, "you will have a hard time digesting it." So I think the members of the church are likely to be troubled with indigestion for a while after taking in this report.

The proof furnished for the extension of an institution is altogether circumstantial. This kind of proof does not convict a criminal, neither ought it to be held sufficient to introduce a new policy in the church. The committee have but two or three texts of Scripture which they rely on as ground for an *inference*, to sustain Synod's position. They must bear the burden of proof. If it is not sufficient, then the case fails. It is not necessary to say that they have *no* evidence, but that they have not enough—they have not the right kind. From the word of God they bring only circumstantial evidence. More is required, for they have to overcome a probability on the other side.

1. As far as I am able to remember, woman was set apart to no office under the old dispensation. I admit extraordinary calls, as Deborah and Huldah. But I see no intimation that woman was ever set apart by the anointing oil for the regular service of the

sanctuary. Nor after the introduction of the Synagogue did they serve, at least, officially, as deacons. According to Brown's Antiquities of the Jews, ten *men* were the least number that could be organized into a Synagogue; for there were so many officers—three of which were deacons. If women served in this connection, it had nothing to do with the constitutional organization. In Acts 5: 6—8, we have persons designated "oi neoteroi," and "oi neaniskoi." Mosheim thinks these were deacons, already introduced after the manner of the Synagogue. It may be so. But the terms to our minds would prove that if so, there were no *female* deacons brought in from the Synagogue, for the words are masculine; and one would think that if there had been *female* deacons, they should have attended to the preparation of Sapphira for burial.

2. The election and ordination of seven men to take care of the Grecian widows, fairly brought in the office of deacon into the Christian church. It was after this, if at all, women were set apart to this office. But the occasion now, if ever, demanded women-deacons, since the care of widow women was the specific reason for the institution. As women were not at that time admitted to office, it is probable that any deacon's work ascribed to them afterwards was unofficial, that is, performed without ordination vows.

3. Nature has set women apart to motherhood, the most important and vital function connected with the existence of the race. The word of God takes care that woman shall not be diverted from so honorable and influential a position by any public or official relation to church or State. 1 Tim. 5: 14. "I will therefore, that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house." This is not a prejudice against her sex at all. It is rather a safeguard. It implies no inferiority of talent; but is on the ground of her being already by nature devoted to a service indispensable to the race. Hence, I think, it is admitted that the so-called female deacon of the early centuries were widows and elderly maidens.

These three facts seem to me to constitute a probability contrary to Synod's decision, (that women may come under ordination vows,) that must be set aside by positive proof from the word of God.

I admit unofficial activity both of *male* and *female* workers, in the times of the Apostles. The argument of the committee proves to my entire satisfaction, that women performed services that some men were under ordination vows to render. This has been my belief for some time before the present question came up for discussion. The inference that they were ordained when they engaged in the work, is not sound. The same argument will bring women into the pulpit. Did not Priscilla teach Apollos? Then why not the congregation? And if she taught, why not infer her ordination? Paul calls her "sunergos," my helper. Mary and Tryphena and Tryphosa "labored" in the Lord. 1 Tim. 5: 17. The elders "labor" in word and doctrine. The committee abjure any intention of carrying out their logic; but logic is a thing that

carries itself out when we put ourselves under its power. And many are even now out-running the committee, who will say that the "labor" was "toil," and in a different line, which the advanced advocates will say that it is "toil" in the same line. In Phillipians, 4: 3, Paul says, "Help these women that labored with me (sunethlesan) in the gospel;" which will be held to greatly strengthen the same opinion. Thus, inference, unless "by good and necessary consequence," cannot be allowed. Such inference enthrones the pope. We cannot trust the child that starts toward the precipice, saying, I will not go over. The committee leads us in a dangerous direction. We must hesitate to follow them. Phœbe's relation to the church at Cenchrea proves that a woman did deacon's work, but it does not prove that she was set apart by ordination vows.

The passage of 1 Tim. 3: 11, I call circumstantial evidence, because it admits a very grave doubt, as able expositors take different sides. In examining the text this impression is made on my mind. Paul is laying down the qualifications of deacons. Among these is the fact that the deacon must be the husband of one wife. He precedes this by giving the qualification of the women, who may be their wives; then he follows up the first subject by showing the qualification of deacons through the government of their children. This, to me, seems more natural, than to stop the subject of *male* deacons when only half done, to speak of the female deacons, then to resume and finish the qualifications of the first. To the reply that the wives of bishops are not mentioned, our rejoinder is that their children are; and there may be a special reason for deacons having wives like themselves, viz: the fact that they must become acquainted with many delicate matters in families. This passage is the strongest ground for the inference of the committee. But the proof is by no means conclusive.

The argument proves the admission of women to the Lord's table by *inference*, is of no force; for this ordinance so obviously takes the place of the passover, which they observed by households, that no person could call it in question, and it never fell into disuse. It stands on the same ground as infant baptism which is practised generally in the Christian church because it takes the place of circumcision. As to the baptism of women, our committee, now in the spirit of deliberation and judicial deliverance, fall into a mistake similar to that made on the floor of Synod. They seem to be putting a patch of new cloth on an old garment, and the rent is made worse. Trying to hide their denial on the floor of Synod, that there is any direct Scriptural proof of the baptism of women; they attempt to imply that what was meant to be said was, that we have nothing to prove it, for a matter of twenty years. They fail to read the record, Acts 8: 12, "They were baptized, both men and women." With this error in one of the arguments, we may be borne with, when we call in question the conclusiveness of the

rest. The committee in their disposition belittle the significance of ordination. There was a doctrine of laying on of hands. Heb. 6: 2. In other words, ordination is a matter of solemn import and not a mere ratification. The laying on of hands contains at least three things:

1. Consecration or setting apart to a certain work in the name of Christ.

2. Conferring the gifts of the Holy Ghost needed in doing that work.

3. A solemn vow on the part of the person to exercise these gifts as a life work.

The statement of the committee that election confers the office is all wrong. This will be new light to those familiar with the history of the persecuted Covenanters. In the "Informatory Vindication," our faithful forefathers emphatically declare that the authority of officers in the church comes down from Christ through ordination. They admit that in the State the authority of God resides radically in the people, and is upward through election. They do not dispute the right of election in the church, but they deny that it gives authority. Now, while the way is open to women to perform in a voluntary way, any service like this, it is not given her to take a vow that would interfere with the duty of marriage. It is objected that the vow is not so construed in the case of men. I answer, that man's relation to the race does not tie him up as woman's relation ties her. Woman's greatest service to the race is that of motherhood. She may still do any voluntary work that does not interfere with her duty to her husband and children; but she is not free to assume another life-work; and though she purpose not to marry, and may rightly entertain the purpose, she has no right to bind herself never to change her mind. Nature is imperative, when she asserts her authority. It is therefore wrong for either man or woman to take entangling vows of single life. But the ordination vow implies more than woman could render in the event of her marriage.

The historical argument outside of the New Testament is not sufficiently definite as to the apostolical period. We admit the fact that the church did legitimately add to her institutions under apostolical directions; but history shows that she continued to do so without such direction, in the subsequent ages, till she lost the entire form of her primitive organization, and episcopacy came in with her archbishops, bishops and her archdeacons, deacons and subdeacons; and we may even surmise that the official female deacon came in to take the place vacated by the men when they assumed the ministration of the word and sacraments. The history of the case also shows that ordination of women was at length withdrawn, which gives rise to the inference that it was a custom found to be of evil tendency, and not a thing of divine right.