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ARTICLE I.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON.

The particular topic to which we shall direct attention is *the Importance of the Office of Deacon*. But before proceeding to its immediate discussion, we shall offer some preliminary remarks in regard to the timeliness and desirableness of considering the whole subject of the diaconate.

1. It has not unfrequently been said, that the age in which we live is peculiarly called upon, in the providence of God, to take up Church-questions and subject them to a careful examination. There is truth in this remark, if it be received with necessary qualification. No doubt, it is the duty of every age to study the whole counsel of God as revealed in his inspired word. But there are peculiar circumstances connected with the Church, at particular times, which compel her attention to certain articles of faith and principles of order. Conflicts arise in consequence of the propagation of error, which necessitate a thorough investigation of the truth which is challenged, and a sharp and definite statement of true in contrast with false doctrine. And as every error is not circulated in every age, but particular heresies prevail at particular seasons, the result is that the special form of truth which is related to the prevalent type of false opinion, requires to be precisely fixed. It is in this way that the theology

of the Church has been gradually developed into scientific arrangement, and has found exact and permanent expression in creeds and symbols. The sword which our Lord said he came to send on earth cuts to pieces the error, hews off false appendages from scriptural doctrine, and carves out the perfect and enduring form of truth. The precise statement of truth is conditioned upon its conflict with error.

Now it takes but the commonest observation to notice that one of the most marked ecclesiastical features of our age is the existence, to an unprecedented extent, of denominational differences, differences not only as to doctrinal systems, but as to the government, order, and administrative economy of the Church. This is the incidental effect of the unfettered exercise of free thought, engendered by the revolutionary and disenthraling action of the great Reformation in the sixteenth century. The individual, who had been shackled in the chains of a rigid and despotic system, sprang into the blissful liberty of thinking and acting for himself, with no responsibility for religious opinion except that which bound him inalienably to his God. The natural, perhaps the inevitable, result of individual liberty in the formation and assertion of religious opinions within the sphere of the Protestant Church, in a condition not yet perfected by grace, was, that external divisions occurred. Outward unity was, in a measure, sacrificed to inward conviction. The evils growing out of this separation of the visible body of Christ into independent communities are confessedly great—they will not obtain in its glorified, and, it may be, not in its millennial estate; but they are to be preferred to those that spring from the enforced uniformity of an apostate Church, which forces the energies of the individual into the grooves of an iron system. It is better that external diversity should co-exist with inward agreement as to the essentials of Christianity, than that an outward unity should clamp together elements which are discordant with each other as to the vital principles of the gospel, and repress their free and separate development. This, however, in passing. It is not our purpose to expatiate upon the comparative evils or benefits which may be conceived to flow from the difference of denominations in the

bosom of the Church. They are now only adverted to as exhibiting the necessity, created by a conflict of views, for the formation, and embodiment in clear and definite shape, of our conceptions in regard to matters which constitute the chief points of dispute. The friction of denominational tenets makes an examination of ecclesiastical questions peculiarly necessary, since it is in reference to them that differences mainly occur.

It ought, too, to be considered, that the conflict of opinions as to matters of doctrine, and even as to the evidences of divine revelation itself, which is the consequence of unlicensed freedom of thought and action, renders it exceedingly important that there should be a fixed faith in relation to the necessity, the nature, and the visible form, of the Church, as an organised institute for the inculcation and maintenance of dogmatic truth. It is true that, relatively to the salvation of the soul, doctrine is of infinitely greater importance than ecclesiastical polity, order, and administration. But it must never be forgotten, that the visible Church is the divinely ordained "pillar and ground of the truth." Sink the Church, and down with it will go the gospel of our salvation. Yield to the clamor—Away with the Church! and we should soon obey the demand—Crucify Him! Him whom it is the duty and the glory of the Church to preach to a dying world. The existence of doctrine is conditioned upon the existence of the Church, the purity of doctrine upon its freedom from corruption. The Church is the body through which the living soul of the gospel breathes and acts, the medium through which alone the blessings of redemption are ordinarily communicated to our guilty and perishing race. However subordinate, then, ecclesiastical government and order may be to the doctrines of grace, judged with immediate reference to the life of the soul, they must be admitted to possess inconceivable importance, judged with reference to those doctrines themselves. Doctrine conducts to salvation and the Church conducts to doctrine. She cannot save, she is not Christ; but without her men would cease to see the index finger that points to him, and to hear the cry, "Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world!"

It ought also to be observed, that the necessity for the legitimate restraints of ecclesiastical discipline in an age tending, in an unusual degree, to radical agitation and a lawless disregard of the checks of constitutional government, evinces the great importance of settling our views of Church polity upon a scriptural and therefore an immovable basis. We ourselves are at this very time witnesses of the need of more definite ideas as to the nature of Church-authority, and the application of recognised principles of government to the conduct of the professed subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom.

It deserves, further, to be noticed, that the genius of the present age, as peculiarly active, enterprising, and aggressive, necessitates the adoption of accurate conceptions in regard to the agencies by which the great and expanding work of the Church is to be most scripturally as well as most successfully achieved. Here there is great danger of mistake—just here lamentable mistakes are actually made. The functions of some church-officers may be diverted from their appropriate ends, and those of others, as distinctive and separate, may be wholly obliterated. The deacon, for instance, in the prelatie communions, as a scriptural officer different from the preacher, has ceased to exist, and the functions originally assigned to him are discharged by the ministry, or an order of secular agents, unknown to Scripture, and devised by the wisdom of man. Is it not the fact, too, in our own Church, that in many cases the presbyter performs the offices which the Scriptures attach to the deacon, and in this way functions, which the word of God disjoins and pronounces incompatible, are brought together upon the same person and merged into each other? And is it not also the fact that there is a tendency to neglect the employment of deacons, and, upon the plea of expediency or necessity, to cause them to give way to unofficial and voluntary agents who are charged with collecting the funds needed to fill the coffers of the Church?

These features of the age in which our lot is cast render the careful examination of church-questions especially important. It would be extravagant to say that these are the only, or even the most important, which claim attention. There are questions

concerning the grounds of theism, the proofs of a supernatural revelation, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the interpretation of prophecy, the future development of Christ's kingdom on earth, and others of a purely doctrinal character, which merit our profoundest consideration. But, still, prominent among these objects of investigation are the nature and authority, the ordinances, and the officers of the visible Church. And as one of these church-questions we are called upon to develop and establish our views of the diaconate. The subject has, to a considerable extent, been neglected. We cannot afford to thrust it aside.

2. We remark, in the next place, that the Elder Question—as it has been called—has for some time past almost absorbed the attention of our Church. We had that question to settle; we addressed ourselves to the discussion of it; and although an over-scrupulous adhesion to old forms has hindered the expression in our Book of Church Order of all the results which have been actually attained, still, what has been engrossed in our Constitution is in advance of anything yet reached in the development of principles of church polity in the American Presbyterian Church. We are on the path to grasp still clearer views of the eldership; and as we have broken the spell of enchantment which hung over the old Book, in consequence of historic associations, and have begun to adjust our form of government more nearly to what we believe to be the apostolic model furnished in the New Testament, the opportunity is fairly offered for making still further progress in the incorporation of scriptural views into our ecclesiastical law. It is to be hoped that the old leaven of semi-Congregationalism will be more completely eliminated, and that our Church will, with God's favor, more and more take on the type of a pure and unalloyed Presbyterianism, or, what is the same thing, the unadulterated polity of the New Testament Church. So much we ought to be thankful for as clear gain. The controversies of the past thirty or forty years have, as they rolled away, left a deposit of incalculably precious truth.

But the absorbing interest which existed in the Elder Question extruded and shut out from view the Deacon Question, the agitation of which promised for a while to be concurrent with

that of the other. It was practically laid over for consideration, until a breathing-time from the conflict about the Elder should be reached. We now have that breathing time; and Providence seems to be calling us to the attentive examination of the diaconal office, and to the development and settlement of our doctrine and practice in relation to it. In the discussion of the Board question, which took place before our separation from the Northern Church, Dr. Thornwell took very strong ground in regard to the employment of deacons, as officers not confined to strictly congregational limits, in connexion with the executive agencies charged with the prosecution of the benevolent enterprises of the Church. Whether he, in later life, modified these views, we will not now inquire. We would only observe that what modification of them he adopted seemed to be more practical than theoretical—an accommodation of them to an existing order of things, which he could not wholly change in accordance with his conceptions. He chose rather to work in connexion with a system in which he perceived defects, than to occupy the position of a theoretical and inoperative isolation. But we have not yet shelved the question which he raised. The General Assembly may have the inquiry to consider, whether the functions of the deacon ought to be employed in connexion with its Executive Committees as central agencies of the Church. That question is also before the Synod of South Carolina.

There is still another aspect of the subject which is worthy of notice. Probably in consequence of the prevalence of the Scotch doctrine that the higher office includes the lower, and therefore that the office of elder includes that of deacon, and in consequence of the habit which grew more and more out of that theory to neglect the election of deacons as superfluous officers, some of our churches have, until a comparatively recent date, been equipped with an incomplete complement of officers. The deacons were wanting. The election of those officers has, however, become more general, and this is progress in the right direction. But there is a degree of rawness in the incumbents of the office resulting from the absence of prescriptive usages which would have grown out of a long standing employment and cultivation of

diaconal functions. Our old Book was exceedingly meagre in its statements touching the office, and was therefore a very incompetent directory as to its duties; and although our present Book is fuller, there are aspects of the subject which it does not touch, and which afford matter for independent inquiry.

All the considerations which have now been mentioned go to show that the discussion of the Deacon question is both timely and desirable.

I. We now proceed to suggest some thoughts as to the importance of the deacon's office in its relation to the poor. Of the existence of a peculiar official relation of the deacon to the poor, which is unmistakeably affirmed in the Scriptures, we shall not now speak. Something may be said upon the question when, in the course of these remarks, allusion shall be made to the divine right of the deacon as an officer in the visible kingdom of Christ. At present we assume the fact of the relation as one maintained by the whole body of the Reformed Church, with the exception of the Church of England and its offshoots, which, in accordance with the prelatical theory, assign to the deacon, as such, a preaching function.

1. It will require no effort to prove the perpetual presence of the poor in the Church. Our Master determined that matter when he said that, although his bodily presence should for a season be withdrawn from the Church on earth, the poor should never be absent. "The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always." We cannot know all his reasons for a dispensation, which we adore as righteous, wise, and merciful. In the ordinary course of his providence towards mankind in general, he allows distinctions to exist between the rich and the poor; and he does not see fit to obliterate them within the circle of his Church. They constitute a means of wholesome discipline for his people, in their earthly preparation for his heavenly service. But ignorant as we are of the whole case, we have one reason intimated by our Lord himself for this procedure of his providence. It would appear that he retains the poor in his Church as, in some sort, representatives of his earthly poverty, and in this re-

gard, tests of his people's love to him. He is pleased to identify himself with them, and will treat, in the final distribution of the rewards of grace, every tender office performed for their benefit as done to himself. In that most affecting portraiture which he gives, in Matthew's Gospel, of the processes of the last judgment, he represents himself, the diademed Judge upon the great white throne, as accounting every deed of kindness, however humble, which had been done to his poor brethren, as having been done to himself, and as furnishing the evidence of affection for him. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, yet did it unto me." Jesus still walks in this vale of tears as personated by his poor and needy brethren. A cup of cold water given to a thirsty disciple is as if pressed to the parched lips of the suffering Son of Man. Now, diaconal ministration to the needs of the poor sustains to the Church as an organised society precisely the relation which the private offices of charity hold to the individual Christian. Contemplated, therefore, from this point of view, the deacon's office assumes an importance which can only be measured by the Church's love for Christ and by the awards of the last great day.

2. The poor members of Christ in a very special manner require the help of the Church. The very fact that they are in the Church renders it less likely that they will receive assistance from without. Entitled as they are by the terms of the gospel to look for help from their brethren, they will, especially if sensitive and shrinking, refrain from seeking it from others. It enhances this consideration, too, when we reflect that outsiders, individuals and organisations alike, as they justly expect that the Church's help will be extended to its own poor members, will not be as apt to assist them as they would those who are not so related, and are therefore more completely thrown upon their own resources. So strong is this feeling that one church expects another church to provide, as is meet, for its own needy members, and reluctantly consents to divide the alms which are intended to relieve its own beneficiaries. This line of thought throws fresh light upon the importance of the deacon's office, as the organ for the extension of the Church's benefactions.

3. It also merits remark that the making of stated and competent provision for its poor members is necessary to the spiritual, and to some extent the temporal, prosperity of the Church. In the first place, no body of Christians can grow in the divine life who habitually neglect the cultivation of the grace of love, a grace which the Apostle Paul, in his glowing and eloquent description of it in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, crowns as foremost among the three essential and abiding attributes of our holy religion. All the other graces condition the development of this, which is the fulfilling of the law on earth, and shall infuse a thrilling rapture into the praises of the blood-washed throng above. A Christian without love would be a body bereft of the soul. We have seen that, in the judgment of our Lord himself, this sacred principle receives its chief manifestation, so far as creatures are concerned, in offices of charity to the poor and needy members of his body. The Church, therefore, which shuts up the channel of diaconal ministration must expect to be dwarfed in the development of experimental religion. In the second place, the judicial displeasure of Christ, the judge of his own house, who walks among the golden candlesticks and thunders in the ears of every flock of his professing people the solemn words, "I know thy works," must fall upon any church which neglects to provide for the wants of his poor. The frown of his holy providence chills the spiritual life of the individual and blights the spiritual prosperity of a church. The withdrawal of his Spirit is at once the seal of his disapprobation, and the shadow of approaching judgments. In the third place, a church which sinks the deacon's office, and so refuses to provide for its own poor, checks the growth of its membership, by making an unhappy impression upon the unbelieving world. A tree is known by its fruits, and, in like manner, a church is judged by its practical exemplification of the grace which it professes. A purely inward religion, which gives no proof of its existence by outward works of beneficence, cannot pass muster in the judgment of the world. It is condemned—and deservedly so—as a faith without works, which is dead. A church with such a faith must be pronounced a dead church; and who will seek for life amongst the dead?

One of the tendencies of the age is to deify the merely human impulse of charity, and render to it the homage which is due alone to the divine principle of love—a love which was incarnated in a dying Saviour, and when moving in the heart of a sinner is born alone of the new-creating power of the Holy Ghost. Societies, institutes, organisations of all sorts, founded in this earth-born sentiment of charity, spring up on every side, and flaunt their banners as the rivals of the Church in the field of benevolence. We would hinder no legitimate combination of secular agencies intended merely to alleviate the temporal woes of humanity. The fearful mass of suffering calls for massed effort to meet it. And, after all, the impression made upon it is like that which would be made upon the ocean by organised attempts to bale it out. Let the dead bury their dead: the office is indispensable. But when organisms designed to relieve the secular wants of men are represented as competitors of the Church of Christ, upon the theatre of a pure beneficence flowing from love, it becomes her to look to her charities. An array of facts confronts her which she cannot afford to overlook. She must provide for her needy members, or succumb to the verdict of failure pronounced by competing secular societies, and bow her head before the judgment that she is untrue to one of her most sacred responsibilities. Her own members would suck the paps of other institutions, and outsiders would shun her as a mother that refuses bread to the hungry offspring of her body. Lovers of Jesus, could we calmly look upon such a triumph of the world over the Church which he bought with his own precious blood, and constituted the exponent of his love in a world of suffering and sin? Not while a pulse of affection beats in our hearts for him who died for us on the tree. Not while we can lift a hand to wipe off the stain of such a reproach from the fair face of the Bride of Jesus—the Mother of our souls. Let us then exert ourselves, each in his own lot, to call forth the sympathies of the Church for her needy members; and if we are shod with the sandals of diaconal service, hasten as her appointed ministers to bear her charities to the hovels of the poor.

4. Owing partly to the disappointment of reasonable expecta-

tions, and partly to the imperfections of nature not wholly sanctified by grace, an evil which has in all ages, and perhaps in an increased degree in our own, characterised, as it is, by an unwonted upheaval of the masses, threatened the peace of society, is liable to prevail in the Church,—we allude to the discontentment and restiveness of the poor. In the sixth chapter of Acts, we are told that the Hellenists murmured because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. This was a source of disturbance to the infant Church which required the prompt and decided application of some corrective measure. What was the remedy for the evil adopted by the apostles? The multiplication of deacons. As soon as this was done, the agitation subsided and contentment was restored. The precedent is instructive. The employment of deacons in the regular and adequate ministration of the Church's alms prevents the dissatisfaction of the poor, or, if through some administrative defect it has arisen, cannot fail to arrest it. The rich and the poor are harmonised upon the diaconate. It is the divinely erected breakwater against the irruption of agrarianism, communism, and every kind of levelling theory, against the peace and order of the Christian commonwealth.

5. It ought not to be supposed that the agency of the deacon should be used only for the relief of absolute pauperism. This would be to cramp the benefactions of the Church into very narrow limits; and yet it is to be feared that this is the view which is often entertained in regard to the extent of diaconal ministration. There are those who, although not reduced to extreme want, should, as struggling with difficulties or bowed down beneath affliction, be objects of the Church's sympathy and help,—honest workers who through no fault of theirs have failed to reap the fruits of labor; women plying the needle in garrets or toiling in garden patches near their cabins, to earn a scanty subsistence; mourners over the dead, unable to meet their funeral expenses; children left orphans at a helpless age, appealing to the Church as their only mother for subsistence and at least a primary education; and industrious young men cut off from the means of support and seeking places of employment, but in the period of transition liable to the experience of want. It is in such cases

that deacons would cease to be mere disbursers of stated stipends, and find occasion for the exercise of wisdom, good sense, and judgment, in ascertaining the actual amount of need, in determining the instances in which a draft should be made upon the beneficiary fund of the Church, and the time, way, and measure in which relief should be afforded.

Such are some of the reasons which serve to magnify the importance of the deacon's office in relation to the poor.

II. The second general aspect of the subject which we propose to consider is, the importance of the deacon's office in relation to the temporal interests of the Church, apart from the care of the poor.

In order to a satisfactory and impressive presentation of this view of the subject, it is requisite to exhibit the scriptural grounds upon which an extension of the deacon's functions beyond the care of the poor is justified. This we proceed briefly to do.

In the first place, if deacons have no scriptural warrant to act beyond the care of the poor, the Head of the Church has appointed no officers to take charge of her temporal interests. No proof can be furnished from Scripture that the ministers of the word have received such a commission. On the contrary, the declaration of the apostles that they—and what was true of them in this particular is true of all preachers—could not with reason leave the word of God and serve tables, but must give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word, excludes the preachers of the gospel from official devotion to the temporal affairs of the Church. The qualifications of ruling elders given in the Scriptures, the functions they are represented as discharging, and the analogy of their office to that of the ministry of the word, in the fact that it is concerned about spiritual ends, make it sufficiently clear to every candid mind that they were not appointed to take care of the temporalities of the Church. The only other officers are deacons; and if they were not divinely assigned to the performance of this function, the conclusion is, that Christ left his Church unprovided with officers whose business it is to look after her temporal interests. That conclusion we cannot accept, and are therefore compelled to believe that the office of

deacon is not confined to the care of the poor, but includes that of the Church's temporalities.

In the second place, the ordinary method of instruction in the Scriptures is to give a special case illustrating a principle or duty, and leave the principle or duty to be collected from that instance as a specimen. Hence it is a legitimate inference from the fact that one kind of temporal business was intrusted to the deacon, namely, the care of the poor, that all ecclesiastical business of the same kind was included in his office. In this way Dr. Thornwell argues, and we believe the argument to be valid.

Substantially the same consideration may be presented in a different form: the analogy of the deacon's office, as confessedly concerned about the temporal care of the poor, would lead us, in the absence of any direct proof to the contrary, to conclude that the office was also concerned about other business of a temporal nature. Either a spiritual officer was charged with the temporal business of the Church apart from the care of the poor; or no officer was charged with it; or the deacon was charged with it. The last supposition is the only one that is reasonable. And as there is no direct proof that can be adduced to rebut the force of the argument from the analogy of the deacon's office as related to the poor, that argument must stand in force.

In the third place, the reason, assigned by the apostles why they should not attend to the distribution of relief to the poor, holds equally against their attention to any other temporal business of the Church. That reason was, that temporal ministration to the poor would hinder the discharge of their spiritual duties. Now, it is perfectly plain that the same result would have followed from their undertaking any other temporal functions. Either, then, no officer was appointed to take charge of the Church's temporalities apart from the provisions for the poor; or the deacon was assigned to that duty. There is not the least reason that another possible supposition in the case could have been the true one, viz., that the ruling elder was appointed to that trust.

In the fourth place, the position that the functions of the deacon were not confined to the care of the poor, but were extended to that of all other temporal business connected with the Church,

has been maintained by the whole Reformed Church, except that portion of it from which the element of Prelacy was never purged out.

These reasons are sufficient to establish the comprehensiveness of the deacon's office for which we contend.

Having shown the legitimate applicability of the deacon's functions to all the temporal business of the Church, the way is open to consider the importance of them in view of this width of their scope.

1. The functions of the deacon are important as freeing the ministry and eldership from engrossment in the temporal business of the Church, and enabling them to concentrate their energies upon their own spiritual duties. We have already spoken of the reason assigned by the apostles for their refusing to take charge of the daily ministration to the poor. They affirmed that it would have been unreasonable for them to discharge that office, because it would have involved the neglect of their own spiritual duties. They declined to leave the ministry of the word for the ministry of tables, and expressed their determination to devote themselves to prayer and to the preaching of the gospel. Now, it is evident that the most important temporal function which they could have performed was ministering to the bodily necessities of their poor brethren. And it follows that if the pressure of their spiritual obligations constrained them to decline the discharge of that temporal function, there could have been no other of like nature which they would have been willing to perform. They declined attending to any temporal business of the Church, on the ground that they could not be diverted from that business which belonged peculiarly to them, and which was concerned about the spiritual interests and the eternal destinies of men. But some of the poor had been neglected. The daily ministration to their necessities from the common fund had not been adequately accomplished. A measure had to be adopted to meet the difficulty. What should it be? The apostles were solicited to remove the evil. How did they do it? By giving their personal attention to the daily distribution? No. They refused to abandon their own proper duties, even to discharge that

necessary office. What then? They counselled the Church to elect temporal officers for the performance of this temporal function. Inspiration had solved the difficulty again, as no doubt it had solved it in all the past history of the Church. Spiritual officers were restricted to spiritual functions; temporal officers were assigned to temporal. The discharge of the duty in question was indispensable. Somebody had to perform it. Had no deacons been appointed, the spiritual officers would have been obliged to attend to it. The appointment of deacons absolved them from the obligation, and set them free to devote themselves to their proper spiritual duties.

It is beyond dispute that the end contemplated in the appointment of "the seven" was a twofold one—the competent performance of a necessary temporal office, and the release of spiritual officers from its discharge.

But, say the Prelatists, the deacon was a spiritual officer with a temporal function. The view, they contend, that he was a purely temporal officer, is not supported by the subsequent history. That shows, according to them, that some at least of the seven were preachers—Stephen disputed publicly in synagogues, and Philip was an evangelist. Granted; but how does that prove that deacons are ordained preachers? Is even the private Christian muzzled, so that he cannot open his mouth to contend for the faith delivered to the saints? Is he prevented, because not an ordained preacher, from meeting the heretic, the infidel, the atheist, on the floor of public meetings, and confuting their arguments? Was it not a notorious fact, that liberty of exhortation was admitted in the Jewish synagogue? And what was to hinder Stephen, without ordination to the preaching function, fired as he was by extraordinary genius and filled with the Holy Ghost, from availing himself of that liberty to discuss the questions at issue between an effete Judaism and a gloriously inaugurated Christianity? The record affords not a particle of proof that he was, formally speaking, a preacher. As to Philip, all that can be proved from the history is, that some time after he had been inducted into the diaconal office, he preached in the capacity of an evangelist. Well; is it anything strange that a

lower officer should in the course of time become a higher? that an elder or a deacon should rise to the ministry of the word? Two ministers in one of the Presbyteries of this Synod were for some time only ruling elders; and in another there is one who had been a deacon. Does the case of these brethren prove that the deacon is a preacher? There is no evidence to show that Stephen and Philip were, as deacons, preachers of the gospel. The prelatical argument, taken at its best, is a bare presumption, and any positive proof to the contrary must rebut and destroy it. We have just such positive proof in the statement of the apostles: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. . . . We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." On this ground they enjoined upon the Church the election of deacons—and the Prelatists refuse compliance with this injunction—to the very end, that men not burdened with the cares and duties of the ministry should devote themselves to the charge and administration of the secular business of the Church. The deacon was appointed with a view to his not preaching. The prelatical position involves the contradiction: the deacon was appointed to preach and not to preach at the same time.

But the case was peculiar to the apostles, it will be said. Their reasoning in favor of an exclusive devotion to spiritual offices had reference to themselves as extraordinary officers, and not to the ordinary preachers of the word. This will not answer. It is a vain, although a last, resort. For the duties specified by the apostles were precisely those which were common to them with ordinary preachers—prayer and preaching. "We will give ourselves continually," they did not say, to sacerdotal functions, or prelatical offices, or the exercise of the gift of inspiration and the apostolic prerogative; "we will give ourselves continually," they did say, "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Praying and preaching, therefore, are affirmed by them to be incompatible with the service of tables—with engagement in the secular business of the Church. All, then, whose official business it is to pray and preach, are, in a regular condition of the Church, in which all its offices are filled, debarred from diaconal service. How then, in

the name of reason, does the record prove that deacons are preachers? The truth is, it proves exactly the opposite.

Rejecting, as we do, the prelatical theory in regard to the deacon's office as untrue, it becomes us to face the question, Do we not act upon it as if it were true? Is not our practice, to some extent, contradictory of our doctrine? Do we not neglect to employ the deacon's office so as to free our spiritual officers from the discharge of the deacon's business? Are we not compelled to answer these solemn questions in the affirmative? Are not ministers and elders, who are not disabled in God's providence from discharging their own proper spiritual functions, charged with the duties pertaining to collectors, treasurers, and disbursers of the moneys of the Church? Do not our church courts, to some extent, undertake offices which, according to the scriptural standard, should be referred to boards of deacons? This is an evil which cries for removal, if we would conform the practice of our Church to her own pure scriptural standard. No doubt, it rests chiefly upon our church courts to correct this anomaly; and we earnestly pray, that as the question is now rising into prominence before them, they will give it the attention it demands, and hasten it to a scriptural conclusion. But we venture to say, that the deacons have also something to do in this matter. Let them show, by devotion to their duties, what can be achieved by a faithful use of the diaconal office. Let them thus destroy the supposition, implied in our practice, that they are incompetent to meet all the trusts reposed by the King of Zion in the incumbents of that office. And let them humbly and respectfully, but firmly and persistently, claim the privilege to do all that their Lord has assigned them to do, so as at the last day to render the account of their stewardship with joy and not with grief. We recommend no arrogant assumption of prerogative, no seditious agitation, on the part of deacons; but they are the free servants of their Master and have a right to speak in behalf of their office, so long as they soberly confine themselves within the bounds of Scripture and of our constitutional principles.

2. The deacon's office is important in its bearing upon the support of the ministry. There are few, if any, questions now before

our Church of greater practical consequence than that which is concerned about the adequate sustentation of the ministry. It is a deplorable fact that so many of our preachers are but poorly compensated for their labors. The principle of justice requires that they be fairly supported—distributive justice, for the laborer is worthy of his hire; commutative justice, for if the people receive spiritual things from the ministry, they ought in return to communicate to them their carnal things. The sentiment of gratitude should impel the people to furnish them a competent support—gratitude to God for the incalculably precious gift of a preached gospel, the instrument of our consolations in this world and the charter of our hopes for the next; gratitude to the human dispensers of this boon, who, for the elect's sake, are willing to endure reproach, affliction, and even death itself. It would not be difficult to show that upon the prosecution of the ministerial work hang the maintenance of our system of government, and the whole administrative working of our practical system. Suspend the work of the ministry, close the pulpits, shut up the churches, silence the preachers, arrest the indoctrination of the people in the truths and precepts of the divine word throughout our borders from Dan to Beersheba, and how long would it take to disperse our church courts, or reduce them to the mere shadow of government, bar the doors of our theological seminaries, scatter our executive committees, and dry up the fountains of Domestic and Foreign Missions, whence living streams are flowing to gladden the deserts of home destitution and heathen despair? Bury the ministry, and the visible Church would share its grave. The imagination of what its loss would entail helps us to appreciate it as a blessing possessed.

We take occasion also to observe, that the ministers of the gospel intrinsically deserve support from the Church and the world. We have lived long enough, and had sufficient contact with men, to form, in the exercise of ordinary judgment, some proper conception of the qualities of our fellow-laborers in the ministry; and we hesitate not to say, without detracting from the merits of others, that they are the noblest class of men that breathe the atmosphere of earth. Subject they are to the pas-

sions and infirmities of unglorified spirits in daily intercourse with a world of sin, and, like the impulsive disciple who denied his Lord, are exposed to temptation, and need to watch and pray. But the depth of an exceptional fall into vice and shame measures the height from which the plunge was taken. Modest as women and affectionate in manners, heroic and self-sacrificing in spirit, animated by zeal for the glory of God and a pure and tireless philanthropy, the least token of appreciation to which they are entitled is the means of living in order to prosecute their holy and beneficent vocation. The pleasure of fellowship with them is as charming below as it is suggestive of the joyful communion on high. Noble and honored brethren! be our lot cast with yours, and to your assembly be our honor united; at your altar we would bow; your trials and your toils be ours; may we live your life of faith, and may our last end be like yours! Gather our souls, Eternal Judge, with theirs, when thou shalt give them a place at thy right hand and lay the amaranth of victory on their heads!

But why speak further of the necessity of supporting the ministry? That will be admitted by all who honor the institutions of Christ, and pray for the advancement of his cause. The practical question is, How shall so desirable an end be attained? The answer to that inquiry must depend largely upon the temper of the eldership, and of the congregations which it represents. It is for the people, with the advice of the Session, to fix the stipends paid to ministers; but it is for the deacons to collect them. They have the best opportunities to judge of the people's ability to give; and in the discharge of their diaconal duties, as they have tongues to speak, as well as hands to receive, should exhort them to come up to the measure of that ability. And when the people respond to their appeals and express willingness to add to their contributions, it is their duty to inform the Session of that fact, and recommend, and, if necessary, urge, a corresponding increase of the preachers' salaries. There is no telling how much may be accomplished by deacons in these ways towards a more competent support of the ministry. How important their office becomes in

this relation must be estimated by the importance of the ministry itself.

3. The deacon's office is important to the prosecution of the benevolent enterprises and the support of the institutions of the Church. It is hardly necessary, yet to save misunderstanding it may be well, to say, that the benevolent enterprises in which our Church as a whole is engaged are, Sustentation, Foreign Missions, the Evangelistic work, the publication of religious literature, the education of indigent candidates for the ministry, and the provision by an invalid fund for disabled ministers and the needy families of deceased ministers. These enterprises depend for their support upon the free-will offerings of the Lord's people. As we have settled it that these offerings should ordinarily be made as a part of the stated worship of the sanctuary, and as, generally, the function of the deacons is exhausted in collecting and distributing them, no special comment is required upon the importance of their office in this particular relation. But there may be occasions, when in consequence of emergencies occurring in connexion with the maintenance of these enterprises, special supplementary effort in their behalf may be judged expedient. At such times a great deal would depend upon the faithfulness and zeal with which the deacons would perform their part of the work in making private collections, and in suggesting to Sessions the most effective mode of procedure. Or it may occasionally be deemed proper by the Sessions to present special causes, falling outside of the regular schedule, in the way of personal application for contributions to them. In this case, also, it is obvious that success would greatly depend upon the efficiency of the deacons in making the required application to individuals.

But let us look at the need of the deacon for the support of our institutions. Take the case of a theological seminary. There are three methods in which its support may be sought: either by an endowment, or by the stated voluntary contributions of the people, or by both combined. While, of course, much may be done by collections made during public worship in the sanctuary—and it deserves serious consideration whether the cause of our seminaries ought not to be put into the regular schedule of objects for

stated collections—still, according to our present practice, reliance must chiefly be placed upon application to individuals for their contributions. It is true that anybody may appeal to anybody in behalf of such an object, and occasionally these sporadic efforts secure large and valuable donations. But we are persuaded that we ought principally to rely upon the divinely appointed agency of the deacon's office. It would be systematic, searching, comprehensive. Put the deacons into the work in every congregation in the territory to which application for help could legitimately be made. Every individual in that scope of country who could be approached on the subject, would be approached. Every one of our church members would have the object brought to his particular attention, and would have the opportunity of contributing his gift in proportion to his ability. What a harvest would be reaped from such a field by such reaping and by such reapers!—the field the Church, the reaping omitting not a stalk, the reapers Christ's official servants, impelled by zeal for his honor and love for his cause. There are about one hundred and sixty churches in this Synod. Now let us suppose that the deacons in every one should canvass the congregation in behalf of the Theological Seminary at Columbia, which is now so sorely pressed for means to continue its noble work. Suppose that by this combined effort of the deacons an average of one hundred dollars should be secured from our churches. Why, that would give half the endowment of a chair in the institution. The other Synods interested in the Seminary might in the same way furnish the other half; and the chair so founded would deserve to be called the Deacons' Chair!

It may be said that this is a dreamy theory. It is a theory, but it is God's theory. It is not a dream, it is Bible doctrine. It is not, as has been intimated, the visionary crotchet of abstract speculation; it is the dictate of divine wisdom. We have long substituted our plans for God's. Suppose that we now try his plan. Ours have come short. Let us put his to the test of trial. Surely we might pay our Master the compliment of employing his method for once. If it fail, we can abandon it and resort again to our superior judgment. Perhaps it may yet suggest a

method which will not fail. Vain man would be wiser than God. Comte thought that he could build a better world than the one we have. But it turned out that he was cracked. Likely, his world would have been cracked too. Our seers have thought that they could construct a better Church than the one Christ gave us. They have tinkered at their scheme, but commend us to the one we have in the New Testament, if we may judge of theirs by its success. Ho, then, for Christ's plan! Deacons to the front! You do not know your own strength, for it has never been thoroughly tried. Go to the fight, each following the Lord fully as Caleb did, and walled cities and the fastnesses of the Anakim will crumble and yield before you. If we had the ear of our church sessions, the captains of the Lord's host, we would say to them: Why keep you back your corps of reserve so long? Why not set free the diaconal arm of the service which sleeps in the rear? Put forward the deacons, and cry with the Iron Duke in the stress of the great conflict, "Up, guards, and at 'em!" Try the deacons on this Seminary case, and let us see what *they* can achieve. It is a conflict we are waging with the covetousness and selfishness of the human heart and the wiles and power of the devil. The great Captain himself will lead us to victory if we obey his orders and adopt his plan.

It might be expected that something just here would be said in reference to the bearing of the full employment of the deacon's office upon those voluntary combinations of effort to sustain our enterprises and institutions which form a feature of the present time alike novel and conspicuous. But allusion can now be made with logical consistency to those combinations, only so far as they are liable to intersect the peculiar sphere of diaconal operations. There are some distinctions in relation to this matter which are apt to be overlooked. Voluntary associations of church members, such as those adverted to, may be contemplated from two points of view: the one governmental, involving the question of their relation to sessional jurisdiction and control; the other economical and financial, involving the question of their relation to the divinely prescribed functions of the diaconate. With the first mode of considering these associations—important as it is,

and demanding, we firmly believe, the prompt and earnest thought of our ministry and eldership—this discussion cannot logically deal. In regard to the second mode of contemplating them, further distinction is necessary. Voluntary combinations of church members, for the purpose of assisting in the pecuniary support of ecclesiastical enterprises and institutions, may be formed with reference to one or the other of three distinct, or at least distinguishable, ends: either to *give* money, or to *make* money, or to *collect* money. So far as the end contemplated is the giving or the making of money for church purposes, the legitimacy of these associations, or combined efforts, must be determined in view of the general principles, the ethical system, of the Scriptures. As the deacon is not obliged officially as deacon, but as a private believer, to give or to make money for the church, associations formed for the purpose of giving or making money for the church cannot conflict with diaconal functions. With such voluntary associated effort, viewed in these specific relations, we must further say, this discussion is not logically concerned. The principles in which they are grounded, the tendencies they inwrap in their bosom—the whole question of their conformity to the word of God as interpreted in our Constitution, ought, we are profoundly convinced, to be subjected to thorough examination; but this is not the place to institute such an investigation.

But, so far as these associations, or ephemeral combinations, contemplate the collection of money for church purposes, they are liable to overlap the prescribed sphere of the deacon and conflict with his official duties. The consideration of this aspect of the matter is pertinent to the scope of these remarks, but the question is a nice one, and difficult to settle in its details, and our space will not permit such a discussion of it as justice requires. All that we can now do is to lay down a general proposition, containing a constitutional principle which will be admitted on all hands, and which is capable of being applied to particulars, and of furnishing their due regulation. That proposition is: whenever voluntary organised associations, or temporary combinations of effort, contemplating the collection of money for church purposes, are substituted for, or come into conflict with, the legitimate

functions of deacons as the divinely appointed collectors of money for ecclesiastical ends, they are to be considered unwarranted by the word of God as interpreted in our standards. That there is more than a fancied danger among us of the violation of this indispensable principle, will be denied by no candid Presbyterian who reflects upon the current events of the Church. It becomes all, therefore, who love the order of Christ's house and ardently desire to see the practice of our beloved Zion conformed to his appointments, to guard against this evil by the use of all the means which God has placed in their power.

4. We remark, in the fourth and last place, that the full employment of the deacon's office is important, in its bearing upon the perfect conformity of our whole system of church order practically, as well as theoretically, to the pattern shown us in the Mount. We profess to hold the principle, that a divine warrant is necessary for every element of our system. This is a true and a mighty principle, and may we have grace never to over-slaugh it! Contended for by heroic champions of the truth, consecrated by the blood of our martyred ancestors, formulated amidst the solemn deliberations of St. Stephen's Hall, and embodied in our grand Confession of Faith, the principle that what God has commanded is binding, what he has not commanded, either expressly or impliedly, is forbidden, is a part alike of our inheritance and of our profession; and may we never be given up to the guilt and folly of abandoning it! All that the Lord hath said we shall do, may we be enabled with Israel, but without Israel's inconstancy, to say, That will we do—all, no less, no more. Having a "Thus saith the Lord" to direct us, we have a pillar of cloud by day and of shining fire by night to guide us through a wilderness of difficulties—a great and howling desert, in which human wisdom quickly loses its way and leaves the carcases of its followers to rot and their bones to bleach.

Now, of the divine appointment, and consequently, the divine right, of deacons as an order of officers in the Church, there has been, as there fairly can be, no dispute. Clear as is our conviction of the scriptural warrant of the office of ruling elder as distinguished from that of the preaching elder, that for the office of

the deacon is still more definitely furnished in the New Testament Scriptures. So clear is this, that the office, in some form, constitutes an acknowledged element in every ecclesiastical system—Prelatic, Independent, and Presbyterian. Paul addresses the deacons, in his letter to the Philippian church, and he expressly lays down the qualifications for the office in his first Epistle to Timothy. The only question about which there can be any debate is, whether the deacons mentioned by Paul as permanent officers were temporal officers, charged with the same functions as “the seven” whose election and appointment are recorded in the sixth chapter of Acts. Were the seven the same as Paul’s deacons? The question is not, whether the deacons are divinely appointed officers—that is conceded—but whether they are divinely appointed specifically to take care of the poor and attend to the secular business of the Church? There is room only for a few remarks upon this point, in addition to those made on a related matter in a previous part of this discussion.

First, it has been already proved that the deacon is not a preacher, as the Prelatists maintain. But he is not a presbyter: so all affirm—Prelatists, Independents, and Presbyterians. Now, preaching and ruling are the only spiritual official functions known to Scripture. The deacon, therefore, is not a spiritual officer. But he is an officer. He must, consequently, be a temporal officer. That granted, his divine warrant for attending to the temporal business of the Church must be admitted.

Secondly, it has also been conclusively shown, from the sixth chapter of Acts, that the seven were temporal officers, with temporal functions. The same thing has just been proved in regard to the deacons mentioned by Paul. Where then is the difference between them? It is clear that they were the same officers. This must be allowed, unless it can be shown that there are other temporal functions assigned to the deacon than those devolved upon the seven. That cannot, from the nature of the case, be done. But even if it could, it would only be shown that the deacon is excluded from the main temporal business of the Church, viz., that with which the seven were charged, which is absurd. Could it be proved—as Vitringa attempted to

do in his work on the Ancient Synagogue—that the seven were temporary officers appointed for an emergency, against which supposition their formal election and solemn ordination, as well as other considerations, afford a violent presumption, deacons must subsequently have been appointed to the permanent discharge of precisely the same class of duties. What then is the difference as to the nature of the office? None. Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall*, tells us that the great church at Antioch supported three thousand poor from her beneficiary fund. Were temporary “stewards” appointed to meet the exigencies likely to arise out of the dissatisfaction of so vast a multitude of beneficiaries, and so mighty a distribution of alms running on with the existence of churches numbering one hundred thousand members? Were they not met by a powerful staff of deacons as permanent officers, and therefore adequate to the permanent requirements of the case? The hypothesis that the seven were not deacons, but temporary stewards, and that deacons had other functions to discharge than theirs, will not stand examination.

Thirdly, the almost unbroken judgment of the Christian Church has been that the seven of the Acts and the deacons of Philipians and First Timothy, were the same kind of officers. If this judgment is true, what is predicable of the seven is predicable of deacons. As the former were divinely appointed to attend to the whole temporal business of the Church, so must have been the latter.

From this position, that the office of the deacon is possessed of divine right, and its incumbents are divinely appointed to the performance of all the secular business pertaining to the Church, two consequences must logically flow. In the first place, deacons ought to be elected and ordained in every church in which the condition of its membership does not make it impracticable. The church which can elect these officers and does not, subjects itself to the charge of wilful disobedience to the will of Christ as expressed in his word, and of gross inconsistency with the acknowledged principles of our system of order. In the second place, where there are deacons—and we are glad to know that they exist in a great majority of our churches—they ought to be employed

to the full extent of their divinely appointed functions. This obligation rests upon the Church at large, as well as upon individual congregations. The significance of these consequences may not appear to the eye of carnal indifference. But apart from the consideration, that love to our Lord and Master, and the temper of obedience to the requirements of his word, should constrain his followers to walk in the path of duty which he has prescribed, there is a secret but certain operation of his providence over his own house, which visits with judicial inflictions their infractions of his will. The success of the ministry, the spiritual growth of the Church, and, it may be, its temporal prosperity are, in a measure, conditioned upon the conformity of its scheme of offices, of its practical work, and of all its administrative measures, to the beautiful and perfect model given by its King in its supreme directory of faith and duty. If we fail in this, the time may come when the sword of judgment will fall on the house of the Lord, and its "ancient men" become the first victims of its edge. Brightly beaming lamps of gospel faith and order once blazed on the shores of the Ægean Sea. Long since they were quenched in the midnight darkness of apostasy. May the time never come when the fearful vision of the ancient prophet will be realised in the history of our own beloved Church: may she never be visited by the linen-vested marker of the foreheads of the faithful, and the slaughter-weaponed executioners of a Saviour's wrath!

We have thus endeavored to magnify the office of deacons. It is not theirs to ascend the pulpit as commissioned legates of the skies to preach "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" to a dying world: not theirs, as official stewards of the mysteries of redemption, to extend the bread and the water of eternal life to the famishing soul. But it is theirs to descend to the pallet of the sick and the hovel of the poor; and as the almoners of the Church's charities to bear the dish of food and the cup of comfort to the suffering body. It is not their vocation to preside upon the bench of the ruler, and to sway the pastoral staff for the government and discipline of the flock of Christ; but it is, to sit at the board of finance, and to wield the staff of the collection bag,

for the sustenance of the ministry, the support of the poor, and the conduct of the Church's enterprises for the evangelisation of our fallen and perishing race. If they carry not the keys, they bear the purse. They are not the leaders of the sacramental host, to train them in the camp and to control them on the field of battle, but they are its quartermasters and commissaries, without whose offices the sinews of the holy war would be severed. They are not called to divide the word of truth; but they are, to distribute the money of the Church—material and earthly, it is true, but consecrated by the purchase of Jesus' death, marked with his atoning blood, and devoted to the advancement of his cause.

More humble and less conspicuous their office may be than that of the elder; but it is not the less divinely warranted, nor is it unilluminated by the splendor of a glorious example. It is a striking fact that the Lord Jesus, in his sojourn on earth, did not occupy the outward seat of the ruler—he condescended to appear as a prisoner at the bar of the eldership of his own visible Church. But, as the great Deacon of Israel, he declared that he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and illustrated the noble unselfishness of that utterance by the untiring dispensation of healing to the suffering bodies of men. Having closed his wondrous mission of beneficence to the poor diseased body, it is affecting to contemplate him, entitled, as he was, to the submission and the homage of a prostrate universe, bearing a towel and a basin, the symbols of a servant; him, before whom every knee shall bow in heaven, earth, and hell, bending his knee and washing his disciples' feet. In the discharge of their peculiar duties, it will be glory to deacons to walk in his footsteps, and imitate his example of compassionate ministration to the temporal wants of men. Their office will not be lacking in dignity, even though sometimes in the estimation of a sensitive nature, it may seem to wear a crown of thorns. It is Christlike, and therefore sublime.

If, as she ought to do, the Church should commit to them the guardianship and management of her goods and property, a most responsible trust will be reposed in them. And so far as their office involves the collection of money for the maintenance and advancement of the Church's institutions and enterprises, they

are not beggars suing for alms. Deriving their warrant from their Master's word, and receiving their commission from his hands, they approach their fellow Christians and their fellow-men as his accredited agents, presenting to them alike the opportunity and the privilege of contributing their means to the promotion of his cause and the benefit of the world. Rebuffs need not abash them, nor call up a blush to their cheeks: they will seldom, if ever, equal the tide of spittle that was poured into their Saviour's face.

Constrained by his love, and supported by his grace, let them go on in the performance of their beneficent and important functions, satisfied with his approval and consoled by the conviction that they represent, in part, his ministry of mercy on earth. Let them use the office of a deacon well, and purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. And amidst the trials which must attend their service to their Lord, let them sustain themselves by the assurance that, the final conflict past, their disembodied spirits will be welcomed by the once poor, but glorified saints of Jesus, to everlasting habitations; and that in that tremendous day, when the great Minister of pity to suffering men shall take the seat and wear the crown of the Judge, he will publicly own their fidelity to him, and place an imperishable chaplet of honor on their heads.

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