

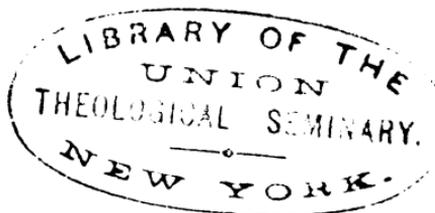
TIMELY TOPICS.

POLITICAL, BIBLICAL, ETHICAL, PRACTICAL.

DISCUSSED

BY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS, PROFESSORS AND EMINENT
WRITERS OF OUR TIME.

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THE CLAIMS OF THE HISTORIC EPISCOPATE EXAMINED.

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THE prelatie, or in current, though less accurate phraseology, the episcopal theory of Church government, is, in its Protestant form, to the effect that in the Christian Church there is a threefold ministry, that of deacons, of presbyters or elders, and of bishops, to all of whom belong the functions of preaching and baptizing, to the presbyters and bishops the right also to administer the eucharist, while to the bishops alone it pertains to ordain, confirm and exercise within a certain district, called a diocese, general supervision.

Among the advocates of this polity, diversity of opinion exists, some maintaining that it is of divine authority and essential to the being of the Church, others holding that it is expedient and beneficial, but not in any other sense of divine institution or obligation.

It may be noted that among Protestants the theory of prelacy by divine right is limited to the United Kingdom, with its dependencies, and the United States. Even in the ranks of Protestantism its supporters are vastly outnumbered by its opponents—a fact which might serve to abate the pretensions and supercilious tone by which many, happily not all, Episcopalians are characterized. True, they have the millions of Rome as a solace in solitude; but Rome ungraciously repudiates them because they do not go farther and admit the supremacy of the Pope.

It needs to be observed that the advocates of high-toned episcopacy contend strenuously for the doctrine of “apos-

tolic succession," that is, the view that the official descent of bishops is, and must be, in an unbroken chain from the apostles. It is not enough that the Church be officered with the three orders aforementioned. The highest order, that of bishops, must proceed in lineal descent officially from the apostles. If, for instance, a company of men were cast by shipwreck on some lonely island, they never could be constituted as a Church of Christ and have the sacraments lawfully dispensed among them and a legitimate ministry unless they could obtain the mystic touch of a bishop's hands, who had himself been ordained by one who could trace his official genealogy to the apostles. This mechanical theory lies at the root of the full-blown prelacy of our day, and affords nurture to that baneful sacerdotalism which, it is to be feared, is gaining ground among Episcopalians in spite of manly protests made against it by many of their number.

The arguments wont to be urged by Episcopalians in favor of their theory of ecclesiastical polity are reducible to two heads, namely, considerations drawn from the Scriptures, and alleged facts of post-biblical history.

THE SCRIPTURAL PLEA FOR PRELACY.—First: It is confidently asserted that the apostolic office was meant to be in its essential features not temporary, but permanent, and that it survives in the order of diocesan bishops; the latter being stationary, whereas the apostles were "ambulatory," or itinerant bishops. Passages of the New Testament are industriously collected in which the perpetuation of the apostolic office is supposed to be indicated. For instance, in Acts xiv., 4, 14. Barnabas as well as Paul is represented to be an apostle: in Phil. ii., 25, Epaphroditus is, according to the Greek, styled an apostle; in II. Cor. viii., 23, Paul speaks of certain brethren as the "messengers [Gr. apostles] of the churches," and in the opening of several of his epistles associates others with himself, such as Timothy, Silvanus and Sosthenes. (See I. Cor. i., 1; II. Cor. i., 1; Gal. i., 1; Phil. i., 1; Col.

i., 1; I. Thess. i., 1; II. Thess. i., 1; Philemon verse 1. Rom. xvi., 7, and I. Thess. ii., 6, are also adduced with the same intent.)

On this branch of the argument from Scripture a few remarks are offered.

1. Beyond doubt, the word "apostle" is used in the New Testament sometimes, in its wide etymological meaning, to denote any one sent, and sometimes, in a restricted and technical sense, to signify a special functionary. A parallel usage attaches to the Hebrew word, מלאך (malak), and its Greek equivalent, ἄγγελος (angelos), which denote a messenger generally; but, in a limited sense, a particular kind of messenger, or agent, whom we call an angel.

2. In the special or restricted sense the title apostle is given in the New Testament to none but fourteen men, that is, to the twelve chosen by Christ to be His immediate attendants, together with Matthias, who was appointed by Christ to apostleship through the ordinance of the lot, and Saul of Tarsus, who received from the Lord an extraordinary call.

3. Among the qualifications requisite for apostleship in the limited sense were the following: Ability from personal knowledge to attest the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead; an immediate, external call by Christ to this office; a power to work miracles as proof in part of the divine mission of the worker; and supernatural inspiration to fit for teaching the truth authoritatively and infallibly. (See Luke vi., 13; Acts i., 21, 22; xxii., 14, 15; xxvi., 16; I. Cor. ix., 1, 2; Heb. ii., 4; John xiv., 26.)

4. There is no express intimation in Scripture that the apostles, as such, were to have official successors. Appeal has been made to Matt. xxviii., 20, as proof that the apostolic order should be continued till the end of time. But this text, if interpreted with rigid literality, would teach that, till the end of the world, Christ would be with the very

individuals then addressed. The reference rather is to all those who, to the end of time, should be engaged in carrying out the great commission. According to the prelatial idea, the preaching of the Gospel pertains rather to the presbyters than to the bishops; the distinctive function of the latter being government rather than preaching.

5. There is nothing in the New Testament to show that the apostleship was actually extended beyond the number of the original twelve, together with Matthias and Saul. The case of Matthias has been urged as evidence of a purpose to perpetuate the apostolic order. But let it be noted that Matthias was simply chosen to do what Judas should have done, that is, bear witness to the fact of the resurrection of Christ, a thing which none but one who had seen Christ after His resurrection could do. But when, at a later date, James, the brother of John, was killed, no successor to him was chosen. Paul, indeed, had been called meanwhile, not only to sainthood, but also to apostleship; but he speaks of himself in I. Cor. xv., 8, as attaining the latter standing irregularly as to time. He was the last to whom the Lord appeared with the view of constituting him an apostle.

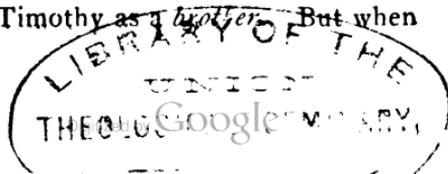
In two instances Barnabas and Paul are together called apostles; but it is noticeable that Barnabas is never called an apostle previously or subsequently to the missionary tour on which he, together with Paul, had been *sent forth* by the Church of Antioch. It seems highly probable that both of these men are in the instances under notice called "apostles" in the wide sense of that word, as being in this particular tour what we would call missionaries sent out from Antioch.

In Phil. ii., 25, Epaphroditus is called an apostle, although in our authorized version and in the Revised version as well, the rendering given is "messenger." But it is observable that he is not styled an apostle of Christ, but "your" apostle, that is, the apostle of, or from, the Philippians; and in

ch. iv., 18, the reason why he was called their apostle is indicated, namely, because he had acted in their behalf in carrying to Paul their gifts. The interpretation just given has the sanction of the distinguished scholar, the late Bishop Lightfoot, who, in his "Dissertation on the Christian Ministry" (p. 196), thus writes: "The true apostle, like St. Peter, or St. John, bears this title as the messenger, the delegate, of Christ Himself: while Epaphroditus is only so styled as the messenger of the Philippian brotherhood; and in the very next clause the expression is explained by the statement that he carried their alms to St. Paul. The use of the word here has a parallel in another passage (II. Cor. viii., 23), where messengers (or apostles) of the churches are mentioned."

The passing remark made in Rom. xvi., 7, respecting Andronicus and Junias that they were "of note among the apostles," can hardly mean that the persons named were distinguished apostles in the restricted sense of that word; but it rather signifies that by their character and labors they had attracted the attention and won the admiration of the apostles. It is not certain, indeed, that Junias, a masculine form, should be substituted for the feminine form, Junia, of the authorized version.

Touching the plea for the perpetuation of the apostolate drawn from the fact that in the introductory salutations of his epistles Paul associates others with himself, it may be said that Paul is careful to distinguish himself in such cases from the others whom he links with his name. For example, in I. Cor. i., 1, he writes, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our *brother*," etc. So also in II. Cor. i., 1, he expresses himself thus guardedly, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our *brother*," etc. In a like cautious way he writes in Col. i., 1, discriminating between himself as an apostle and Timothy as a *brother*. But when



he conjoins himself entirely with Timothy, he uses a title common to both, namely, "servants of Jesus Christ" (see Phil. i., 1). Nor does the language used in I. Thess. ii., 6, warrant the view that Silvanus and Timothy, in common with Paul, are designated apostles; for Paul occasionally speaks of himself in the plural (see I. Thess. ii., 18), and, besides, the context, particularly verse 2, compared with the narrative in Acts xvi., forbids the supposition that Timothy at least is referred to in verse 6.

Second: By many Episcopalians great stress is laid on the alleged prelatie authority with which Timothy and Titus were clothed. "These men," it is said, "were established, the one in Ephesus, the other in Crete as bishops, to ordain to office, as occasion might demand, and to maintain supervision over presbyters, deacons, and people."

Now it is admitted that these men were invested with large authority. But they were extraordinary officers, for the circumstances in which they were called to act were extraordinary. The Church of the New Testament was then in a forming state. The apostles, as pioneers, carried the Gospel far and wide, but they could not tarry sufficiently long in every place where converts were made to organize them fully into ecclesiastical societies. Timothy and Titus, perhaps others also, were employed to complete what apostles had begun, and this in the way of establishing the faithful in the truth and carrying out in detail the organization of churches (see Titus i., 5). These men were coadjutors of the apostles, like them itinerant, not stationary, enjoying a special measure of delegated authority, and being directly instructed by apostles as to the duties to be performed. There is not the slightest evidence, but much to the contrary, that Timothy and Titus were settled as diocesan bishops in their respective fields. A disclosure of the reason why Timothy was left at Ephesus is given in I. Tim. i., 3: "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus,

when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." In II. Tim. iv., 9, 13, 21, Paul expresses the expectation and earnest desire that Timothy would come to him at Rome. And it is clear that when Paul wrote from Corinth his Epistle to the Romans, Timothy was with him (Rom xvi., 21) and that he was also with him when he wrote from Rome his epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians and Philemon respectively. If Timothy was bishop of Ephesus, he must have been sadly negligent of his diocese.

Titus was *left* in Crete, Paul intimates in his letter to him (Tit. i., 5), to attend to certain specified duties. It is not said that Titus was *established* in Crete. Besides, Paul wrote to Titus from Nicopolis in Macedonia asking that he come to him there, a procedure very singular if Crete was the proper diocese of Titus.

Third: It is claimed that James, who took a prominent part in the council, or synod of Jerusalem, was bishop of that city.

In opposition to this view, it may be urged that in the New Testament James is never styled bishop; that the only functionaries who figured in the synod were apostles and presbyters, or elders, to whom alone appeal had been made for a decision of the question at issue; that the words of James, "wherefore my sentence is," etc, imply no assumption of authority over the others present; and that there are reasons of great weight for the belief that he was an apostle, who, though not necessarily confined to any territory, labored chiefly at Jerusalem, or at least among the Jews.

Fourth: Episcopalians have long insisted that diocesan bishops are meant by the angels of the seven churches of Asia of whom we read in the first three chapters of the Apocalypse.

A few strictures on this line in the argument for prelacy must suffice.

1. If the angels were prelates, the elders are utterly ignored. Those elders of Ephesus, for instance, whom Paul, in his parting charge to them, had led to believe that they had much to do with the oversight of the flock, are not recognized at all by Christ, if the Episcopal interpretation of the term, angel, is correct. This would be singular indeed.

2. In the course of the epistles to the Seven Churches, a particular angel is addressed, or indirectly described, as plural; a fact which favors the view that "angel" is used collectively to denote the company of elders. (See Rev. ii., 10, 13, 24, 25.)

3. John several times elsewhere in this Book of Revelation, uses the word "angel" to signify a plurality of agents. Thus, in chapter xiv., 6, it is said, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth," etc. Does not the angel here symbolize the ministers of the Gospel, a vast number? and may not the angel of a church denote the ministry laboring in that church? In Rev. i., 21, it is explained that a candlestick symbolized a church, which is a collective unit, and that a star symbolized an angel of a church. Might not the word "angel" also be used as a collective term to mean many?

It may be added that candid Episcopalians are beginning to admit that their cause can derive no help from the angels of the churches. Bishop Lightfoot distinctly does so. (See his "Dissertation on the Christian Ministry," p. 199.)

A few thoughts may be subjoined to our very hurried review of the argument from Scripture in behalf of prelacy.

1. It is unaccountable that in the New Testament there is no distinctive title given to the alleged third and highest order of permanent ecclesiastical officers, if such an order actually existed before the completion of the canon.

The first and second orders are distinguished respectively as deacons and elders, the latter class being also styled

bishops. After centuries of quibbling on the point it is now conceded by the ablest defenders of prelacy, Bishops Onderdonk and Lightfoot among them, that in the New Testament usage of the words, bishop and elder, or presbyter, are identical, or denote precisely the same kind of officer.

Is it credible that the highest permanent order would be destitute of a distinctive name? The absence of the name is a sure sign that the thing itself, the order of prelates, was absent from the arrangements of the apostolic Church.

2. It is most remarkable that, although Paul formally describes in his pastoral epistles the qualifications and duties of elders, or bishops, and even those of deacons, he says nothing about the order of prelates, if such an order existed. Does not the omission indicate that such functionaries had no place in the Church of apostolic times, and that their existence was not contemplated as desirable or lawful?

3. It is highly significant, also, that in stating the duties of elders (or bishops) and deacons, Paul never enjoins it upon them to obey a superior order of officers, now called prelates, or diocesan bishops. In the letters attributed to Ignatius this duty is insisted on vehemently. But not a word on it is penned by Paul!

4. The fact that the title, bishop, was, in the course of time, appropriated to prelates, favors the view that the prelates sprang from the order of elders, and covered the usurpation of the prerogatives of the latter by retaining that title of the elders which suggested the idea of rule.

5. The elders, or Scriptural bishops, were vested with such powers as rendered needless a permanent superior order. The teaching, the ruling, the ordaining, and, so far as it pertains to any one, the confirming power was theirs (Acts xx., 28; I. Tim. iv., 14; Jas. v., 14, 15). What need, then, for a standing superior order?

6. The claim of any one in our day to be a bishop by tactual descent officially from the apostles is incapable of

proof. Archbishop Whately, with a candor creditable to him and an inexorable logic, has shown this in his "Kingdom of Christ Delineated." This idea of succession, with its correlated mysticism, has formed a bridge of passage for many Episcopalians into the realm of Rome. As already said, the mere plan or form of Church government is in the eyes of the chief sticklers for prelacy of far less moment than the fancied lineal succession.

THE HISTORICAL PLEA FOR PRELACY.—Let us now turn to the argument drawn from the condition of the Church in the second century in behalf of diocesan episcopacy. Bishop Lightfoot rests the cause of episcopacy mainly on this ground. An effort is made to prove that almost at the opening of the second century, just after the demise of the Apostle John, the prelatic form of polity prevailed generally in the Church. The inference is that this mode of government must have been established, at least sanctioned, by the apostles, or that it was the natural and purposed development of germs planted by them.

The historical evidence adduced is derived mainly from the epistles of Ignatius and the writings of Irenæus and Eusebius of Cæsarea, but from the first-named pre-eminently.

Unable to deal minutely with this line of argument, we may yet offer some criticisms upon it which may suffice to show how insecure a basis it affords for the towering fabric of prelacy.

1. The assumption that in the early part of the second century diocesan episcopacy generally prevailed in the Church is unwarranted.

Touching Ignatius, the chief voucher for the early prevalence of prelacy, it is not rash to say that his reputation for veracity is badly damaged. The real Ignatius, could we reach him, would doubtless be an unexceptionable witness; but there is room for the gravest suspicions that the

epistles which bear his name have all been fabricated, tampered with at least, in the interests of the hierarchy, which, it is granted, supplanted at a very early date the primitive form of ecclesiastical polity. Any one conversant with the history of the Church in ancient and mediæval times must know how common it was to seek favor and currency for certain views by publishing them in documents purporting to have proceeded from men of high reputation in the Church. The collection of rubrics and counsels, known as "The Apostolical Constitutions," is an eminent, but by no means a solitary, instance of the practice described. Now around the name of Ignatius, probably the oldest pastor of Antioch, a halo of glory speedily gathered, both because he was reputed to have enjoyed direct apostolic instruction, and because he fell as a martyr for Christ, an event which happened probably in A.D. 115 or 116. The tradition is that, having been ordered from Antioch to Rome to suffer there, he addressed, while on his journey thither, a number of letters to individuals and churches. Of such letters, bearing the name of Ignatius, fifteen have come down to us; but that eight of the number are forgeries is now universally admitted. The remaining seven have been transmitted in Greek in a double form, a longer and a shorter, and three of them also in Syriac in an abbreviated form. By scholars in modern times it is generally held that the longer form in Greek is not genuine; and very many of the highest repute, among them Neander, regard even the shorter Greek form as much corrupted. This form, however, most Episcopalians pronounce genuine, and in this judgment Bishop Lightfoot, whose edition of the Epistles of Ignatius is a monument of fine scholarship and patient research, concurs. Some have taken the ground that all of the epistles ascribed to Ignatius are alike spurious. This we are inclined to think is an extreme view. It is most probable that Ignatius did on his way to Rome pen some letters,

perhaps the seven that have found most favor; but that these have been all interpolated with the view of promoting the pretensions of an ambitious hierarchy. We know that forgeries in the name of Ignatius have been perpetrated. Then, again, suspicion is justified by the fact that these epistles have come down in a longer and a shorter form, each purporting to be genuine. Furthermore, while the external evidence in their behalf is but vague and scanty, the documents considered in themselves are fitted to beget strong suspicions that they have been corrupted for a purpose, if indeed they are not entire forgeries.

The very intensity and persistence with which the duty of revering and implicitly obeying the bishop is inculcated in these letters are fitted to rouse suspicion, and this all the more when, in other writings originating about the time of Ignatius, or even much later, the genuineness of which is hardly questioned, presbyters and deacons are brought to view, but no prelatic bishops. For example, in the lately discovered treatise entitled "The Teaching of the Apostles," which, by the most competent judges is supposed to have been composed not later than A.D. 160, possibly as early as A.D. 120, these words occur, "Choose for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord," etc., the word "bishops" being used unquestionably, as it is in the New Testament, to denote elders. Not a hint is given in this treatise of the existence of a bishop as superior to elders.

Again, in the Epistle of Clemens Romanus written to the Corinthians about A.D. 96, while bishops (or elders) and deacons are mentioned often, not an allusion is made to a prelatic bishop; this, too, by one for whom it is claimed that he was a bishop of Rome.

The same may be said of the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, written probably as late as A.D. 150. Well might Bishop Lightfoot in his notice of this letter say, "We are thus led to the inference that episcopacy did not exist

at all among the Philippians at this time, or existed only in an elementary form, so that the bishop was a mere president of the presbyteral council.' ("Christian Ministry," p. 115.)

But it is said that the representations made as to Church polity in the Ignatian letters are corroborated by lists of bishops given by Eusebius. In answer it may be said that the information given by Eusebius rests largely on very hazy tradition, as he himself, in the opening of his history, candidly confesses; that the oldest presbyter in a city, or district, seems commonly to have presided in the meetings of the presbyters and to have been vested with a large measure of executive control; that by degrees he came to have the title bishop given to him by way of eminence, although theoretically he was still only the organ of the presbytery, the first among his equals; that later writers viewing the past through the customs of their own times, unconsciously in some cases, but in other cases consciously and with a view to the confirmation of hierarchal claims, transferred to the pastor, or moderator, of the early times dignity and prerogatives which only in the lapse of years had become associated with the title, bishop. These different positions can be supported by an array of evidence which it would be much easier to ignore than to encounter. Thus the assumption that diocesan episcopacy was widely established in the early part of the second century, and presumably with the sanction of at least one apostle, the saintly John, rests on grounds of a very precarious character.

2. It is a reasonable presumption that the form of Church government established by the apostles was meant to be permanent. So far as the New Testament sheds light on the point, the church wherever erected by the apostles was framed on one uniform plan. There is no evidence that one apostle organized on one plan and another on a different plan, or that in different countries divergent forms of Church government were adopted under apostolic direc-

tion. This uniformity of settlement points to purposed permanence; especially as no hint is given that in the course of time changes might lawfully be introduced. But according to Bishop Lightfoot and some other influential advocates of episcopacy, the form impressed on the Church at its organization by the apostles did not outlast the first century, nay that before the close of that century and before the death of the Apostle John, a new order of officers was created, not recognized in the book of Acts or in the epistles, for whom as yet there was no distinctive name, but corresponding to modern prelates in having jurisdiction over deacons and presbyters. The evolution, or rather revolution, resulting in the creation of this third and supreme order must have been marvellously rapid. When the curtain falls at the close of the sacred canon, the only discoverable permanent officers of the Church are deacons and elders, or presbyters, called also bishops. When it rises slightly in the first quarter of the second century, a new order has been evolved, by what authority no one can tell, but it is fondly conjectured by that of the Apostle John at least. Bishop Lightfoot says ("Christian Ministry," p. 195), "It is clear then that at the close of the apostolic age, the two lower orders of the threefold ministry were firmly and widely established; but traces of the third and highest order, the episcopate properly so called, are few and indistinct." He seems, however, to think that as circumstances changed, a new order became necessary and was added, just as the order of deacons was established when need for it arose. But he overlooks the facts, that the diaconate was established at an early date in the history of the New Testament Church; that it was not a growth, but was instituted definitely and at once by the apostles; and that a record of its institution was made in the inspired Word. If the inferior order, that of deacons was placed upon a foundation so solid, surely the order of diocesan bishops, if meant to exist

in the Christian Church, the highest order, as Episcopalians think, would have been formally established by the apostles, and the fact recorded in the sacred volume.

3. Even though it could be proved that prelacy grew up under the eye of the Apostle John, it would not follow as a necessary inference that it received his approval. We know from his writings that many evils were in the Church in his time, nay that the spirit of antichrist was then at work.

4. The historic plea is faulty because it implies that the Bible is not the only rule of faith. We grant that evidence confirmatory of our faith and useful also for the interpretation of the Scriptures may be drawn from many sources, and among them from post-biblical history; but the matter and ground of our faith must be found in the Scriptures alone. Those who would have us accept the prelatie theory on the ground of post-biblical history, ask us to renounce the great Protestant position that the Bible is the sufficient, the infallible and the only rule of faith and practice. In closing this examination of the claims of the "historic episcopate" we might say in the words of Seneca, "*Inopem me copia fecit.*"