





Mr. *Tucker's*
S E R M O N
AT THE ANNUAL
DUDLEIAN-LECTURE,
September 2, 1778.





The Validity of Presbyterian Ordination
argued, from Jesus Christ's being
the Founder, the sole Legislator,
and supreme Head and Ruler of
the Christian Church.

A
DISCOURSE

Delivered in the Chapel

OF
HARVARD-COLLEGE

IN

Cambridge, New-England,

September 2, 1778.

At the LECTURE founded by the

Hon. PAUL DUDLEY, Esq;

By JOHN TUCKER, A. M.

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1776. Mr. Morrill of Wilmington.
1777. Mr. Wigglesworth, Professor of Divinity.
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Several of these Sermons were printed. It is desired by many, that the public may be favored with the others, which are carefully preserved in the Archives of the College.

A
S E R M O N, &c.

J O H N XVIII. 36.

Jesus answered, my Kingdom is not of this World.——

IT is a principle, in which Christians are generally agreed, “ that the declarations of Christ and his Apostles, which we have in the New-Testament, are of divine authority ;” tho’ they are not so fully agreed that these are the only things, respecting christianity, which are so.

The Church of Rome have added hereto many of their own traditions, together with many decrees of Popes and Councils, as infallible interpreters of the word and will of God, to which they ascribe an equal degree of divinity.

Protestants profess, indeed, to reject these, in the general, as groundless and unwarrantable additions to the christian system ; yet Protestants are not wholly without dissensions among themselves.

Whether

Whether it be that some, who have rejected the grosser corruptions of the Romish Church, are still fond of retaining some of a smaller size, as less hurtful, or more to their taste; or that length of time, and the mutable nature of language, have led them to affix different ideas to the same things—from whatever cause it hath proceeded, so it is, that their conceptions of the Christian Church, and particularly of the officers Christ hath appointed in it, and of the powers with which they are vested, are, in some points, very different.

But as the Gospel continues the same—as the words of Christ and his Apostles, there recorded, remain unchanged, however mutable men's opinions or practice may be, it must be a good rule, for determining what is of divine authority, and what is not, to recur to this original plan; and, by carefully examining things by it, to form and settle our own judgment.

By thus tracing back, to its first principles, any system of religion, which pretends to be founded on the Gospel, or to have Christ for its author, we are most likely to distinguish what is true and genuine, from what is spurious or apocryphal—what is from heaven, and of divine authority, from what is of this world, or the inventions of men—to separate one from the other, and to receive or reject accordingly.

It is agreeable to this method that I shall attempt, from the passage of scripture now read, as the foundation of my discourse, to consider the particular subject which is, at this time, to engage our attention; I mean “The validity of Presbyterian Ordination.”

But

But what can be farther said upon a subject so limited in its nature, and which has now been so often handled in the rotation of this Lecture? It has been already so thoroughly and fully examined and discussed, both with respect to scripture and antiquity; and particularly by one of our venerable Fathers, whose discourse has been made public, that little or nothing new can be added.

The most, it is hoped, that can now be expected, is, that the subject may be still held up in some new points of view, whereby farther light may possibly be cast upon it, and some additional weight given to the arguments already used to support and vindicate the practice of these churches.

It will be readily granted, I presume, that by the kingdom of Christ, mentioned in my text, is intended the Church of Christ. He is a King, though not like earthly princes. The King of Zion is meek and lowly. He claims no dominion over the states of this world, as such, nor does he assume any thing of the outward splendor and magnificence of earthly potentates.

They who believe in him, as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world—who openly acknowledge him under that important character, and sincerely submit themselves to the government of his sacred laws—All such, whether considered at large, as scattered through the world, or as united together in distinct societies, are his loyal subjects. Over these he reigns, and these are his church or kingdom.

As

As divinely commissioned and appointed to that important business, he has founded this kingdom. He is the supreme head over it, and sole legislator in it. The officers of this kingdom are appointed—their qualifications and powers described and ascertained, and the duties of their office pointed out by him: And to him alone the subjects of this kingdom are accountable in what relates merely to their religious sentiments and eternal salvation.

These are things implied in the text, some of which I shall particularly notice, and consider, as

- I. The being and constitution of the Christian Church are of divine original.
- II. Jesus Christ, as the founder and supreme head of this society, hath the sole right and authority of making and establishing laws, and appointing officers in it. And therefore,
- III. No laws or officers in the Christian Church are to be esteemed, as of divine authority, any farther than they are laws made and officers constituted and appointed by Christ; or than as they are conformable to that original and divine plan he hath left us.

The consideration of these things may lead to some proper view of the particular point before us—may set the evidence we have of the validity of presbyterian ordination in a just light, and shew the weakness of some objections usually brought against it.

I. The

1. The being and constitution of the Christian Church are of divine original.

The justness of this observation from the text appears from the manner in which our Saviour expressed himself—*My kingdom is not of this world.* It took not its rise from the craft and subtilty, or from the ambition and power of men. It was not founded by human policy and wisdom, but originated from heaven, and is of a divine and spiritual nature.

That the Christian Church originated from heaven appears from the evidence we have of Christ's divine mission into the world, who was the founder and framer of it. And of the sufficiency of this evidence no one can reasonably doubt, who, with a fair and candid mind, shall examine this evidence, as it arises from the prophecies that went before concerning Christ, compared with the corresponding events which happened, as to the time and place, and other circumstances of his birth, and the manner of his life. As it arises likewise from the many and incontestible miracles which he wrought, healing the sick by a word, and raising the dead to life, &c.—from the more than human wisdom and knowledge he discovered—from the predictions he delivered, and their exact accomplishment, and particularly as to his own resurrection; and from some other things which might be mentioned to the same purpose.—No one, I imagine, who shall consider these things, with a mind free from prejudice, and open to conviction, can retain a reasonable doubt, but that Christ was what he pretended to be—the Son of God and Saviour of the world. That he came down from heaven, as he declared, commissioned and sent by the Father; and that God was with him—owned and approved of him in what he did.

B

And

And this being granted, it follows, that whatever Christ did, in prosecution of his important ministry, was from divine authority, agreeable to what he sometimes declared, that *he spake the words, and did the works of God.*

As acting by divine authority then we are to conceive of him, when he chose his Apostles—appointed them to their important office, and sent them forth as his ministers; therefore could he say with propriety—*As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you †*

And the divine appointment and mission of these prime ministers of the Gospel was abundantly authenticated and confirmed by their being endued with the power of working miracles themselves, to confirm the doctrines they should teach, and the facts they should relate; and particularly by their being, according to Christ's prediction and promise, filled with the Holy Ghost, on the day of Pentecost, when they spake a variety of languages, to the astonishment of those who heard them.

Thus qualified for spreading the Gospel through the world—for propagating and establishing the kingdom of Christ, they received this commission from their Master and Lord, introduced with a declaration of his divine power and authority—*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. ‡*

Thus

† John xx. 21.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

Thus commissioned, the Apostles set out on their ministry; and the surprizing success which attended their labors, may be justly viewed as an additional evidence of their heavenly mission and of the divinity of that religion they taught. For though they appeared as sheep in the midst of wolves—Though they had to encounter the ignorance and superstition—the bigotry and malice of this world, and met with great opposition—with hardships and sufferings, yet they triumphed over all, and soon spread the Gospel far and wide. Many believed and turned to the Lord, and by baptism were gathered into the Church of Christ.

This society, small at first, and as a grain of mustard seed, presently enlarged and spread itself through the nations. Particular societies were formed in different places—united under Jesus their common head, and furnished with proper officers for their religious government, instruction and edification.

Thus was the kingdom of Christ first set up in the world. Not, as I said before, by human policy and power, but in opposition to these. It had not its first rise from, nor any dependence upon this world. Its being and existence were evidently from heaven. It was the work of God—the effect of divine wisdom, power and goodness.

And not only the first foundation and establishment of the Church of Christ, but its whole frame and constitution, and the great end for which it was erected, exhibit strong and convincing marks of its heavenly original. Of all this we must be sensible, if we examine the New Testament, where the nature and design of Christ's kingdom are represented.

B 2

Let

Let us view there the laws and ordinances of this kingdom—the sacred rules and maxims by which the subjects of it are to be governed. They have nothing of this world in view. They are not calculated to advance men in earthly riches and greatness, nor to elevate some above others, in worldly pomp and dignity; but they breathe a celestial spirit and influence, and are manifestly designed to rectify the disorders of our minds—to improve and perfect our natures—to make us like to the blessed God, and fit for those high and noble enjoyments which are consonant to our rational and moral nature.

Let us view there the sanctions of these laws. They are not taken from this world. The rewards promised to the obedient, are not any high and honorable offices in this life, and lucrative posts and employments; nor the punishments threatened, pecuniary mulcts, fines, imprisonment, or death.

The great motives by which the laws of Christ are enforced, lie above, and beyond the present state and scene of things. They respect the favor or displeasure of Almighty God, and everlasting happiness or woe in a future world.

Nor are the officers Christ hath appointed in his kingdom like the rulers of this world. They have no lordly power and authority over his subjects, like what is exercised by the princes of the Gentiles. Instead of tyrannizing over others, they are to be their servants, ministering to them in acts of kindness and benevolence. It is their duty, indeed, to endeavour the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, and to increase the number of his subjects, but not by any of the hostile measures of this world—the weapons

weapons of their warfare are not carnal. But they are to endeavour this, by preaching up a crucified Saviour, and publishing the truths of his Gospel, in their purity and simplicity;—by enlightening men's minds, and convincing and persuading their judgments, not by the absurd method of bodily tortures, or any other motives taken from this world, but by arguments drawn from the sacred oracles, and suited to their intellectual nature.

The business of Christ's ministers, who are officers in his kingdom, is to seek especially the spiritual welfare and happiness of his subjects. To elevate their minds above this world—to raise their views to heaven, as their proper home, and to endeavour their preparation for that blessed abode.

In a word. The whole frame and constitution of the Christian Church, as delineated and set before us in the Gospel, as well as the manner in which it was first founded and set up, declare its divine original. From heaven it took its rise, and the great design of it is, to bring men to that glorious and happy place.

From this account of the being and constitution of the Christian Church, I proceed to the second thing noticed from the text.

II. Jesus Christ, as the founder and supreme head of this society, hath the sole right of making and establishing laws, and appointing officers in it.

Jesus answered, my kingdom, &c. He therefore is King of this ecclesiastical society, which implies his sovereign dominion over it. And it seems essential to his being possessed of such dominion, that the power of legislation and government should be wholly in his hands,

This

This is not the case, indeed; I mean, it ought not to be the case, in civil states, and cannot be, in free states, where subjects have a proper enjoyment of their just rights. For as all human power must originally reside in and proceed from the community, rulers, though elevated in office, yet, strictly speaking, are the creatures and servants of the people.

And as the highest earthly rulers are but imperfect men—liable to misconduct through ignorance, avarice, ambition, &c. it is reasonable they should never be possessed of absolute, uncontrollable authority. It is just, and tends to the good of society, that the state should always have this check upon the legislative and governing powers, to resume that authority which they have parted with, only for the common good, whenever such authority is abused.

But in such respects as these, Christ's kingdom is not of this world. None of his subjects ever stood upon a level with him, nor contributed any thing to that supreme power of which he is possessed. His kingdom is of his own founding and establishing—it is his own property.

And besides, that on this account, he may appear to have a natural right to sovereign dominion, he is eminently qualified to exercise such dominion, without ever abusing it.

The absolute rectitude of his nature—the perfection of his wisdom and knowledge, and his consummate goodness, render it impossible but that his laws and government should be always just and right, and calculated for the good and happiness of his subjects.

And

And Christ being thus head over all things to the Church, a supposition that any, besides him, may have power of legislation and government in it, is wholly without foundation. For such must act either independently of him, and by an authority of their own; or else as his delegates, and by a power derived from him; neither of which can be the case.

For to suppose they act independently of him, is most obviously inconsistent with his own supremacy. This is at once to dethrone him, and take his kingdom out of his hands. And as to any one's acting by delegation, or as having received power and authority from him, to make laws, and appoint officers in his kingdom, of this we have not the least intimation in the New-Testament. Christ has constituted no such law-makers and vicegerents in his church; and we have abundant reason to conclude he never intended there should be any. He has given it in solemn charge to all his subjects, not to assume or pretend to any such authority, nor to submit to it if usurped, or claimed by others. *Call no man your Father upon earth—neither be ye called Masters. One is your Father who is in heaven—One is your Master even Christ, and all ye are brethren.**

And this supreme dominion and authority of our exalted Redeemer must have respect, not only to the simple acts of making laws and appointing officers in his kingdom, but to whatever will have influence on the nature and operation of laws; as for instance—the particular sense in which they are to be understood and obeyed.—And to whatever will affect the business of officers,—is their rank and dignity, and the powers committed to them. This will be evident on a moment's reflection.

* Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10.

For,

> For, let it be supposed that any man, or body of men, have authority to determine the sense of certain doctrines or laws of Christ, so as to oblige others to receive them in *their* particular sense, it is obvious such men may, by virtue of their own interpretation, alter the nature of these doctrines and laws, just as they please; and may absolutely annihilate them, as to their original intention. And these authoritative interpreters would, in effect, be the legislators and rulers in Christ's kingdom, in contradiction to his own acknowledged supremacy and dominion.

So likewise, if new officers should be added to those Christ hath appointed in his kingdom, or, which amounts to much the same, if those he hath constituted should be altered, and made different from what they were—if, for instance, that equality which, 'tis supposed, the New-Testament clearly points out between bishops and presbyters or elders—if this equality should be destroyed—if some of these should be exalted above others in dignity and power—should be raised to distinguished honors and privileges, and authorized to perform peculiar acts, from which others are excluded, as incapable, it is manifest that by such changes and alterations in the Christian Church, it would become quite a different thing from what it was when first constituted. It could be, *but in part*, the kingdom of Christ; in part it must be a kingdom of this world; or the kingdom of those men, who made these changes and alterations in it.

But now, Christ being the supreme and sovereign Lord over his own Church or kingdom—being the sole legislator and authoritative ruler in it, must intirely and forever exclude all others from any such authority

authority and power—from any authority to make new laws, or appoint new officers in his kingdom—from all authority even to interpret any of his laws or doctrines, so as to oblige others to receive and obey them, in their particular sense. And, as intirely must this exclude all others from authority to make any distinctions among the officers of his kingdom, which he hath not made;—to give powers to some which he has not granted, or to deprive others of those with which he has invested them.

And if this reasoning is just, it follows, I conceive, as an undeniable consequence.

III. That no laws or officers now in the Christian Church are to be esteemed as of divine authority, any farther than they are laws made and officers constituted and appointed by Christ, or, than as they are conformable to that original divine plan he has left us.

This conclusion results from its being manifestly inconsistent with the supreme dominion of Christ in his own kingdom, that any besides him, and independent of him, should have authority to act as legislators and rulers in it. Any laws, therefore, or officers, which have taken place in the Christian Church, and appear not; or, so far as they appear not, to have been made and constituted by Christ, we are not to look upon as properly belonging to his kingdom, nor as of divine authority.

And this naturally brings us to consider and examine the particular point we have in view, viz. “the article of presbyterian ordination.”

C

I

I cannot persuade myself, indeed, but that, if all controversy was out of sight, no one could reasonably doubt the validity of ordination by Presbyters or Elders, who, with a fair and honest mind, should examine that plan of the Christian Church the Gospel sets before us.

We, as Dissenters from the Church of England or rather, as forming our sentiments by the sacred Scriptures, believe and assert this validity. The Churches in this country, in general, with many elsewhere, practise upon this principle; and, we doubt not, God approves our practice—has greatly blessed, and will continue to bless the ministrations of his servants thus ordained.

Episcopalians, as they are called, zealously oppose us in this point, and represent our ordinations as null and void. And it is opposition from this quarter, and not any doubtful circumstances, attending the subject itself, upon a scripture view of it, which has rendered the defence of this article important, and, 'tis likely, gave rise to this lecture, in the mind of the honorable founder.

It is an avowed principle of the Church of England, and no immaterial part of the foundation of its present grand hierarchy, that Bishops and Presbyters are not the same, but two distinct officers in the Church of Christ;—that Bishops are an order superior in rank and dignity, and have, in particular, the power of ordaining others, or separating them to the gospel-ministry, which Presbyters have not.

In support of these sentiments, some writers on that side the question have laid great weight on what, they say, were the opinions and practice of the church in the early ages of it, and even from the Apostles days.

But

But any considerable acquaintance with the ancient history of the church must satisfy the unprejudiced, that no argument of any force can be drawn from thence. For it is manifest, and is acknowledged by some of the most learned and judicious of Episcopalians themselves, that, in the earliest ages, the words Presbyter and Bishop were used, as they were by the inspired writers, without any discrimination; and intended persons of one and the same office.

In times more remote from the apostolic age, when, through length of time, and the lusts of men, various corruptions had crept into the church, it is readily acknowledged these words were used, by some writers, to point out different officers; and the Bishop was then exalted above his brother Presbyter.

But this was not the only innovation which took place in the church, nor was the exalted Bishop the only new officer who was constituted and set up in it.

There soon entered, and by the same door, *Subdeacons, Archdeacons, Archbishops, Patriarchs, &c.* with a long catalogue of religious rites and ceremonies, which were introduced, not all at once, indeed, but *gradatim et paulatim*, to beautify and adorn the church, and edify its members.

These all stand upon the same bottom with Bishops, as distinguished from Presbyters, and were created by the same power, i. e. human power. They all are the inventions and institutions of uninspired and fallible men.

Some of these might originate, 'tis probable, from pious views and designs, in the weak and injudicious — others from the pride and ambition of a corrupt clergy.

clergy, who imposed on the ignorance and superstition of the vulgar; and others might spring from other causes.

But we mean not to settle the point before us by human authorities; and it seems, indeed, but a useless kind of parade, to muster the Fathers, as they are called—to marshal them on opposite sides, and play them off against one another.

Having the inspired writings for our instructor and guide, it is of but very little consequence, in this controversy, what the Fathers, or other fallible men, have wrote or practised—what opinions or customs they have approved or condemned, especially since they have so often contradicted one another, and themselves too.

As to all innovations upon the scripture plan, our Saviour's remark, respecting divorce, is a sufficient confutation of them—*But from the beginning it was not so**

Our appeal is to the sacred books of the New-Testament, where we have, from divine inspiration, the only account we can fully depend on, of the first foundation and constitution of the Christian Church;—of its laws, ordinances, officers, &c. And there it appears, in a light sufficiently clear and strong, that Bishops, and Presbyters or Elders, were the same officers in the Church of Christ;—that there was no difference in their qualifications, their powers, or employments.

It will not be expected I should mention all those passages in the sacred oracles, which might be pertinent on this occasion. I shall take notice only
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* Matt. xix. 8.

of two or three, which may be sufficient to the present purpose. The first is in Tit. i. 5, 7. where the Apostle Paul tells Titus he *left him in Crete—to ordain Elders in every city.* He then shews how these Elders were to be qualified. *If any man be blameless, &c.* and immediately adds this reason of his advice—*For a Bishop must be blameless.* The word *for* there is evidently causal, and shews the identity of office between an Elder or Presbyter, and a Bishop.

Titus was to take care that the persons he ordained *Elders* were of blameless character; and for this reason, because a Bishop must be *so*. But to what purpose could this be said, or with what propriety, unless an Elder and a Bishop were the same in office? And from this passage it appears, not only that the office of a Bishop and Elder was the same, but that their qualifications, were the same likewise.

The next place I shall mention is in Acts xx. 17. Where we read that Paul being at Miletus, sent to Ephesus for the Elders of the church, to take his last leave of them, and to give them his solemn parting charge. To these Elders he thus addressed himself in the 28th verse. *Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (ἐπισκοπους bishops) to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Here it is manifest, not only that Elders were Bishops, or that their office was one and the same, but that the work assigned them, in the execution of their office, was the same also, viz. *to feed the Church of God.* The word ποιμαίνω here rendered *to feed*, is of somewhat extensive meaning, and may signify

signify to preside over, and govern the church by the laws of Christ, as well as to minister to it in other respects. Elders and Bishops had therefore the same power committed to them in the Church of Christ, and were authorized and directed to perform the same ministerial service.

And this may appear still farther evident from one passage more I shall mention, which is in 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. *The Elders which are among you I exhort, who are also an Elder, &c. feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof [ἐπιμενέτε] performing the office of Bishops] not by constraint, but willingly, &c.*

I am not insensible that some objections have been offered against the plain and obvious sense of the above passages of Scripture: But these have been so often considered, and so fully removed, that I shall take no notice of them; nor of attempts which have been made to prove a superiority of rank and power in Bishops above Presbyters, from the supposed Episcopacy of Timothy and Titus. The supposition that these two Evangelists possessed episcopal powers, which Presbyters did not, is so intirely without any scripture foundation, that it merits not our consideration, any more than the doctrine of an uninterrupted succession of Bishops, in the modern form, even from the time of the Apostles; and some other things which over-zealous and whimsical men have laid stress upon.

Our appeal, as I said before, is to the sacred books of the New-Testament, where we have the words of divine inspiration to determine our judgment and practice.

And

And it appears, I conceive, with sufficient evidence, from the passages above quoted, as well as from many others which might be mentioned, that, according to the constitution and pattern of the Christian Church, left us by Christ and his Apostles, the names Bishop and Presbyter or Elder, were used indiscriminately, to signify or point out persons of one and the same office:—that their qualifications, their authority, and the work assigned to them, were precisely the same.

They were equally authorized therefore to preach the word, to administer the ordinances of the Gospel, to ordain, or solemnly to separate other meet persons, to the gospel ministry; and to perform any other service which belonged to their office as ministers of Christ. From all which we may very justly and safely conclude the validity of ordination by Presbyters.

For if the office of these and of Bishops was the same, and the work appointed to each of them, as ministers of Christ, was the same, it will then follow, as a just conclusion, that ordination by Presbyters is scriptural and valid, supposing that the Act of ordaining others was a part of the work assigned them.

True, our opponents may say, supposing this—supposing the act of ordaining others, to be a part of the work assigned to Presbyters, or even to Presbyters and Bishops in common, then this conclusion might be just; but this is denied.

We grant that a power of ordination existed in the first ordinary and standing ministers of the Gospel, and hath descended down from them to others, by Christ's appointment; but then this power was only in Bishops, as distinguished from Presbyters.

To

To this objection, which rests wholly upon an arbitrary distinction between the office and power of Bishops and Presbyters, it would be a sufficient answer, to observe, that we have instances, in the New-Testament, of ordination performed by persons under the name of Presbyters,* but not a single instance of any performed by persons under the name of Bishops ; from whence we might fairly conclude, that if there was any distinction of office and power between these, Presbyters and not Bishops had power to ordain.

But I chuse to rest the point, at present, upon that identity of office, of power, and of work or service we have fully proved between Presbyters and Bishops.

There is no dispute between Episcopalians and us, as to Bishops having, in the apostolic age, a divine right to ordain others. This we believe and assert equally with them. And it being evident, to demonstration, that at that time, the words Bishop and Presbyter were convertible terms, and used indifferently for each other ;—that Bishops were Presbyters, and Presbyters Bishops ;—that their qualifications, their office, their power and business were the same, the conclusion is fair and just, that ordination by Presbyters is scriptural and valid.

And it follows likewise, from what hath been said above, of the equality and sameness of Bishop and Presbyter, that whatever distinction between these has taken place since the apostolic age—whatever superiority in rank, and dignity of office, or of power in the Church of Christ, a Bishop is supposed now to have, above a Presbyter, is a distinction and superiority

* 1 Tim. iv. 13, 14. Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3.

superiority without any foundation. A Bishop, thus distinguished and elevated, is no officer in the church or kingdom of Christ, but merely of human invention and creation.

And in the same light we justly view a large number of others, as *Canons, Deans, Archbishops, Chancellors, &c.* Of these, and of some other officers, tho' of high importance in the Church of England, we read nothing in the New Testament. They have neither name, nor place, nor work assigned to them, in the divine constitution and form of the Church of Christ which is there exhibited. They are all officers of men's creating and setting up. Their existence and authority are not from Christ, the divine founder and supreme head of the Church, but wholly from this world.

But from this some may be ready to conclude, I am for cutting off the Church of England, from being any part of the Church of Christ ;—for demolishing all her officers, and nullifying all her administrations. But such conclusions as these, from what I have said, would not be strictly just. Nor do I mean to retaliate upon our episcopal brethren, by any hard and uncharitable reflections.

I sincerely wish the character of that Church may be ever supported, and appear respectable in the eyes of all Christians, so far as it is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

I doubt not but great and good men—sincere disciples of Christ, have, and still belong to that establishment ; and that some of its most dignified clergy have been eminently servicable in promoting
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the true interest of the Redeemer's kingdom : Nor do I doubt its being a part of the Church of Christ, notwithstanding the many human additions which still adhere to it.

But then these additions—all its deviations from the scripture pattern, cannot be justly esteemed any part of its character, as a Church of Christ, but so many corruptions it has unhappily received, and still retains; and which, instead of adding to its true beauty and glory, really disfigure and deform it. These are not gold, silver and precious stones, built on Christ, the only foundation, but wood, hay and stubble, which the power of truth may in time, purge and purify it from.

And tho' the Church of Christ knows no such officers as Bishops, of superior rank and power to Presbyters, yet I charitably believe ordination by these may be valid. Not indeed, as they are Bishops, in a prelatical sense, but as they are Scripture Bishops, and the same in rank and office with Presbyters. For it is only in this view of them, that they can justly be considered as officers in Christ's kingdom, and as having any divine right to ordain : In the other view, all their authority is from this world, and is, therefore, in reality, no authority at all.

So that if our ordinations by Presbyters are not more valid than those by Bishops, they certainly cannot be less so, unless an authority derived from men—merely from this world, may be supposed greater and better than an authority derived from heaven.

I shall now beg your farther patience, only 'till I offer a few reflections upon, or inferences from what hath been said, And,

I. The

1. The Christian Church being of divine original, we should ever look on its constitution as sacred and inviolable.

Every work of God is perfect in its kind, nor are we able to improve upon, and mend, what was designed and executed by infinite wisdom. The most pious views and motives will not justify us in attempting this, as we have neither authority nor capacity for such business. Corruptions in the Church, 'tis highly probable, were early introduced, by a disposition to mend it, or make alterations to its advantage. Good men, but weak and injudicious, imagined that an officer of higher rank and greater power, than a common Presbyter, would have more influence in correcting abuses in the Church, keeping out heresies, &c. Hence, 'tis likely, the office of a Bishop, as distinguished from, and superior to Presbyter, first took its rise. Other alterations might proceed from the same cause, and many from other causes much less justifiable.

Corruptions once begun, were carried from one degree to another, 'till, in some places, what was called the Church of Christ, had very little of its original form left, and became almost intirely a kingdom of this world.

Bishops, in particular, were not only raised above Presbyters, but their elevation gradually increased. They were made Archbishops, Patriarchs, &c. And, in some places, in addition to their episcopal dignities, they were created *Counts, Marquisses, Dukes*; and have sometimes claimed and possessed all the *Regalia* of sovereign Princes. They have given laws to nations, and battle to their enemies, at the head of numerous armies of their own raising. This was making the Church of Christ a church militant indeed.

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But

But how unlike to the meek and benevolent Son of God, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, must these military heroes appear, who pretended to be his disciples, and officers in his kingdom?

Now, as such gross corruptions proceeded from small alterations, at first, in the scripture plan, how cautious should we be of ever attempting any thing of this nature! How inviolable should we hold the institutions of heaven!

And it is by a close and steadfast adherence to that divine pattern left us by Christ and his Apostles, that we may hope the truth, as it in Jesus. will, in time, prevail over error and superstition, and, by its powerful efficacy, remove, by degrees, all those human alterations, which have so greatly mutilated and deformed the church;—will restore it to its original purity and glory, when it will appear again, to its friends, fair as the moon, and clear as the sun; and to its enemies, terrible as an army with banners.

Again,

2. The supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, over his own church or kingdom;—his being the sole legislator and authoritative ruler in it, as this should caution us against aspiring at any lordly dominion over others, so it should guard us against submitting to the authority of any, who would usurp and exercise such dominion over us.

In all things which respect our religious faith and practice, we are to recur to the sacred standard Christ hath left us. We are to compare all things with this, and to judge of all things by this.

I:

- It is of but little importance to us, what are the opinions or practice of this or that fallible man, unless we can find them agreeable to the doctrines and laws of Christ. He only is our Master in what relates to conscience, and our eternal salvation. To him we stand or fall. And if we approve ourselves to him, we need not be greatly anxious as to what men may judge or say of us.

3. Upon the principles which have been now laid down and established, our dissent from the Church of England—our rejection of her form of government—of her rites and ceremonies, must be forever justified.

We dissent from her in no article, but where we are well persuaded she herself has dissented from the Scripture Plan. We reject nothing, but what we are well persuaded had its rite and establishment from the inventions and power of men. We separate from her, only so far as we believe she has deviated from the form, and constitution of Christ's kingdom, and is become a kingdom of this world. And thus far, even our allegiance to Jesus Christ, as our only supreme head, our lawgiver, our ruler and judge, obliges us to dissent.

Instead therefore of imagining our fore-fathers were guilty of schism, of which they and their followers have been often accused, in separating from the Church of England, and casting off the yoke under which they had groaned, we ought to venerate and honor their memories, for that pious zeal and fortitude they discovered, in asserting the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free: And that from a regard to their own consciences, and the honor
of

of their diſtine Lord, they ſubmitted to hardſhips and ſufferings, in planting churches in this land, more conformable to the goſpel pattern.

And it certainly becomes us their deſcendents, who reap the happy fruits of their trials, not to become again entangled with the yoke of bondage; but to ſtand faſt in that liberty they have tranſmitted to us.

And from the ſame principles which juſtify our diſſent, in general, from the epifcopal form and government of the church, we conclude, and with the greateſt reaſon, the validity of ordination by Preſbyters, or Scripture-Biſhops.

For, by examining the conſtitution of the church, or kingdom of Chriſt—its doctrines and laws—the officers he hath appointed in it—their qualifications and powers, and the work he has aſſigned to them, as theſe things are placed before us in the New-Teſtament—upon ſuch examination, we find it evident, beyond all reaſonable doubt, that Biſhops and Preſbyters had one and the ſame office, and equal authority to perform all miniſterial ſervices, and therefore ordination among the reſt. And the objections to this, from our opponents, being grounded, mainly, on a ſuppoſed ſuperiority of Biſhops to Preſbyters, and reſting on unwarrantable alterations in the Church of Chriſt, and receiving therefore all their force from human authority, ought not, in the deciſion, of the preſent point, to have the weight of a feather.

And I cannot but recommend it to all—to the young gentlemen of this Society in particular, and eſpecially to ſuch of them as are deſigned for the goſpel

gospel ministry, to give close attention to the sacred Scriptures in their examination of this subject. Your looking back into antiquity, will, indeed be no disadvantage to you, nor to the practice or cause of these Churches, if you can take a proper extensive view of what has been wrote relative to this controversy.

But then remember that after all your researches, the sacred Scriptures ought to be your guide. The words of Christ, and of his Apostles, are not only more ancient than those of the Fathers, as they are called, and of later writers, but they alone are of divine authority, and ought to determine and settle our judgment, in all things of a religious nature.

And I am persuaded that the more the present point is viewed and examined by the light of Scripture, the evidence for the validity of presbyterian ordination will appear brighter and stronger, and triumph over all objection.

To conclude,

Let it be the concern of all, that they are the true and real subjects of the kingdom of Christ. A religion so evidently divine as that which the Gospel teaches, and the great design of which is so infinitely gracious, must, in the highest degree, deserve our attention; and greatly solicitous should we all be, that we experience its sanctifying and saving influence.

But our beloved sons, the students in this place, for whose welfare we feel a parental tenderness, will suffer me, in a particular manner, to recommend this to them.

Amidst

Amidst all your studies of the liberal arts and sciences, and to acquire those literary accomplishments, which may justly adorn your character, and render you useful members of society, let me request it of you, not to neglect the study of yourselves, and a proper cultivation of your own minds, in a moral view.

Converse much with the sacred classics. Make the doctrines and laws of Christ familiar to you. Often compare yourselves with, and examine yourselves by them; and be concerned that every thing yet amiss in your tempers or lives, be rectified by the grace of the Gospel;—that you are daily improving in the true and solid virtues of Christianity, and ripening for that state of endless glory and felicity, which shall be the portion of the righteous.

- Believe me, my young friends, all the glittering charms of this present world, so apt to engage and captivate the mind in early life, are but gilded dancing bubbles, which vanish in a moment, compared with this.

And may we all so conduct through the present state, as to be accepted of our great lawgiver, ruler and judge, and find our lot among his faithful subjects, at that important time, when having put down all rule, and all authority and power, and subdued all his and his church's enemies, he shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all and in all.

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