

BENEFICIARY
MINISTERIAL EDUCATION;

THE SUBSTANCE OF A REPORT ADOPTED BY THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN THE

CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA,

AT ITS SESSIONS IN

CHARLOTTE, N. C.,

In May, 1864.

PREPARED BY THE

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BENEFICIARY

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION.

There never has been a time, in the history of the Presbyterian Church, when there was serious difference of opinion touching the necessity of an educated Ministry. From the earliest period of her existence, she has, by every form of official action possible to such a testimony, uttered a distinct and emphatic voice in behalf of the highest standard of mental qualification on the part of those who were chosen to preach the Gospel from her sacred desks. Whilst, indeed, no Church has more strenuously insisted upon the unspeakable importance of healthy and vigorous *piety* in the pulpit; yet none has been more determined to possess a pulpit characterized by something more and better than the impatient zeal, the unguarded enthusiasm, and the heated impulses, in which mere vehemence of religious emotions is so apt, when left to itself, to waste its fires;—a pulpit where saintly ardor of soul shall be tempered and directed by discipline of mind, breadth of knowledge and accuracy of scholarship.

Regarding, therefore, the conclusions of the Church with reference to this vital point, as sound and irreversible, our attention is now fixed upon another branch of the subject of Ministerial training, to which the wisdom of our denomination has been long directed, but where the decisions of that wisdom has not appeared so satisfactory to all good men. We are to consider, in some of its respects, the great question of '*beneficiary education*;' and particularly, whether that scheme of stipendiary schooling, with whose details our connection with the Presbyterian Church in the former United States has rendered us familiar, is the best one for us, in our new condition as a separate ecclesiastical organization, to continue.

It will be recollected that the General Assembly which con-

vened (December, 1861,) in the city of Augusta, unanimously passed a series of resolutions, "solemnly re-affirming the deliverances made in our former connection concerning the responsibility that rests on the Church to secure and maintain for itself a pious, gifted, and learned Ministry: and in conformity with this re-affirmation, appointed "an Executive Committee to aid Candidates for the Gospel Ministry who may need assistance," chose a "Secretary of Education," and did all other things that we required to set in motion a system whose operation might impart efficiency to this arm of the Church's usefulness. There is now raised, not simply the question: shall the scheme of beneficiary education, so long in prosperous use by the Old Assembly, and so much in favor throughout the entire country, be set aside for a new and altogether different plan? But, in addition, the enquiry is stated: shall the solemn action of our own initiative Assembly which formally contained a substantial adoption of this tried scheme, be, before three years have elapsed, and, time has been allowed to test its value under changed conditions—shall this, too, be swept away for the inauguration of some policy wholly foreign and novel? The fact that our first Executive Committee of Education was suddenly arrested in their word by the paralysis of war, and compelled even to disband, almost at the beginning of their career; and the additional fact that the new Committee appointed in their stead have been unable, owing to continuance of the same causes which operated at the outset, to much more than maintain a nominal existence;—this state of facts, throwing us back to the point whence the original Assembly started, would appear to offer an opportunity for reviewing the whole subject, as auspicious as if nothing whatever had been done. But still, that Assembly *did* act; and its action was, no doubt, as maturely considered by that body as it could have been, had it been assured beforehand that the fairest and fullest play would have been secured to it proposed policy by every favoring circumstance of peace.* It ought, therefore, to be only under the stress of solemn convictions of duty whose path is illuminated by light which our brightest comet did not possess in 1861, that its successor in 1864 should undertake to reverse its decisions in a matter so grave and vital, or even suggest a material alteration in the

* The following [Art V of the Constitution of the Education Committee organized at Augusta,] indicates the principal basis of the plan: "It shall be the duty of this Committee to dispense aid, in prosecuting their education, to such Candidates for the Gospel Ministry as may be recommended to them by the Presbyteries. It shall hold and disburse all funds put into its hands for this purpose. It shall also have a general oversight of the diligence and deportment of those who are aided by it."

great law of the Church touching this matter. The Church should be slow to alter where alteration is not demanded by the detection of serious error, or the discovery of some hitherto unsuspected truth. In permanency reposes strength.

It is believed, however, that they who most desire to see the whole field of beneficiary education again explored, have difficulties to examine and to remove that lie back of every possible scheme. These difficulties attach to certain injurious consequences involved in the policy which exhibits its essential character in the use of the word "beneficiary." It is thought by many that there should be no ecclesiastical recognition of *indigency* in Candidates for the Ministry; and that the Church has no authority to bestow *benefits*, out of her meagre treasury, upon aspirants to the sacred office who are too poor to help themselves. They would, therefore, disencumber the Church altogether from the charge of their maintenance, and throw this burden where (say they) it honestly belongs, *i. e.* upon the students themselves; a measure which would necessarily revolutionize the whole subject of Ministerial education as it has been heretofore understood.

The confusion of thought which has resulted from the use of the word "beneficiary," as applied to qualify the education we are considering, and many of the difficulties which serve to obstruct the Church's path of duty in the premises, would be removed if a clear statement of her relation to the Candidate could be authoritatively made by the General Assembly. It is expressed with sufficient distinctness in the following proposition: a proposition that, we feel confident, indicates the real belief of the great body of God's people touching this point. It is this: *Every Candidate for the Gospel Ministry does, in sundering the ties which connected him with secular avocations, so far dedicate himself to the service of God in the Church, as to entitle him to expect at her hands the education which he may yet need for that service; and he is, therefore, not to be regarded by the Church or by himself, in the light of an object of charity, but as a laborer already occupying a place in the field of Ministerial duty.* This statement it is not proposed to elaborate at any length. When once announced it immediately commends its self-evidencing truth to every thinker. It sets aside, altogether, the common notion, that a reception of pecuniary aid by the Candidate, when such aid is administered by the authority of the Church, places the recipient in the attitude of beggary and the bestower in the attitude of benefactor; a notion cruelly unjust to the Candidate, dishonoring to the Church herself, and opposed to every intelligent idea of the Ministerial work, which, from the first step of incipient

Candidacy to the last steps of the preacher's finished labors, righteously demands for the spiritual workman his hire: and this, too, by the express ordinance of God. The association of *charity*, therefore, with the subject of beneficiary education, is uncalled for, and is plainly injurious to the honor of that blessed Master who will have no man whom He calls into the immediate service of the Church, and thus of Himself, become the bearer of His own charges. And, so prevalent and so vicious is the habit of associating these two things together—so wide-spread is the unhappy assumption that the Church, in the relations she sustains to her Candidates for the Ministry, is a grand eleemosynary institution—that you find it impossible to prevent mankind from going further, and carrying forward this assumption to its logical result in the consequent belief, that *all* Ministerial support is from first to last mercenary-hearted bounty which may be withheld without sin, but which, when bestowed, entitles the bestowers to the high praise of disinterested benevolence. With this deep-seated impression in the public mind the pulpit itself has been compelled to maintain a constant and wasting struggle; a struggle which is destined to continue between the *pastor's* demand for an adequate support while exclusively devoted to the full service of the church, and the people's resistance to this demand, until the day when it shall come to be distinctly understood that, from the very *outset* of the minister's career—from the moment when he first puts his hand to the plough in the field of *preparation*—he is a claimant, not upon the church's generosity, but upon her justice; not upon her feeling of pity, but upon her sense of duty. Having given *himself* to her, does he bespeak her charity, when, with all her wealth she could not repay his service, or, with all her endowments, do without it? No, the favored party, all along,—if either may be so styled—is not he. So that every consideration; whether of gratitude to her Lord for bestowing the young man upon her; or of honesty in her treatment of him who has cheerfully acceded to this disposition of his person, by which he chooses her service in preference to all others, gives force to the proposition that he is entitled to her sympathies not only, but also to the utmost liberality of support at her hands, as well while taking the steps that may conduct him to her pulpit as during the whole period of his incumbency therein. The strength of which position will further appear, when you reflect, that, although God has imparted to the church the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost, and cheered her with the promise of glorious

triumphs over every opposing kingdom; yet, in order to give her a formal completeness for her gigantic work, He has so organized her as to secure the co-operation of the principle of *self-perpetuation*—a principle which obviously lodges with her the elements of a distinct and solemn responsibility in the matter of providing, through her licensing and ordaining agency, her own ministers down to the end of time. And the duty to provide involves the duty of making provision effective. Effective, however, it cannot be, unless those candidates for the sacred office whom the Master has called and placed in the church's hands, as a precious gift, be by her properly trained for their destined work; and, clearly, this indispensable training includes all that is ever meant by "ministerial education." She has no right, therefore, to compel, or even advise, the candidate to support *himself*—much less to treat him as a burden upon her charity in the event of his declining to do this. The obligation is all her own, as the benefits accruing are hers. And so she herself acknowledges, by ordaining those inexorable laws for his education—both as to its nature and its extent—a departure from which, so far from being optional with him, may debar him from all access to her pulpits. Thus binding him to her service with one hand, can she, with the other, repel him when he demands the means of engaging himself in it? This would be, indeed, requiring the bricks whilst refusing the straw. But, if they who come to her doors, seeking entrance into her ministry, *choose*, or their friends choose for them, to afford all needful pecuniary aid to help them forward to the period of their ordination, this is another matter. The church may accept this assistance, but, in doing so, she is simply accepting a contribution to her treasury for which she ought to be grateful. She has no authority to *demand* it.

It is, truly, no wonderful sacrifice for a young man to make, when casting aside all those worldly prospects which offer to him the rewards of ambition, or wealth, or ease, in a hundred other pursuits of life, he resolves to devote his energies and his time to the service of God as a herald of salvation; and, thus resolving, seeks to prepare himself, at his own cost, for so high and so sacred a calling. Doubtless it is an honor unspeakable to be selected by the Holy Ghost to be a messenger of grace to lost men. And he who is thus distinguished, by being permitted to look forward to unusual labors, and uncommon sacrifices, and, perhaps, to pre-eminent usefulness in the cause of Christ, may well afford to inaugurate his career, by casting all his property, as he

does all his talents, into the effort to prove worthy of so peculiar a distinction. But the point at issue does not lie here. It is, not what the candidate may esteem as *his privilege*, but what the church must regard as *her duty*. If he be in the condition which enables him to enjoy the luxury of offering to the church, himself not only, but himself prepared for his ordination vows, let him esteem it no hardship to taste the honey of such an act of dedication. But, nevertheless, if this he cannot do—or, if this he feels that he ought not to do—then, must the church take him up from the beginning, conduct him into her schools, and, by every means in her power, endeavor to make him a workman who will never “need to be ashamed.”

We are aware, indeed, that however you may dispose of this fundamental position in a discussion of the subject of beneficiary education,—even though it may readily be granted—yet, objections are urged to the *existing scheme* adopted by the wisdom of the almost unanimous church, for meeting her obligations in the premises; and, on the ground of these objections, the plea for a radical change is set up, with a degree of plausibility. That this system is free from difficulties, no one will pretend. That it has been, and is always liable to be, abused, every observing and reflecting Christian must promptly allow. That the old “Board of Education” had seen some of the principles which underlie the whole subject, to dangerous, or, at least unwise, extremes, many thoughtful persons have justly believed. But, if we steadily look at some of the difficulties of continuing this system, (in its new organization under our General Assembly,) which have been pointed out,—if we measure their true magnitudes,—it will be seen that they are by no means insuperable in themselves, or fatal to the plan proposed; but that they are simply those inseparable adjuncts to it as a plan whose working has necessarily been entrusted to the imperfections of human wisdom, and is applied to the weakness of human subjects. It may be well, however, to glance at a few of the difficulties which are said to beset this path of the church’s usefulness,

1. The objection, often urged, that a promise of support to indigent candidates is fraught with the danger of attracting men from the lower orders of society, thereby threatening the pulpit with the evils of rustic coarseness on the one hand, and, on the other, deterring men of commanding social position from seeking it—this is

hardly deserving of serious refutation. Under any state of things—seeing that “not many rich, not many noble are called”—it must be the case that comparatively few in affluent circumstances would be expected to enter the ministerial ranks. To the poor, and, to a large extent, by the poor, was the gospel ordained to be preached. But, notwithstanding this, it is believed that the ministry of our church—composed to a considerable extent of those who were once “beneficiaries”—has never been materially damaged by any lack of refinement in its incumbents. At any rate, God’s order is the best.

2. A more formidable objection lies against a tendency which the beneficiary scheme is said to strengthen, to induce men to aspire to the sacred office from improper motives; for its high social position, its sources of personal influence and aggrandizement, and the assurance it gives, in most cases, of a respectable living. That this tendency has, in some instances, become effect, is as undeniable as lamentable. But it is, on the other hand, historically true, that the examples of genuine piety, whose prevailing inducement for seeking this holy service has been the desire to promote the glory of God, rather than to aim at the prizes of worldly ambition, or of mere professional emolument, are as numerous under the system in question as could be hoped for under any plan which implies the abandonment of this. The objection, therefore, presses only upon the corruption of the human heart, as lying back of the whole matter, viewed in whatever aspect it may present itself.

3. A third drawback is, that it is supposed to beget a spirit of *mendicity*, instead of cultivating that of personal thrift and manly independence. This may be said to be practically counteracted by the fact that no candidate has ever yet been supported from the treasury of the church, to such an extent as to remove all care from his mind touching his daily sustenance. We, however, believe that, as a general thing, our candidates have not been liberally enough supplied with pecuniary help; and that, whenever the feeling of mendicity has humbled their honest pride, this has been due not to the aids they have received, but to the *spirit* in which the stinted allowances have, too often, been extended. Spirited young men have been made to experience the emotions of a beggar, because the hand which doled out to them their pittance has been that of a lordly benefactor. But let this notion

be once removed from the mind of the church—let it come to be distinctly understood that her candidates are not her debtors, but her creditors—that they are receiving simply what is their *due*, not what is their need in distress—and, in no case, will they sink beneath the consciousness of shame, but will hold up their heads in the consciousness of unabashed self-respect. The same result, indeed, might be reached (it is contended) by driving these men from the doors of the church, with the haughty, to do the double work of elevating their characters, and providing for their own education, by employing themselves in teaching, or some other useful pursuit, or by stripping themselves, for winning in the arena of scholarly conflict, those bursaries which have been provided for the ambitious victors. But, to say nothing more of the want of *right* in the church thus to treat her future ministers, such a plan is surrounded with formidable impediments on the ground of simple expediency. Experience demonstrates, that those students who, in order to secure a livelihood which shall maintain them throughout their course of preparation for the pastoral office, devote their energies to teaching, or to mechanical labor, do, in a majority of cases, waste, in harassing efforts to procure a livelihood, that precious time which would otherwise be far more profitably employed in direct and consecutive study. Thus the requisite education is delayed, unless they meanwhile study privately; and, if this be done, their training is fragmentary, imperfect, and in many ways damaging to their future influence. Or, if they find, as has too often been the case, that they and theirs can be more easily supported, by the methods they have been forced to adopt by a parsimonious church, they by-and-by resist the gradually enfeebled call which once had stirred their souls, and fail to enter the ministry at all. And, as to bursaries, or scholarships, to be contended for as the reward of talent, these do not exist to any extent; and if they did, they would necessarily be left open to all students, religious or irreligious, and to those seeking the several professions alike. By means of such a plan, therefore, if brought into being, we might secure a talented ministry, but it would be insignificantly limited as to numbers. And besides, God, under no dispensation, has called only those of high intellectual gifts—men of commanding genius—into the ministry; while yet there has been a place for every one who was divinely

called, where he might be useful, whether great or small in the order of his native abilities. To the reply, however, that the scholarships in question might easily be increased in number by the use of those monies which are now expended in beneficiary education; and might also be confined in their destination to candidates for the ministry exclusively,—the obvious and the crushing rejoinder is, that thus there would be lodged in the very bosom of the church a source of evil, from whose baleful presence must necessarily issue ambitions, envies, jealousies, to poison the fountain of ministerial character, and jeopard the dearest interests of Zion. For, in the emulation of an excited conflict for precedence, the contesting candidates would experience every influence which fosters pride; and, after a generation or two, the fatal effects would be witnessed in the disorders of a torn church, when the lowliness of John has given place to the vain-glory of Diotrephes. The inexorable law of Christ's kingdom is humility.

Still other objections to the present scheme of beneficiary education exist, and are urged. But it would not be possible to discuss them all in a document like this, which can serve only as an introduction into a field which is capable of the widest exploration. But, we believe that, however far such exploration might be conducted, at each successive step the friends of the existing plan would find new cause for admiring the wisdom which devised it—for applying themselves to the effort to perfect it,—and (whilst praising the Head of the Church for the eminency of its past success,) for exerting every appliance of spiritual foresight to expand its usefulness. We can see, then, no cause for alarm in the proper administration of this plan, in any evil influences it may exert upon the *beneficiary*, if care be taken to instruct him in his true position as such: nor in any wrong it can do the *church*, if care be taken to place her upon the ground of unencumbered and absolute duty in the premises.

In accordance with these views, the General Assembly unanimously passed the following resolutions:

1. *Resolved*, That in the judgement of this Assembly, it is the duty of the church to pray unceasingly to her Head for a large increase of candidates for the gospel ministry;—and when they are received at His hands, it is her further duty to provide them with a suitable

education in the way of preparing them for their work, and to provide it, *not as a matter of charity; but of justice to all the parties concerned.*

2. *Resolved,* That this Assembly can discover no sufficient reason for superceding, at this time, the organization of the Executive Committee of Education.

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PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.