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Preaching  
to the  
Poor

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1876



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Preaching to the poor

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# PREACHING TO THE POOR:

A Centennial Test of Presbyterianism.

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## SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

# PRESBYTERY OF ALBANY,

ON THE

13th of June, 1876,

IN THE

CHURCH OF BALLSTON CENTRE.

BY

WILLIAM DURANT.

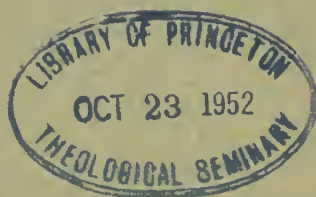
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OCT 23 1952  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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Rev. WM. DURANT:

DEAR BROTHER—Having listened with interest to your Sermon at the opening of the last stated meeting of Albany Presbytery, and believing that the facts and arguments therein contained may be helpful in the future discussion of plans for Church work, we, the undersigned, would respectfully suggest the propriety of your offering a copy of the same for publication.

Fraternally, Yours,

JOHN JAMES, ✓  
✓ T. G. DARLING,  
✓ PETER STRYKER,  
✓ J. N. CROCKER,  
✓ GEORGE ALEXANDER,  
✓ M. E. DUNHAM,  
✓ ALEX. S. HOYT,  
J. G. K. McCLURE, ✓  
✓ J. D. COUNTERMINE.

The undersigned, unavoidably absent from the meeting of Presbytery at which this Sermon was preached, cordially unite with their brethren in requesting its publication.

E. HALLEY, ✓  
HENRY DARLING, ✓  
J. McCLUSKY BLAYNEY, ✓  
ANSON J. UPSON. ✓

*To the Revs. John James, D. D., George Alexander, Henry Darling, D. D., and others:*

DEAR BRETHREN,—

I comply with your suggestion, gratified to learn that you think the Sermon of enough moment for review; and hoping that, in spite of its defects, it may be to some degree helpful in the way you mention.

Obediently, Yours,

WILLIAM DURANT.



# PREACHING TO THE POOR:

A CENTENNIAL TEST OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

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*Matt. XI. 5, (last clause),—*“THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.”

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PRESBYTERIANISM, twin-born with the ideas of *Synchronous* civil liberty, reads its growth in the rise of the first *growth of Church and Republic.* American Republic.

Three years after Columbus went out of the 1506.  
world John Calvin came into it. In 1559, when 1509.  
the ships of Elizabeth had become familiar objects  
on our northern fishing banks, The Institutes  
received the author's latest changes, and that same 1559.  
year Knox returned from Geneva to begin the  
Scotch reformation. Only twelve years after the  
organisation of the first Presbytery, at Wands- 1572.  
worth, Raleigh, on the shores of Carolina, took 1584.  
possession of this country for the Queen of Eng-  
land: from the one resulted our church; from the  
other, our nation.

As the sixteenth century ended Scotland intro- 1592.  
duced Presbyterianism “pure and simple;” but  
ten years before Gosnold laid the foundation of 1602.  
the first New England colony, by landing on Cape  
Cod, the first Englishman to set foot in that sec-  
tion. In March, 1641, the band of exiles, led by 1641.  
Roger Williams, unanimously agreed upon a *March.*

“Democracie or popular government” for their  
*December.* island; while the December following saw two  
 other events most important in church and state:  
 Massachusetts adopting its first written “body  
 of liberties,” and the petition of Parliament to  
 1643. secure the Westminster Assembly. The act cre-  
*June 12.* ating that Assembly finally passed only five days  
 after the last colony ratified the articles of New  
 England confederation. But one month later, in  
 the very year of the Solemn League and Covenant,  
*Aug. 17.* Plymouth colony began “the representative sys-  
 tem, and each town sent its committee to the gen-  
 eral court.”

Memorable to us, as citizens and sectarians, is  
 the brief period of six years between 1684 and  
 1690. On the former date appeared “the first  
 1684. tendency to a union of all our colonies”; North  
 and South met at Albany in the persons of “the  
 governors of Virginia and of New York, and the  
 agent of Massachusetts,” to treat with the Indians  
 for “peace from the St. Croix to Albermarle;”  
 1690. on the latter Presbyterianism obtained “perma-  
 nent establishment in Scotland,” while, in the  
 1684-1690. interval, Francis Makemie planted throughout  
 Maryland and Virginia the first churches of the  
 denomination in this land. When the Presbytery  
 1706. of Philadelphia organised, the common-sense  
 philosophy of our political institutions rocked in  
 the cradle of a Boston infant, just at the time  
*Jan. 17.* English newspapers, and “people of all conditions  
 and qualities,” were bruiting the prediction that  
 the colonists would, before long, “declare them-  
 selves a free state.” Half a century elapsed and



that babe become the man, Franklin, was presenting his “finished plan of perpetual union,” to be adopted by “the memorable congress of commissioners from every colony north of the Potomac,” and from Virginia south, assembled at Albany; while the proposal of a “conference” between the Old and the New Side Presbyteries, made only two months previously by the Synod of Philadelphia, was fast bringing about the union of the church. The former union waited another generation for its establishment; the latter, but four years, to occur during the same twelve months in which Washington led his pioneers over the Alleghanies and opened the “gateway of the west.”

1754.  
July 10.

May.

1758.

July 4th, 1776, a lineal descendant of Knox, representing the Presbyterian ministry and church, the state and college of New Jersey, voted the Declaration of Independence. Hardly more than a decade later, Presbyteries and States, in the very same year, ratified the Constitutions which gave to the one a General Assembly and to the other Congress: here the twin-birth appears a remarkable heredity to determine the climax of the development of the republican idea in these two offspring, ecclesiastical and political, each alike its youngest and strongest. Consistently, the Assembly marked its first session by voting a congratulatory address to Washington, who precisely three weeks before had been inaugurated first President of the United States.

1776.

1787.

1789.  
May 21.  
April 30.

Among the interesting parallels of the present century time permits merely a hint at two coincidences: abolitionism manifesting its first organised

1837. strength just as the church falls asunder; while  
 1870 the Re-union follows close on the heels of a war of emancipation, which made the nation for the first time absolutely free and more securely effected its unity.

1876.  
 June 13.

One other significant event should not be forgotten at this hour. As we gather in this ancient church for ecclesiastical affairs, but with anticipation of the nation's centennial day so near at hand, two important bodies of English Presbyterians are completing, in Liverpool, an organic union which already gives promise of Presbyterian unity throughout all Great Britain and Ireland.

*Comparative growth of church.*

This remarkable synchronism prompts strongly to the observance of a Presbyterial celebration alongside the National. If the Republic has good reason to glory over its advance, the stride of the church, reaching further, affords better reasons for jubilation. Imagination must help to appreciate the contrast which the facts present; expressed in percentage it appears fabulous. During the century the population of the country has increased nearly eleven-fold: the Presbyterian church counts twenty members now for every one recorded only sixty years ago. I can find no record of membership previous to 1810; from the official number of churches and ministers one hundred years ago, a fair estimate makes the increase in members at least seventy-fold. In the same century our church has grown at a rate six times greater than the remarkable increase of the country's population. Far outstripping the ratio

of national growth, the church also ranks third on the list of Christian denominations in the land now, in place of fourth then. This feature of numbers alone constrains us to exclaim with the Psalmist: "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."

Facts so remarkable compel attempt to account for them. Through a period of three centuries the epochal events in the development of both Republicanism and Presbyterianism, occurring at intervals of one or more generations, have yet been almost simultaneous. Besides, Presbyterianism has made its greatest strides in a Republic. Only a common cause could produce these parallels. Christ's evidence to his divine mission formulates that cause: "the poor have the gospel preached to them." Seeking to give the same evidence of its faithfulness, Presbyterianism points to the republican door of its theology. To the Anglo-Saxon race, fitted by nature for political independence, Calvinism gave the impulse and the education for the development of free institutions, by establishing a church in which all classes had equal rights and whose polity furnished a model for the state. In a word, because Presbyterianism founded a church for the people, the people would not be denied similar rights in political government.

*Cause of the parallels and the rapid growth.*

But gratulation over progress occupies a low place in the emotions excited by the political commemoration of the year. Added to the usual fitness of anniversary seasons for learning lessons for future betterment from past mistakes, outrage-

*The present a time for considering flaws.*

ous corruptions, exposed these jubilee days, turn thoughtful men to consider the causes and the remedies of the evils sloughing the fair face of the Republic. And the parallels in the history of the two make the time appropriate to attempt a similar task for Presbyterianism. This task I now desire to essay, because mediocrity can blame where genius fails to give discriminate praise. If the attempt should provoke attention so as to result in your independent, more able and more influential consideration of the flaws in modern Presbyterianism my object will have been gained.

*The text brings flaws to light.*

Those flaws prove sensitive to the probe furnished by the text: preaching to the poor gives, not a flattering, but an effective centennial test of Presbyterianism. Christ himself declares it the climax of evidence to the credibility of his claim to be the one sent from God; it bears as important relation to the faithfulness of any church in its divine mission. Argument that Presbyterianism to-day fails before this test, would be waste of ink; the fact stares us to shame. Judged by the fruit of preaching to the poor, the single church which evinces faithfulness is the Roman Catholic.

*Unfaithfulness to the poor a modern evil;*

Although coming into view as the poor man's sect, Presbyterianism now hastens toward a comet's aphelion from him. Unlettered day-laborers, this age of steam, are better off for physical comforts and intellectual provender than the mass of those whose stubbornness for ideas and conscience and God drove the stakes of our church, three hundred years ago, in a martyr's

fire at home or in an exile's wilderness on these bleak coasts. The similar class to-day, if by disposition independent, roam the streets or hills, uninvited by the Gospel; if religiously dependent, they go to mass, yet almost equally strangers to the Good News. Presbyterianism having lifted the second generation above their fathers, in prosperity and intelligence, rises itself with each succeeding generation further from the ignorance and dirt of real poverty; or, rather, its swelling roots spread along just under the pushed-up surface, without striking downward. This sort of growth always topples in the storm. And yet the unreached poor offer to the church a richer soil than prairie loam. For what is called "the lower classes" seems to have no lowest. As culture and religion raise one strata after another, a deeper remains; and, unlike Harlequin's many coats, one cannot think of a last removed to show day-light on the other side. Stretch up one end of a rubber cord till the attenuated thread seems ready to snap in two, and still the end held fast to the ground keeps thick; so the thickness of the poor, whose continued presence in the world the Saviour predicted, scarcely diminishes. Besides, society forces physical poverty into close companionship with moral poverty. To this association Jesus owed his title of "poor man's friend." He mingled with the hungry and naked and silly, because he went to the bottom after degrading vice cute enough to indulge greed and lust, making himself, according to the gospel of the Pharisees, "a friend of publicans and har-

*while the duty of the Church appears in their numbers,*

*and condition.*

lots," and "eating with sinners." Therefore, the special wards of the church are not merely the wretched poor, but the wicked poor.

*Prime cause of failure to reach the poor:*

DECLINE OF CALVINISM.

The prime cause of the failure of Presbyterianism to reach these poor, is the decline of distinctive Calvinism in its pulpits. Evidence of this decline offers in plenty; there is opportunity now simply to indicate its nature. As a rule, theological writings of even the last century bristle with Calvin's "points;" their absence marks the similar works of to-day. Note, also, the surprise at the success of celebrated preachers, who still, like rare echoes from the past, make prominent the fundamental doctrines: Then question both pulpits and pews to learn their mutual ignorance in the Shorter Catechism. I may appeal to your own observation and practice: your ordination vows assented to the Calvinistic system, but how much do man's depravity and God's sovereignty fill your own thoughts and your people's ears?

*On the one hand, its compensation valuable,*

Gain in one direction, it is true, goes far to compensate for loss in another. Allopathic dogma has given place to sweetly infinitesimal doctrine. The great Light that burst upon the world to reveal escape from the horribleness of sin, which its glare made apparent, when turned off permits free use of artistic side-lights, to point the beauties of the shifting scenes in the heavenly vista. Refrain from exposing the need of a Saviour, and, of course, there is more time to descant important but smoother things. No doubt historical and exegetical research; analysis and comparison



of creeds; word painting of sacred localities and characters; timely exposure of social evils and hot advocacy of popular reforms, aptly humorous or denunciatory, discoursed mainly to the people, serve a desired end in preparing them for the Gospel, both in belief and in life. No doubt Christ is preached more to-day as a person—a loving, helping, sympathising, divine-human Friend: here is incalculable gain. No doubt exhortation to accept his love is more frequent, because warning to flee the wrath to come is omitted. Perhaps a need existed for holding out the universal offer of salvation, to the exclusion of the truth of man's inability to "ways that make for righteousness," which used to be so commonly heard. A certain good has resulted from this labor over the twigs and flowers of theology, to the neglect of its roots. Evil, however, already appears. Many even now demand a new reading of the old parable. They will have it that not God but the sinner has been sinned against. With not a few, it is the father, who, feeding on the swine's husks, comes to himself and pleads for a servant's place in the home where the prodigal riots at pleasure and by right. Nor can we blame them for the notion, since a perpetual and exclusive urging to accept the offer of God's love makes him a beggar for men in sin, not from sin. Consequently, the skepticism of the age denies the fundamentals of faith—the sovereignty of God and the dependence of man; while simple truth, elaborated into philosophy, invites the poor

*but not adequate to the times.*

man to a religious feast in vain, because he lacks the requisite cultured hunger.

*On the other hand, its neglect blunts the motive to obey the text;*

This neglect of distinctive Calvinism destroys the motive of Presbyterianism to carry the Gospel to the poor. Ideas shape affairs. Equality came to view when the light of Genevan reformation displayed, without magnifying, God's absolute sovereignty, man's total depravity. No one can be better than another, if all are "dead"

*because Calvinism alone, with its republican theory, opens the church to the poor:*

on account of sin. Contemplating human hopelessness, except as the object of divine, unmerited favor, discovered the rock of civil liberty.

The assertion in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal," draws its truth only from the dogma that "all are born under condemnation:" America's glory is the fruit on

*proved by its principles,*

the graft of Calvin's first point. The brotherhood of mankind received emphatic recognition when The Institutes proclaimed to ready listeners the old Pauline truth, that infinite grace alone saves, and offers pardon on identical terms to both the Pharisee and "the chief of sinners," to Dives and to Lazarus. Predestination cut at the roots of feudal caste. Says Bancroft: "Did a proud aristocracy trace its lineage through generations of a high-born ancestry, the republican reformer, with a loftier pride, invaded the invisible world, and from the book of life brought down the record of the noblest enfranchisement, decreed from all eternity by the King of kings." Calvinism contrasts man with God, Creator and Saviour; every other system of religious philosophy, down through Pelagianism to heathen Pantheism and

cultured Atheism, contrasts him with himself: under the former "there is no difference;" under the latter, one has ability and merit more than another.

The practical side of this truth appears in the remarkable fact that every church whose theology <sup>by its political affinities,</sup> is not strictly Calvinistic has an anti-republican polity. Even mild Arminianism, whether seen predominant in the church of Wesley or of Henry VIII, clasps hands with an autocratic bishop or presiding elder. It is not surprising, then, that the Presbyterian and Calvinistic Baptist denominations should together number nearly one-half of all the church-going people in this republican country. And it was to be expected that the Baptists should draw ahead of the Presbyterians in the last fifty years. For, more democratic in polity, their proportionately more rapid increase has naturally been coincident with the democratic impulse which in the same period successfully revolted against the old Federalists, and procured changes in the constitution of nearly every state. With the political reaction toward more purely republican principles already set in, even brighter prospects open before Presbyterianism than glow in the reflecting clouds of the past. But in order to utilise our opportunities, we must, as a church and as individuals, drink energy at the old fount of Calvinism. The church must show itself to be in reality a church for the people. The spring that bubbles limpid and pure up through the bottom sands, clarifies the pool; the clearest rill that only skims the surface lets

slimy ooze collect below. To be true to its great doctrines, Presbyterianism must offer not only a refuge, but a home, with equal rights, and not a patronising, but a brotherly, sympathy within it, to the unfortunate of the race. The glory of the early past is that our church recognised this responsibility both in dogma and in life. Preaching the Gospel of Him who has no respect of persons, it lifted the generations out of mediæval ignorance and serfdom to the intelligence and freedom of citizens in such a Republic as our own.

*by its ex-  
ceptions,*

It may be said, however, that the present strength of Romanism, Methodism, and Episcopacy disproves the assertion that the republican door of its theology measures the capacity of a church to receive the people into its fold. But other distinctive features sufficiently account for these apparent exceptions. Rome's mummery attracts the superstitious, her priestly authority drags the ignorant in the net of tyranny: removal of superstition and ignorance has ever emancipated her religious serfs. Methodism, the apostle of a new departure, gains the majority of her converts by preaching the "theology of the feelings," to the neglect of that of Delft: Calvinism, meanwhile, emphasizing the doctrines of the "new birth through irresistible grace," and "the assurance of faith," provides better ground-work for a "theology of the feelings," if only her teachers were less enamored of mere intellect so as to use their advantage. Episcopacy feeds on the old carnal pride of caste; frugality saved out

of poverty the wealth which the descendants of Puritans, who now fill her pews, expend to gratify leisurely aesthetics, and dole in charities to the poor they socially ignore: this a degenerate Presbyterianism apes. Looking further, it becomes evident that those churches which propagate alone the republican bud of Calvinism do not succeed in making it affect the mass below the point of grafting: Humanitarianism, whether expounded by a radical Frothingham or by a conservative Bellows, fosters an intellectual exclusiveness, which leaves needy humanity in the cold outside their doors. On the other hand, the Baptists, with a Spurgeon as theologian for the people, attest the adaptability of distinctive Calvinism to all classes, and the equality which it engenders. Moody's career is evidence to the same point.

Their success also exposes the neglect of that system by the church which boasts it as her lineal heritage. That neglect leaves our ministry ignorant of the solemn obligation to preach the "glad tidings" without respect to persons, and content to edify alone, not God's elect, but their own electors. Consequently, our membership, untaught the poor sinner's divine right of equality with the rich in the matter of salvation, not only build churches which practically exclude the poor man, but refuse to treat him as a "neighbor," and to compel him come to the Gospel feast. In a word, Presbyterian preachers, having remanded to dust-covered books those distinctive Calvinistic doctrines which recognise man's equal

*and by the present condition of a large part of the church.*

ity before God, the poor man finds no equality before their pulpits. This year we glory over the intelligence and wealth represented by Presbyterianism: the truth in that boast should send the hot blood to our faces; for when the church of Calvin can no longer be called the poor man's home, it is failing to pronounce—if it is not renouncing—the ideas of Paul and the Gospel of Jesus.

*A secondary cause of the failure to reach the poor:*

A secondary cause of the faults in modern Presbyterianism, revealed by the test of preaching to the poor, is laxity in Presbyterian order.

**LAXITY IN DISCIPLINE,**

Prof. Diman shows\* that denominational growth in our country during the century coincides with thoroughness of denominational discipline. Presbyterianism, indeed, stands well up on the list in this respect; exceptional particulars alone evince its laxity in discipline. The weakness due to these, however, can be properly estimated only by comparison. Methodism, from an insignificant organisation at the beginning of the century, now heads the list of religious denominations in the country. Romanism and Episcopacy have, of late, made proportionately larger advances than Presbyterianism. In all three legitimate authority has been more strict than with us.

*Main elements of efficiency in our polity:*

Theoretically there is no allowance for this result. We need concede to no church the possession of an order of government more efficient and equable than our own; our practice has simply

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\* North Amer. Rev., Jan., 1876.



come short of our standards. For the element in Presbyterianism, which makes its polity just less than purely republican, after all gives a stability and an executive power to its order, of which England furnishes the best parallel among nations. A Presbytery consists of two parts, distinct in kind, acting as one body, like brain and brawn in man; a ministerial oligarchy and a representative eldership. The first factor, conservative because permanent, guards divine principles and tends to thorough execution; the second factor, radical because changeable, guards popular interests, and tends to practical measures: both in one combine the qualities and the means to beneficently effective discipline. Still further, a Presbytery so composed is the fountain of power in the church. Calvin with most of the Reformers, it is true, maintained the validity of lay inauguration of sacramental and ecclesiastical functions; but only in solitary exceptions, and as possibilities rather than probabilities. As in some plants, a new species, though originating in a solitary seed, can propagate its kind only by cuttings from the developed plant; so Presbytery, once formed, contains the sole resources for further Presbyterial growth. This truth appears in the fact that Presbytery alone may organise churches, license and ordain a ministry, move and effect changes in the constitutional system of doctrine or government. National and provincial as well as sectional courts are included in this system; but the powers of the two former, far from being original,

*composition,*

*and original jurisdiction of Presbytery.*

are delegated from the latter for the sake of convenience and unity.

*Natural tendencies to weakness,*

But as the republican idea revolves through the cycle of generations it continually suffers from a centrifugal force; individual despotism limits the tangent in one direction, communistic anarchy in the other. Naturally, Presbyterianism shows the same divergent tendencies to disintegration; the offshoots at the nearest points on opposite sides bear the harmless names of Episcopacy and Congregationalism. Strictness of discipline affords

*counteracted by watchful discipline;*

the only centripetal restraints on these inherent elements of weakness; just as civil liberty is but the resultant of a wise application of checks on corresponding forces in the state. That Presbytery may be watchful to apply its constitutional checks against the tendencies to prelacy and independency there is need of boldly recognising the faults which weaken its discipline. Although at present such faults may seem so insignificant as to indicate a harmless laxity it is neither hypercritical nor unwise to expose them. Magnifying little evils for the sake of great principles at stake has ushered in many a mighty reform and revolution. The Londoner quietly paid four times the tax for which the colonist upset his tea into Boston harbor: the evolution of that mouse into the biggest sort of elephant justifies the mountainous labor at the birth.

*hence, propriety of exposing present faults.*

Here again preaching to the poor effectively tests the weak sinews in our polity. The faults exposed may be considered as affecting the church

*Here also text tests our weakness:*

first in its General and then in its Particular Government.

Without amplification it stands evident that the General Government, through the administration of its Boards and Committees, aims mainly to supply the poor with the Gospel. Two questions then obtrude themselves: what result does the present method of carrying out this aim show? and is that method constitutional?

FIRST, IN GENERAL GOVERNMENT; the policy of the Assembly's Boards and Committees tested by its aim,

No doubt grand results may be trumpeted; immense sums contributed, an army of preachers commissioned, scores of churches erected every month, and multitudes not only made listeners but also converts to the Gospel. But the boastful enumeration of these items establishes nothing for the value of the method until we hear also, on the one hand, how much the circumstances of the times have favored this result; and, on the other, whether other methods have done better under the same circumstances. As a fact the times have been most favorable to the beneficent operations of the church. For more than half a century and down to within five years, the increase of the country in wealth has struck the world with astonishment. The worst method might win laurels in such a period. And yet it is also a fact that comparatively we have lost ground. The Methodists and Baptists and Roman Catholics, even the Episcopalians, occupy many a field in these eastern states once cultivated alone or most efficiently by the Presbyterian church. On the frontier other denominations push their outposts further in advance, and establish them more securely

by favorable circumstances,

by comparison with other methods,

*by actual condition of poor churches in many Presbyteries,*

than ours. The traveler west of the Mississippi needs but poor eyes to see the truth of this latter statement. For the former, our own Presbytery is more than a fair average to judge from. What comparative advance for the church has our general beneficent administration accomplished here? In the country our churches close their doors or beg louder every year from the various Boards, because, forsooth, the wealth of the farms flows into the cities; while the poverty that takes its place gets the Gospel, if at all, from a church which administers its affairs more thoroughly. In the cities, the poor, when not equally neglected, are cared for by introducing a most pernicious policy of the fifth century. Tested by its main purpose, viewed under the light of favorable circumstances, by comparison with other methods, and by actual results, I do not hesitate to assert that the administration of our Boards and Committees is a failure.

is (1) A FAILURE.

*That policy is also (2), UNCONSTITUTIONAL,*

The answer to the second question proposed a moment ago accounts for this failure. The method is unconstitutional and subversive of discipline. Nominally acting through the Presbyteries, all the Boards and Committees are practically autocratic. Be it church or student, missionary, colporteur, or ministers' widow; in Delaware or Oregon or India, each is directly responsible, so far as dependent, to the respective Secretary. The Presbyterial relation is secondary if not ignored: and nominalism in philosophy, a shadow; in character, hypocrisy; in government is a dry rot.

*because infringing on Presbyterial jurisdiction.*

Precedent, to be sure, may be found for this direct control of the church at large over the subjects of Presbytery. But that precedent lodges such power in a high commission, possessing all the prerogatives of the body creating it, without review. This feature, I believe, is still prominent in the Scotch church; it played an important part in the first half century of Presbyterianism in this country. A Synodical commission not only exercised all the functions of Synod during the intervals of regular meetings, but frequently began and ended proceedings against particular churches, thus usurping the prerogatives of Presbytery. The custom, however, was incongruous in American Presbyterianism, and did not survive the adoption of the present constitution. If in place anywhere now we might expect to find the commission in Presbytery; but you know how every attempt to make use of it here, even for ordination and trial, is successfully resisted. For years the effort has been strong in Assembly to erect a judicial commission, with full powers; defeat, however, continues to be its fate. Only when both parties voluntarily consent can an appeal be adjudicated by commission without review; but the element of mutual consent in these makes them not properly judicial, but extra arbitration cases. The Continental commission finds no legitimate place in the idea which shapes the American church: akin to the bureaucratic administration of a monarchy or empire, it disappeared from our Standards with

*"Synodical commission" the only precedent that can be cited,*

*but this finds no place in the theory of the American church now.*

the old teaching concerning the "civil magistrates."

*Yet present policy tends to usurp commission powers; e. g.*

But if the principle is outlawed the practice should be outrooted: when the powers of a commission, coupled with the name, are denied, the jurisdiction without the name should not be tolerated. And yet the reverse is fast becoming the status of the Assembly's Boards and Committees. A study of the growth of their powers reveals the drift. Created at first as auxiliaries to the weaker parts of the church, their subjection to Presbytery was carefully defined; now, while as many words in their charters declare the same subjection, many more have extended their authority until the strongest Presbytery must go on its knees to them and beg for favors. For example, the Board of Education originally received from the churches, only (I quote from the Digest, page 354) "the surplus funds [of Presbyteries and Societies] which shall not be necessary for the accommodation of those immediately depending on them for support," and acted as a general agent in raising money and reporting the work of education throughout the church. The early history of this cause is brilliant for the results accomplished: to-day, with the cause in dispute, Presbytery may obtain the privilege of paying the bills of its own candidates only after much red-tape and as an unmerited favor. Requests for this same privilege from the Board of Home Missions meet with nothing but flat refusal or polite snubbing. Yes, it has come to this, that a Presbytery may not apply the Home Mission

BOARD OF  
EDUCATION,

BOARD OF  
HOME  
MISSIONS,



funds, raised by its own churches, directly to its own needs. It is well known, also, that the Foreign Board not only refuses to receive contributions for objects that have not its indorsement, although a foreign Presbytery may be unanimously appealing for them, but it undertakes to order the members of Presbyteries from one place to another, without reference to the wishes of those Presbyteries. To the same piece of bureancratic administration, as a logical corollary, belongs that resolution rushed through the Assembly of 1875, which forbade churches to report, except as miscellaneous, any sums for beneficence not sent to the Treasurers of the Boards. Whatever its intention and parentage, that rule was in effect a direct blow at Presbyterian work and authority, in the interest of enlarged powers for the Boards.

BOARD OF  
FOREIGN  
MISSIONS,

*Rule of  
Assembly  
of 1875 re-  
specting  
contribu-  
tions.*

These indications of the tendency to commissional government practically appearing in the administration of the General Beneficence, show that the same influences have been at work in the church as in the nation: centralisation has made alarming development. The monstrous evils inherent in that policy warn us now to raise the cry of State Rights in the one, and Presbyterian Rights in the other. For in the church centralisation subverts discipline by gendering the natural elements of weakness. One of these, the tendency to prelacy, appears in the almost absolute control which the perpetual Boards exercise over the changing Assemblies. Besides the trained lobby interest brought to bear in their

*Centralisa-  
tion at the  
root of this  
unconstitu-  
tional  
policy*

*fosters, on  
the one  
hand, the  
inherent  
tendency to  
prelacy;*

favor, letters, sent “where they will do the most good,” prevent the election of delegates counted inimical to the policy of the Boards. The Board of Publication, for instance, during several years has succeeded in staving off an investigation of its accounts. An audit by a committee of respectable names after all may not be trustworthy; one cannot forget the Astor & Co. indorsement of Controller Connolly’s Ring accounts. Then, too, objection made on principle to the policy of the Boards is hurled back as if it was a personal attack upon the Secretaries; the clans gather to defend their personal integrity and industry, while the whip cracks all the sharper over those who dare to criticise. But must I always sail in a leaky boat, and never complain of the dampness, because the pilot pays for his washing and sleeps only five hours out of the twenty-four? Around this personal favoritism the power has historically centered that concealed dangers to both state and church, and, at last, carried Cæsars and Cæsar Borgias into autocratic office. On this side, then, centralisation creates powerful rings in the church, which gradually assume control of its general legislation, and treat personal interests as of more importance than ecclesiastical principles.

*on the other  
hand, the  
tendency to  
independ-  
ency.*

On the other side, centralisation destroys discipline by fostering independence of Presbytery among its subjects. I need not enlarge on an evil already so patent. The Boards, not the Presbytery, commission the missionary; the aid-receiving church or student reports formally, not

to the Presbytery, but to the Board. Presbyterial indorsement, indeed, must be obtained at intervals; but in all business the indorser occupies the position of a convenience and guarantee, not of a principal to whom obligation must be rendered. Presbytery thus takes all the risks and practically surrenders direct control over its own subjects to an outside Board. Beneficiaries of all classes pay first allegiance to the Boards; second to the Presbytery. They cannot serve two masters, and so service goes, as all the world over, to the one that dispenses the bread and butter.

If good were gained, expediency might be urged as an offset to unconstitutionally; but the very aim of the Boards is defeated. Common sense would predict it preposterous in this country of township freedom to expect a few Secretaries to cultivate personally the great field of beneficence with thoroughness; failure is no discredit to them. And we have no right to remain blind and supine to the fact that, in our Presbytery for example, this centralising policy lets the rural churches grow weaker every year, and does absolutely nothing for the poor of either country or city; while the indirect effect of the policy has already played sad havoc with the original powers of the Presbytery over subjects not beneficiaries. In truth, it is equally as inexpedient as unconstitutional to give general Secretaries and Boards direct control and authority to any degree over the individual subjects of Presbytery, whether persons or churches.

Where, then, is the remedy? Simply in the

*Expedi-  
ency can-  
not be  
urged as  
an off-set.*

*The remedy suggested by "Assembly's tax."*

reverse of the present practice; make the Boards practically what alone they can be constitutionally, auxiliaries to the Presbytery, not to the individual subjects of Presbytery. The item of the Assembly's tax reveals the legitimate solution of the difficulty. That tax meets not only the expenses of Assembly but also of Synods and Presbyteries. But if the paying churches and anxious creditors were brought into direct relation with the general Treasurer, the matter would not be so effectively managed as now. This efficiency is wholly due to the Presbyterian responsibility in collecting and disbursing the amount. In the same way let the Presbytery receive the beneficent funds from its churches, the collections remaining in number and name as at present, and have sole charge of their disbursement. The sums collected for foreign missions should then be turned over at once to that Board. From all the other collections the Presbytery should send only the surplus, after supplying its own needs, to the general Treasurer.

*Advantages of the change.*

Is it said? "Then the weaker Presbyteries must suffer together with the beneficence and advance of the church at large." I reply, by no means, for two sufficient reasons. First, every Presbytery will have a stronger motive than at present for stimulating the beneficent collections of its own churches, and the receipts, therefore, should be larger. And, second, not only the independence, but in the same degree the rapid growth of the weaker Presbyteries will be promoted by thus giving to Presbytery, and not to a general Secretary, the disbursement of its allotment from the gene-

ral fund. This would be constitutional, and also bring the effective policy of concentration into exercise, in place of the weakening one of centralisation. Other advantages, for lack of time, may only be hinted. The Secretaries would not be legislated out of office, for agents will be needed to keep the church alive to the various distant needs and to tabulate reports of Presbyterian work. But concentration would lessen the expense of much clerk-hire, now necessary. Besides, one Treasurer could do all the work required, of the present six, if his accounts were with the Presbyteries, and not with persons and churches. A Synodical committee in each Assembly could apportion the surplus for the year among the needy Presbyteries: the Secretaries, or agents, would be left free to a ministering work, rather than loaded with the Episcopal labor which they now attempt.

Your patience has been already so egregiously taxed that I shall but touch upon a few of the evils in our Particular Government revealed by the test of preaching to the poor. By Particular Government is meant the discipline of Presbytery over its subjects. Laxity in the former case endangered Presbyterian sovereignty from a prelatial usurpation and indirectly fostered independency among the churches; laxity in this case paves the way for Congregational irresponsibility and so indirectly allows the entrance of diocesan rule.

SECOND, IN  
PARTICU-  
LAR GOV-  
ERNMENT.

So far as government goes, loyalty to Presby-

*Authority  
and Au-  
tonomy of  
Presbytery,*

tery is the member's first duty, not only on account of vows taken, but, back of these, on account of the basal idea of this court. If needed, the individual must be sacrificed for the public good, because not only the welfare but the very existence of the member depends on the existence and welfare of the body. Destroy Synods and Assembly; still Presbyterianism might fill the land: but expunge Presbytery, and neither church nor minister could be found with the right to the name. The solitary independent Presbyterian congregation is as false in name as absurd in theory: congregational or ministerial independence is the antipodal contradiction of Presbyterianism.

*with its two  
classes of  
subjects,*

The subjects of Presbytery fall into two classes: persons, covering the whole ministry; and corporations, represented by the eldership. If it would be faithful in preaching to the poor, Presbytery must employ its sovereign authority over both classes to this end. It has the right to say to its ministers: Go here, or go there; to its churches: Do this, or refrain from that. Disobedience is disloyalty, heresy, schism. Yet brought to the test of my text, what appears as the actual exercise of this power? Where does the Presbytery make use of its legitimate prerogatives to send its subjects out into the highways and hedges to compel the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind come to the feast of the Lord?

*tested by  
the text.*

*Some evils  
that follow  
laxity in  
control,  
(1), of per-  
sons;*

Enumerate for yourselves the evils arising from laxity as affecting the personal subjects of Presbytery. The poor remain in darkness, while



unemployed ministers scintillate on self-chosen spots, or continue in leisurely eclipse. A tried, gray-haired "W. C." begs for a charge, and, his elective affinity undiscovered, Presbytery lets him peddle books for a livelihood. Sometimes, indeed, the suggestion comes to put beneficiaries at work which others avoid; but, though I may never have cost the church a dime, Presbytery possesses as unquestionable right to my obedient service, where it will, as to that of him who has been a life-long recipient of its funds. Presbyterian parity admits no Pecksniffian order of Pharisees.

Among the evils disclosed by the text, and springing from loose control by Presbytery over its corporate subjects, time permits but a hint at two. First appears that much-be-praised device to reach the so-called "masses," the metropolitan mission chapel. The question last month forced on the attention of Assembly, respecting the ecclesiastical status of the preachers in these chapels, pointed toward the real heresy in their establishment. By just such initial steps rose the first metropolitan cathedral and diocese. Presbytery cannot afford, at this day, to aim at a good end through this pernicious system, against which its early history records most valiant protest, and so long as legitimate means exist in its own polity. That they do the Presbyteries of Albany, Baltimore and Troy, for example, have given most noble instance. In them are churches the justly-proud mothers of many fair and independent

(2), of churches :

a, The seed of Episcopacy;

daughter-churches, not the despotic and aristocratic owners of illegitimate slave-chapels.

*b, Costly churches and church debts.*

The second evil mentionable now is the worldly policy which builds costly churches for the rich alone, and pretends to dedicate to God edifices that are mortgaged to Dives: Lazarus wont take his rags into either. Presbytery has the right to prevent these evils if it would preach the gospel to the poor. But it is said: "Would you refuse to erect those temples which honor God by their expensive magnificence and give architectural beauty to our cities? Cheap churches are mean buildings; wealth will seek another denomination: then what becomes of your beneficence? Would you snap the sinews of missions? The Master's glory bids you treat the matter as a question of expediency, if not of religious sentiment." People who applauded the sentimental plea 'for groined naves and gorgeous domes under which to worship the Creator on his footstool,' as urged recently by an ex-Governor, probably forgot that the writer was the father of a son who aspires to the Episcopal chair of the wealthiest diocese in the country, and is himself Treasurer of its funds, extremely desirous of connecting his name with a magnificent cathedral yet to be built. Sentimentalism sometimes blows the pathetic pipes for supreme selfishness. Presbyterianism was not born in a cathedral: it does not need them now to live.

*The sentimental plea.*

*The Mammon plea.*

Nor will the plea for the extension of God's kingdom hold. The church has ever come to grief in the attempt to serve God by worshiping

mammon on the plea of missions. Rome's whole races of converts saved her not from the fate deserved for paying homage to the golden calf of the world on pretense of advancing the Lord's cause. I believe in missions heartily and pocketly, but not at sacrifice of Christ's honor: give millions to evangelize the heathen, but make the givers Christians too. The matter must not be touched by the smothering robe of expediency: robust sincerity keeps warm without it; expediency usually cloaks a thin, sinuous duplicity.

The true question is: what does God say? We *The Bible answer.* read\*: "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons. . . . If ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For [and right here comes in that "for" which we like better to employ in other connections,] whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If God teaches that, then we are bound to obey despite every excuse of expediency, and though obedience should cut us off from the affection of father or mother or sister or brother, for he who loveth these more than Christ is not worthy of the Crucified. Yes, if need be to reach the poor of this world whom "God hath chosen rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him," would that Presbytery might exert its rightful power and disown the religious club-houses, where the poor man is bade stand in a corner or sit in the gallery, or, more coldly, in-

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\*James II. 1, 9, 10.

vited to move on to the place provided for him in the back street chapel. A contemptible spectacle this: a church boasting the Puritan cut of its customs, yet snobbishly dressed to conceal that feature, and toadying to the gold-ring wearer. Class distinction in this country rests on money: with St. James' Epistle in our "rule of faith and practice" we still lack the whip-cords of the Nazarene, incensed for purity of worship, to drive that distinction out of our churches.

*A suggested  
remedy.*

A letter in a New York daily paper signed "E. R. C., Newark, N. J.," suggests as the true remedy for these evils a return to the old parish responsibility. Persons now attach themselves to whatever church pleases them. The writer would have this custom of elective affinity in determining the membership of a particular church broken up, since it produces class churches; he would have only those living in a certain district, rich and poor together, collect in the church. Without attempting such an impracticable departure, Presbytery may enforce the parish spirit into its churches. We pastors may be held strictly responsible to Presbytery for two things to this end: first, personal attention to the neglected poor within our parish bounds; and second, the teaching of such distinctive Calvinism as shall prepare our people to welcome the poor our own labors may gather, and stimulate them to gather more.

*Revival of  
an old  
"gift"  
points to an  
additional  
means.*

Besides the regular exercise of the powers of Presbytery, the times suggest one other means to obey the text. In the providence of God the evangelistic, or more properly, the prophetic

charism, of the early church, appears again to-day. By recognising the persons so endowed and commissioning them, as evangelists or elders, for general work among those whom the churches fail to reach, Presbytery will be not only moving within its proper sphere, but using the Lord's special agents for his chosen work—the saving of sinners whose repentance gives joy in the presence of the angels of God.

As remarked at the beginning, the test of preaching to the poor does not flatter modern Presbyterianism. Perhaps the evils seem to you to have been disproportionately magnified. But I have admitted a great degree of purity in doctrine and discipline: the progress of the church in the century could not have been so great were it otherwise. I have admitted that the existing flaws are exceptional: upon the surface, apparently harmless. They have purposely been painted in high colors so as to provoke attention. For a tiny pimple may hide a malignant pustule: the stupendous error built on the power of the keys given Peter almost passes comprehension. Although seemingly unimportant, the faults in Presbyterianism which make our church to-day, if not antagonistic, yet far from faithful, to the poor, are real evils—evil in principle and idea; sure to breed monstrous defects unless corrected. To counteract them I plead with you for more distinct and emphatic utterance of our fundamental belief; for more strict adherence to the spirit of our discipline. These are not new, un-

*Conclusion: the evils, exceptional, have been highly colored,*

*because extremely dangerous;*

*while remedies proposed are old, tried, and should inspire enthusiastic devotion;*

tried remedies. They rescued our fathers from the corruptions of Rome. The wisdom of the past, the intelligence of the present commend them. History testifies to their efficiency, while association with names that thrill us begets enthusiasm for Calvinism and Presbyterianism. The solemn ordination vows of allegiance should instill us with the crusader's devotion in this cause with these weapons. That cause is the Saviour's service. Behold, in the devotion rendered to the least of his brethren, he himself is served. The poor of this world are dear to the heart of him who was cradled on the rude manger of Bethlehem; who had no place where to lay his head; who, though rich, yet for our sake became poor, even to the loss of his own life, that we might be made rich. Shall we not make an effort to give this proof of our faithfulness in his service, as it was his chief evidence of divine mission on earth?

*especially  
as the cause  
is pre-emi-  
nently the  
Saviour's  
service.*

*Let our  
Presbytery  
set the ex-  
ample.*

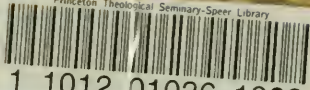
Do you say: "The task falls upon the whole church; we are too few, too feeble, to influence the great body." But our Presbytery has made itself felt: it gave the "Plan of Union" which resulted in disunion; it gave the first Moderator to the reunited church. Here is a grander task before us; by example, in loyalty to truth and constitutional order, to give unto the whole church this Christ-like evidence of faithfulness:—the poor *shall* have the Gospel preached to them.



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