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I. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SEMINARY CURRICULUM.¹

I AM disposed to look upon the subject the discussion of which I have been asked to open, as a practical rather than as a purely theoretical one. One result of this mode of looking at it will be that we shall approach it from the point of view of our existing institutions, and ask, not what is the ideal curriculum for theological study, but what is the ideal and what the practicable curriculum for such institutions as our theological seminaries actually are.

The fundamental facts here, I take it, are three.

(1), Our theological seminaries are not the theological departments of universities, but training schools for the Christian ministry. That is to say, the object they set before themselves is fundamentally a practical one. They do not exist primarily in order to advance theological learning, but in order to impart theological instruction; their first object is not investigation, but communication; and they call their students to them, not that these may explore the unknown, but that they may learn the known in the sphere of theological truth. They do not exist primarily, again, in order to place in reach of all who may be interested in theological thought facilities for acquiring information concerning whatever department of theological learning each inquirer may for the moment desire to give his attention to; but in order that they may provide for a select body of young men, who

¹ A paper read before the "General Association of the Professors of the Theological Seminaries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," June 3, 1896.

III. THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD.

IT has been well said by Thomas Carlyle in his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, that "a man's religion is the chief fact in regard to him. Of man, or a nation, we inquire, therefore, first of all, what religion they had." As there is, and ever has been, but "one living God," all the rest being dead, this religion is readily found by differentiation from multiform paganism. This leaves us Christianity with its variations, and Islamism, which is a violent protest against the corruption of the Syrian bishops. None of these can claim a monopoly of religion. They all bring us to God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only living and true God. Jeremy Taylor and Augustine, Spurgeon and John Bunyan, Pascal, Quesnel, and Thomas á Kempis belonged to the church of the living God, though in different communions. Protestantism, also, is protean, yet all of its variations claim origin from the same source and authority for their distinctive features in the same Scriptures. Of the many shapes assumed by corporations of Christian people, there must be one that conforms more closely to the outline given in these writings than do the others, and that receives the largest patronage of individual Christians. This, if found, may be accepted as more authoritative over the sanctified conscience, and more helpful in developing a godly character and godly seed, than any other.

The spiritual and invisible gives origin to all things, and supports them. Matter is secondary to spirit, and is upheld by it. So in the church. The spiritual and invisible body is first in order of time. This is the organizing and life-giving principle. The elect of God, given to the Son by the Father, are they whom he came to call out of the world for "a possession." As the Spirit says in Ephesians i. 10: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated

according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This possession is, or must be, universal "in the fulness of times."

With this idea we start in our search for "the Church of the living God." In order to become visible, this church, unorganized at first, must be organized. And to organization, the following things are necessary, viz.: Outward profession, officers, duties. These duties, which are teaching, ruling, and managing temporal matters, must be permanent and universal. This gives it visibility everywhere, sometimes more and sometimes less, accordingly as the truth is taught in purity and the duties faithfully performed.

All the varieties, though numbered by the hundred, may be classified under three heads: that in which the governing power is vested in one man; that in which the people confer upon a select body this power; and that in which it is retained in the mass. The Lord Jesus dwelling in the midst of the church, as the centre and source of its life and power, supersedes the necessity for any intermediary. The church is, therefore, a theocracy. From him comes all the power to the people. In answer to prayer, he appoints or indicates those whom he wants to rule or teach in his possession over his people for their good and for his glory.

He lodges the power of governing separately to itself, or in combination with that of ruling. This is most clearly taught in 1 Timothy v. 17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." That is, some elders rule only, and others both rule and preach. Their rank is one, but their powers are two. This combination of functions has never been successfully controverted. The ruler is called by two names in Scripture, sometimes by one and sometimes by the other. But the functions are never complicated. In the same chapter we sometimes find the one word used to express the one power, and in close connection another word, used of the same person, to express the other power. In Acts xx. 17, the rulers are called presbyters, and in verse 28, immediately below, they are called bishops. The most eminent scholars, even in the Anglican church, now notoriously admit this,

and some of them go so far as to say that presbytery was the form of government first established in the church, and that episcopacy or prelacy, its offshoot, developed by circumstances in the third century.

If the two words express two different officers, having different powers, then the authority for presbyter or ruler is fifteen times as strong as that for bishop, because used fifteen times oftener to signify this function—the word bishop being used four times and the word presbyter sixty-two. The equivalency of the words is indispensable to perspicuity. Their differentiation would introduce hopeless confusion.

The permanency of this office is unquestioned. The ruler has held his place in the church of the living God in all ages and dispensations. Changes have occurred in her outward form, in her modes of worship, sacraments, names and duties of officers; but the ruler has always been the elder. Strictly speaking, the minister of the word had no place in the Old Testament church. The scribe more nearly resembled him than any other officer. Preaching the gospel, as a means of religious instruction, and for the promotion of religious feeling, was first *formally* instituted by Christ when he said, "Go, preach." Reading the Bible publicly for this purpose seems to have begun with Ezra, the scribe. Priesthood ceased when the great antitype came. The order of Levites ceased when the temple fell. Altars vanished when the veil of the temple was rent in twain. But the ruler has held his place in the church of God from the beginning, and was seen in prophetic vision in the church in glory by the Apostle John. It is, therefore, the one everlasting office in the church of the ever-living God.

The apostles emphasized the fact of their office as elders in the church. "I exhort you, who am also an elder," wrote the Apostle Peter. Though the first called of all the apostles, and very eminent, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed at the resurrection, he yet felt that his office as elder was a subject of cordial self-congratulation. The Apostle John styled himself "the elder unto the elect lady and her children," and "the elder unto the well-beloved Gaius."

While magnifying his office as apostle, he yet prefers to be thought of as a permanent officer in the unchangeable church.

This church of the elders it was that fled from persecution into the fastnesses of the Alps and Appennine mountains, where she nourished an independent life down to the Reformation and our own times. The Reformers throughout Europe adopted it as their church. Only in England, where the Reformation was a secession from Rome, led by King Henry VIII., who was actuated by prudential considerations, personal to himself, was the feature of diocesan episcopacy retained.

It is also true that in our times churches, in which the spiritual oversight is specifically bestowed upon bishops, are adopting our distinctive feature. The "lay element" is now generally admitted into the church councils of the Episcopal and Methodist Churches of Great Britain and her colonies, and of America. The "historic episcopacy" is being modified by necessity. The same necessity is felt in the Baptist or Congregational communion. Spurgeon lavished his praise on the session of the Presbyterian Church, and had associated with himself in the government of his enormous congregation a company of men answering to all intents the purposes of our session.

On the ground of scriptural authority and practical efficiency, the Christian world might more readily confederate in a great spiritual commonwealth, a representative republic, than on diocesan episcopacy. This would be indeed a formidable foe to the absolute monarchy of Rome, and popular with the world. When "the torch of liberty" is enlightening the world as to the true and best form of civil administration, the Presbyterian Church might well rise to the occasion and do likewise for ecclesiastical administration. We start midway between absolute monarchy and unorganized democracy. Ours is, therefore, the true meeting-point for all "the variations of Protestantism."

Moreover, the flexibility of our system invites this effort. Presbyterianism is capable of indefinite contraction and indefinite expansion. The story of Prince Ahmed and his fairy wife Parabainon, given us in the *Arabian Nights*, well illustrates this idea. In order to ingratiate herself into the good will of her father-in-

law, the Sultan Mirza, who had turned his face away from his son because of his romantic marriage, she wove and sent to him, as a present, a tent of the finest and most elastic material. It was so small when folded that Prince Ahmed carried it in his hand. Yet when he gave it to his father and opened it, the tent spread until it completely covered the Sultan and his family, and, still spreading, it covered his entire army, and he was assured it would spread until it covered an army twice as great as any that he could set in the field. It is literally true that the Presbyterian Church can contract into a single family, as that of Abraham or Chloe, and it can expand until it includes the human race, and govern it without confusion.

This is, therefore, the church most nearly conformed to the pattern given us in the Scriptures, and best adapted to the wants of companies of believers in all the ages. Other churches and their ordinances are valid, though irregular; this is both valid and regular.

Valuable as government is for efficiency in promoting the best interests of both the individual and the mass, it is yet much less important than the saving doctrines of the Bible. "Truth is in order to goodness, and the great touchstone of truth its tendency to promote holiness." We are "born again . . . by the word of God that liveth and abideth forever." We are "made clean through the word."

While Presbyterianism, strictly defined, is that body of professing Christians which is governed by elders, yet there is a sense in which we may use the phrase *Presbyterian doctrine* as well as Presbyterian government. There is a system of doctrine, closely knit, setting forth the true ideas of God, men, and Saviour, which was first developed from the Scripture in its three integral parts, respectively, by Athanasius, Augustine and Calvin. This system has been held by the Presbyterian Church in all her history, and is now held by this church throughout the world. Nor is it merely held as "a form of sound words," a party shibboleth; but it is cordially believed and lived by. It is the "strong meat" on which Presbyterians have ever grown strong in faith and good works.

The starting-point of this system is the fact that God determined to save a people—a definite number of immortal beings—out of this ruined world. To this end he entered into a covenant of redemption with the Son, to whom he gave this people to be saved. Predestination, then, is the first fact, and the Saviour the second fact, in the Bible. From this point of view the whole Bible is to be studied; for the Bible is an inspired record of the government of God over this world, executing his eternal purpose. Of this elect people our Lord Jesus himself says, “All that the Father hath given to me shall come to me.” For this purpose “he was made head over all things to the church.” As mediatorial king, his reign is absolute and universal. In executing the decree of the Father, all things are done under the sun by him, “by whom are all things and we by him.” Creation, providence and redemption converge to this result. For this the world was made, the seasons revolve, kingdoms and governments rise and fall, wars cease unto the ends of the earth.

The setting up of this church in the wilderness; the completion of the canon of Old Testament Scripture; the incarnation; the descent of the Spirit; the dispersion of the church from Jerusalem into all lands; the calling of the Gentiles; the finishing of Scripture—all these signal events of divine providence are simply waymarks “in the course of human events,” showing how the eternal purpose of God in election is executed.

This is the thread by which we make our way through the labyrinth of Scripture. The “progress of doctrine,” both in the Old and New Testaments, cannot be seen except in the light of this fact. The law makes way for the prophets, and the prophets for Messiah and his church. The last book in the Bible, written after the church had been established, and forty years after Messiah had ascended, whose text is in these words, “Come up hither, and I will shew thee the things which must be hereafter,” is history written in advance, an outline of “the things,” symbolically stated, which were to precede his second coming. And so we see how it is that the purpose of God, according to election, is made to stand.

The decree of election is, then, the first link in the golden

chain of redemption, and the starting-point in the career of every soul whom God means to save: "For whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The *εκκλησιοι* become the *κλητοι*, and the *κλητοι* become the *δικαιοι*, and the *δικαιοι* become the *αγιοι*, and the *αγιοι* compose the *εκκλησια*.

This sequence of events in the moral history of each soul, beginning with its being given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, is not only recorded in Scripture, but also realized in the experience of that soul. He knows his election by these events. These are its logical outcome to his own consciousness. Like a chain-shot from a cannon, the one draws the other after it inevitably. This is true of the individual because true of the mass. Effectual calling, justification, adoption and sanctification, are linked to election and stapled in the all-embracing decree or eternal purpose of God. The Holy Spirit abiding in them as the church of the living God imparts to them the power of self-government.

For this system of doctrine the Presbyterian Church feels an intense zeal. Her pulpits give no uncertain sound. In the Roman, Zwinglian, Lutheran, or Episcopal Churches the pulpit is divided between Calvinism and Arminianism. But from the Presbyterian pulpit, whenever the sermon runs along the dividing line between the two opposing systems, we confidently expect to hear something more or less directly connected with—

"Fixed fate, free will and foreknowledge absolute."

Believing that the highest duty of the church, the chief end of her existence, is to keep, as a trustee, and hold forth the word of God, the lamp of life, in all places and through all time, she guards the treasure most sacredly; whenever necessary, contending earnestly for it against all enemies, whether without or within her fold. The church has been a controversialist in all her history, and her sons have ever been in the forefront of the battle between truth and error. She followed "Athanasius against the world," he having been elected to the Patriarchate of Alexandria by the clergy and the people. She followed Augustine against Pelagius, and Knox against the Stuarts. At the sound of this

trumpet call, "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," she has never failed to gird her sword upon her thigh to slay the enemy on the highest places of the field. Knowing this fact, they have been wont at times to avoid this conflict. At the rise of Arminianism in Holland the innovators "sought to hinder the meetings of ordinary synods; and at other times it has been when the safeguards of Presbyterian discussion and discipline have been in abeyance that error has come in and spread." This has been true in a more especial manner of the Presbyterian than of other churches. "Everything connected with the formation of its creed, the admission of its members, the education, license, and teaching of its ministers, and the bearing of its public acts, as affecting the truth of God, is thus matter of public interest and debate, and the ordinary procedure of its courts affords innumerable opportunities of witnessing for truth and resisting defection, such as do not exist under other forms of government." (*First General Presbyterian Council*, p. 55.) So Dr. Briggs, of Union Seminary, New York, and his allies, fearing these safeguards of the truth in the Presbyterian Church, sought to avoid conflict in endeavoring to set aside the supreme authority of Holy Scripture and introduce a new religion. But in vain. A deep sense of the value of the truth and her responsibility for it, as divinely-appointed trustees and guardians, constrained his presbytery to arraign and try him, and his General Assembly to pass sentence of condemnation upon his teachings. Within the last thirty years the Northern Presbyterian Church has disciplined and sentenced many heretics. Faithful and godly men in other churches lament the fact that heretics are tolerated in their midst. This is because either of a lack of unanimity and zeal, or of plain statutory law. This church of the living God is known to be such by fruit in history peculiar to herself.

In conversation some years ago with the Rev. Dr. A. T. Bledsoe, the most notable antagonist of Calvinism in our time, he said, "Though in my younger days a member of one and now of another church, there are three facts in the history of your church for which I admire it more than any other, viz., 'it has given to the world religious liberty, the martyrs, and the best devotional

literature.'” This opinion is well sustained both by authority and by “the cold facts of history.” The pen of Calvin quietly planted the seed which yielded both civil and religious liberty. His *Institutes*, dedicated to King Francis in 1536, had a wonderful circulation. We may not accept as strictly true the statement that it reached one thousand editions in his life-time, yet it certainly was enormous, and exerted great influence in preparing Europe and America for the true theory of human rights.

In the centre of Europe he founded a republic on the four following principles: (1), All power of government flows from the will of the governed—the people *en masse*; (2), This power is properly deputed to rulers chosen by the votes of the people; (3), The exercise of power by the rulers is properly regulated by the will of the people; (4), The church and state in two different corporations, each existing by divine right, each ordained for divine glory, but aiming to attain this end, the one by administering justice, the other by communicating grace. These are the four cardinal principles of Presbyterianism. These ideas revolutionized Western Europe. Geneva, of course, was revolutionized; and from every part of Europe thinking and enterprising men came to study his doctrines, and so applied them that for a century and a half they governed a large part of Europe. The General Synod of France, which met May 25, 1559, epitomized these *Institutes* into a Confession of Faith. In his *Memoirs of the Reformation in France*, p. vii., the Rev. R. Robinson says, “The New Testament was the Goliath’s sword of the clerical reformers; there was none like it.” But he adds on the same page, “Calvin . . . was a chief instrument; he slid his Catechism and other books into France, 1541. . . . *The Reformation was called Calvinism.*”

Knox carried these principles to Scotland and impressed them ineffaceably upon his countrymen, and by them the monarchy of the Stuarts in England was overthrown. Dr. C. Hodge, in his *History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, Vol. I., p. 53, quotes from *Hallam’s Constitutional History of England*, Vol. III., p. 427, as follows: “In the providence of God, it was the struggle of the Scotch for the liberty of their church which

was the means of preserving the liberties of England. Charles had succeeded in governing the latter kingdom for twelve years without a parliament. When the Scotch formed their national covenant, that is, a voluntary agreement to sustain each other in resisting the arbitrary measures of the king, and prepared to oppose force by force, Charles found it absolutely necessary to summon a parliament. The Scotch being in arms in the north, the friends of liberty in the House of Commons were emboldened in their opposition to the court, and entered on that course which soon ended in the overthrow of the monarchy and of the established church."

These principles of Calvin were also received into Holland and inspired that love of liberty, which, after a protracted struggle with Spain, resulted in the Dutch Republic. The English Puritans restated the system of doctrine in the *Institutes* in their *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Now, from these sources flowed the streams of population that settled our country and laid the foundations of our institutions, both civil and religious; because of which fact the historian, Bancroft, called Geneva "the fertile seed-plot of liberty." Motley also, in the preface to his *History of the Dutch Republic*, says, "So much is each individual state but a member of one great commonwealth (international), and so close is the relationship between the whole human family, that it is impossible for a nation, even while struggling for itself, not to acquire something for all mankind. The maintenance of the right by the little provinces of Holland and Zealand in the fourteenth, by the Hollanders and English united in the seventeenth, and by the United States of America in the eighteenth centuries, forms but a single chapter in the great volume of human fate; for the so-called revolutions of Holland, England and America are all links of one chain." And so Calvinism has been powerful, both as a religious and political force.

An agent of the American Tract Society, Rev. Jonathan Lyon, attended a meeting of the Methodist Conference of North Carolina when they were debating the proposition to establish a publication house for their use as a denomination. One of the speakers

objected, urging the fact that they then had excellent religious literature, suitable for devotional purposes, published and sold on good terms by the American Tract Society, and that it would be a misappropriation of money to spend it in building a house they did not need. The argument was answered by saying that while the literature of the Tract Society was good, yet it contained Calvinism in dangerous quantities; as a fact, he asserted that it was full of it, as the cup of coffee he drank for breakfast was full of sugar, every drop of it being sweetened with sugar, which yet could not be seen. His argument prevailed, and the Conference cast its vote in favor of what is now known as the "Methodist Book Concern." Mr. Lyon gave me this fact as his own personal testimony. Nor need we hesitate to agree with the speaker when we remember that the body of that literature was the work of Bunyan, Baxter, Doddridge, James, Wilberforce, Hodge and Alexander, all of whom were Calvinists. The hymn writers, Watts, Toplady, Cowper, Newton, Doddridge, Kirk White, Bonar and others, were Calvinists.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, in a corner of the yard of Old Greyfriar's Church, is a marble slab, colored with age, on which is carved an epitaph in memory of eighteen thousand Presbyterians who were put to death by the Episcopal government for refusing to worship God according to the liturgy of the established church. These all laid down their lives between 1661 and 1688, or in about one-quarter of the century throughout which the persecution raged. The number of those in Scotland, from Patrick Hamilton, who had the honor of being "the first to announce the glad tidings to his countrymen and of sealing them with his blood" (*Life of Knox*, by McCrie, p. 32), greatly exceeded eighteen thousand. Besides these were the countless martyrs among the French Huguenots, the Hollanders, the Alpine Vaudois, the Bohemians, and the Presbyterians whose blood reddened the hills and plains of Europe. The Presbyterian Church has been emphatically a martyr church.

The admiration of Dr. Albert Taylor Bledsoe, author of a *Theodicy*, editor of the *Southern Review*, the greatest champion of Pelagianism of this century (though stoutly denying it himself),

who claimed to have overthrown *Edwards On The Will*, and found a common ground on which Arminians and Calvinists might stand, was well founded.

That which has given to the world religious liberty, the martyrs, and the best devotional literature, may well be called "the chief fact" in regard to a man or nation; and the church that professes and practices this religion is presumably the church of God; and if it has been shown that the Presbyterian Church of which this is true is also, in its internal faith and external form, agreeable to Holy Scripture, have we not attained that which we seek for?

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