

PREFATORY NOTE.

UNDER the general title of Church-Officers are here grouped several monographs by Dr. Thornwell:

1. The first, entitled "*The Call of the Minister*," was, under the title of "*The Christian Pastor*," published in the Southern Presbyterian Review, December, 1847. It discusses especially the question, What are the Elements which evince a Call to the Gospel Ministry?

2. The second, entitled "*The Ruling Elder*," was published in the same Review, June, 1848. As an argument it is intended to prove that, according to the Standards of the Presbyterian Church and the Scriptures, the Ruling Elder is a Presbyter, an integral element of the Presbytery, and his presence necessary to its regular constitution; and that, consequently, he has the right to participate in all strictly Presbyterial acts, and to take part in all the stages of the process by which Ministers of the Word are ordained.

3. The third, entitled "*The Ruling Elder a Presbyter*," was originally published in December, 1843, in the Spirit of the Nineteenth Century, a magazine conducted in Baltimore by Dr. R. J. Breckinridge, and was, therefore, an earlier production than either of the two preceding. It was, in July, 1867, republished in the Southern Presbyterian Review. Its design is to show from the records of the Apostolic and Primitive Church that the Ruling Elder was a Presbyter therein, and was by consequence entitled to impose hands at the ordination of the Minister of the Word.

4. A brief series of Resolutions is appended, in which Dr. Thornwell sets forth the rights of Ruling Elders. It was prepared to be submitted to the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia in the year 1843, at a time when the whole Presbyterian Church in this country was agitated upon the question. But it being the last meeting of that Synod as a united body, its attention was necessarily absorbed in the business of the separation, and he found no time to introduce them.

5. The fifth, entitled "*Presbyterianism and the Eldership*," is a sketch of a sermon first preached September 21, 1856, at the ordination of Ruling Elders Muller, Gaston and McMaster in the Columbia Church, and repeated in 1861 at the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, at the request of Ruling Elders in that city.

CHURCH-OFFICERS.

THE CALL OF THE MINISTER:

BEING A REVIEW

OF BRECKINRIDGE'S CHRISTIAN PASTOR.

DR. BRECKINRIDGE'S pamphlet consists of three separate tracts, all bearing directly upon questions which have been recently agitated in reference to the polity of the Presbyterian Church. The first is a sermon preached at the installation of the Rev. Robert W. Dunlap as pastor of the Presbyterian congregation worshipping in Aisquith street, Baltimore, and was intended, as we learn from its title-page, "to vindicate the Divine calling of the Pastors of the Christian Church, to illustrate the divinely-appointed evidence thereof, and to lift up a warning voice against prevailing errors." The second is a speech, or rather the "substance of an argument on the composition of the Quorum of a Presbytery, delivered in the Synod of Philadelphia, met at Baltimore, on the 20th of October, 1843." And the third is "The substance of an argument," delivered in the same Synod, "on the right of Ruling Elders, when members of Presbytery, to impose hands in the ordination of Ministers of the Word."

To say that these subjects are discussed with ability is only the statement, in another form, that they are discussed by Dr. Breckinridge. Malice itself has never ventured to deny to him the distinction of extraordinary endowments;

Thornwell, James, Henley. ¹⁵*The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*. Vol. 4. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.

It seems to us self-evident that "we have no more warrant"—to use the language of Dr. Breckinridge near the close of his Sermon—"we have no more warrant from God to make a church-government for Him, and in His name, than to make any other part of His religion. It is idle to talk about church government being *jure divino* in its great principles and not in its details, or, as they say, in *the abstract* and not in *the concrete*. The truth is, it is both, for not only are the great principles laid down for us, but the officers and courts are named; the nature and duties of the one, the qualifications, the vocation and powers of the other, are set forth; the relations of all the parts to each other and to the whole are precisely set forth. A government in general, the kind of government in particular, the officers and courts in special, their duties and powers in detail—this is what God has set before us, by revelation, for the Christian Church." These views, we insist upon it, are just, but whether just or false, they are views which have always characterized the Presbyterian Church, and which are distinctly and in different forms of statement inculcated in our Standards. We have undertaken in our Formularies to make nothing, to create nothing: we have simply *declared* what the Word of the Lord reveals. We have given the result of our interpretations of Scripture, both in reference to order and doctrine; and our Presbyterian polity is placed upon the same foundation with our system of evangelic truth. We might as well say that no scheme of doctrine is plainly revealed in the Scriptures because learned and good men differ in their views of what is enjoined, as to say that no plan of government is commanded because there is a diversity of opinions upon this point also. Socinians cannot find the Sonship of Christ in the Bible, but what Presbyterian doubts it is there? Arminians cannot find the sovereignty of God in election and reprobation, but what Calvinist hesitates to affirm that it is not only there, but plainly there? And so Prelatists and Congregationalists may be unable to detect the ele-

ments of Presbytery, but yet they may be there, obscure to nothing but the eye of prejudice.

We have dwelt, at disproportionate length, upon this point, because we are apprehensive that a disposition prevails in some quarters to relinquish the ground which our Church has heretofore uniformly held. We dread the consequences of surrendering the *jus divinum Presbyterii*. The power of our system has never been effectually tried, and its full strength can never be developed until our people shall be brought to feel that it is an institute of God. As long as we hesitate to trust it, or rather to trust in the Almighty Saviour who appointed it, we shall not be permitted to do valiantly for our Master and His cause. "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

Having defined the general relation of the pastoral and all other offices to the people of God, and deduced the inference which obviously follows from the true statement of the case, Dr. Breckinridge proceeds to the immediate subject of his Sermon—the nature and evidence of a call to the ministry of the Word. He first exposes the futility of the three prominent theories to which almost every form of error upon this great subject may be ultimately reduced. All pretensions which are not founded upon a real call of God, properly authenticated according to the provisions of His Word, must either claim to be extraordinary, and then extraordinary evidence should be produced; or, they rest upon a perpetual succession which has transmitted the rights and properties of the office from Christ the Head through an unbroken line of office-bearers to the present incumbent, and then the succession becomes a question of fact to be proved by testimony, and the validity of the title founded upon it a doctrine to be established by Scripture; or, they rest upon the conviction and belief of the individual himself, unsupported by any proof but his own extravagance or enthusiasm. These false pretensions to official authority are briefly but ably discussed. The argument against the theory of succession is neatly and conclusively

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