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ON

LAY PREACHING.

BY J. N. DARBY.

LONDON:
GEORGE MORRISH, 24, WARWICK LANE,
PATERNOSTER ROW, E. C.

Price Twopence.

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THE question of lay preaching is one of the greatest importance, and one in which, it is obvious, the interests of the Church are deeply concerned; because, if God give His Spirit to laymen for the purpose, there is positive loss in the hindrance, and the Spirit of God is grieved. The point to be proved by those who are opposed to it is this, either that no laymen have the Spirit of God in testimony; or that, having it, the sanction of man is necessary for its exercise. I do not purpose here a general investigation of the principles of the subject, but merely to inquire whether laymen are entitled to preach, if the Lord give them opportunity; or, whether there be any human sanction needful for their doing so. I affirm that there is not; and that no such sanction can be proved to be necessary from scripture; and that no such sanction was therein afforded.

The question is not, whether all laymen are individually qualified; but, whether as laymen they are disqualified, unless they are what is commonly called ordained. I say, commonly called, because the word, used in scripture, does not in the original convey what it does to an English ear at present. I affirm that no such ordination was a qualification to preach in the days of scriptural statement. I do not despise order; I do not despise pastoral care—I love it where it really exists, as that which savours in its place of the sweetest of God's services. Though it may be exercised some-

times in a manner not to our present taste or thought, a good shepherd will seek the scattered sheep. But I confine myself to a simple question—the assertion that laymen ought not to preach without episcopal or other analogous appointment. My assertion is, that they are entitled; that they did so in scripture;—were justified in doing so, God blessing them therein; and that the principles of scripture require it, assuming of course here that they are qualified by God; for the question here is not competency to act, *but title to act if competent*. Neither do I despise herein (God forbid that I should do so*) the holy setting apart, according to godliness, to any office such as are competent by those that have authority to do so.

Let us see what scripture says upon the subject. The question can only arise as to their speaking *in* the Church, or *out of* the Church. These admitted, all anomalous cases will readily be agreed in. And first, *in* the Church. And here I remark that the directions in 1 Corinthians xiv. are entirely *inconsistent* with the necessity of ordination to speak. There is a line drawn there, but it is not “if ordained or unordained.” “Let your women keep silence in the churches;”—a direction which never could have had place, were the speaking confined to a definitely ordained person, but takes quite another ground; and which implies directly, not that

* I leave the passage as originally published. My thoughts on ordination will be found elsewhere; as well as on appointment to office, which is the subject in this sentence—though I think the distinction of office and place of service by gift was not originally clear in my mind. Gift is in the member of the whole body and so in the whole body. Office, properly speaking, was local—as elder, deacon.

it is right for every man to speak, but that there was preclusion of none because of their character as laymen. Women were the precluded class: there the line was drawn. If men had not the gift of speaking, of course they would be silent, if they followed the directions there given. The apostle says, "Every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Does he say none ought to speak but one ordained? No; "Let all things be done unto edifying." *That* is the grand secret, the grand rule—"in a tongue by two, or at the most by three, and by course, and interpret." Prophets two or three, &c. "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." "For God," &c. "Let your *women* keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto *them* to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience."

We have then a distinction, not of ordained and unordained, but of those who from their character—*women*—are not permitted to speak, *and the rest are*; and directed in what order to do so, and the ground of distinction stated. And this is *God's* plan of decency and order. For the rest they were all to speak, that all might learn, and all be comforted; not all to speak at once, not all to speak every day, but all as God led them, according to the order there laid down, and as God was pleased to give them ability, for the edifying of the Church. I apply all this simply and exclusively to the question of laymen speaking; and I assert that there was no such principle recognized as that they should not, but the contrary.

It will be said, I know, that these were the times of extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; but this is a

false view of the case. Do they mean to argue that ordination did not begin as a distinctive title till after the departure of the Spirit of God? Moreover, the Spirit of God does not justify, by systematic rules, breaking through His own order: it would be most mischievous to say He did. But the case was not one of the prerogative of spiritual gifts, but of order; for women had spiritual gifts, as we read elsewhere, and directions are given for their exercise; but they were not to use them in the Church, because it was out of order—not comely. But there was no hint that any of the men were not, *but the contrary*, because it was *not* out of order. Aptness to teach may be a very important qualification for a bishop; but it cannot be said *from scripture* to be disorderly for a layman to speak in the Church, if God have given him ability. Besides, though these extraordinary gifts may have ceased, I by no means admit that the ordinary gifts for the edification of the Church, of believers, have ceased. On the contrary, I believe they are the instrument, the only real instrument of edification; nor do I see why, on principle, they should not be exercised in the Church, or why the Church has not a title to the edification derived from them. If I were to speak of lay preaching, I should be referred to the orderly way in which Christ had given, in His Church, some apostles, &c. Now, unless one man centres all these in one person by virtue of ordination, I do not see how it applies. I read, “some, one; some, another”—the Head, Christ, “from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which *every joint supplieth*, according to the effectual working in *the measure of every part*, maketh increase of the body, to the edifying of itself in

love." And I read, that there are given, one the eye, the other the foot, the other the ear, that there *might be no schism* in the body. And if we have lost many and ornamental members, it is no reason why we should cut off the rest; the word of wisdom, or the word of knowledge, or the like. If the Spirit of God be clean gone out of the Church how came that about? Was it when laymen spoke, or office was maintained?

It will then be said, they may do it *out* of, but not *in*, the Church. Why not? Thus far, then, for speaking in the Church. I advocate no system. I mourn over the departure of many of the comely parts, on which God set comeliness. I take these scriptures as scriptural evidence, that the notion of laymen speaking in the Church being wrong, has not the scriptures to rest on. I speak not here of elders, or appointed teachers; their value or not. I speak merely of the one point, the wrongness of a layman speaking in the Church as such. If we are told of the danger arising from all teaching, I admit it at once. 'But we are warned against it, not by wrongness as regards office, or its effect merely on others; but as one of the things in which, as evil will come out, so the remedy is applied to the spirit from which it flows: "My brethren, be not many teachers, for so shall ye heap to yourselves greater condemnation." But the warning still again shews, that there was no such restriction of office as is now supposed, for it would have been, "You have no business to teach at all, you are not ordained." But, no; the correction was turned to *moral* profit, not to formal distinction of pre-eminent office.

But it comes to be more important out of the Church; because it precludes the testimony of the gospel by

a vast number of persons, who may have faithfully borne it to others. Let us enquire the scriptural facts. In the first place, then, all the Christians preached—*went every where preaching the word*. (Acts viii. 4.) Some critics have endeavoured to elude this plain passage by saying, that this is *speaking*, which a layman may do: The short answer is: It is not. It is *εὐαγγελίζομενοι*—evangelizing the word. And we read elsewhere, that “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Now, unless all the Church were ordained—I think they *are*, to preach, as far as they have ability—here is the simplest case possible—the case in point. The first general preaching of the gospel which the Lord blessed beyond the walls of Jerusalem, was by laymen; or, however, it knew no such distinction. It had not entered into their minds then, that they who knew the glory of Christ were not to speak of it, where and how God enabled them. And the hand of the Lord was with them. Paul preached without any other mission than seeing the glory of the Lord and His word—in a synagogue, too, and boasts of it. And he gives his reasons for Christians preaching elsewhere—“as it is written: I *believed*, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe and *therefore* speak.” Apollos preached; and when Paul would have sent him from Ephesus to Corinth, he would not go. Yet, so far from being ordained before beginning to preach, he knew only the baptism of John. And Aquila and Priscilla took him to them, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly. At Rome many of the brethren, waxing bold by Paul’s bonds, preached the word without fear. And here I must add, as critics vex themselves about this too, the

word is *κηρύσσειν*—are heralds. The same habits of wandering preaching we find in the second and third epistles of John, guarded *not* by ordination, but by doctrine. Nor is there such a thing mentioned in scripture as ordaining to preach the gospel. Paul preached before he went out on his work from Antioch. And if they will plead his being set apart there, they are quite welcome; for I reason not against such setting apart, but against the assertion that laymen are incompetent to preach. But the case, if it proves anything for them, proves that laymen can ordain as well as preach, that is all. The only other passage not commonly quoted, but which seems to me nearer the purpose is, “The same commit thou to faithful men, able to teach others also.” But the thing committed here was the doctrine, and proves tradition, if anything, not ordination; for it does not appear that they were ordained for the purpose.

I have now produced ample evidence from scripture, to a simple mind. I am not attacking ordination, nor anything that may, in the eyes of others, appear valuable, but simply the assertion, that laymen ought not to speak *in* or preach *out* of the Church; and I say that this assertion is a novelty in Christianity, for that scripture recognizes their doing so. I have abstained from diffusive discussions upon what has led to it, or the principles which are involved in it; I put the scriptural fact to any body’s conscience. And I call upon any one to produce any scripture positively, or on principle, forbidding laymen to preach, or requiring episcopal, or other analogous ordination for the purpose.

And here I will advert to what is commonly adduced upon the subject, the case of Korah, Dathan, and

Abiram. It is remarkable that those who do so should pass by a case immediately preceding, bearing upon this immediate subject: Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp, though they had not come up to the door of the tabernacle, because the Spirit rested upon them. "Would God," said the meek man of God, "that all the Lord's people were prophets!" What was here typically proposed—the pouring out the Spirit on all—was, in principle fulfilled in the christian dispensation. Then, subsequently, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram acted not under the influence and energy of the Spirit in testifying to the people, but would have assumed authority—the kingship of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron. This was their fault. These things were typical of our dispensation. So the apostle states. They make universal preaching desirable and the assumption of priesthood a sin. If this be not the force of these passages, let those who object to the explanation explain what is. To the same end is the argument of the apostle applied, the exclusion from the office of priesthood save by such call as Christ had; in which, in one sense, all believers are partakers; in another sense He is alone, unaccompanied into the holy place. In a word, the assumption of preaching by laymen is right. The assumption of priesthood by any, save as all believers are priests, is wrong. This is the dispensation of the outpouring of the Spirit here, qualifying for preaching any here who could do so—in a word, speaking of Jesus—(for the distinction between speaking and preaching is quite unsustainable by scripture, as any one may see, if he take the trouble)—and in which Christ alone exercises the priesthood within the veil in the presence of God for us. This, I believe, then to be the force of

these passages. The type of the pouring-out of the Spirit in the camp, with the gracious wish of Moses is the characteristic, the essential distinction, of Christianity.

Accordingly we find in its primary presentation to the world, the Spirit poured out on the one hundred and twenty who were assembled together, who thereupon began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance. And St. Peter, standing up, explains to the *Jews*, that they were not drunk—but that it was the thing spoken of by Joel—the undistinguished pouring-out of the Spirit upon men of all classes, servants and hand-maidens, their sons and their daughters prophesying—the pouring-out of the Spirit upon all flesh. This was the characteristic of its agency, and this we have seen acted upon in the subsequent history: to deny this is to mistake the only power of the dispensation, and, I will add, to lose it. And what is the consequence? Irregular action goes on, and cannot be restrained, for kingly power cannot be assumed to such purpose, or they are taking the part of Dathan and Abiram; but the power of the Spirit, in which God would give competency to restrain evil, has been slighted; and office which has been relied on affords no remedy, unless the rights which the Roman Catholic system has assumed be attached to it, which is the assumption of power not given to the Church at all. It is not for me to assert what is the evil of the present day:—I am sure it is not the overflowing boldness of testimony against evil. And if evil teaching exists, the remedy is not in hindering or rejecting lay preaching (for hindered it surely will not be, nor can it be), but the cordial co-operation of those who hold the truth; by which the common energy (and

common energy is infinite energy in this matter) should be exercised to sustain it against that which does not hold the truth; and the clergy and all may be persuaded it will be needed. Thus the distinction will be between truth and error, and not office and the Spirit, the most mischievous that human wit could have devised. In the mean time, those who hold office really from God will find those who have the Spirit, but not special office, gladly, aye, thankfully, most thankfully, recognize them in it, instead of being thrown into opposition, colour given to those who have not the Spirit, in their apparent similarity of conduct; and apparent evidence afforded, that those who have office are opposed to the Spirit, in their prohibition of those who have it exercising it.

The times call for decision; and the only thing which will withstand evil and error, is truth, and truth wielded as a common cause against error and self-will by the saints under the Spirit; and then God can be wholly with them, instead of being obliged to withdraw *His* countenance from them when they are opposed to their brethren and rejecting them, when *He* must justify them, when it is the order of His glory, and all their blessing to do so. May *He* by His Spirit guide us into all truth!

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