

PAROCHIAL ARRANGEMENT DESTRUCTIVE OF ORDER IN THE CHURCH.

“GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF CONFUSION.” 1 Cor. xiv.

To treat with apparent lightness of spirit any thing that concerns the Church of God I hold to be a great sin; and though there are a few occasions, very few, and those not connected with the humiliation of Jesus, in which the *folly* of evil may be brought before the eyes of the many,* yet my present subject, although absurd to the moral mind leads me to no such feelings, nor do I desire to treat it in any such spirit. Looking upon it as a matter wherein the Holy Ghost is grieved and dishonoured, if I speak under the influence of that Spirit, I shall feel grieved also: and such is my feeling whilst observing how much of that which wears the fairest appearance, and ranks highest in ordinary estimation,—nay, which is considered as the very triumph of Christian skill, and perfection of ecclesiastical arrangement, is actually at utter variance with the mind of God, and consequently with essential beauty and truth, which are only expressions of that mind.

It is often thought that the complaint of the present state of the Church is a wild feeling, taking the dissatisfaction of self-will for the freedom of God's Spirit, and seeking licentiousness under the name of liberty, and in defiance of order. But, *where principles are not assumed* (which is often the unsuspected foundation of many a pile of well connected reasoning), it would not be difficult to prove that such a complaint is not necessarily fanatical or visionary, and that the plain and practical path of obedience is marked out on the other hand by nothing more than common spiritual discernment, and common honesty of heart towards God. Now it appears to me that the present circumstances of the Church have destroyed order, as well as liberty, which two things, at any rate while man is a sinner, must go together; and this is shortly proved. 'Take the existing state of things in its broad lines—it is not order—that all,

* Of which we have instances in Elijah's contention with the priests of Baal; and the more deliberate reproof of Isaiah in his comparison (of which man had forced the institution) of Jehovah the everlasting God, and the stock of a tree; and again in the exposure of popish false miracles and pretensions at the time of the reformation, analogous in character.

or the majority of those called pastors, should be, instead of pastors, unconverted men. Yet this is admitted—even by many who acquiesce in the circumstances which have of necessity produced this fruit. It cannot be called order that they should be appointed by man (men perhaps not members of God's Church)—and not by God; this is not order, nor does it produce order, but dissent, and schism, and confusion. But this is a fact not only in its results, but in its principles—namely, that in what is called order, the appointment of the pastors flows from men not members of God's Church at all. Succession, in whatsoever degree it may be rested upon, comes not from Christ the minister of God's power, but from the prime minister. In days of infidelity or indifference it must be immediately evident to any one, into what danger this at once throws the Church, as far as it depends on this succession. Nor is this a speculative apprehension, for this danger is even now in full operation, and by no means a mere probability, but in fact working in its worst possible form, namely—in shewing itself as the instrument of evil principles, not of good. Where such a *fact* is evident, and that on all sides, it may seem superfluous to reason on the *principle* of the succession itself, for we have its legitimate results before us; but as many who are children of God hold by it, and seek to defend it, it may be of some service to the truth to state it on their own principles.

The ordinary arguments against all objections are usually these:—that in *theory the appointers are members of the Church of God, that in this view only they can look at it, and that the actual evil is no ground to go upon.* But, as will be seen, Christians will often find themselves in strange situations who disregard actual evil on the assumption that the system which produces it is theoretically correct; for in this manner there may be no limit to the measure of practical wickedness which will be tolerated, while conscience satisfies itself on the plea of an abstract excellence which may turn out to be a mere shadow, or worse. Such, however, is not the path of sound and Christian principle, which at once pronounces that the actual evil *is* the ground to go upon.—God acts upon it, *even though the system may be His own*, as in the case of the Jews.—“Thee only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities:—and the Church is bound to act upon it, having the intelligence of God's Spirit to discern the evil. The distinctive character of

the Church—of the individual informed by the Holy Ghost, is this—“Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity;” but the argument used *admits the actual evil*, yet, *whilst avowing the name of Christ*, does not depart from it. I ask high churchmen in particular, is it not iniquity that pastors, chief pastors, should be appointed, not by the Church, by Christ, but by men, be they what they may? Is not this the fact? and if so, do they then depart from it? Is it the Church that appoints them? If the predicament into which they are forced by this question is sought to be evaded upon the plea that the Congè d’ Elire saves them (a drowning man will catch at a straw), the answer does but further prove the iniquity of this system, from which men should depart, for it assumes that the persons in ecclesiastical office have the power to elect, or the argument is null, and consequently shows only the uniform betrayal of the interests of Christ by them into other hands than those of the Church. They are thus driven to an extremity, where choice is to be had only between two conclusions: the last of which, i. e. the surrender of the power if possessed, exhibits the constant iniquity of the Church: whilst on the other hand, if not possessed, the Church is proved no longer to exist in the exercise of its habitual and necessary functions:—indeed practically, it seems most honest and simple to say that the sovereign appoints to the bishoprick. In Ireland even the poor excuse of the Congè d’ Elire is taken away, for the bishops are appointed by letters patent openly by the crown. I have touched on this ground because refuge is sought in it by some who feel conscientiously upon the subject. Let us return to the plain facts of the case. The minister of the crown appoints the pastors to the flock of Christ, but churchmen defend themselves on the plea that it is still the Church that does it. The simple answer is this—It is not so now, *even in theory*. No religion is necessary to the prime minister, nor does it practically constitute part of the theory of the state at all.* But even on the supposition that it did, and that all the persons appointing were churchmen and Christians, it is not *as such* that they have to act in the capacity of appointers.

* “No head of any college, nay, no three colleges possess half the ecclesiastical patronage of which I have the disposal. I have from 800 to 900 livings in my gift, and from 18 to 20 stalls in cathedrals, still I am not bound to subscribe the 39 articles—I have never done so; I am not called upon. No test, sacramental or subscriptory, was demanded be-

But supposing *it still further to be so*, what at best is the state of things? We have Christians and laymen (I speak upon the Church theory) appointing to the highest ecclesiastical offices, the superior pastorships of the Church, because they have secular office which the Church, *save in civil subjection*, knows nothing about. Now I say this is disorder and not order,—the real Bishops of the Established Church are the king and ministers of the day; for there cannot be a more important function of the Church in its order, than the appointment of fit persons to feed the flock.

I can see nothing which seems to me Christian order in such appointments of bishops or chief pastors of God's flock; it presents nothing but immense disorder. I cannot recognize the *hand* of the Church in the Bishop of Exeter, or the Archbishop of Armagh, though I do the Church's *responsibility*. He may through God's mercy, be a very good man, nay, he may have eminent qualities for the pastoral or episcopal office, but there is no *order* of God's Church in it, but the order of the prime minister of England, or the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who are not God's constituted officers for the appointment of the bishops of His flock, in *any Church* order. In point of fact, the necessary consequences have resulted in confusion and discord in the Church of God; for while there was nominal order to which holy minds might desire to be subject, there was at the same time the complete amalgamation of the Church and the world, which the Spirit of God loudly testified against, and holy men must separate from, and the professed Church become the great author of schism.

And here we must note what is a great fallacy in the notion which the Church of England desires to give respecting her own constitution. It carries a falsehood on the face of it. We are referred to the articles, or canons, and prayer book for her constitution and order, but she has not said a word there about her constitution and order or what she has said is false. The constitution and order of the Church of England and Ireland is, that the king and his ministers, or other analogous persons, appoint to all the pastoral offices in the country. Where is this stated in these fair-spoken documents? Would churchmen who hold fast by these documents state and avow this; that laymen, it may be ungodly men, should appoint to all the fore or after my admission into office." (Extract from Lord Brougham's speech in the House of Lords, in April, 1834.)

pastoral offices in the country? Is this what they mean to plead as order—Church order? Yet Church order it is.—They state indeed that they only ascribe to their princes to rule with the civil sword all the estates of the realm, but they ascribe a great deal more.—This was a most godly ascription; but if *they* have only ascribed this, their princes have ascribed a great deal more to themselves (and they have acquiesced in it, though they have not put it in the book—though it constitutes the special difference of the system, and makes it the Church, or as some may say, *not* the Church of England); and that is, that these individuals, who might be in excommunication, appoint nearly all the pastors in the country.—I would ask if there is any order in all this? We have had an eminent instance of this system in principle and practice latterly, when with one fell swoop, a minister, and not the king at all, but a House of Commons (and who are *they* in the Church?) strikes off ten or twelve of the bishops of a country—that is, he not only is the appointer of the persons, but orders the whole internal arrangement of their superintendence, saying how much is a proper extent of episcopal care, and who shall exercise it. But the great point which strikes at the root of all the Church order and of which the documents state nothing, and therefore are a false witness for the Church, is, that the pastoral appointments have no connection at all with the Church. The succession is from the crown, from the world and its power, *not from God at all*; so that the great distinctive difference of the Church of England would not be found on the face of her own account of herself at all. *But that distinctive difference destroys the principle of a Church.*

But while the Church does not honestly state its character, the principle of disorder goes a great deal farther, and all real order is destroyed by the system. By virtue of this system, a number of persons are appointed as clergy or ministers of parishes. There is no reference whatever to the various offices flowing from specific gifts. The scripture indeed speaketh on this wise—“He ascended up on high and gave gifts unto men,” “and gave some, Apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”—the beautifully ordered and united means by which the body is perfected and built up. But this is trampled under foot for a fancied succession which is denomi-

nated *clergy*, a body of men not appointed to offices in the Church, but to the exclusive government of a geographic district.—That is, the offices of the Church, the legitimate channels for the exercise of the combined gifts by which Christ ministers to its edification and the perfecting of the saints, are thrown to the winds: so that even when the clergyman happens to be a godly man, the saints, if there be such in the place, are deprived of the ministration of their offices, by which Christ has provided for their edification, by virtue of the system which calls itself order, but the principle of which is to throw the appointment of even nominal pastors out of *all order*, into the hands of secular men. The same individual must be pastor, evangelist, teacher, and every other office necessary for the perfecting of the saints and edifying the body of Christ, or the ministry must be crippled and maimed, and the results accordant; and this is the principle of the system.—Christ has ordained certain gifts for the edifying of the saints; men have ordered the placing of certain persons, who may not even be Christians, in a given place, with the sole ordering of the Church in that place. The argument then is brought to this point—either the system must assume the possession of every gift by all the individuals it pleases to appoint, *and exclude all others from them*, or it is proved that their system is at variance *in principle* with the right order of Christ's Church. But they can assume no such thing, for the Spirit distributes to every man severally as he will. This is His prerogative. The system is proved, therefore, to be at variance with the order of Christ, and that in its vital object—"the perfecting of the saints." It is at variance with the actual order in which He declares that He ministers it, for He gave some, pastors; some, teachers. But no! we must make all of them every thing, or the system violates Christ's order in its very objects; and this the Apostle controverts (how much more may we in these days)—"Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?" But no! Christ gives gifts as He pleases, and man gives authority as *he* pleases, and then calls this order! It is the devil's order, a turning of things upside down, and exhibits a state of things justly calling forth the expression of righteous indignation no less than of godly sorrow. Surely "it is yet a little while."—So that on the whole the principle of the system is not only at variance with the derivation of grace and knowledge, seeing that the selection is made by the crown

and its ministers, not by the Church of God, but also necessarily with *all office in the Church*, by which the body should be ministered to, according to the gift which Christ had given to every man for the effectual purpose of that ministry. I speak now of the theory, passing by all charges on the state of facts in parochial ministrations, and I affirm that the theory precludes the exercise of the offices which Christ has instituted for the perfecting of the saints. A man is appointed a deacon for the purpose, perhaps, of being an evangelist, and would justly, perhaps, refuse to attend to tables. God may have called out by the ministry of this individual, another eminently qualified to be an elder in the Church of God, for which, though gifted as an evangelist, the former may be eminently disqualified; nevertheless the same person now perhaps transferred to the order of a presbyter or priest, without the least change of gift, becomes elder there with no qualification, to the exclusion of one who is qualified, having, it may be, his usefulness as an evangelist quite destroyed by his being put in an office for which God never qualified him; but it must be so because he *is* the clergyman. Thus again, we find in principle, that the offices of Christ's Church, by which its order is kept, are altogether avoided by this system which is called order; yea, that the offices and the system are incompatible; for the notion of the individual who was called to it being presbyter, or of any one being presbyter whom God has qualified for it, is precluded, for some one is called the clergyman of the place. Again, reverse the case.—A godly man well qualified to be the pastor and edifier, it may be, of saints, a terror of the ungodly, and healer of them that are wounded, a warrior against Satan's entrance into the fold, is set in a place where, from neglect, there is scarcely any practical knowledge of Christ. God has not gifted the man as an evangelist—what is the consequence? he has no saints to edify, and his heart is discouraged at his utter uselessness; he might have been a signal blessing to the Church of God somewhere if such a system had never existed. But let us look a little farther. One whom God has gifted as an evangelist comes in and exercises his gift in the same locality (it must not be a clergyman, that would be *disorderly*, nor is evangelizing properly a parochial ministration); but *he* is irregular; the godly pastor without any flock is a bar, on the system of the Church of England, to any of God's

ministry being carried on; and if he be consistent with the system, he opposes God's ministry in the place, and while perhaps a real saint himself, has none of the Church of God around him to which he might be useful. Thus a schism is created; or it may be, the other qualified to be an evangelist, is constituted by the people to be a pastor, to which God never called him at all; and he who would have been a blessing to them, is despised and neglected, because of the system of the Church of England, which necessarily involves the subversion of all the offices of the Church of Christ. Indeed it does not proceed on the recognition of them; the country has been secularly divided into districts, and the clergy appointed, without reference to the state of the people at all, in their respective districts; the effect of which is only to place any one besides who exercises the office which is necessary there, in the position of a schismatic. It is quite clear too, that in a vast number of instances, being a secular interest, the appointment is made by those who have no Church principles at all, for temporal reasons and motives. And if we are then told "the Church is not to blame," and the question is asked, "How can the bishops help it?" I answer *not at all*, and *therefore* the Church is fundamentally wrong in principle; it avows it cannot help evil, and how could it, since the heads of it are appointed on the same principle? But supposing the bishops godly pastors of Christ's flock, and to appoint to offices according to Christ's institution, evangelists, and teachers, and pastors, or to recognize any other office in the Church, they would at once be in schism as to the whole present constitution of parochial arrangement; that is, the system if recognized, is irretrievably at variance with the admission of offices in the Church of God, by which the saints are perfected, and the body edified—and the effect of it is to give the character of schism to all those who exercise the office to which God has ordained them. And this is called order—it is the most heinous and wicked disorder—in God's Church. Let me be ever such an evangelist, gifted like an apostle, I am disorderly in exercising it; nor would ordination in any way mend the matter, for my exercise of the gift would be disorderly because of a nominal pastor in a given place; all is pre-occupied—and evangelizing has no place, and becomes irregular.

The conclusion therefore which is forced upon our minds is, that the system is not only evil in the disastrous results of

so many being called pastors who have no pastoral qualifications,—a consequence flowing from the principle of appointment; not only mischievous as restraining the exercise of liberty in the people of God (a restraint indeed which is often very right if done according to godliness), but has being destructive of all offices in the Church of Christ, and subversive of the principle on which they rest; and moreover, that, under the parochial or rather clerical system, the offices of the Church of Christ cannot be exercised, at least in order. Nor does the system of dissenters appear in this respect at all different: they equally confound the order of the Church, with the difference only of having no local limits, which *so far* prevents the notion of schism; a system of local limits having by the way no possible consistency or warrant from scriptural order of Churches. I am not entering now on the question of diocesan episcopacy, but it is quite clear that in its origin it went by Churches, not by geographical limits; that is, a bishop governed the Churches in such a limit, i. e., those who might be gathered out from heathenism—but that was all; and within such district, all the offices above mentioned might be exercised with gladness of heart and profit to those who were gathered; but parochial clericalism can not in any way combine with this. It is absolutely without consistency with any order in the Church. An individual is appointed at three or four and twenty, to a curacy or parish, and he alone may be the elder (an office for which it is clear that he is seldom qualified), teacher, pastor, evangelist, if needed. He is the shut-door to the exercise of any office in the Church, whether he himself have any gift or the contrary. If God's Spirit is to work at all, then it must be a schismatic; and this is the hateful evil and disorder of such a system—it makes a schismatic of the Spirit of God.

The office of an evangelist is not a parochial office. It may in given instances be exercised within the limits of a parish, but the office knows no such limits, nor does the exercise of such an office imply qualification for being a pastor; nay, in its ordinary exercise it necessarily disqualifies for being an elder. But the notion of a clergyman, which is wholly unsupported by scripture, summarily settles the whole question, and removes all the offices at once; for it assumes all within the limit to be Christians, and decides that the person (having the sphere of his service prescribed by men, though his

ostensible commission is from the laying on of the bishop's hands) who is thus considered as being over *his* flock, is to have the title to exclude the exercise of every office which he may not happen to possess, though it is evident, that even if a good man (most frequently not the case), he may be gifted for no office at all, and clearly cannot be assumed in every instance to possess them all. And now suppose the Spirit thus grieved and dishonoured should begin to work in sovereign mercy, will it be exclusively confined to the system which has dishonoured it, and haughtily domineered over all its order and grace? It cannot be so, it works where it may work, blowing where it lists. Some of those who, unconscious of the evil, are in the system, may be quickened into energy by its influence; and though in extreme irregularity and disorder (an evangelist exercising the office of a pastor here, and a pastor exercising the office of an evangelist there, and both unprofitably), yet in some measure they may work within their respective limits. The system however itself is un-mended. Some of those who are without, may be raised up into energy; they at once see that the system is essentially wrong; they wish not to be schismatics in any sort: labour they must—yea, exercise pastoral care if God has committed it to them; but these individuals with the very same class of gifts are stamped at once dissenters and schismatics. And what is the meaning of this but that the system which gives the name of schism is such as to preclude the exercise of God's gifts as far as it can.

Let us suppose for further exemplification of our argument, a large district without the gospel preached in it.—An individual is raised up of God, a stranger to the place, who preaches there; a thousand souls are converted,—what is to be done? Of the number thus awakened, five are specifically gifted of God for the office of pastor, or teacher, or elder. The question at once arises, are these thousand souls to be left shepherdless, because men have chosen to appoint persons called clergymen, who turn out not to be Christians at all,—nay, who it may be, belie the gospel of Christ? I will suppose that to prevent heresies and confusion, a point surely of material import in these days, some or all of these five practically act as pastors. Ordained for it according to the Church system they cannot be, for the clergy are there already; but the love of Christ constrains them to do the best they can for the sheep.

They are at once set down as causers of division, that is, the whole church of God as far as that place is concerned, is denounced as schismatic. In a word, the effect of the Church of England system, instead of being godly order, throws into schism in reputation nearly the whole Church of God. And this is any thing rather than an imaginary case. Afterwards, it may be, a saint becomes a clergyman in the district; he draws some back to Church, or is the instrument of converting others; and thus two systems are formed in which saints within one and the other are thrown into opposition; and of the whole of this part of the evil the Church of England system is the original cause; however it may be perpetuated by the other system which its evil may have generated. The mischievous results are endless; but while these are abundantly sufficient to act upon, the truth is that the principle of the system is irreconcilably at variance with the order, the discipline, or the efficiency of the Church of God; while it excludes the recognition of *all offices* in the Church, and infallibly perpetuates schism. And such has been its effect.

The point to which I now specifically allude is, that it has been the author of, or has at least perpetuated the destruction of all offices in the Church of God, by which the saints are to be perfected, and the body edified; which are absolutely incompatible with the notion of that scripturally unrecognized, and actually undefined office—a clergyman. By casualty it may have happened that one gifted for office, may have had a limited opportunity of its exercise, but in no case can it have been exercised according to the order of the Church of God. It does not appear to me that the dissenting body has at all emerged from this snare, office with them being equally confused. I will now give its effects even within the system, where there are godly ministers, under circumstances in which it is practically reduced to the limit of dissent as a system—the private choice of ministry, which is the common practice in large towns. I give it in the words of one who being a godly high churchman forms an unexceptionable witness to its practical effects.

“It is one of the sad consequences of our divisions and dis-
 “unions, and the neglect of pastoral superintendence, that
 “the oneness of interest, which ought to prevail among the
 “members of one Church, and especially of one flock, is very
 “much weakened, if not lost sight of. Each man looks to his
 “own things, his own edification, his own comfort, his own

“progress, so that a kind of selfishness has sprung up in our
 “religion itself. The injury which this has done in the Church
 “is incalculable.—It leads to endless divisions. Each man is
 “tempted to seek a ministry adapted to his own state. If he
 “be only a little way advanced in his perception of divine
 “truth, he will go where he can hear taught the early lessons
 “of the school of Christ. If he be further advanced, he will
 “go where he can hear deeper things; and the temptation
 “arising from this to the ministry is, that it should be ever
 “accommodated to the state of the hearers, thus checking
 “all growth in grace, and destroying all symmetry in the body
 “of Christ. Hence it arises, that we have some congrega-
 “tions who are only babes in Christ, and content to remain
 “so; and others more exclusively strong men in Christ, who,
 “forgetting their own former weakness, are apt to be filled
 “with self-sufficiency and pride.”*

The statements I have made are neither an exposition of abuses, though abundant room might have been afforded for it, nor indefinite, though I have reasoned on the principle, because the soundness of this is alleged when abuse is admitted.—I say abundant room for exposing abuse, for the computation of the most sanguine evangelical ministers is, that two-thirds of the pastors so called of the Church, are not merely without specific gifts for given office, but do not preach the gospel at all. Surely a strange state of things, and one which flows from the system they are anxious to vindicate, whilst the perpetual use of this criterion of “preaching the gospel” shows the want of any apprehension of the difference of offices in the Church, which the habits of their system have generated—a system, I repeat it, subversive of all specific office in the Church of God.

* General redemption and limited salvation, by W. Dodsworth, M.A.

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