

## The Free Service of Christians

1 Cor. 15: 15, 16; 2 Cor. 4: 13; Phil. 1: 14-17; Col. 2: 19.

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A Letter to the Irish. Or the so-called "Lay Preachers."

Dear brethren,

My attention has been directed to the leading article in the *Achill Missionary Herald*, No. 332, January 10, 1865. This paper deals with three classes of correspondents: first, "those who consider lay preaching as altogether unlawful;" secondly, "those who disapprove of it *as a system*, but who think that circumstances may warrant the occasional use of it;" and thirdly, "those who regard it with unconditional approval, and who do not entertain a suspicion that it can be productive of anything but the happiest results."

First. The author of the article refers to a tract on "Lay Preachers" for proofs of the untenableness of the first position. He justly argues (from Acts 8: 4; Acts 11: 21; Revelation 22: 17) that all believers may, and should make known the gospel to others, privately or in public, when they have the opportunity. Besides the necessity there may be for such preaching, he remarks "that there is not a single instance in the Old or New Testament of any one having been prohibited from preaching." This witness is true — mark it well.

Secondly. Singular to say, after such an admission, after dwelling on the Scriptural principle and corroborative facts, the author professes to agree to some great extent with persons of the second class, i.e., those who disapprove of free evangelism! How comes this? Is it not the proved system of Scripture? The sore point soon appears: "If lay preaching is designed to supersede the ministry of an ordained clergy, we must lift our voice against it." Then comes a bitter explosion of feeling, not only from an anonymous clergyman, but on the part of the author, against those Christians popularly designated "Darbyites," or "Plymouth Brethren." The epistles to Timothy, Titus, etc., are supposed to convict them of disrespect for a considerable part of God's revelation. What has this to do with your "lay preaching?"

But you have taken the Lord's Supper without an official administrator! This is intolerable. Lay preaching may send souls, previously indifferent, to attend the public prayers — may be used to convert unregenerate parishioners. But the administration of the Lord's Supper by the "lay preachers" draws down the author's "unqualified disapprobation," "as an unwarranted intrusion into the proper work of the ordained minister. We have no doubt that the divine ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are included in the 'mysteries' of which the duly ordained minister is 'the steward' (see 1 Cor. 4: 1\*); and it seems to us that the assumption of a right to administer it, by one who has no warrant for a call to the ministry, but his own persuasion, involves a denial of the authority of the ordained ministry altogether." Yet with that singular absence of fixed principle which is so often found in his party, the author immediately after allows that he "can imagine a case where an ordained minister could not be had, when two or three assembled in the name of Christ, might commemorate His dying love in 'breaking of bread,' but this is an exceptional case which does not apply in the town of -, where the Lord's Supper is administered not only by a duly ordained minister, but by one whose whole life and conversation prove that he has been called by the Holy Ghost to the office and ministry which he adorns." In the next paragraph the writer looks more kindly on "our lay brethren." "It must,

however, be stated that the act to which our correspondent has called our attention is not a public one [as if a fundamental question like this were one of mere degree! as if more or less publicity could affect the character of what he takes for granted is assumption and a denial of proper ministry!]. Our lay brethren have their own conscientious convictions, and they must adopt the line of conduct which they suggest as pleasing to the Lord. We think they are mistaken; they think otherwise; but so long as they abstain from urging their own views in this matter upon others [just as if they were not at least as free of man as the author, and equally bound to their Lord to urge on others what they believe to be God's truth on this point!] we cannot see why ministers of the Church of England should not avail themselves of their valuable services in calling sinners to Christ."

\*"An old man" should have known the gross perversion of Scripture involved in this misapplication. I will not quote Dean Alford nor even Dr. H. Hammond to correct the error, but two worthies of the olden time, when there were no Darbyites to regard with "abhorrence." "The word in the Greek [Eph. 5: 32] is *μυστήριον*, which is never in Scripture used to denote what we properly call a sacrament." (Dr. Whitaker's *Disp. on Scripture*, Parker Soc. p.197.) Still more express, if possible, is Abp. Whitgift (*Works*, vol. ii., p. 519) on this very text, 1 Cor. 4. "Here is not one word for your purpose, except you take mysteries for sacraments, which, if you do, you are much deceived; for by the word 'mysteries' here he [Paul] understandeth the word of God, and gospel of Christ; as all learned writers do interpret it." Even Cardinal Cajetan (on Eph. 5) distinguishes a sacrament from a mystery. Thus the *Achill Herald's* zeal betrays it into a mistake repudiated by a papist. No Scripture restricts baptizing or breaking the bread to ordained men.

The author then gives his testimony, clearing them from the wish to establish a separate sect, and assuring his readers of the extraordinary blessing which has attended their preaching, and this in his own parish. "We say to all opponents of this blessed work, 'Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'"

Thirdly. To the last class the author now turns, thinking that his advanced age enables him to view things with more sobriety than those who unqualifiedly approve of lay preaching. One might have hoped that a hearty acknowledgment, under the first head, of the clear, express teaching of the Bible, would have silenced unbelieving fears. Ah! beloved brethren, never expect the simplicity of faith where a given course is judged, not by the sole standard of God's word, but by its effect on one's own associations. Where is the sobriety or the conscience that so much dreads lay preaching superseding ordained ministers, and so soon forgets ordained episcopal sceptics and Romanizers, nay, even professorial chairs indoctrinating the nascent clergy with their own neology or sacramentalism? It is certain that these boasted paper bulwarks have not hindered the rise and progress of deadly error within the Anglican body. It is certain that there was incomparably more purity of faith before they were invented. Ecclesiastical history demonstrates that they are vain: so does the actual state of Anglicanism. Human documents are faulty and even presumptuous as articles of faith; they stumble many good, they check few bad men. Such are the notorious facts. No wonder that the author here quotes not the Acts of the Apostles, but Bishop Burnet, whose sentiment, he thinks, "must commend itself to the common sense of every intelligent reader." Brethren, is "common sense" your arbiter? It is excellent in human things, but in divine what a miserable exchange for the Holy Ghost's guidance by the written word of God! "We have the mind of Christ," says the apostle; and, thank God, there are those still who refuse to descend to a lower ground. Neither Bishop Burnet nor any one else can prove that it is wise spiritually to trust a traditional human arrangement in ministry; for surely if there be, as all admit, danger "from hot-headed men of warm fancies and voluble tongues" among lay preachers, there is far more when

those men, or even worse, "thrust themselves on the teaching and governing others" with all the authority of official status. If unofficial men preach nonsense or bad doctrine, what is the mischief, compared with that which flows from the same stuff preached by men who boast of the highest ecclesiastical sanction? It is the standing of the Oxford essayists which chiefly makes their freethinking dangerous; and it is the impotence of the Anglican body to put down the like official heresy and infidelity, not free preaching of the gospel, which brings that religious system "into disorder and under contempt." Besides, it is passing strange that a worldly-minded, unsound person like Burnet should be quoted as an authority by a man who values the gospel and loves souls for Christ's sake. Does he not know that Burnet (Exposition, Article xi.) makes the faith that saves to be, not believing on Him who justifies the ungodly, but "the complex of Christianity in opposition to the law?" The low churchman of the days of King William III. agrees in this with the highest churchman of our day, ("our faith which includes our hope, our love, our repentance, and our obedience!") and treats the essentially different doctrine of justification as held by the Reformers, and as defined at the Council of Trent, as, "after all, but a question about words!" Burnet's "common sense" did not even secure the truth of the gospel.

Doubtless, dear brethren, you feel that nothing but grace can raise up fit labourers for the Lord's work, and the grace only can continue them as long as it pleases Him. I am sure you pretend to nothing more than using what He has given you for perishing sinners or famished children of God. Beware of sects, old as well as new. As you are assured the Lord has "sent" you at His charge, fear not the frown of some, beware of the flattery of others. Serve the Lord on your own responsibility to Himself. You are naturally dreaded and suspected by those who are under bondage to a merely human system which usurps the functions of the Head. You have a Master over you, not a mistress; your allegiance is due to Him. The Church cannot teach, cannot give mission, cannot call servants save to service of tables or distribution of her bounty. Christ only gives ministerial gifts. To Christ alone is His servant responsible in the exercise of his gift. Hold fast your liberty, but hold it in direct subjection to Christ and His word.

Suffer me to make a few remarks on the references to Scripture which fill the "postscript."

No doubt you agree with the author, as I do, that God has appointed a ministry to rule and teach the Church, and that its members are responsible to the Lord for the performance of their duty. But the choice of proof-texts evinces that the author confounds *the local charge of elder, or bishop, with ministry of the word*. What would be thought of his acquaintance with Ireland who limited the magistracy to stipendiaries? All exercise of a ministerial gift is ministry. Not to speak of apostles and prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, exhorters, were all of them ministers; whereas none of these *per se* was a presbyter. A teacher might be invested with that local office, of course; but he needed due ordination before he could be properly styled an elder. Whereas the possession of the gift from the Lord of itself made him a teacher. On the other hand, so far were elders from being the only proper ministers, that local rule and not public teaching was their proper business. Hence says the apostle, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, specially they who labour in the word and doctrine." Ruling was their necessary duty: if they ruled well, proportionate was their honour. Labouring in the word and doctrine was specially to be valued, but it was a blessed accessory rather than an indispensable function. Hence it will be noticed that, in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4 (which furnish the fullest teaching of the New Testament on ministry,) there is not a word on the local office of elders. For the exercise of these gifts, as far as they are continued of the Lord to the building up of the Church, the author's system leaves no room, and if it were only for this, it would be convicted of being false and unscriptural. Does Christ give evangelists, pastors, and teachers to preach, and teach, and rule now as at the beginning? and is not the Church now, as then, bound to receive them and profit by their ministry? The Anglican system does not even pretend to

receive all such, nor to allow to any that free exercise of gift which Scripture demonstrates was the practice of apostolic times; for its parochial plan is inconsistent with anything of the kind. Does not the author abandon this large part of Scripture? It is certain that his system excludes action on it; and he is bound to his system as long as he abides there.

Acts 14: 23; Acts 20: 17-28; 1 Timothy 2: 5, etc.; 1 Timothy 5: 17, 19; Titus 1: 5, 7, 9; 1 Peter 5: 1-4, speak not of ministry in general, but solely of elders or bishops. Even here Anglicanism differs essentially from these principles: for, first, it sets bishops into a superior class, contrary to the express force of Scripture; and secondly, it asserts and furnishes a single bishop over many churches, whereas Scripture makes it certain that, where bishops and elders existed at all, the practice was to have *several* in *each* church or assembly. Of 1 Corinthians 4: 1, 2, I have already spoken in the note to p. 2. As for 1 Timothy 3: 8, 13, is it not absurd to found that unmeaning novice, the Anglican deacon (aged, perhaps, three or four and twenty), upon the Scriptural diaconate, which was a distinct office and not a mere formal stepping-stone to eldership? Where is the respect for Scripture in such a citation? Again, what is the meaning of the reference to 1 Timothy 1: 3, 4; 1 Timothy 5: 22; 2 Timothy 4: 1-5? Timothy had a special work, as had Titus; and neither ought to be confounded with an ordinary bishop or elder. Alas! the pride of human system leads men to imagine they are "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," when, in truth, they are in Laodicean misery and blindness. It is mere delusion to fancy that any on earth are entitled to act like those apostolical men, who had a defined letter of instructions from an inspired apostle for their individual action within a certain given sphere. Who are most modest and obedient to Scripture — the men who imitate apostles and their envoys without warrant, or those who keep within the exercise of that measure of gift which the Lord still graciously gives? Happy they who faithfully preach the gospel, teach the believers, or rule the flock of God, if they are so sent of the Lord! Woe to those who pretend to give the Holy Ghost, or to appoint elders, by imposition of hands, without being apostles or their delegates! Hebrews 13: 7, 17, and 1 Thessalonians 5: 12, prove that there may be rulers, guides, or chief men, whom the brethren are bound to obey, yet without the smallest intimation that they were ordained.

To lay down that "ministers should be ordained to office by laying on of hands" is to set aside a vast body of Scripture on ministry (*i.e.*, the exercise of spiritual gifts), through a mistaken use of the very peculiar place of Timothy, or of his subsequent duty. For what else can one think of referring us to 1 Tim. 4: 14; 5: 22; 2 Tim. 1: 6? The author evidently treats the case of Timothy, not as exceptional, but as the rule, in the face of a double array of facts. For, on the one hand, Timothy received a gift or χάρισμα through the apostle's hands, the elders joining, after prophecy had designated him to his peculiar task: which circumstances are not true either of ordinary ministers in general, or of elders or bishops in particular. On the other hand, according to Scripture, whoever had a gift of ministry in the word was not merely free, but responsible at once to exercise it, (*i.e.*, to minister, Rom. 12, 1 Peter 4: 10, 11,) not only outside, but within the congregation (1 Cor. 14), quite independently of the functions of elder or deacon, which did require apostolic appointment or what was equivalent.

Cordially and decidedly do I hold that ministry is a divine and permanent institution. This is not the question; but whether human systems (and the author's among the rest) do not exclude the due exercise of the various ministerial gifts in the public congregation and elsewhere by an unscriptural monopoly assigned to local office.

But it is a total mistake that "bishops ordained by the apostles were to ordain others." You will find this in the fathers, never once in Scripture. 2 Timothy 2: 2 says not a word of ordaining, but of communicating truth to others, as Aquila and even Priscilla did to Apollos. Did that worthy couple pretend to ordain him? Titus 1: 5 shows that an apostle had authority to delegate another like Titus to

ordain or constitute. elders; but nowhere in God's word is Titus called a bishop; and the bishops there are invariably the ordained, never the ordainers, in evident opposition to the author's statement as well as to the Anglican system. Is it not humbler, then, in present circumstances to bow to God and confess our lack, rather than assume to have apostles or their delegates, or to do their work without being either?

That a maintenance is due to those who minister, if they need it, is indisputable: 1 Cor. 9: 13, 18; 1 Tim. 5: 17, 18. Gal. 6: 6 would be my third text, rather than 1 Peter 5: 1-4, which does not treat of this subject.

It is agreed, too, that "separation from the Church is not warranted by corrupt living of ministers," though Matthew 23: 2, 3 seems rather wide of the mark as a prohibition of it. Again, that "unworthiness of ministers does not nullify their office" may be more or less true, while John 11: 49-52 is a strange foundation for it. It is quite certain, however, that the Church is bound to put away corrupt livers (1 Cor. 5), whether ministers or not; and that Scripture (2 John) is explicit that all — even a lady and her children — are not only at liberty, but bound to refuse him who does not bring the doctrine of Christ, were he a deacon or a bishop. The author's system, on the contrary, is at issue with the Bible and sustains an ordained man, even if he denied inspiration or atonement, as many of the clergy do.

No intelligent Christian holds, as the author insinuates, that "divine life" is "the bond of visible union;" nor is Colossians 3: 4 needed to refute such an absurdity. But it is clear that, if we hold to Scripture, Nationalism and Dissent and Popery are novelties contrary to its teaching, which shows that to all Christians on earth, if walking according to truth, there is but one body as well as one Spirit. The principle of sects or different denominations is wholly condemned by God's word. (1 Cor. 3, 11; Gal. 5) Membership not of *a* but of *the* Church is the true doctrine. (Acts 2: 47) And so with ministry: a gift was a joint of the body of Christ. "God (not man) hath set some in *the* (not in *a*) church: first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers." (1 Cor. 12) Is this all gone, and another principle to be on foot, because there are no miracles, or healings, or tongues? God forbid!

Again, there is not the smallest force in appealing to the Seven Churches to justify Nationalism or Dissent; because the bodies in the Apocalypse, with abundance of evil which the Lord was judging, *were really churches*, whereas these systems *are not and never were churches*. The assembly in Ephesus, for instance (and so of the rest) had been gathered and ordered according to the word of the Lord, and the presence and sovereign action of the Holy Ghost had been fully owned in its midst; while nothing of the sort is or ever was true of the religious associations before us. Till the Lord gave up an assembly, it would have been premature to leave; but what became the duty of one who had ears to hear, if the assembly rebelled against His final message? Surely to purge himself from the vessels to dishonour (2 Timothy 2), when evil became a sanctioned institution without remedy. But the national bodies and dissenting societies, excellent as many of their elements are as institutions of men, and precious members and ministers of Christ as there are in both, never having stood on the basis of the Church of God according to Scripture, possess no divine claim on the faith and affections of God's children. Who ever cited the parable of the tares (Matt. 13: 24-30) for "visible separation from the corrupt portion of the churches?" Often indeed this Scripture is employed to show that you must endure evil men in, not put them away from, the Church. But this is a stale sophism, which ought to be left to Papists or to its originators among the fathers. Hooker misuses it thus (Eccles. Pol. b. iii. § 1); but even Chillingworth exploded it when urged by his adversary long ago: "Our blessed Saviour foretold, you say, that there should be in the Church tares with choice corn. Look again, I pray, and you shall see that the field he speaks of is not the Church, but the world; and, therefore, neither do you obey our Saviour's command, 'let both grow together until the harvest,' who teach it to be lawful to root these tares, such

are heretics, out of the world; neither do Protestants disobey it, if they eject manifest heresies and notorious sinners out of the Church." (Religion of Prot. chap. v. 57.)

It is fully admitted that a church must be apostate to warrant separation from it (which the author founds on Rev. 18: 2-4); but what claim on a Christian has a body which never was a church of God at all?

Trusting that this brief review may be graciously used of the Lord to help such as desire to do His will, I subscribe myself, dear brethren, though a stranger in the flesh,

Your brother, and A FELLOW-LABOURER.