

MINISTERIAL SUPPORT¹

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES.

IT is believed the Synod accepts the following statements as true:

1. The Presbyterian Church in Virginia has not realized that growth demanded for our wide destitutions, and of which the church of God should be capable. The apparent obstacle to an experiment of other means is that a proposal of amendment implies criticism, and this implication is likely to be resented. But since God has promised to be with his faithful ministers constantly to the end of the world, one of two things must be concluded, either that he is as much with us, and our labors are as successful as we are to desire or expect, or that we are not entirely faithful. Hence, if impatience of criticism is proper for us, we must believe that God's cause ought not to advance faster than it has done among us.

2. Recognizing our dependence for success on sovereign grace, and the supreme importance of more zeal and holiness in ministers and people, we account for our disappointment of fuller results partly by the fact that our whole ministerial force is not actively and continuously employed. The one hundred and eighty-four ministers and licentiates on our roll probably do not perform the work of ninety-two men continuously employed. And this disastrous loss of efficiency proceeds greatly from deficient support. Where half a minister's days is consumed by worldly toils, the loss of true efficiency is even greater, because a heart harassed and untuned by secular anxieties and habits of feeling is less energetically given in the remaining fragments of time to the care of souls.

3. But if the inability or injustice of churches lays this necessity on pastors, they are by no means to be blamed for making an honest secular calling supply their wants, after the example

¹ This paper was presented to the Synod of Virginia, in 1867, as an argument in connection with a report from a committee appointed on that subject in 1866.

of Paul, the tent-maker. We rather rejoice that, by means of this self-denial of ministers, the destitutions are supplied with partial ministrations which otherwise would be wholly neglected, while yet we deplore the obstructing of so much spiritual effort which might otherwise be enjoyed by the church.

4. To realize the full effect of the pastor's work he must be "free from worldly cares and avocations," to devote his whole time, not only to Sabbath preaching, but to catechizing, preaching the gospel from house to house, and a perpetual and manifold oversight of souls. And one great lesson to be taught our laity is their urgent need of all this spiritual labor, and the wisdom of purchasing and exacting it. Whereas their sense of want is often no more than of the Sabbath sermon and the occasional call, which are dispatched in a fragment of the minister's time; whence the not unnatural feeling that a partial compensation therefor is all that justice requires.

5. Our merciful Divine Head still shows us, amidst all our delinquencies, that a true pastoral work is still always rewarded by the sure growth of the charge which enjoys it. This fact summons us, by the most solemn and pleasing obligation, to make experiment of such full and faithful work in all our field.

6. It is a truth equally clear and important, that Presbyteries cannot exact of their members this full work while these are necessarily engaged in earning otherwise a part of their maintenance. Whence *adequate sustentation is an absolute prerequisite for proper Presbyterian government over pastors.*

7. It is not unnatural that both Christian parents and their sons should have a feeble sense of the claims of the ministry, while the church fails to employ fully the clerical force she already possesses. Hence we shall draw more laborers into Christ's harvest by giving more efficiency to those now in the field.

From all which it appears plain that the two *desiderata* of our church in this department are:

- (1.) *Adequate and sure maintenance for her laborers.*
- (2.) *Their entire consecration to the ministerial work.* Can these be secured?

Supposing the first secured, it appears to us that we must depend for the second on the removal of all pretexts and obstacles against concentration of heart and labor, on the demands of a

mere enlightened Christian opinion in the church; on the more firm oversight of Presbyteries over their own members; and chiefly on the Christian conscience and fidelity of ministers themselves.

But touching the first, adequate maintenance, it seems to us that experience, if it can prove anything, has proved that this result cannot come from our present practice; for the sad fact is that most of our pastors are, and always have been, in trouble about this matter; and that the provisions actually made for them are, in most cases, notoriously neither adequate nor trustworthy, and this, after the most strenuous appeals and injunctions in every form, from Assemblies, Synods, Presbyteries and pastors. The records of our own Synod especially will show that this evil has been for years a special subject of legislation, and yet it is not abated, but rather increased.

CAUSES OF OUR DIFFICULTY.

The true causes of this standing difficulty appear to be, first and *radically*, the natural unbelief, carnality, and deadness of man's heart towards spiritual things. We see men generally neglectful or forgetful of the pecuniary value of instruction in the things of God, precisely because they are indifferent to those things themselves. And as long as men are born sinners this difficulty of support will assuredly continue. The secondary causes are neglect of official functions by elders and deacons, the partial secularization of pastors from this very difficulty, and consequent neglect of pastoral functions by them, so that this plague of our Zion potently operates to propagate its own mischiefs; and probably still more than either of these, the feeling of the laity, that, as they are not enjoying and do not really use the whole time and energy of their preachers, so they are not justly held to pay for more than a fragment.

THE REMEDY.

From this view of the causes, it is perfectly evident that there is a *vis inertiae*, permanent and general, in unsanctified, and partially sanctified, human nature, by which we must expect ministerial support to be partially obstructed as long as it is left to the separate *momentums* of the very bodies in which this *inertia* inheres. Whence it appears obvious that this function,

like that disciplinary one of "general review and control," is precisely one of those which requires the invigorating force and will of the ruling power of the united church; because that general ruling power is supposed to represent the highest wisdom, zeal, and spirituality of the whole. I confess that I cannot evade the conviction, that our practice of leaving the question of each minister's support to his own charge and himself, is not, and never was, either sensible or practicable; that from its nature it has been, and must be hereafter, inadequate to the end, and ought to be definitely abandoned.

We also believe that it is inconsistent with the true spirit of our time-honored constitution. This gives the Presbytery discretionary control over the compact between the pastor and his people; so that while, on the one hand, no pastor can be intruded on a people without their free choice, and no minister can be forced to any field against his will, neither can a pastoral compact take place without the approval of the Presbytery, and this court remains the umpire and guardian of both parties to the bond. But our usage practically leaves the pastor and his proposed charge to settle terms as they choose, or can. Our system scripturally teaches that God gives ministers to his church as a whole, and that the grand duty of which they are public organs, that of evangelizing the world, is enjoined on the whole church. But our usage treats the pastor as though God had given him to his particular charge alone, and thus it alone were responsible for his support. The Scriptures teach both the spiritual and organic unity of the church, by which all the parts sympathize together, and they command (2 Cor. viii. 13, 14), not "that other men be eased and we burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time our abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for our want; that there may be equality." They command us (Phil. ii. 4), "to look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." They say (Gal. vi. 2), "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." But our usage practically leaves each congregation to bear its own burdens, notwithstanding a great, and sometimes an enormous difference of ability. By our disjointed method of sustaining this prime agency of the church's work we entail feebleness and failure on many of our essays, which are nearly wastes

of money and labor, because not directed by the best wisdom of the church, or not steadily sustained by her united means after a beginning is made. The Presbyterian Church has much to learn here from that great enemy of Christ's truth, the Papacy. This thoroughly knit system appears always to have its men at the right point, and money to sustain them there; because all act in concert, and each priest knows that he depends on the united treasury of the church. So, to do its work successfully, our church must realize in action the scriptural theory of its unity of spirit and government.

PRESBYTERIAN PRINCIPLES MUST BE CARRIED OUT.

To what then shall we look for *momentum* to overcome the partial indifference and *inertia* of individual congregations? Religious establishments by the State and a general religious assessment have been repudiated by the common judgment of our church and community. The law of God expressly leaves Christians free to use their own judgment in the amount of their contributions, saying (2 Cor. ix. 7), "Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity." There remains, therefore, no other authority save that of the church, and this extends only to enlightening, instructing and persuading the people, by the love of the "Lord Jesus, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor;" and to the wise direction and administration of the contributions of the faithful.

But our system can never exhibit its full vigor until our church courts become Presbyterian in fact as well as in name. The different courts must actually govern the church, and be the efficient *media* of the power delegated to her by her Divine Head. Ministers and congregations must be governed, as well as individual laymen. For instance, Presbyteries must prevent those arrangements which often virtually sequester and neutralize ministers, where domestic convenience, or some such motive, leads them to settle over feeble churches, which in fact are not able and do not expect to pay for and employ their whole time. The church as a united whole should possess and direct the labor of the whole ministry, as her appointed organ for her grand task; and so the strength of the whole must be concerted for their support.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

The attempt to organize more efficiently the service of the church is not seldom met by doubts of this general kind. We are reminded that the true life of the church is the life of spiritual religion in the hearts of its ministers and people. It is suggested that the desire for more compact organizations is often the result of the decline of this true life, and is a species of attempt, necessarily vain, to substitute for the life of true religion a sort of "*machine religion*;" that nearly all the corruptions of the church in past times have arisen thus, in the well-meaning but ill-judged essays of good men to heal evils of the church which nothing but true revival can remedy; that human foresight, when it goes thus rashly to legislating, can never foresee the ulterior results in which its expedients will eventuate. And just thus, it is said, popery with all its spiritual tyranny, grew up by the human expedients of good men.

Moderator, there is a sense in which these remarks are true—valuable, statesmanlike truths. Especially would I admit that it is beyond the reach of man's foresight to surmise the ulterior workings of human institutions. Nothing but the light of experience, or else the teachings of omniscience, can guide us safely here. Therefore our wisdom will be to attempt to invent nothing, and to apply to the maladies of the church no other expedients but the plans given to us by the precepts and precedents of the Bible. For then, and only then, we shall be safe; because then we have the safe guidance of omniscience. But I also urge that, while the true life and strength of the church are spiritual, our Lord has manifestly decided that certain instrumentalities are necessary to foster this life. He has ordained the employment of such. He has resolved to work usually through them. Among them are, according to our Confession, "the reading, and especially the preaching, of the Word." There is, then, a true sense in which it is our duty to employ "machinery," and to expect success proportioned to its completeness; that is, God's own machinery. And now my desire to apply this more closely-adjusted system is grounded wholly upon the belief that it is God's expedient, God's machinery; or, in other words, that it is but a more correct and full application of the church government laid down for us in the New Testa-

ment. This I have endeavored to show. If I am wrong, let it not be adopted ; but if I am right in this, we need not fear that it will result either in the substitution of a "machine religion" for life in the heart, or that it will eventuate in an unforeseen perversion of our spiritual liberties, for we are following an all-seeing guide.