

ECCLESIASTICAL RELATION OF NEGROES.

SPEECH

OF

REV. ROBERT L. DABNEY,^{ewis}

IN

THE SYNOD OF VIRGINIA, NOV. 9, 1867;

AGAINST

THE ECCLESIASTICAL EQUALITY OF NEGRO PREACHERS IN OUR
CHURCH,

AND

THEIR RIGHT TO RULE OVER WHITE CHRISTIANS.

RICHMOND:

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SPEECH.

THE Synod first hurriedly adopted without inquiry, the following preamble and resolution; and then re-considered it; viz.

“Whereas the paper upon the subject of the coloured people, adopted by the last General Assembly, has been erroneously construed by some as teaching the doctrine that coloured men, possessing the qualifications required by the standards of our Church and the word of God, should not be ordained to the full work of the Gospel ministry, simply because they belong to the negro race; therefore,

“Resolved, That the General Assembly be overtured to declare that the Church is Christ’s universal kingdom; that its doors are open alike to all those who love the Lord Jesus, and that ordination to the work of the Gospel ministry is to be given to all those called of God to, and qualified for the work, without respect of persons.”

The motion to reconsider having brought up the above on its merits, Rev. R. L. Dabney, who was entitled to the floor, waived his right to speak, in favour of a member making a motion for indefinite postponement without debate. This motion was ruled to be debatable; and on it discussion was continued an hour; when it was negatived. Rev. Mr. Dabney, regaining the floor, spoke as follows:

Then, Mr. Moderator, it seems this unhappy and mischievous subject must be thrust upon our attention, whether we wish it or not. I therefore beg you to note, that its agitation is not of my making. When entitled to the floor, I cheerfully yielded it for a motion of indefinite postponement, without a word upon the merits of the question, although the debate had been exclusively by the members of the other side; and the last thing which the Synod had heard was an earnest and long speech, most forcibly delivered, in advocacy of views which my whole judgment opposed. But the house will have discussion: I therefore beg leave to say a few things, as briefly as I may.

I oppose sending this overture to the General Assembly, because the whole subject is unseasonable. The country, the black people, our own minds, all agitated by unusual passions, are in no state to settle this question wisely or well. It is believed there is not a member on this floor who does not think, with me, that it would have been better had the Memphis Assembly let this matter alone, although their decision was right in principle. Why then double the evil of untimely action, and

again disturb the subject, possibly to settle it wrong? I have had enough of declarations and manifestations of special interest in, and love for, the souls of "the freedmen," under existing circumstances. When I see them almost universally banded to make themselves the eager tools of the remorseless enemies of my country, to assail my vital rights, and to threaten the very existence of civil society and the church, at once; I must beg leave to think the time rather *mal appropos* for demanding of me an expression of particular affection. If I gave it, I should not expect any one to credit it. Were you traveling in Mexico, assailed by bandits, wounded, dragged from your carriage, bound to a tree, and looking with a bleeding pate upon the rifling of your baggage, if you were called on to state, then and there, how exceedingly you desired the spiritual good of the yellow-skinned barbarians who were persecuting you, it is to be presumed that you would beg to be excused, under the circumstances. So I, for one, make no professions of special love for those who are, even now, attempting against me and mine the most loathsome outrages. If I can only practice the duty of *forbearance* successfully, and say, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," I shall thank God for his assistance in the hour of cruel provocation.

I oppose this overture, second, because it is both incorrect and ambiguous. It begins—"Whereas the Memphis Assembly has been erroneously construed," &c. Mr. Moderator, the malignant slanderers of that Assembly do not misunderstand it. They know well enough what the Assembly meant. Their accusations are prompted by no zeal for truth or good, but solely by a spiteful pleasure in goading us by the obtrusion of a distasteful and difficult subject. Tell me not that there is any true regard for the negro's good in these people, when I have before me the proof of their cruel indifference to both the bodies and souls of their own free blacks, and their recent perpetration upon the Southern negroes, of the most enormous crime of the century, at the bidding of factious zeal. I, for one, will not so degrade myself as to truckle to this spiteful hypocrisy, by explanations and uncandid retractions. The meaning of the Memphis Assembly is plain; and it is, in the main, correct. They say that while the blessings of redemption are free to all, of every race or caste, the privileges of church office may be properly withheld from some, at the dictate of a sound discretion. This is Scriptural truth. The Memphis Assembly was right in principle, (although wrong in details) and is not misunderstood.

This overture demands that the Assembly shall declare that "ordination shall be given to all those called of God to, and qualified for the work, without respect of persons." Now, sir, there is a sense in which every one in this house will assent to this as a general proposition. But in which meaning is it to be taken? Does it imply that we may properly decide that the evidence of God's *call* and *qualification* is fatally defective, where an insuperable difference of race, made by God and not by man, and of character, and social condition, makes it plainly impossible for a black man to teach and rule white Christians to edification? If so, I adopt it. Or does it mean, that it is right to ordain a black man possessed of the piety, integrity and learning required by our standards, (if we have any such,) to preach to black

Presbyterian congregations, if we have any? Then I adopt it. Or, does it ask the General Assembly to enact, that I shall help to ordain a negro to teach and rule white people, and make him a co-equal member with myself in West Hanover Presbytery, to sit in judgment on the affairs of white churches and members? Is this its end? I see one and another boldly and defiantly nod their assent. On this point, gentlemen, I am utterly opposed to you; and I can only account for hearing a proposal so astounding, from such gentlemen as I know you to be, by these two motives; an overstrained and quixotic magnanimity, and the stress of a supposed necessity of logical consistency, under which you have fallen by means of a sophism. As the friends of this measure avow that this is its real extent, I shall direct my remarks to this point chiefly.

And third: I oppose the agitation of this whole subject, because it is unpractical. The only appreciable effect it can have will be to agitate, and so to injure our existing churches. On the basis you profess, (that is, to exact impartially of the black man, as of the white, full compliance with the requirements of our standards,) the negro is not coming to you. He will none of you. He wholly prefers the Yankee to you. So that this whole zealous discussion presents us in the ridiculous light (as was remarked by a venerable member now on the floor) of two school boys, who after a stiff fight over a bird's nest, ascertain that it is too high for either of them to reach. Perhaps this is the very thought which prompts some to support this scheme; that they may disarm Abolitionist criticism by seeming to obey their imperious dictation, and to open the door of our ministry to negroes; while they rely on the negroes' hostility, to protect us from their entrance; a result which they would no more accept than I do. Thus they hope to "save their manners and their meat" at once. Is this candid? Is it manly? Is it Christian honour?

But I warn these gentlemen, that they will be deceived by the result. While I greatly doubt whether a single Presbyterian negro will ever be found to come fully up to that high standard of learning, manners, sanctity, prudence, and moral weight and acceptability, which our constitution requires, and which this overture *professes* to honour so impartially; I clearly foresee that, no sooner will it be passed than it will be made the pretext for a partial and odious lowering of our standard, in favour of negroes. Do not facts prove it? Were not the only black ministers ordained by our church since the war, all three ordained in flagrant violation of the constitution? There has broken out among many a sort of morbid craving to ordain negroes; to get their hands on their heads. Indeed it seems to be a fatality attending that moral and mental *malaria* which infects the age, that when people become interested about this unfortunate race, they must take leave of their own good sense, and grow extravagant, hasty, and inconsiderate. No clearer proof need be asked of the presence of this disease here, than the case which is made the pretext of this overture. The mover of it, and others, have already told you that the discussion is not unpractical, because Rappahannock Presbytery has now an actual case pressing, urgently pressing, for immediate decision, for which those brethren need the guidance of the Assembly to-day; that there is a black licen-

tiate of many year's standing, of excellent gifts and character, who should have been ordained already, and whose application for orders is pending. Now, Mr. Moderator, will you not be surprised to hear this statement, which I derive from the most unquestionable source, that this coloured man, although an excellent man, was undoubtedly licensed without the constitutional qualifications; that he certainly has not yet acquired them; that he is not an applicant for ordination at all, but is perfectly satisfied with his position; that there is no coloured Presbyterian Church to call him as pastor; and that there is not even a Presbyterian mission field for him; but he is labouring among the coloured Methodists. If this statement is disputed, the authority is ready. But I advise the contestant not to demand it, unless he desires to be put to confusion. There is manifestly an unhealthy restlessness about the ordination of black men. Let this overture pass the Assembly, and you will soon see it made the occasion for violating our standards, at the prompting of quixotic and romantic generosity towards this unfortunate race, and for introducing some into our ministry, as much unfitted for it by attainments and character, as by colour. My point then is this, that if the action proposed is wholly unpractical, it is neither candid nor dignified. But if it is destined to have any practical effect, its operation will be only mischievous, just to the extent it is operative.

Fourth: I oppose the entrusting of the destinies of our Church, in any degree whatever, to black rulers, because that race is not trustworthy for such position. There may be *a few exceptions*; (I do not believe I have ever seen one, though I have known negroes whom I both respected and loved, in their proper position) but I ask emphatically: Do legislatures frame general laws to meet the rare exceptions? or do they adjust them to the general average? Now, who that knows the negro, does not know that his is a subservient race; that he is made to follow, and not to lead; and his temperament, idiosyncrasy, and social relation, make him untrustworthy as a depository of power? Especially will we weigh this fact now, unless we are madmen; now, when the whole management to which he is subjected is so exciting, so unhealthy, so intoxicating to him; and when the whole drift of the social, political, and religious influences which now sway him, bear him with an irresistible tide, towards a religious faction, which is the deadly and determined enemy of every principle we hold dear. Sir, the wisest masters in Israel, a John Newton, an Alexander, a Whitefield, have told us, that although grace may save a man's soul, it does not destroy his natural idiosyncrasy, this side of heaven. If you trust any portion of power over your Church to black hands, you will rue it. Have they not done enough recently, to teach us how thoroughly they are untrustworthy? They have, in a body, deserted their true friends, and natural allies, and native land, to follow the beck of the most unmasked and unprincipled set of demagogues on earth, to the most atrocious ends. They have just, in a body, deserted the churches of their fathers. They have usually been prompt to do these things, just in proportion to their religious culture and to our trust in them. Is not this enough to teach us, that if we commit our power to that race, in these times of conflict and stern testimony, possibly of suffering for God's truth;

it will prove the "bruised reed, which when we lean upon it will break, and rend all our side, and cause all our loins to be at a stand?"

Last: I deprecate this action, because so far as it is to have any success, it is to bring a mischievous element into our church, at the expense of driving a multitude of valuable members and ministers out. Sir, it is paying too dear for the indulgence of religious romance, or the propitiating of meddling abolitionists, to rend our Southern Church, and drive from us its noblest part. I solemnly caution members of this Synod of the intense, the indignant, the irreconcilable opposition which their measures excite among the great body of our eldership and people. Do they say that they see no striking marks of such opposition; that the free ventilation of the proposal, in the newspapers and elsewhere, does not seem to have provoked it? I reply, I know the temper of the Southern people, at least of Southern Presbyterians. The reason they have not spoken out in thunder-tones already, is twofold: first, they have hitherto been incredulous of a serious intention to force negroes into ecclesiastical superiority to themselves; and they have felt a disgust so profound for the whole proposition, and the unseasonableness of its discussion, that they have turned aside with loathing from the whole debate. But let this plan be put in practice, and if I know anything, I forewarn you, gentlemen, that you will spring a mine, which will blow the engineers of negro equality high into the air.

Look, I pray you, at the *grounds* of this sentiment, which you will outrage. For a generation, Southern Christians have seen the negro made the pretext of a malignant and wicked assault upon their fair fame, and their just rights. At length, he has been made the occasion of a frightful war, resulting in the conquest and ruin of the land, and the overthrow of all our civil rights. And now, our conquerors and oppressors, after committing the crime of murder against our noble old commonwealth, and treading us down with the armed heel, are practising to add to every atrocious injury, the loathesome insult of placing the negro's feet upon our necks. This day we are threatened with evils, through negro supremacy and spoliation, to whose atrocity the horrors of the late war were tender mercies. And these ebony pets of this romantic philanthropy, this day lend themselves in compact body, with an eager and almost universal willingness, to be the tools of this abhorred project; the scorpion—say rather the reptile lash in the hands of our ruthless tyrants. But our brethren, turning heart-sore and indignant from their secular affairs, where nothing met their eye but a melancholy ruin, polluted by the intrusion of this inferior and hostile race, looked to their beloved Church for a little repose. There, at least, said they, is one pure, peaceful spot, not yet reached by this pollution and tyranny. There, at least, Virginians may meet and act, without the disgust of negro politics, and the stain of negro domination. Will you, dare you say to them, *no*? There too, the hated subject and the foul intrusion shall be thrust upon you; thrust upon you by the folly of Southern men, of your own spiritual guides!

And now that every hope of the existence of Church, and of State, and of civilization itself, hangs upon our arduous effort to defeat the doctrine of negro suffrage, shall the General Assembly be invoked, to

go out of its province, and stretch its constitution, so as to set the most significant precedent which can be imagined, *in favour of this destructive doctrine?*

But this is not all. Thoughtful men see in this pet of tyranny and oppression, to the edge of which the negro and his allies now urge us, "beneath the lowest depth, a lower deep still opening wide." It is a result which, we well know, the astute architects of our ruin clearly foresee and intend; and for the procuring of which they provide, when they implore the political equality of the negro, with a cunning inspired by their own master, the devil. They know mankind, in its weaknesses and baseness. They have measured accurately the degrading effects of subjugation, of poverty, of grinding oppression, of despair, upon a people once chivalrous. They know that where the ruling mob is, there must be the demagogue; even as the vulture comes where the carcass is; and they know the bottomless subserviency of the demagogue. They understand the ever increasing assumption of the negro's character, growing by its indulgence. Hence the safe calculation, that when once political equality is confirmed to the blacks, every influence will tend towards that other consummation, *social equality*, which they will be so keen to demand, and their demagogues so ready to grant, as the price of their votes. Why, sir, the negroes recently elected in my own section, to represent in the pretended convention, districts once graced by Henry and Randolph, are already impudently demanding it. He must be "innocent" indeed, who does not see whither all this tends, as it is designed by our oppressors to terminate. It is (shall I pronounce the abhorred word?) to *amalgamation!* Yes, sir, these tyrants know that if they can mix the race of Washington, and Lee, and Jackson, with this base herd which they brought from the pens of Africa; if they can taint the blood which hallowed the plains of Manassas, with this sordid stream, the adulterous current will never again swell a Virginian's heart with a throb noble enough to make a despot tremble. But they will then have, for all time, a race supple and grovelling enough for all the purposes of oppression. We have before our eyes, in Mexico, the proof and illustration of the satanic wisdom of their plan. There we saw a splendid colonial empire, first blighted by abolition; then a frantic spirit of levelling, declaring the equality of the coloured races with the Spaniard; and last, the mixture of the Castilian blood—the grandest of all the Gothic—resulting in the mongrel rabble which is now the shame and plague of that wretched land.

Such is the danger which is now before us. Let no one say that these fears are visionary. Wise and sober statesmen do not think so. Ask those who know mankind, who know the springs of political action, and the power of its passions; they will tell you that *if such counsels are to rule* as have been insinuated here, the danger is real and near. Impartial and intelligent spectators abroad do not think my warning visionary. The London Times, in a well considered leader, declared that a gradual mixture of blood was the obvious end to which present influences tended.

In view of this, our christian people looked fondly to their beloved Church, as a last bulwark against this tide of shame and misery. But now they are told that this too must be levelled; levelled by the hands

of their own spiritual guides; that they must submit, at the dictation of a romantic sophism, to an ecclesiastical amalgamation, of which social confusion must be the inevitable result; a result all the surer because the ill-starred precedent is given for it in the highest range of our social life—the sacred.

And now, when they indignantly recoil, shall this high and noble sentiment be stigmatized as “a wicked prejudice of an evil world?” and shall this Synod be invoked, in the the imposing names of principle and moral courage, to trample upon it? Sir, I protest against the slander. In the name of the enlightened and faithful people of God, who profoundly entertain this sentiment, I protest. By the indignant blush on the cheeks of our christian wives and sisters, I protest. This is no “blind, passionate prejudice of caste; but the righteous, rational instinct of pious minds. It is not the prejudice of a wicked world, which I would have you respect; the world’s passions and blame are naught to me; but the conscientious conviction of Christ’s own people, who are as God-fearing and honest in this thing as you are. I wish to know, by what patent the advocates of this novel and astounding doctrine have received a monopoly of all the consistency and conscientiousness, leaving our laity none?

If, in the presence of all these considerations, any leader in our Israel must still feel himself compelled by conscience and principle, to demand of his brethren this concession, he should feel that he is asking of them the most cruel and heart-rending sacrifice ever demanded by duty. We shall make it, if consistency requires it, with an anguish akin to that of Jephthah, when his rash vow compelled him to immolate his virgin daughter. Has this solemn, sympathizing sense of the sacrifice demanded been exhibited? No, sir. And I shall show, before I am done, that the imagined stress of conscience, under which the bitter crucifixion is exacted of us, is as baseless and unreasonable, as was the superstitious obstinacy of that ancient Robber-chief.

And, if it shall appear that this Africanizing of our Church is not duty, then, how wretchedly untimely is the policy of fixing the odium of it on Presbyterianism, at this time, of all others, when the whole American people are so manifestly beginning to array themselves on the issue between the white man’s party and black man’s party, when this one issue is so completely absorbing all others; when the party of the white man’s supremacy is gathering in such resolute might, and is so surely destined ultimately to sweep its opponent out of existence. Why attach our Presbyterianism to a doomed cause, to a type of opinion predestined to be exploded, and to leave, for all time, naught behind it but a savour of *odium* and abhorrence, clearing for generations to all who have afflicted us with it?

Let it be thoroughly considered how far this view must lead us, if squarely followed. Its advocates have much to say about “following out principles consistently, without regarding popular inclinations.” The attitude they assume is one of a calm superiority to such feelings. They have “risen above these mere prejudices of caste, as things unworthy of christians.” They deprecate my allusions to the practical consequences of their doctrine, as an unseemly appeal to the passions of a dead controversy, and the pride of a social order which has passed

away, never to return. When I beseech them not to pervert and overstrain ecclesiastical principles, in a manner not only needless, but positively erroneous, so as to make Christ's church virtually a tool for the propagation of the political heresies of negro suffrage and amalgamation; they reply with a grand dignity, that the Church is a spiritual kingdom, and does not concern herself, *pro* or *con*, with secular results. To my common sense, the application thus given to a truth most valuable in its place, is virtually this: That if the church has an opportunity, without going an inch out of her spiritual sphere, and indeed, by the very fidelity with which she adheres to it, to give valuable support to earthly interests the most fundamental and precious, oh, then she has perverted her character; she is meddling with secular questions! But if she misunderstands and perverts her own spiritual charter, to corrupt at once her own government and peace, and to give, under a scriptural pretext, most direct assistance to the vilest factionists, in their assaults upon the dearest rights and interests of the community, it is all perfectly spiritual and legitimate!

Now then, gentlemen, come with me, and let us see whither this iron consistency in which you boast will lead us. You say that if a negro appears to have a scriptural call and qualification, you have no option, but must make him your own co-presbyter, and ecclesiastical equal.— Thus, at once, he becomes a joint ruler over white churches; he must sit, and speak, and vote among you. I shall not permit you to use the quiet hypocrisy of those Yankees, whom you permit so imperiously to dictate your action in this matter; who, after making a negro, in pretense, their co-presbyter and equal, give him a tacit, but imperative hint to take himself off to the coloured gallery, and thence witness the presbyterial proceedings, as a very humble spectator. This will not do in your case: you are thoroughly consistent. So you must have this negro of yours, reviewing and censuring the records of white sessions, and sitting to judge appeals brought before you by white parties, possibly by white ladies!

But this is a small part. After all the negro exodus from our communion, there are still churches which have a large majority of black communicants. After you have ordained your negro, one of these churches may regularly elect him pastor. Constitutionally, the white minority cannot here resist the will of the majority, when regularly exercised. Suppose the former come to you for remedy. Can you tell them to take dismissals and join a white church elsewhere? Distance may forbid. Besides, you will be bound by that jewel, consistency, to tell them that such a solution of their trouble would be wholly out of the question. You made race and colour no obstacle to putting this negro equal to yourselves; how can you encourage these white members in making them a pretext to rend a church-roll? Consistency will require you to say to them, "Remain and submit." So, there you have a black pastor to white families, clothed with official title to ask their experimental, heart secrets; to visit their sick beds; to celebrate baptisms, marriages and funerals over their children! And this, on your principles, is no utopian picture; but what may become a literal fact, in a month after you execute your plan.

Now, is any one so fond as to believe still that this can be honestly,

squarely done, and yet social equality can be denied? Do you tell me that after you have admitted this negro thus to your debates, your votes, your pulpits, your sick and dying beds, your weddings and funerals, you will still exclude him from your parlours and tables? *Credat Judæus Apella!* I tell you, Sir, this doctrine, if it does not mean nothing, or if it does not mean Yankee hypocrisy, means ultimately, *amalgamation*. What more emphatic evidence did ever a traveller bring back to us, of the utter confusion of bloods in Spanish America, than to tell us that he there saw black priests to white people? But now, when the negro is grasping political equality, when he is no longer an inferior and in servitude, when his temper is assuming and impudent in many cases, when in many sections he outnumbers the whites, it becomes both Church and civil society to guard this danger with tenfold as much jealousy as when they were our servants.

Are we then shut up by principle to this most repugnant thing? Do the Bible and our standards require us in consistency to introduce black men into all our Church courts as our equals, and as spiritual rulers of the laity of the superior race? This, Moderator, is the cardinal question. If God and duty require *any* sacrifice, *let it be made*. *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum*. I trust I shall not be behind any of my brethren in temperament or conviction, when the true necessity arises for acting upon this severe maxim. But I have desired that you should have fully before you the true extent of the concession demanded of you, that if it shall appear the logical exigency is imaginary, and the argument demanding it a transparent sophism, you may be delivered from so cruel an error.

It has been argued here that the gospel is a religion for universal man, and that participation in the blessings of redemption is decided, not by any reference to race, class, or social grade, but by the person's faith and repentance alone. This blessed truth, it is presumed, every true christian joyfully believes. We have been reminded of the apostle Peter, who was taught by vision not to "call that common which God had cleansed," and was thus forced to overcome his prejudices of caste, and receive Gentiles to an equal place in the Church with Jews.

And this instance reminds me of a truth, which I beg leave to commend to gentlemen of the other side; that our brother Peter found, very soon, that *this consequence* was natural and necessary, which they so stoutly disclaim; namely, that the ecclesiastical equality involved social equality. Peter, after admitting Gentiles to an equal footing in the Church, was obliged to admit them on an equal footing to his table and parlour; and was found "eating with the Gentiles." "But when certain came from Jerusalem, he dissembled, and withdrew himself." So, I predict, will these our brethren be found "dissembling," when they are brought face to face with the awkward consequences of their present position. And I pledge them, that I shall not fail to be their Paul, to rebuke them for their inconsistency, and insist that they face the musick of their own levelling doctrine. But this by the way.

They quote for us also, such passages as these; that in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all in all." Hence, they jump to the inference, that not only the blessings of redemption, but the

privileges of church office and rule, are common to all believers, irrespective of caste, class, or condition. I shall show, Sir, beyond all cavil, that there is a vast, and an unbridged chasm between this premise and this conclusion. The argument is, that because the blessings of redemption are common to all classes and races of true believers, therefore it follows, of course, that every privilege and grade of church power must be made common to them. But the answer is, that several Bible instances themselves show that this consequence does not follow. None here will dispute that the Old Testament church had a gospel; nor will any deny that its saving blessings were common to *all believing Hebrews*, though not to all Gentiles. But lo! the priesthood, the clerical function of the day, was expressly limited to the tribe of Levi! In Galatians 3: 28, (a passage parallel to the one quoted against me,) St. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Blessed doctrine! Yet the same apostle says, "I suffer not a woman to teach;" thus excluding from official privilege, on grounds of class, one half of the the whole Christian world, which he had just declared to be "all one in Christ Jesus." So you see, gentlemen, that the apostle Paul evidently did not believe in your argument. Miss Antoinette Brown and Mrs. Abby Kelly were precisely with you; but the Apostle was not. Again, the Apostle, in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, rules that no convert who was implicated, before his conversion, in polygamy, must be ordained a presbyter. For so the best expositors view 1 Tim. 3: 2, and Titus 1: 6. Here is another exclusion on grounds of class. Surely no one will argue that these husbands of more than one wife were excluded because they *had been* sinners. Had not the Apostle himself been a murderer? Or on the grounds that they were still living in sin; for this would also have excluded them from the *Church*. It is an exclusion *on grounds of class*, and independent of the question of their faith and repentance. Thus we have three instances, confirmed by inspiration itself, showing that the supposed consequence does not hold, and that it is not true that all distinctions of class are abolished as to church office, because they are abolished as to church membership.

But here our opponents resort to an evasion, drawn from the very fact that these instances are confirmed by revelation. They plead: The limitation is right, we admit, in these three cases, because God made it himself. But man has no right to make any other limitation at all.

Again, I answer, no; you shall not change your ground. Your argument just now was that an entire community in church office followed from the admitted community in church membership, *by the very nature of the case*. But I showed you that this did not follow, because God has decided the contrary, in three cases; and he can not do wrong.—I claim therefore, that the argument is mine. I have manifestly taken away your position; I have removed from under you the very ground on which you yourselves placed your conclusion. It is vain to seek another: the case is mine.

I answer, second, that, even if it were allowable for you to change your ground, your new ground is not true. It is not true that the Church has no right to place such limitations upon the common claim

to church office, in cases other than the three which God has made.— For she has claimed, and has exercised this very power, on grounds of class; and has been justified in doing so by all the divines and ecclesiastics; *certainly by you*. One instance of this was presented by the primitive Church, which, from the very days of the apostles onward, always refused to ordain slaves, although they freely admitted them to the Church. Have you ever heard any one, Mr. Moderator, charge this usage as unscriptural? Another instance of a hundred and fifty years' standing was presented by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which, in all that time, never ordained a slave. Yet they were freely admitted to the church membership, and during all that time we constantly preached to them that "in Christ Jesus there was neither bond nor free." But we all, you, gentlemen, as much as I, exercised, and justified, the power of limiting the privileges of office from them. Where was then your doctrine, that the universality of the Gospel left the Church no power to restrain any church office or power from any class? Where the overtures and demands that the Assembly should declare colour and race no barrier to ordaining a negro as the spiritual ruler of white men, provided he had the other qualifications? You did not even demand their ordination as pastors of blacks; and you were right then, by the same showing that you are wrong now.

But, Mr. Moderator, there is an evasion at hand here also. It is, that the law of the land then gave masters rights over the labour of their servants, and that our allegiance to Cæsar (which is a scriptural duty) then made it obligatory on us not to interfere with this secular right. But now Cæsar has declared the Africans free! This plea will not do; and for two reasons. All the time, there was a multitude of free negroes in the North and in the South; but no Presbyterian asked that one of these should be made equal to us as teacher and ruler over white men in our church: and south of the Potomac, no free black was ordained, so far as I know, even to preach to our servants. The second reason is, that man's spiritual interests are more priceless than his secular; that the church, the guardian of the former, is independent of all but Christ in caring for them; so that if this right of Christian slaves to preach was sacred and indefeasible under the Gospel, it was your solemn duty to tell their owners so, and to demand, in Christ's name, their emancipation in order that they might preach. Where then was this high doctrine, which is now held up to be so imperative; and where that towering moral courage in defying prejudice and consequences?

Now I ask emphatically, what change has taken place in the black race, to make them more fit for ruling over white churches than they then were? Are they any wiser, any more religious, any purer, any more enlightened now? Nay; the only change is a violent revolution, made by the sword, by which, as every intelligent Virginian knows, they have been only injured in character, as in destiny. Hence, I cannot see why an ecclesiastical policy towards them which was wise, and right, and scriptural then, is not at least as much so now. But it is said: "Then they were by law slaves; now they are by law free." I reply, does Christ's kingdom wait on the politicians and conquerors

of the world, to be told by them how she must administer her sacred charge? Where now is that fastidiousness which a little while ago said so softly, that the church was a spiritual commonwealth, and had no concern, *pro* or *con*, with seculars? I invoke it *here*: *this* is the place for it to assert itself, where I demand for the church the right to carry out still her own scriptural polity towards the Africans, as she has practised it for 150 years, justified by all sound Presbyterians, North and South; and to pursue the even tenour of her way, regardless of the decision of the sword and faction; and *not there*, where the imposing plea was but a pretext for assailing the dearest earthly interests of your fellow citizens, through a sophistical perversion of our spiritual charter.

The truth is, Mr. Moderator, the doctrine I oppose involves covertly the whole conclusion of the abolitionist. If, as is here argued, membership in Christ's church secures to all, irrespective of class and condition, the indefeasible right to church office; and if the civil government imposes on a class of Christians a condition practically inconsistent with their enjoying such spiritual franchise; then that secular order is intrinsically anti-christian and unrighteous. For the soul is above the body; eternity is more than time; man's spiritual liberties are more indefeasible than any social relation; and God is above Cæsar. If this doctrine I oppose is true now, it was true from 1706 to 1865. The rights of masters, which prevented you from putting that doctrine in practice, were essentially criminal. The church was continually derelict, in not testifying so, and preaching abolition. And our holy fathers lived and died in sin. This conclusion is inevitable. Ask Henry Ward Beecher; he will tell you, that the links of this deduction are adamant, if your premise, which is his, touching the right of negroes to clerical equality, be granted. Therefore I know that it is false.

But it is urged, with great confidence: "If God, by the call of his providence and Spirit, says to a black christian, Preach; how can the church dare to forbid him, on the mere ground of the colour of his skin?" *If* God says to any one, Preach; of course we must not bid him forbear. But not so fast. This short argument assumes several essential things, very wide of the truth. In the first place, it is very far from being the same thing, that a given branch of the church composed of a given people, shall say to an alien whom God may have called to preach: "We do not wish you to teach and rule us;" and that they shall say to him: "Preach not at all." Next, it by no means follows that a man, white or black, is called of God, because he thinks he is called of God. If I know anything of the doctrine of *vocation*, as taught by the Scriptures, our Constitution, and the great Reformed divines, it includes these truths: That no man's call to preach or rule is valid, until the people of God voluntarily echo it, inviting and electing him to teach and rule them: That even as the Holy Ghost moves the soul of him whom Christ calls to preach; so, the same Spirit moves the hearts of Christ's people to approve and select him: That the Spirit is as much in the body, as in the clergy: and that His divine voice, as uttered in the two, cannot contradict itself. Now, by what right can any man, black or white, assume that he is unquestionably

commissioned of God to teach and rule in this church, when this church distinctly demurs that her God, whose Spirit is as much in her heart as in the man most certainly called, has not prompted her to accept and prefer that particular man's teaching? By what right will any man on this floor assume that the body of our pious and enlightened laity has rejected God's voice in this thing, and has wickedly mistaken an old caste prejudice for a scriptural disqualification; while the negro (because, I suppose, he has a black skin) shall be assumed as right of course in his aspirations? There is no possible risque, is there? of his mistaking conceit, vanity, lust of power, forwardness, ambition, impudence, for the spiritual impulse to intrude himself upon white christians! No one here, I presume, will take this ground. For this would be equivalent to saying, that the religious consciousness of a negro, because he is a negro, is a so much truer vehicle of the mind of the Spirit, than that of a white man, that the assumption of any black candidate for the ministry is better entitled to credit as the voice of the Spirit, than the refusal of a whole church of educated, pious, enlightened, white Presbyterians. The force of abolition frenzy could no farther go. No, sir, there is no adequate proof of God's call, until the church freely recognizes and seconds it. Hence, it is a begging of the question, to argue that when a church intelligently and conscientiously witholds her call, she forbids him whom God commands to preach.

Let us now briefly review the points established. The universality of gospel blessings to all believers does not carry with it a universal right to church office, as was asserted. God has often restrained the latter, on grounds of class, or natural distinction, where he has conceded the former. God has given to his church discretion to restrain it for similar cause, in suitable unrevealed instances. The Church has in every age exercised this lawful discretion, for her own general edification. The case of the negroes among us presents just such an instance, where the wise exercise of the scriptural discretion is proper. For, as I have shown, the setting up of black men to rule white Presbyterians, is, on every account, not for the church's true edification. Here it may be added, it would be as mischeivous to the souls of the blacks, as it is odious to the whites. For instance; how many negroes are there in all the South who would not, in an era of unhealthy excitement, and approaching strife of races like this, be utterly spoiled by this elevation? How many would retain to the end their sobriety, their modesty, their sound discretion, under a condition so utterly foreign to their previous experiences?

I am opposed therefore to the attempt to establish a clerical equality between the two races, in the same churches and judicatories, as being bad for us, and bad for them. It may be well to attempt an answer to the natural question: What alternative do you propose? I reply that I would first kindly invite and advise the black people to remain as they were, members of our churches, and under our instruction and church government. For I am well assured that this would prove best for their true interests. But if they will not be wise enough to agree to this, while I deplore their mistake, I would still attempt to do them all the good possible, which can be done without

injustice to our church, and by righteous means. Then, as the second alternative, I would assist and encourage them to build up a black Presbyterian Church, ecclesiastically independent of, and separate from ours, but in relations of friendship and charity. To this end, I would extend to them ministerial and missionary labour liberally. I would aid them in church building. I would provide schools, separate from our own, for training black men to be pastors of black churches; and I would, if necessary, give ordination to enough men to form a separate Presbytery, when enough can be found possessed of constitutional qualifications. But I would make no black man a member of a white Session, or Presbytery, or Synod, or Assembly; nor would I give them any share in the government of our own church, nor any representation in it. "It is confusion."

NOTE.

The above is substantially what was spoken in the Synod. But it was delivered without much premeditation or method, and under great haste from the fear of prolixity. Hence some things were probably said, which are here omitted, and some things which I intended, were omitted in the speaking. I have therefore introduced a few sentences here and there, in the way of expansion and illustration of points actually made in the Synod, which were not spoken there.

R. L. D.