Ezra - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Ecclesiastical 2, Scriptural Views Upon the Subject of Elders

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(Geneva, 1849.)

CHAPTER 1.

THERE is a difficulty in believing that the most precious truths- truths which, when received from God, are a source of joy and blessing to our hearts-should produce controversy and painful conflict.

But we must take it as it is. It is exactly these truths, the dissemination of which meets with all the hostility of the flesh and all the prejudices of souls accustomed to things which cannot hold their ground in presence of those truths. I shall draw the attention of the controversy, to which the testimony of God in these last days has given rise. It is true that the fundamental points have been sufficiently discussed, but since the truth has made immense progress, those who are opposed to it have completely changed the ground on which battle was joined.1 An answer then must be given to these fresh attacks directed against the truth and to the fresh arguments intended for the defense of error.

In the case which now occupies us the defense of the old order of things has been entirely given up. The greater part of the things which, for a long time were the objects of various attacks, has been abandoned, as not being in accordance with the word of God, and not only abandoned, but stigmatized as faulty. Those who, for many years, have borne testimony against these things, speak of them more calmly.

According to our adversaries themselves, the clergy is of the devil.2

Again, according to them,.the visible unity of the Church has been lost.

Thus, at least, there is much ground gained; one would have thought that the controversy was at an end.

No! A man does not always receive the truth even when he is reduced to confess that he is in error.

Nothing but the ground of the contest is changed, and in changing to a new ground, it is sought to render a part of that which has been written on these subjects useless. As the actual order of things is no longer vindicated, the attacks upon it, say they, are superfluous. But let us state the facts plainly. If the attacks are no longer vindicated, it is because the conclusions of those who love that testimony have been accepted. Have they been accepted from the bottom of the conscience before God, so as to place them humbly in the position which follows the admission of these principles? Alas! in no way. They only say that, since the early centuries, it is true, all has been corrupted; that the order established by God has been abandoned; and that the order of things which has sprung from it is of the devil. It is true, say they again, that the visible unity of the Church has been destroyed; but they add, " I can re-establish it quite as well as the apostles; and those who do not submit to that which I have established, are the enemies of the unity of the Church."

The facts are admitted intellectually, to give room for the pretentious action of the will of man. The truth has not penetrated their conscience so as to place it in humiliation before God.

CHAPTER 2.

At Geneva it was needful, either to induce certain brethren to join the new Free Church founded under the name of the Evangelical Church of3 Geneva, or else to throw discredit on their principles, and thus in one way or another to destroy the testimony rendered to the truth. It may be that the testimony had been borne in much weakness and accompanied by faults and shortcomings in every respect.

It is a thing which the brethren who bore the testimony would not deny. They would confess it all before God and before man. But the testimony was there. The humbler, they who bore it, kept themselves, the better they would find themselves for it.

The details of the steps taken, of the correspondence, and of the conferences which took place, would bring no great profit to the reader. What concerns Christians is the path they have to follow in order to glorify God.4

The question is a very serious one. It is admitted, that, as regards its visible unity, the Church is in ruins. They profess that the clergy, with whom this visible unity has rested for sixteen centuries, is not according to God. But it is pretended that, putting the clergy aside, we can re-establish that which existed in the days of the apostles, such as the apostles themselves had established it.

It is, it must be allowed, a pretension which has a very wide bearing, and we should compromise ourselves deeply in giving way to it and submitting to those who put it forth, if after all it is a pretension unauthorized by God.

Are the Christians of Geneva in a position to re-establish the organization of the Church in the primitive state in which the apostles left it, and which state, by the consent of all, exists no longer?

Yet, I do not deny, since they have put forward this pretension, it is a solemn thing to reject it, if in truth the thing could be done. We must look deeper into it than the individuals. Even if those who have undertaken it are not capable of it; if the thing be possible; if it is according to the mind of God, one should be very cautious of raising any obstacle to it and of discouraging those who seek to realize it. One thought, which, moreover, will act with power on a conscientious soul, on a soul penetrated with love for the Church, is the dread of limiting the energy of the love of God towards His Church. It is the reproach of the Spirit of God to Israel: " They limited the Holy One of Israel." It is clear that in itself, putting aside every other consideration, and all the recognition of the ways and judgments of God, it would be a thing infinitely precious

to see the Church shine forth in all her pristine beauty, in the unity and in the ensemble which it had at the beginning. For my part, I have so little faith, that I always fear to cast a doubt on the path of him who seems to have more. It is certain, at least I am fully convinced of it, that we can and ought to realize infinitely more than we have done of that primitive state. Insomuch that I am far from disposed to raise obstacles to the realization of many things which do not exist, provided that the realization proceeds from faith, and from the Spirit of God.

But here we have to do with positive pretension, and it is that we have to answer.

Yet in this respect I find myself in a rather peculiar position. The ink is barely dry of my answer to an attack coming from the same side,5 in which we were accused of making a code of law out of the gospel, and in which we were opposed, by insisting upon the falsity of the principle which considers, as now binding on us, the primitive rules of the apostles. The word of God is no law in like matters, say they, while blaming us.

My answer to these reproaches maintained in all respects the whole authority of the word, all the while that I confess the humbling incapacity in which the Church finds itself to recover certain things which it has lost.

Is it not then a rather surprising thing to see those who cried down, in the ears of everybody who was disposed to listen, the system of Gospel-code-to see them accuse us at this time of disobedience and even of blasphemy (for to such an extent have they gone) because we do not submit to them, when they insist on the same rules, adding thereto the pretension of being in a state to re-establish them in full vigor?

If we had only to do with controversy, it would be enough to ask them to answer themselves. And why, when, in appearance at least, it is but a simple question of your maintaining your ground, in the midst of a general movement, in a place of authority which is escaping you-why would you wish to impose on us that chapter of what you call with contempt the Gospel-code, and impose that one on us, whilst canceling all the rest as being no rule, and whilst rejecting, in principle, the continuance of the obligation to that which is found there, whilst denying even the existence of that binding character beyond the occasion itself, which gave rise to the apostolic direction? You should at least have left to the Christian public time to forget that which you alleged six months since, and which you were repeating not six weeks ago.

But the matter is too serious to be treated thus, for the interests of the Church of God are called in question. It is a question of making oneself certain of the truth and of walking in it by the power of the precious grace of God. It is not enough to point out the errors of those who are opposed to it a sad employment of one's time, fruitless to oneself and too often to them also.

After having lost its normal position and its primitive rules, is the Church capable, when it has sinned thus, of re-entering as of right into the old position, and of re-establishing all that which the rules, long ago laid aside, had established, without taking count either of its fall or of the ruin resulting therefrom?6

Another aspect under which the right to establish an ecclesiastical system has been viewed, is that which we have just pointed out, namely, that the word is of no authority in the case,7 and that we must take our stand boldly on the platform of human order and evangelical liberty.

Having strongly contended in the " Glance," etc., for the full and entire authority of the word, I add nothing here on that point.

It is with the first point that we have to do.

But before entering on the subject, I take the liberty of laying before the eyes of the reader some facts relative to Geneva, because these facts throw light on the question of the establishment of elders, and on the position of the brethren of " L'Ile "8 with regard to these matters.

CHAPTER 3

Having gone about eleven years ago to Geneva, because I had been told that I should find there some brethren who met on nearly the same grounds as ourselves, without any intention of laboring in those parts, I found the pastors of the Borg de Four divided amongst themselves, and the flock on their part holding meetings with the object of judging of the prerogatives of the pastors.9 After some hesitation, I endeavored to bring them together and repair the breach; a work to which, as a stranger, I might apply myself without entering into painful details.

By the grace of God I succeeded, and peace was reestablished.

The principle that the Church was in ruins powerfully contributed to that end, in that I maintained the authority of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, whilst recognizing that the actual state of things placed obstacles to our following out these epistles rigorously and in the details, on the question of elders, which had the effect of calming their minds. I cannot fail here to acknowledge the kindly feeling and affection which I at that time met with, whether from the ministers or amongst the brethren. I enjoyed their hospitality. God is my witness that I sought but their welfare. There was in their system more formalism than I could have desired.10 But I bore with it, avoiding certain details which weighed on my conscience, such as voting, in which, as a stranger, I was plainly not called to take a share, although soon much bound up with the flock. During four years I labored in maintaining peace and unity, pressing on brethren the remembrance that though they might find some things which grieved them, the pastors had been the means of assembling the flock, and that very fact, as well as their work, was a legitimate source of influence, and gave them a right to the respect of brethren.

More than six months before the rupture which took place at La Pelisserie, on the occasion of a conference between the pastors and the flock, one of the pastors let me know that I ought not to be present, seeing I was not one of the flock. This communication was made to me at a moment when I was uncertain whether I ought to be present at the meeting or not. All uncertainty was put an end to, and I answered, " Well! I hardly knew what to do; here is my path plainly marked...." I have taken no part in the course of affairs at La Pelisserie from that day onward. I left Geneva and I withheld totally from all interference.

During a stay elsewhere, and when my relations with the flock were quite broken off, difficulties arose in their midst on the subject of a meeting for reading the word, a meeting to which the ministers raised some objections. One of them himself designated as a coup d'tat, on their part, the step they took, which resulted in the withdrawal of brethren; the meeting of whom formed the first nucleus of the meeting at L'Ile. In no way was I informed of what was passing, or consulted on the subject. I had no knowledge of it till later. When I heard of it, I despaired of any reconciliation. After six years' discussion it became a question of a distinct clerical principle on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a formal denial of that principle. Later, one of the pastors addressed himself to me to get me to bring about a reconciliation. The

difficulties arose about a platform from which the supper was given out and on which the ministers stood alone. " The platform is a trifle," said he to me. " It is," I answered, " a standard which symbolizes a principle. Let the pastors place themselves at the table with the brethren,11 and they may be certain of ensuring more influence than by standing on their rights." I cordially hope for my part that they may have all the influence that their labor may have brought them.

Although it is true that the question since that time has been much developed, I would still hold to this day the same language. And although the flock at Geneva was not all that I could desire, and inasmuch as I could not approve either the election of pastors by the flock or the principle of dissent which was more or less prevalent in its constitution, I can say that the remembrance of my first connection with it, has always rendered this breach infinitely painful. One of the pastors of whom I spoke above said to an English brother, that if I had been there the division would certainly not have taken place. That is very possible. God had other thoughts. And I believe in truth, that with regard to all that has taken place in the religious world, and to the development of the principles which lay at the root of the question which agitated the assembly, the position was not tenable. The division was none the less. painful to me in every respect. I was forced to despair of finding any remedy for it. If the pastors had consented to take their places at the table when they met to break bread, nothing would have prevented me from trying it. The question of clergy was at the bottom of it.

This then, as to elders, is the extent to which I have gone. I could have joyfully recognized their existence in practice when they had given themselves up to the work and had received there the seal of God. Will people nominate them? I must stop. Without stopping to question the door by which they entered, I have recognized them according to my principles, when I have found them at the work. If their nomination is to be put forward as a principle, one must be decided.12

The whole question of knowing, what the Church is, what is its state, what are the bases of its relations with Christ, what is its responsibility, the path which befits it in its state of failure; all is compromised. If not, my mind turns in preference to subjects totally different to that of the election of elders. Christ is too precious, the times too serious, to dwell on such points.

CHAPTER 4.

I now come to the tract, " Are Elders to be established? "

Its author and those who with him oppose the truth may rest assured that they have something far different to do than to rejoice at the opportunity which the ill-worded sentence of a brother has given them, of falsifying and blackening the principles of " brethren." They have to do with God, who protects His truth-a God who humbles His own when they have need of it, but who knows how to judge those that oppose Him and His truth.

I now approach the root of the question.13

I say distinctly that I believe the root of the thought which has been called in question is perfectly right, and that the whole question is contained in it-a question too serious to be discarded by a mere personal discussion. The expression of it, it is true, was not accurate, and I think some fault may be found in that it had not been sufficiently weighed before God.14 But I think that to reject the thought is a mark of want of conscience and of heart toward God.

It seems to me to be the pretentiousness of human pride at the time when God calls for humiliation and self-abasement. If, in such a state, one had felt willing to own in fact and in heart those whom God had manifested to be true elders in the midst of all the flock of God at Geneva, I could but have rejoiced at it. Souls alas! have not come to that yet. What has been done is far removed from that. It is said by them that they cannot obey their spiritual leaders, unless a preparatory commission and a popular election had established them as such. On what command is the existence of such commission founded? On what command does the election of that commission rest? And on what does the ancient commission itself rest, which settled matters thus?

To insist on the nomination of elders, as if it were an act of obedience, is to betray a want of conscience and of heart towards God, and a plain simile will make it understood. A father desires that his children should go and show themselves to their grandfather in their clean clothes and in a proper manner, and he orders them strictly to walk on the footpath and by no means to leave it, for fear of dirtying their clothes. The eldest of the boys, whose pride is hurt at the idea of going and showing himself to his grandfather as a little child, goes and splashes himself with mud whilst on his road thither, and then begins to insist on the duty of walking on the footpath in order to keep himself clean. Is that obedience? Is that conscientiousness? Is that a fitting feeling towards his father? Where, let me ask, is the authority which he claims over his brothers?

The root of the question which has provoked so much indignation is, that considering the state of the Church we cannot act to the satisfaction of those who wish to nominate elders; that this nomination of elders is a proud piece of pretension; that corruption having laid hold on the whole system which God had established by the apostles, men are not capable of establishing anew a similar system, that we cannot now refound the Church. I speak only of established organization. The Church herself plainly exists at all times.

In reality, what they pretend to do is to lay the foundation of the Church anew.

A fundamental principle in all the argument of our brother, M. Foulquier, is that God never re-establishes the " original state" of things that have fallen into ruin in the hands of man.

The anonymous author denies this principle. Let us see with what success.

He takes the time of the Judges as that of the deepest corruption of Israel, which, under a certain aspect, is so far true that I accept it without raising more difficulties. What then was at that time the primitive state in question? It was that God Himself was their king; just as God Himself points it out to Samuel; Sam. 8: 7, 8; chap. 12: 12. The priest was the point (contact, the bond between the people and God; and God raised up judges when there was need of them.

Has that state of things been re-established? Never. And what is more, it never will be. It would be difficult to find an example more striking and more indisputable of the truth of the principle contested by the anonymous author.

In a certain sense, many things will be re-established under the Messiah; but the counsels of God, as regards the Messiah Himself, exclude the possibility of the return of Israel to the state in which they were under the judges. As regards the priesthood itself, not only another family has been invested with it, but the very position of the priesthood has been totally changed. The priesthood has lost forever the position in which it was formerly. It continues, it is true, and without it man could not stand before God. But God has said, " I will raise up a faithful priest who will stand before my Anointed."15 The introduction of the Anointed has changed everything. He it is, the King, who became responsible for the maintenance of order in the midst of the people, who governed them, who judged them, and whose conduct determined so to say the judgment which God passed on His people; 2 Kings 23:26.

The anonymous author asks, "At what time did royalty fall?" and he answers at once, " It was under the reign of Saul."

Plainly Saul (asked for by the sin of the people, although allowed of God) is not the monarchy according to the will of God. David and Solomon are those whom we see in that character. It is in Solomon that the fall of the monarchy is shown. God's patience was long-suffering for the sake of His servant David. The immovable promise of God to the posterity of David cannot fail in the Person of the Christ; but it is quite clear that the monarchy has never been re-established in its primitive state, and that on the contrary, as far as this monarchy was confided to men in the flesh, it has been judged by God; that, after long-enduring patience, God has put an end to it, and that at the same time He has put an end to the relations of His people with Himself.

Does the anonymous author think that the primitive state of the people was re-established in the time of Nehemiah?

In order to present to the people the Messiah, His Son, come in the flesh, and to place Israel under responsibility on that point, as He always does before accomplishing His designs of grace, God preserved the tottering remnant of a people enslaved by the Gentiles. Was this the primitive state of that people? Was it their primitive state to be slaves of the Gentiles? Was it for this that God had redeemed them from Egypt? Was the name of Lo-anlini recalled? The state in which God called Israel " not my people " (Lo-ammi), was certainly not the primitive state of the people of God. At the command of Cyrus, His king, a residue of the people go up to Jerusalem,16 whilst Daniel, the type and sign of the true position of the people, remains at Babylon, and at the same time tells before God their history according to the counsels of God. The altar was re-established by faith. It was on the one hand the grace of God, and on the other in man the faithfulness which recognized Him in his difficulties, as his safeguard and wall of defense. Look at that beautiful passage, Ezra 3:2, 3. The people of God are always in their right place when they adore God and recognize Him as their surety and strength.

It is quite another thing to pretend to re-establish, according to the order of the dispensation, that which has been lost. Could he re-establish the kings? Did he place Zorobabel on the throne? By no means. That would have been to have disowned the judgment which God was passing on His people. Did Nehemiah dare even to put in order the priests who could not trace their genealogy? No; he put them aside.

Read Neh. 9:36, 37 and you will see how far the primitive state had been re-established.

The anonymous author wishes to distinguish between the dispensation and the political state. That is really too bold for a reader of the Bible. Was the subjection of the people of God thus to the Gentiles only a political affair? Had the king of Israel' no connection with the dispensation? God had abandoned His temple and His throne, and had confided to the Gentiles the power on earth, in saying of Judah, "they are no more my people" (a word which will not be withdrawn till the return of Christ); and they go on to say that it bears no reference to the dispensation but to the political state of the people! This is too violent! What is the political state of the people of God on the earth apart from the dispensation?

Must we then alas! overturn all this to re-establish elders? For my part, I believe that we have the assured promise of the Savior, who changes not, that He will be always in the midst of two or three met in His name, so that we always have the right to raise our altar. It is our duty. We are always bound to recognize God. Hence by His grace I ought to do all that He may give me the power to do for His glory. To work for Him, He must send us for this object.

As to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people, the meaning which the anonymous author attributes to the passage, Hag. 2:5, is totally foreign to it. God had never withdrawn His Spirit from His people, although He had judged and punished His people (Neh. 9:20). The Spirit instructed and directed the people still. (Compare Isaiah 53: 14.) But it is certain that, in a sense different to that which we have just given the passage, the Spirit of God has not dwelt in the midst of His people till after that Jesus was glorified.17

As to slavery, it is certain that in certain respects the people of God can be in slavery. At the very epoch of which the anonymous author speaks, in saying that Israel was not under the slavery of Satan, " since," etc., Nehemiah says that he was the slave of kings whom we know to have been the instruments of Satan, like wild beasts. Even were I a child of God, if I put myself under the directions of Rome, led away by the seductions of the enemy, I should surely be under the slavery of Satan, wrongly if you will, but I should be there.

The question is to know, if it would not be the same sort of thing in the case where one puts oneself under elders, who have been chosen apart from the will of God. I say neither yes nor no. Nothing is more simple than what is said of it. The idea that a child of God cannot put himself under the slavery of Satan is a dangerous error.

The remark of the anonymous author in section 17 is totally wrong. The priesthood had been the center of unity, it was so no longer. The monarchy had become the center.

As to section 20, with reference to the difference in the directions of God (Isa. 37:33; Jer. 25:8, 9), the force of the argument is not apprehended by the anonymous author. The texts are cited quite fitly to show the principle in question; and that which the texts show is that what God authorizes at a given moment, does not necessarily become a rule for those who are in a different state. To apply in this state an order of God, is not to have consciousness of one's sin; it is as if one pretended to walk on the footpath to keep oneself clean, when one had already purposely splashed oneself off the footpath. The worship of Cain was " sin," because he took no account of his fall. To elect elders, is not to obey; it is to pretend to have the power to do that which the primitive Church did, that which the apostles did.18

As to section 25,19 if we take popery as an example, all the weakness of the arguments of the anonymous author is at once apparent. There Satan governs clearly in the Church under the appearance that that form is one approved of God. It is plain that the anonymous author does not understand what the power of Satan is, nor that Satan can exercise a fearful power, even over the children of God, if they remain in a

system where this power acts, and the rather because it is veiled from them, and that they themselves conscientiously hold this system to be the Church of God, thinking that to remain in it is to obey the authority that God had established in the Church, and to keep the unity which ought to be found there.

I understand that the anonymous author pretends to escape, in that which he does, from this power of Satan. But to set oneself in principle against the thought expressed in the paragraph of Foulquier, which occupies us, is to deny that which spiritual intelligence ought to understand and recognize as true.

" It is clear that if the adversary gains possession of a thing which God had placed in our hands, to desire to retain it is to remain so far under his power."

That is clear, if we preserve that which Satan makes use of in the exercise of his power; so far we remain under that power. This is so plain that the proposition demonstrates itself.

That nevertheless is not a sufficient answer. The anonymous author may answer, and does answer in fact in one place: I wish to keep nothing. The Church has not kept the scriptural system. The clergy is of the devil. I want none of it. I want to re-establish elders, such as they were at first. I, for my part, want to begin anew the Church at Geneva, on the primitive footing.20

One can answer, Your elders will be always the clergy. One can answer also, God has given you no mission for that; an answer which we must justify, as to the first point. As to the second, it is for the anonymous author to produce his title and to prove his mission, or that of those who have undertaken that work. If they do not gather with Christ, they scatter.

Let us examine in detail the anonymous author's objections. Alas! all here is sophistry. He asks when the apostasy begins. Well! we will say with him that the germ of it existed at the epoch which is spoken of in these terms, " The mystery of iniquity doth already work," 2 Thess. 2:7. After that epoch, says he, the apostle desired there should be deacons. Then our author lets us see that the Church was in a bad moral state in many respects when the apostle directs Timothy and Titus to set up deacons.21 Be it so. He asks in consequence, " How does this same disorder impose upon us at this day the obligation of putting aside this institution? " Finally, he adds, as to the setting up elders, " This state of failure does not dispense with our duty of preserving them in our turn."

What an argument! The faithful are in a sad state. Officers have been established to reduce it to order. That is the reason why, when officers, having possessed themselves of the rights of the sovereign, have become the source and instruments of disorder, it is needful to keep them. That is a convincing argument! Also the anonymous author must change totally what Foulquier said! He makes him say that this institution puts us under the power of Satan, because we live in a dispensation in a state of failure. Foulquier said, If the institution itself is under the power of Satan, in that case to retain it, would be to put ourselves under that power. To maintain the institution when it was a barrier against corruption, or to maintain it when it became the source, the power, and the expression of it, these are two very different things. But that is not yet all.

They wish not to give up the establishment of elders, and to maintain it in its turn. Ah! I ask, What is it that the anonymous author retains at Geneva? Are elders established? Where is the institution so dear to him) It has no existence, and, according to him, it is centuries since it ceased to exist. The test consists then not in maintaining but in re-establishing it, in creating it anew. On the other hand, there cannot be any question of giving it up; we cannot give up that which has no existence. There is nothing then which we can give up.

This institution is not then to be maintained but to be produced anew. Our author thinks that his colleagues and he have enough creative energy to do that which the apostles did in the Church.

The following facts will show us how they are in a state to imitate them.

First, There has been a commission charged to draw out a constitution for the Church.

Secondly, By this constitution, the Church confides its administration to the assembly of the elders. (Art. 14.)

Those who have given their adhesion to this constitution being considered to compose the Evangelical Church at Geneva, they must needs have elders. They are called together to elect a commission, to be charged with preparing the difficult and important task of the election of elders. There is no inquiry either if there be men fit to be elders, or if the elders desired of God for His Church at Geneva are to be found in the midst of that which takes the name of the Evangelical Church. To obey the word of God, this Evangelical Church is called on to have a presbytery; it ought to choose those whom the Lord calls to be elders or bishops in the flock. What flock? Is there more than a sect there? It is natural that those who have placed themselves at the head of the movement should direct it. Let us suppose even that some will seek to add some persons for the purpose of giving a counterpoise to this establishment of clergy, and that others will oppose it. Is there the slightest resemblance between this and the Epistles to Timothy and to Titus? If not, why speak so loudly of a positive command? Would this positive command be to judge by the facts, to reinstate you in the clerical position, which you have just lost and which you still love? Would this command be to make a trial of a new sect and to attach oneself to it to see if that attempt would succeed? The Spirit of God never makes attempts. Do you think that one who walked after the Spirit would try it? He obeys when he has light; and when he has not, he waits. Do you think that, finding brethren occupied in the midst of Christians assembled out of the world, watching over them, devoted to their service, caring for their souls, and blessed by God in their labor, I should question their service? Never. But, when I see a special class of persons raising the pretension of founding a church, preparatory commissions, and others to install men in their places, and that they appeal to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, whilst accusing me of disobedience to the word of God if I do not submit, I hesitate. I cannot either recognize a like pretense or submit myself thereto, as if it was to yield obedience to the epistles, which they bring forward.

If the author deceives himself, if it is not to assemble with Christ (and if it be a false pretense, it is certainly not to assemble with Christ), it is then to scatter. He presents unity, which we all desire, under the condition of recognizing the elders. He will pardon me if I hesitate. He accuses me of being disobedient in my not recognizing that he has sufficient authority to create them. For it is just this. That I should obey leaders [given of God], well and good. I will do it with all my heart. But that a command to obey implies the power to create that which we are to obey, is going rather too far.

What we ask of you is the command to make elders. We quite recognize the biblical command to obey them. But at this time the elders whom we ought to obey do not exist, and that is the point on which we are all agreed. So to demand, as you do, that we should show a biblical command to reject the institution of elders, when that institution is no longer in existence, is really to say nothing. I repeat it: I reject nothing. Where are the elders? Ah! says the author, there are none. How then reject them? But we want to make them, says he. I answer, That is another question. Has God sent you for that? Where is His command? I await it.

But, that all may come to naught rather than reject the setting up of elders, the anonymous author asks us why, if the ruin of the Church hinders us from electing elders, we preserve baptism and the Supper. I ask him, in my turn, Have those two things ceased to exist? No. I only have to withdraw myself from the additions and abuses which corrupt them. Besides, in putting them in practice, I create nothing; I neither elect nor set up anyone; I make use of no authority.

Pardon me, says the Papist or the Puseyite, and even often the Protestant, in consecrating the Supper you use authority. You arrogate it to yourself in preaching the gospel. What authority have you for that?

I stop. The question is solemn. Am I under the alternative, either of rejecting these privileges and blessings, or of accepting them with every sort of corruption and vitiated by grave errors?

I examine my Bible seriously, and that is what I have done, and I find all liberty. I open it, and the clergy which have corrupted all that, is not recognized there. It teaches me that I may enjoy them freely.

I say then, as regards these things and others like them, I have withdrawn myself from under the slavery of Satan. Yet more, I will recognize, as far as lies in my power, those persons who bear, even in the face of many imperfections, the marks of being overseers. If they insist on the clergy, and if they deny the unity of the Church, I cannot walk in such a path.

As regards the promise of the presence of Jesus in the midst of two or three met in His name, it is not I who institute anything, if I meet with others. It is Jesus who accomplishes that which He promised. The interpretation of the anonymous author is surely totally erroneous. He strives to deprive us of all.

Happily we, with all the Church of God, have too often, unworthy of it as we are, had experience of the faithfulness of Jesus, to be troubled with this interpretation.

It is a mistake to restrict to discipline the scope of this promise. It is, on the contrary, one reason for which discipline thus exercised is recognized by God; and that reason is, that Jesus is there. But this precious declaration is applicable, and more directly applicable, to requests made in similar circumstances than to discipline. It is a fact always true that, where two or three are met in the name of Jesus, Jesus is there. It is a general declaration given as a reason for which discipline is valid. For, says the Lord, where two or three are met in my name, there I am in their midst. Nothing more simple. I have nothing then to recognize except that the interpretation is wrong.

I have already spoken of Nehemiah's altar. The passage from Jeremiah proves nothing, unless this principle, namely, that the Lord can put aside that which He has Himself established. In fact, that has come to pass as regards the elders. The question is simply this, Is it the will of God that we should re-establish any anew officially? As to the altar, we have it, and we have it restored through grace. We adore with joy around the table of the Lord. We can do the same in everything, which is not a pretension to that we do not possess.

The anonymous author has marred the meaning of section 28, by separating it from the sentence of section 27, to which the section 28 relates, and which shows very clearly that it has reference to the word of God, but that the power and operation of the Holy Spirit are necessary to give us discernment.

Section 27 speaks of the light of the conscience, of the light of the law, of the prophets, and of the light of the gospel.

Does the anonymous author deny that the witness of the Holy Spirit is necessary in these very times? If he is of this opinion, nothing will surprise me.22

To quote the conduct of Diotrephes as a sufficient proof that he was an elder, is a curious way of attracting us to this species of authority. Let us congratulate the preparatory commission, that a like argument has not a shadow of a foundation. There are, alas, but too many Diotrephes, without its being necessary to have established elders where to produce them. We can hardly believe that our author seriously wished to say that the fact of desiring to be the first, and in consequence not to receive the apostles, proves to him that a man may be an elder. He asks if we should not separate ourselves for the cause of the presence of Diotrephes. And why separate ourselves from the Church, because it contains an evil man? For my part I would never separate from anything, of which I could have an idea that it was the Church after having left it. Besides, I do not believe that 3 John 10 means " When I come I will show him what he has done." Martin employs, it is true, this expression: but upomneso rather means, I will remember that which he has done, or I will make him remember that which he has done, without precisely stating what the apostle proposed to himself to do when he had come.

As to the explanation of the seven churches of the Apocalypse, this is scarcely the place to give the interpretation of them. It would be writing a book. It is clear that when one states that " the angels of the churches can only be their councils of elders," one can draw what conclusions one wishes. This meaning of the word " angel " is neither that of the word nor that of tradition. It is beyond doubt that, in the word, angel does not mean a council of elders, and tradition also gives a totally different meaning.

The growing failure of the seven churches is a question of interpretation with which I shall not occupy myself here. The anonymous author makes confusion in that which he says of it, for it is evident that the fact of being a candlestick of gold, in no way hinders the fact of failure already pointed out to Ephesus (" remember whence thou art fallen "), and does not even hinder it from being spued out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus, that which was to be accomplished with respect to Laodicea. In that which follows he makes such a confusion between the state of the universal Church, to which the question of failure applies, and the local churches, in which there were elders, that a few words will be enough to show the weakness of his argument.

We may take the seven churches as churches; or we may, with many Christians, consider them as a prophetic history of the Church as regards its moral state here below. The author says, as regards this last point of view, the elders and the churches ought to exist even to the

end. But this is complete confusion. For in this last view we have ceased to regard these chapters as being occupied with the seven [local] churches. The Spirit makes use of it to show the state of the professing Church in the course of ages.

CHAPTER 5.

At last we come to that which we asked. The anonymous author alleges a distinct command. Titus was left in Crete to appoint elders. That is clear. No one denies it. But here is the question.

How does that authorize it, or, if he prefers it, how does that authorize some believers in Geneva to appoint them? It is very certain that it was not believers who had the power to appoint elders; for had it been so, it was needless to send Titus to Crete to do it.

It was an act for which the believers were not competent, and for the accomplishment of which the presence of the faithful companion of the apostle himself was necessary.

What is there that shows that the anonymous author and the preparatory commission have that competency? They say so, but that is not exactly enough to make us receive it. The order of Paul to Titus speaks evidently of a commission confided to a certain person left there on purpose, because the thing which was the object of this commission could not be executed without him. I ask the reader if that is not the natural force of this passage: a conclusion which the character of Titus supports. The anonymous author tells us that it is " a positive order, a very clear command of the Lord, given by His apostle, not only to Titus, but to all those who later would be called by the Holy Spirit to lead the Churches of God." This term " to lead the Churches of God " is rather doubtful. Does the author wish to say that the elders of one town have a mission to establish elders in all towns, and that they have a special mission for that? Now that was undoubtedly the case with Titus. He had been left in a peculiar case to set in order the things which the apostle had begun and was furnished for that purpose with the authority of the apostle.

Have the elders a like authority? Are they charged to impose rules on other churches, and furnished for this purpose, with the authority of the apostle? Now that was the case of Titus. And, if one part of the command be binding, why should not the other part be equally so? It is the same authority which is in exercise. The apostle, in imposing on Titus, without any other direction, the task of setting in order that which remained to be set in order, showed he had confidence in his capacity to do it in a fitting way. It is just the same as to the appointment of elders, which rests exactly on the same foundation. If the author is authorized to appropriate to himself these things, the pope has not less reason to take to himself that which the Lord confided to the son of Jonas.

Many things had been set in order by Paul; others were to be so by Titus; that is, all that remained yet to be set in order. In doing so, Titus used an authority in the exercise of which he could act in a competent way, which gave to his acts the same authority as the acts by which the apostle, whose delegate Titus was, had already set in order other things.23 Had all elders this mission? Was this command always binding? The anonymous author cites not one word of scripture to show us that this command applies to Christians of the present day. But, says he, it is clear it is a binding command at that time, for he tells Timothy in what way one ought to conduct oneself (not " to behave thyself ") in the Church of God. This point has been already discussed. But, as it is an important point, and the sole and solitary foundation of the author's system, it is worth while examining it again.24

We do not doubt that elders had been established in the Church. We wish even to realize and respect all that is possible to be realized of their work in these present times. Brethren have always acted according to this principle,25 on certain occasions with more energy than on others.

I have frequently declared this in the controversy which had taken place: the question of elders has never been a capital point in my eyes. Nevertheless I have always recognized so much of it as existed, and when the occasion offered, I have sought to give activity and development " to that excellent work." By the grace of God I will do so still, giving to it all the energy which He may grant me. In certain places it has been in exercise happily and with blessing. In others it would be a great blessing if God in His goodness would raise up the instrument. But if, because the name of clergy yet inspires repugnance, it is wished under the name of elders and under the pretext of obedience to re-establish the clergy, I do not let myself be deceived by words. When I am told that I can neither obey the elders nor recognize them (1 Thess. 5:12, 13), unless men have officially set them up, I cannot trust it, although I am told that it has no more anything to do with clergy. I do not see the action of the Spirit of God in the preparatory commission. This commission takes the place of the Holy Ghost; and in taking it, it denies Him, even if they are not aware of it.

And as regards the command itself, the commission with which Timothy was charged, had not as its object the establishment of elders, nor did the apostle give any command like it. Paul, on going into Macedonia, had begged Timothy to remain at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), a town in the Church of which elders existed, the establishment of which is never mentioned in the word; I Tim. 5: 10, 17-19. And see in what terms the apostle expresses the special object of the mission of his son Timothy, " As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine."

Then he enlarges on certain points over which Timothy was to watch for the purpose of putting them in order. In explaining himself on various subjects, he enumerates the qualities and gifts desirable in a bishop. But before entering on all the details of that which was fitting for the Church of God, for the Church of the living God, over which he was thus to watch, the apostle says, My son Timothy, I entrust to thee, I give thee (paratithemai) this command, this charge, according to the prophecies which have been made in former time concerning thee, in order that by them thou mayest war this good warfare. It was a charge confided to him, and for which he had been designed by express prophecies; and consequently, when the apostle was to leave Ephesus, he leaves Timothy there to preserve order, in virtue of the charge he had in the house of God. Finally, after having given him the directions necessary, about a certain number of things, he adds, " These things write I unto thee [not to the Church nor to the elders], hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God," etc.

I ask, Was not the commission entrusted to Timothy a special one, for the carrying out of which the apostle gave26 him the necessary instruction? The apostle says, " If I tarry long." What matters his return if this instruction concerned at once the behavior of one particular flock, and that of the universal Church in all times? It is true that since the apostle teaches us in what manner Timothy ought to make Christians walk, this ought also to direct us in the things that concern us, although Timothy was no more there to insist on these things. That is plain.

If Timothy was to watch that the widows were not to live at the expense of the Church, when they had relations who could support them, that remains a rule for the relations of widows, although Timothy be there no longer, because the instruction which was addressed to him is a means of knowing the will of God concerning those persons. But to say that the mission entrusted to Timothy is a rule for all those who conduct the churches, is to attribute to themselves that charge for which direct inspiration had marked out Timothy by prophecy.

Clerical subtlety will ask of me, Why do you make that which concerns the widows a rule good for all times and not the rule for establishing elders?

And, first, no such order was ever given to Timothy. It was given to Titus, a thing which, we remark in passing, proves that since Paul had left Titus in Crete expressly for that, the churches had neither the authority nor mission to do so. And as the order to establish elders was not given to Timothy, the words, " how he should behave himself," do not in any way apply to the nomination of elders, as has been so assiduously urged on us to believe. Besides, when I find that which concerns widows, the widows of this time can profit thereby, because they are in the position in question. To profit by the directions given to Timothy we must also be in the position in which Timothy was; and if we are not, to pretend to act as Timothy, is not to obey, but to arrogate to ourselves the position of Timothy.27

When I find the qualities required by this epistle, and the excellent work in activity, I will recognize and support, with the energy God may give me, that which God has given and sanctioned. I will engage other persons to use to profit all those of His graces which may be found, if God calls me thereto in His grace. The more I see the losses which the Church has suffered, the more I am desirous of turning to profit in her all that which in His long patience and His supreme goodness, our God has left us, to the end that we may glorify Him, by giving thanks to Him with a feeling even still deeper than if I enjoyed all. This is far different from saying, I can do all that which apostles and Timothies did, and from accusing those of disobedience who do not submit themselves to a like pretension.

And when even Timothy or Titus had a special mission, and for my part I do not understand that a soul truly subject to the word could deny it, do not other parts of the word cast some light on this question? Yes, much.

The epistles instruct us by their absolute silence. If the Epistles to Timothy and Titus are remarkable for the detailed instructions which show that a special charge had been committed to them, the epistles to the churches never touch on the question of the establishment of elders, surely a curious thing if that establishment was a general duty of the Church in all ages.

The opportunity of speaking of it was not wanting.

Paul had not yet gone to Rome. He writes to the Christians of that town-Christians whose faith was celebrated throughout the whole world. He speaks of the exercise of various gifts and graces according as God had divided to each. Amongst other gifts and graces he mentions those who were leaders, those who went before the flock, who acted to it as guides and " pillars " (proistamenoi); not one word of elders, not a shadow of a command to establish them as the only means of walking in obedience.

If any allusion to that office should be found anywhere it is in the Epistle to the Corinthians. There was at Corinth disorder, sin, details to set in order. No mention at all of elders, no command to establish them.

In the Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, nothing.

In the Epistles to the Thessalonians, which were the first written, the apostle exhorts the faithful to recognize for their work's sake, or rather to know those who worked, to take knowledge of those who labored in their midst and who led them;28 a proof more than evident that no one had been officially established among them, and that the apostle did not feel the want of doing any such thing, a no less evident proof that one could love people heartily so useful to the Church, recognize them, and obey them in Christian love, without any official nomination having given them the right to demand that obedience officially, nor to impose that obedience on those who had neither faith nor affection; which is exactly the method in which the clergy act.

The Epistle to the Philippians mentions bishops without adding a word more. Peter recognized elders, placing himself on the same footing with them.

The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts to obedience to those who led them by. following their faith, because they watched over souls as responsible for that, and not because they were officially established.

Never was obedience placed on this miserable carnal footing: still less is it said that obedience was impossible without it, but just the contrary.

Neither in the epistles to the churches nor in those addressed to Christians in general is there anywhere found the smallest word relative to the choice or establishment of elders, nor to the necessity of choosing or establishing them, whilst one finds in them that there were leaders that the faithful were exhorted to recognize and respect by very different motives to that of an official establishment. What a confirmation of that which we have already abundantly shown in our examination of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus!

The Acts of the Apostles do not leave on their part any doubt. There the apostles,29 Barnabas and Paul, choose elders for the flock in each town. The anonymous author speaks of the want of exactness in the French translations of this passage. He is right, for they wrongly add " by the suffrages of the assemblies."30

Now that word so paraphrased signifies quite simply " they chose." According to the etymology, it alludes to the act of extending the hand, a common way of voting; but its regular meaning is to choose, and in this -sense it is twice used in the New Testament (2 Cor. 8:19; Acts 10:41, " witnesses before chosen of God "): passages which leave no doubt of its meaning. The authority of the most valuable dictionaries confirms what these passages point out.

The anonymous author speaks of apostles of a lower class, as Junias, Andronicus, and Barnabas, sent by the churches. The word of God gives no room for any such thought. There were, for certain objects, messengers of the churches. But the word of God nowhere says that Junias, Andronicus, and Barnabas had been sent by a church. There is one messenger of a church whom scripture calls " sent." It is Epaphroditus. But the Philippians only sent him to carry temporal assistance to Paul, a prisoner at Rome; Phil. 2:25.

When Barnabas was sent, Paul was there as well as Barnabas, and it is the Spirit and not the Church that sent them. So there is no question in this passage of apostles of a lower class sent by the Church. It would be needful, to come to that, to say that Paul as well as Barnabas was an apostle of a lower class, and that would only be to play the part of the evil Jews of his time.

That which the author says on the subject of baptism is sufficiently unfortunate. The apostles hardly ever baptized. They left that care to others. Paul said he had not been sent for that; although other persons did it without any need of being authorized thereto. Further, we have already answered all that.

The author says it is no want of faithfulness to entrust to the presbytery the task of establishing elders. The question is, To whom has God entrusted this task?

Moreover, to entrust this to the presbytery is to conceal a difficulty, in a very curious manner. The care of establishing elders is entrusted to the presbytery. But according to the constitution the presbytery is the assembly of the elders; so that they are already established. And who is it who has done this? The preparation of this difficult and important task has been confided to the preparatory commission. Then it is the members of the Evangelical Church who will carry it out, so that it is entrusted neither to the presbytery, nor, according to the teaching of the author, to the evangelist, unless the presbytery prepare the thing so as to name themselves. It seems that what the word says about it is of no importance; one may as well proceed in one way as in another.

Here then we see the author thrown upon the same ground as the journal " The Reformation," that is to say, " human order and evangelical liberty," and that too while at the same time accusing brethren of wishing to put the word aside. He has full liberty to do that which he wishes. It is little matter what the apostles said; little matter the fact that they had entrusted the task in question to special delegates, without ever recognizing in the churches any capacity for its accomplishment. Provided elders are set up, no one is bound in any way to follow apostolical ways. Then the Evangelical Church says a thing, does it, and the anonymous author does it with it.

Here they make resound in our ears a word which sounds very well-that of the presbytery. It is " the presbytery " which acts. But when we translate the word all vanishes.

" The presbytery " is exactly the assembly of persons who are to be called into existence.

The anonymous author says again that if the choice belonged to the apostles and to those specially sent for that purpose by them, our view might well be conceived; but that we forget it is the establishment, not the choice, of the elders, which was given to Timothy and Titus; that it is nowhere said that the apostles chose them themselves, and that the French translations are false. We have seen, in effect, that they are so, in that they add " by the suffrages of the assembly." And it is the suffrages of the assembly that now they wish to follow at Geneva. That is to say, that the sense of the word has been falsified to sanction the system. Timothy did not, as far as we know, set up elders. Titus was sent for this, but nothing else is spoken of but the act of Titus himself. Titus, and Titus alone, set up elders. The apostle does not suffer the idea of another's acting to appear, outside him whom he had sent into the midst of these Cretans (always liars as they were). Neither does he say that Titus had associated other persons in his work. The anonymous author pretends that scripture says nowhere that the choice of elders pertained to the apostles, nor that they themselves had chosen the elders. Now the fact is, and it has been plainly shown, that the scripture says very positively that the apostles chose elders for the faithful in each church31 (Acts 14:23). It is true that the French versions have rendered this passage badly in that they have added " by the suffrages of the assembly." The author does not say that the error of the translation consists in making the assemblies here to take a part, as he wishes himself to make a certain number of the faithful to act who do not yet even form an assembly.

As regards deacons there is no analogy. When money is in question, the apostles withdraw from occupying themselves with their work; and later, Paul refused to take on himself the distribution of the offerings of the saints, unless there was one with him chosen by the churches to co-operate with him; so that his conduct should not give place to the smallest suspicion that could injure his ministry. What analogy is there, as to the source of the authority there exercised, between the case of tables and of money, and the care and the rule of the flock of God? The apostles desired that the flock should be satisfied as to temporal matters, so that there should not be any cause for discontent, jealousy, or suspicion. This principle is not applicable to elders, to whom money is nothing, and whose authority is exercised according to that which has been given from on high.

At the end of his work the anonymous author avails himself of the fact that Moses does not say who should pour the oil on the head of the priest, when he succeeded his father after his death.

The analogy which he wishes us to see in this with the question of elders seems to me to be without force, and for this reason: it is because the eventual successor of the chief priest was marked out by God Himself. The eldest son by clear right was priest after the death of his father. Genealogy confined the right of being priest. In the case of elders, the question is one of nomination, of the choice of fitting persons.

All the law hangs on the principle of hierarchy; Heb. 7:12. The word " establishing " hides this difference. It has not the same meaning in the two cases.

When it concerns elders, it is necessary that some one should officially name them. If that be done with the authority of God, the imposition of hands will be a matter of small importance. So that the analogy does not exist; because in one case, to establish means to designate, and in the other, this has been already done on the part of God-a difference which goes to the very root of the question.

And as to the other part of the analogy, namely, the imposition of hands, it is nowhere said in the word that hands should be laid on elders. According to the habits of that age, we can well believe it to have been the case, God took care that the fact should not be recorded in the word. His fullness of wisdom knew all beforehand. So that the formal part of the analogy fails also. Thus then the analogy exists neither in the foundation nor in the form.

The designation of priests by their genealogy was of such importance, that, in the time of Nehemiah, as some priests could not spew theirs, they were rejected as defiled. Now what we ask for is exactly this very designation, conformably with what is said in the New Testament. Those who re-establish after the example of Nehemiah ought to respect the New Testament, as that instrument in God's hand respected the Old Testament, when there is a question on the very point to which the analogy in question is applicable. When disorder had broken the

succession, and the office was seized upon by persons who, though priests, had no right to exercise the functions of the high priest (which took place in the time of the Lord Jesus), no one thought of raising up other persons to the high priesthood beside those who wrongfully occupied the place. The faithful sought elsewhere the redemption of Israel.

Speaking historically, the anonymous author would find it difficult to show that after Aaron the sovereign priest had been anointed. In the case of Eleazar, no mention is made of it.

The anonymous author goes farther, and thinks " that the apostles were in truth themselves mistaken." It would seem this reassures him about the danger, which he and his colleagues are running, of being mistaken also. But, to say nothing of such an argument (for this anxiety of setting in order a form of government really has no respect for anything), how is it that he has not been arrested by this expression (Acts 20:28), " The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers "? Was the Holy Spirit then mistaken? Will the author dare to say to those whom he will have established at Geneva, that the Holy Spirit has set them over the flock of God, which He has bought with His own blood?32

That is the root of the question. To correspond to those of whom the word of God speaks, the elders ought to be the elders which the Holy Spirit set over the flock of God. If not, it is but a sect, with the chiefs which this sect would have. And here it is a question clearly of the visible unity of the Church of God, that visible unity which the author allows to be lost. Now the first thing to do is to re-establish it, to form this flock of God.

CHAPTER 6.

I content myself now with the question relative to Geneva, although I believe that it would be impossible to do it in a single place with reality, during the general dispersion of the sheep. But let us confine ourselves to the consideration of one place. If I recognize those whom God has caused to labor in this good work with the needful qualities, I only submit myself to what God has manifested, in supporting and honoring it. But if I said, You cannot obey, unless at least we establish them officially; in this case all depends on the authority which establishes, and on the correspondence of the work in truth with that which we find in the word. Have our brethren of Geneva, and with them the anonymous author, re-established the flock of God? If not, what are their elders elders of? Can they in virtue of their official nomination say, " Over which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers "? For they say, " that one can only obey in virtue of this nomination." For my part, I can act without fear or without hesitation on the principle I have laid down, in full recognition of our weakness; and I can do it, because I am on the ground of moral proofs and of the work done by the Holy Spirit; and it is my joy to recognize His work, wherever it may be.

You, brethren of the Evangelical Church at Geneva, you cannot do it. You rest solely on nomination and on official establishment. It is, you tell us, for this reason that it can be said that the Holy Spirit has placed them over the flock of God. Where is that flock? Does it consist of you, a mere handful of believers? Where is the authority of the Holy Spirit? It is we exclusively, say you, who exercise it, who put it in motion, and without this there is nothing which you can obey. Now there we are thrown upon the narrowness of the old33 dissenters,34 and a clergy to boot; and if we do not recognize you, and if we do not recognize that which you do as binding on our souls, we reject the word of God. Which of the two is it, you or we who give a hold to the Church of Rome? Is it you who tell us that obedience is impossible, if those to whom that obedience is due are not officially set up by the Church on earth? or is it we who accept that which God gives us in the midst of the ruin which surrounds us, and who act according to the precious promise that where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, He will be in the midst?

Brethren, know that we have made trial of the faithfulness of our gracious Master, according to His promise, and that in order to enjoy this, weak though we be, it has not been needful for us to await your convenience, nor to adhere to your pretension of re-establishing the Church of God.

In order to put out of sight this grievous schism, you wish (and Mr. Merle insists on it) that we should come to you, that we should be one with our brethren. Since when has risen this pressing need of our being in your midst? Since when did you make the discovery that the clergy are of the devil? Since when have you, has Mr. Merle, made the discovery that it was absolutely necessary to have elders, without whom they have gone on till this time? that not to come and submit to them is to sap the foundations of all obedience and morality; and finally, that not to range ourselves as partners in your work, is to make ourselves guilty of all sins? You make elders, I suppose, because you had none. What do you think then of your obedience and morality up to this moment? Brethren, such pretensions and such grand words come rather too late. Is it since your convocation to name a preparatory commission that Christian morality is compromised in this affair?

The anonymous author tells us, " It is for this reason that we raise up again, according to their example [Ezra's and Nehemiah's], as far as we can, that which has fallen."

Ah! what then has fallen? It is no question here of " the brethren's point of view." You do something; you raise up again the fallen Church, and this it is that you take on you to do, as Nehemiah did with regard to Israel. It is the analogy of which you avail yourselves. It is then the fallen Church, it is then the fallen dispensation, which you raise up again.

Ah! you tell me, we speak only " from the point of view of brethren."

We are not speaking of words only. You do something, you are acting. And, tell us, are you acting according to the views of brethren? In that case, this view is true in your eyes. You raise up again. How raise again if nothing be fallen? The Church, its dispensation, you believe to be then in ruins And you pretend to raise them up again with such an authority on God's part, that if we do not recognize your work, we are unable to obey! or, according to the language of Mr. Merle, we are guilty of every possible sin, according to the principle laid down by James, if we are not subject to that which you do!

My brethren, forgive us if we do not admit pretensions so exorbitant. We find in admitting the ruin (and you admit it, for you cannot raise again that which has not fallen, nor act as Nehemiah, if, in fact, all is not in ruin), you demand too much; you raise pretensions too extravagant.

It is Romanism in all its purity.

Obedience, say you, is impossible outside your system; and think of this, of a system which is not yet established! And you hold this language to us-you who up to this day have lived in disobedience, for you had not then the indispensable elders, since you are going to set them up.

I declare before God that, if at Geneva I had found true elders, who without pretension took care of the Church of God at Geneva, so far as the Holy Spirit had brought it together, I would have blessed God for it, and would have submitted thereto with all my heart. As I have already said, I have tried to do it.

But when, in order to draw me into it, they come and tell me that the clergy, to whom, until yesterday, they have so obstinately held, are of the devil; and that besides, they declare that I cannot obey without the human and official establishment of a distinct body of men; when they reason as if those who are acting in this new mode formed by themselves the flock of God; and when they represent all those who do not walk with them as in the sin of schism; I avow that such a pretension awakes in me a deep distrust. I fear that they will raise up again, not the Church, not the fallen dispensation (I hold in doubt their capacity for such a work), but that which has fallen, that which they well know has fallen, and, in the eyes of those taught of God, fallen forever.

We repeat it, We suppress nothing. The proof of it is that, at the moment I am writing, you have not yet created the order which you are desirous we should submit to.

You create something, and in doing so you have compromised the existence of the Reformed Church from its foundation, for obedience to it has been impossible. That to which it has been subject is of the devil, you tell us. It has been guilty of all sins at once. Christian morality has been thereby compromised. They have touched the apple of the eye, the throne, of God. For these elders (whom you are going to set up, raising up again that which is fallen) were not in existence there. Forsooth, it is the clergy who are found in it, with whom you will have no more to do. I believe indeed that such pretensions are found but in few hearts; but they are none the less subject to those who set them up.35

Mr. Merle declares, it is true, that he glories in belonging to the Reformed Church. To which? Where is this reformed church? I ask with a deep feeling of grief (for whatever may be the attacks of our adversaries, the state of the Church and the actual result of the beautiful testimony of the sixteenth century, or rather of the faithlessness of man with respect to that testimony, have been for me a lesson learned with tears and in profound anguish).

To what reformed church is it that this brilliant writer of " The History of the Reformation " belongs? He is making a new one. He lends his hand to establish institutions which are opposed to those established by Calvin at Geneva. Does he belong to the synod of the Reformed Church of France, or to those who, from convictions which all respect, have separated themselves from it?

Alas! all is ruin. We depend on the faithfulness of Him whom ruin cannot reach. Mr. Merle has haughtily attacked those who were convinced of it. Now that he believes it, he sets up something new, telling us that we must needs come, and this too while saying he glories in belonging to that which exists no longer, to that which he has abandoned, as far as it exists, and abandoned for conscientious convictions, for which I should be the last to blame him; but which he has in fact abandoned. For, finally, in the midst of the free churches on every side, in order to make the rights of Christ respected, to maintain healthy doctrine, to establish elders who did not exist and without which one cannot obey, where is that reformed church to which Mr. Merle belongs?

No. The truth comes out in spite of them. They wish to raise up again that which is fallen, and they wish that we should confide the task to them and their preparatory commission.

Come to us, they cry, and so you will put a stop to a schism which afflicts the Church. You are then the Church in its unity; and apart from you is schism.

But I do not believe it. The language you make us hear is that of Rome. I have come to Christ. I see no need of going farther; this would be to leave Christ. And who is it who addresses this invitation to us?

It is the writer who published not long since that the ministry, that is to say the clergy, was that glory which should remain, mention of which is made in 2 Cor. 3:11! and who closes the exhortation of which we speak, by asking things which, notwithstanding his talents, which I most sincerely recognize, betray (as regards God's ways and specially as to that which occupies us at this moment) an ignorance which we should have had difficulty to suppose in him. Here are his words: " When we see how evangelical Christians are firmly bound up in different denominations, we ask if this great union ' of a single flock under a single shepherd ' shall ever take place on this earth before some future period yet enveloped in mystery; and if, as it were, to melt all these little bells of peculiar churches into one great bell of the universal Church of Christ, which by its majestic sounds may call the world to believe in Him whom the Father has sent, there be not needed an immediate intervention of Him who, in the day when He shall appear, shall be as the refiner's fire? "

If we add withal the last paragraph of the Report, which calls for the coming of Jesus in the words of the Apocalypse, chapter 22, to come and dwell in the midst of the Church, as He who alone can increase in the midst of us cordial affection, I ask of those who have sober and thoughtful ideas on the revelations of the word of God, What can we think of a declaration which binds together the passages which he quotes, with the desire of merging the separate churches into the universal Church of Christ on the earth, and of producing that great union of a single flock under a single shepherd, to call the world to believe in Him whom the Father has sent? And without speaking of details, I ask if it is not to ignore the first elements of the revelation of God, such as we have it in the word, to confound grace with judgment, the gospel with the personal reign of Jesus, the glory with the patience of the saints and the grace of God, heaven with earth?

And in a critical and serious moment they present themselves to lead us, as if they possessed the intelligence of the ways of God. And they do it while expressing thoughts in which an incredible confusion prevails.

Is this a thing to command our confidence towards those who come forward to raise and set up again that which is fallen, and to give a direction to the movement of the day?

Yes, it is a question of raising up again and re-establishing not only elders but the flock of God, over which, according to them, these elders are to be placed. They do not deny that what has resulted from the first establishment of elders is under the power of the enemy. They make a new church, a new presbytery, a presbytery so new that they have set up a preparatory commission to know how they should proceed in it.

What can I see there but a sect with greater pretensions than others?

They begin the thing. Those who lay on hands, whence come they? Is it the old clergy who will do it? Can everybody do it? This is important; for it is an authority in question so necessary and so obligatory, that without it elders could not exist nor the faithful obey.

CHAPTER 7.

For myself I am not in this difficulty. The Apostle Peter speaks of elders in a way which by no means implies the idea of an official nomination. " The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder." In like manner he adds,

"Likewise ye younger [presbuterois, neoteroi] submit yourselves unto the elder," 1 Peter 5:1, 5.

In Acts 15 we find also in the assembly at Jerusalem elders, whose appointment is nowhere related, but who are there on the footing on which Peter expressly put them in his epistle.

I find, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, leaders recognized in their work. So that I doubt not at all, that in the midst of Christians of a Jewish origin the eldership was but a moral matter.

In the First Epistle to the Thessalonians I see that the apostle charges the faithful to take knowledge of those who were working amongst them and who went before them, and exhorts them to esteem them much for their work's sake; a motive more moral than dependent on their age, although I doubt not this entered into it, save in exceptional cases.

In the Epistle to the Rom. 1 see persons who go before, faithful ones who in that sense were at the head of others, and who in their turn are exhorted to acquit themselves of it with diligence, in the same way that he had told the Hebrews that they watched over their souls.

We read in the First Epistle to the Corinthians 16: 15: " I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas that it is the firstfruits of Achaia and that they have addicted [devoted themselves in a formal manner] themselves to the ministry of the saints), that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth."

I have then in the word of God very clear authorities for recognizing those who are in the position in question; I have rules for my conduct with regard to them, and for their conduct in the midst of the flock. I profit by them; and the flocks are called to profit by them. They can do so without pretending to be the flock of God,36 whilst a great number of the faithful remain still outside their meeting, and that number among those perhaps who would be elders in reality if all were assembled; and they can do so without falsifying their position in the very serious way which would be the case if they pretended to be that which they are not. They can do it without setting up that which God would put aside if He accomplished a complete work, for that would make them into a sect. They can enjoy according to God, all that God has given them, without denying the state of ruin of the visible Church-a state which has brought ruin on every side and the forgetfulness of which shows, alas! that the conscience is not reached by that which is near to the heart of Christ, and which ought to be to us deeply painful. The author of the tract "Are Elders to be established? " denies the possibility of obedience to the passages which we have just quoted.

I am thoroughly convinced that the foundation thus laid in the word is the surest foundation, and that the walk which is directed according to this is the true walk. Thus, I can respect, according to the measure of their labor, those who are not fully manifested in the way demanded for the office, and without elevating, in a manner hurtful to himself, to a position which he cannot fill to the profit of others, one who does not possess all the qualities demanded for the charge.

To demand the establishment of elders, is at once to plunge oneself into all sorts of questions on the subject of their establishment; our powerlessness must be hidden under fine phrases; and then we fall into a labyrinth of gropings which always end in a clergy.

Who will choose them? Who will establish them? Who will lay on hands? If every one is not agreed, there is a new sect. From the beginning brethren have acted according to the principle which I have drawn as above from the word of God. Perhaps in some places they do not draw from these passages the profit which they might. I think, besides, that in proportion to the fall of the Church the elders came more into prominence. But since that, all is changed. The proposal is to begin anew; and the official nomination raises the question of knowing who will do it, a question to which the word of God will only give you answer by making you feel the absence of those whose authority could resolve it. Not that they resolved it by a revelation (we possess this entire), but by an authority which had been confided to them, and which you do not possess. The pretension of exercising it is either the yoke of popery, or the disorder of some who impose on others and only on those that follow them.

Beside, are they agreed among themselves?

Far from that. If one consults them, I know not which to listen to. One tells me that all is free-that the word is no rule. Another tells me, it so completely is a rule that I can only obey by naming elders. A third tells me, Pastors and elders are the same thing. No, says a fourth; I assure you that the examination of the word shows the contrary. A fifth declares that the Greek word, which means to choose, means to make others vote. This is a mistake, cries a sixth.

At last the conversation is ended by telling me, that if I do not join them I am disobedient and schismatic.

Whom am I to join, pray?

All of us.

On what principle?

We are all agreed.

On what?

To have elders named and to condemn you.

Now I understand: only I ask what authority the word gives to your acts.

It must be done! it must be done!

At last then I understand you; I forgive you, and I pray for you.

Meanwhile, I obey the word in recognizing those who have the rule over us; and I do not pretend to do that which you are pretending to do, without even being agreed amongst yourselves on what the word has said as to this subject, without even being agreed as to whether what it says about it has any authority.

Although they may have not been named, I can recognize those who do a good work, and I would even recognize them in their work, although they had entered thereon irregularly, and although the pretension of reconstituting the Church places them in a position which we cannot recognize as belonging to them.

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