

**THE DIVINELY PRESCRIBED
METHOD FOR THE SUPPORT OF
THE
CLERGY, THE ORDINANCES OF
RELIGION, AND POOR. PP. 6-67**

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The divinely prescribed method for the support of the clergy, the ordinances of religion, and poor. pp. 6-67 by David Thorburn

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DAVID THORBURN

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TO
HIS FATHERS AND BRETHREN,
THE MEMBERS OF
THE FREE PRESBYTERY OF EDINBURGH,
THE FOLLOWING
OUTLINE OF AN ARGUMENT,
ON
A HIGHLY IMPORTANT SUBJECT,
IS
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

1, ANDERSON'S PLACE,
LEITH WALK, EDINBURGH,
20th February, 1847.

but which, from the circumstances in which, in the providence of God, it has been placed, it is forced to consider.

Nor should the Church deplore what has led to the necessity under which it is thus laid. That event ought not to be regarded as a calamity, even although in itself a fearful thing, which compels any section of the Christian Church to inquire, *What is truth?* and, having ascertained it, shuts it up to its adoption. By fearful things, in righteousness, it has often been that God has answered the prayers of his people.

In any case, the Church must have recourse to the Volume of Inspiration, for the principles by which it ought to be guided in regard to this, as well as in regard to every other matter connected either with doctrine or discipline—either with its internal life or external organization.

It contains a perfect revelation, at least in so far as the present dispensation is concerned. It is a complete rule of duty. It exhibits fully the will of God in regard to all we are required to believe, and either expressly enjoins or lays down the principles by which we ought to be regulated in all we are required to do.

In regard to the subject which is now to engage our attention, there are both express injunctions given and principles stated, the imperative obligation of which is universally acknowledged. So universally, indeed, is it admitted that it is the clear, undeniable, and imperative duty of the members of the Church to provide for the support—if not of all classes of the clergy—at least of the Christian ministry, the ordinances of religion, and the poor, that it is not necessary, for the purpose of establishing the obligation, that we should either quote the passages in which the duty is expressly enjoined, or refer to the principles on which the duty rests.

But it is generally, all but universally, supposed that, beyond merely enjoining the duty, Scripture is silent; that, although it is said that an individual should give *according as the Lord has prospered him*, every one is at liberty to determine for himself the meaning, the force of the expression—the extent of the obligation; and that no power, either civil or ecclesiastical, is entitled to attach such a meaning to the expression as shall have the force of statute, binding the conscience and authoritatively regulating the conduct; that the duty is not determinate, but indeterminate—a duty of benevolence, not of justice—in the language of the schoolmen, *debitum caritatis non justitiæ*.

Now, there is *prima facie*, a presumption against the soundness of this view. The presumption is not against, but in favour of, an

opposite hypothesis. The nature of the divine procedure towards our race, from the first of time, favours the presumption that God has not left the duty of giving for the support of the ministry, the ordinances of religion, and the poor, so indeterminate as is generally supposed. From the first, God has given a revelation of his will. This revelation, although given at sundry times and in divers manners, has in all ages embraced whatever at the time was requisite to be known in regard to *the nature of the worship* God requires, the *manner* in which it ought to be performed, the *time* to be appropriated to it, and the *means* by which it should be provided for. And as no man ever was at liberty to worship God but in accordance with his revealed will, so no man is at liberty to dispense with any part of the revelation given, without his express authority. *For, whatever was once prescribed relative to the worship of God, or the duty which man owes to his brother man, was designed to be not only of universal use at the time, but, unless modified or repealed by some subsequent communication of the divine will, of perpetual obligation.*

If this proposition be well-founded, as we believe it to be, two subjects of inquiry present themselves:—1. What was the substance of the revelation given during the patriarchal dispensation? and—2. How far have its enactments been modified or repealed by subsequent communications of the divine will?

What were the enactments of the primeval revelation, we are in a great measure left to infer from the actions of those to whom it was given; for, with the exception of the institution of the Sabbath, particular kinds of sacrifice, and the rite of circumcision, there is no express command on record in regard to the worship to be paid to God. But the manner in which several of the actions of the patriarchs are spoken of is so distinct, as to leave no doubt what were some, at least, of the enactments of the primeval revelation.

Thus the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice showed that God had enjoined the offering of the *first* of whatever was possessed; and the commendation of Abraham's offering to Melchizedek, made evident that God had enjoined *the payment of tithes*. There is no reason to conclude that the payment of tithes originated with Abraham; on the contrary, there is every reason to believe that the obligation was previously known, and in all probability coeval with the institution of first-fruits. But whether this was the case or not, the approbation of the offering showed that it was in accordance with the divine will, and laid all men under an obligation to go and do likewise.

The conclusion derived from the payment of tithes by Abraham, is greatly strengthened by the circumstances in which the obligation

to pay them was acknowledged by Jacob. It was after God had appeared to him in Bethel, and graciously promised that he would be with him in all places whither he went, and bring him again to his own land, and that he would not leave him until he had done that he had spoken to him of. Deeply impressed with the divine goodness, we are informed Jacob vowed a vow, saying: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house." And, addressing himself to the Angel of the Covenant, to Jesus Christ, the true Melchizedek, he added: "*Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth to thee.*"

These two incidents afford, as we conceive, sufficient and satisfactory evidence of the practice of paying tithes during the patriarchal dispensation, and of the fact that the obligation to pay them constituted part of the primeval revelation. And if so, then, unless it can be proved that the statute enjoining their payment has been altered or repealed by some subsequent communication, we maintain that they were designed to be of perpetual and universal obligation. *whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning, upon whom the ends of the world are come.—All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

Whether the obligation of tithes was designed to be perpetual, certain, at least, it is, that there was a time when it was acknowledged to be universally binding; for ample and satisfactory evidence exists of the payment of tithes amongst all, or almost all, the nations of antiquity, from the earliest periods of their history; and more especially among the Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Medes, the Persians, the Ethiopians, and the Arabians.

Into the proof of this we do not mean to enter. The limits within which our remarks must be confined forbid us so to do. Those who desire to know somewhat of the nature and amount of the evidence which exists in regard to this, we refer to that work in which we have at large expounded the argument—of which we can now give but a brief, meagre, and imperfect outline.* And simply remarking, by the way, that the fact of the obligation being universally acknowledged, affords additional proof that it constituted part

* *Perpetual Obligation of Tithes.* Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1841. Part i., chap. iii., pp. 17-28.

of the revelation originally given to the fathers of the human race, we proceed to show that, so far from being modified or repealed, it has only been confirmed and enlarged by subsequent communications of the divine will. The law, as given from Mount Sinai, did not limit or annul the obligation, but simply made a change in the parties to whom tithes were to be paid, and pointed out more definitely than had been done before the extent to which they were due.

So far from limiting or annulling the obligation, the law appears to have added to it. For whereas previously we merely read of one tithe, or of tithes generally, under the law mention is made of three tithes—the first of which was for the priests and Levites, the second for the ordinances of religion, and the third for the poor.* And the question now to be determined is, whether the law enjoining the payment of tithes still remains in force, or whether it passed away with the types and ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation.

For the purpose of preparing the way for the readier admission of the conclusiveness of the argument whereby its lasting obligation, as it appears to us, is established, it is of importance to advert to the *design of the Hebrew polity*.

There were certain respects in which, as is universally admitted, it was designed to be merely temporary; but there are other respects in which it can, as we think, be satisfactorily shown it was designed to be a perpetual model for every future state.

Amongst other respects, it was obviously designed to be merely temporary in regard to the separation of the Jews as a peculiar people, the outward form of worship, and several of the precepts of the moral and political code.

But there were other respects in which not less obviously, as appears to us, it was designed to be a perpetual exhibition of the principles which ought to be embodied in the constitution of every state; as, *ex. gr.*, in regard to the source from which all authority ought to be recognised as proceeding; the end for which power is conferred, and ought to be exercised; the rule according to which every state is bound to frame all its enactments; the general character of its civil and ecclesiastical institutions; and the manner in which provision ought to be made for the support of the clergy, the ordinances of religion, and the poor.

In regard to the last mentioned subject, in the Hebrew polity provision was made for the clergy, the ordinances of religion, and the poor, partly from tithes and first-fruits, partly from certain cities

* Perpetual Obligation of Tithes, part i, chap. iv., pp. 29-40.

and lands which were specially set apart for that purpose, and partly from free-will offerings and alms; and in regard to the provision which was thus made for these classes and objects, we maintain that the institutions of the Hebrew polity—and, in so far at least as tithes are concerned, we proceed to show—were designed to be of perpetual and universal obligation, or at least to be a perpetual model to every future state.

If not, it must be—supposing the proposition on which the whole superstructure of our argument rests to be well founded—because the law enjoining the payment of tithes has been modified or repealed by some subsequent communication of the divine will. But no such communication has been given; on the contrary, subsequent communications only confirm and enforce those which were given on the subject under the patriarchal and Levitical dispensations.

The evidence, indeed, for the continuance of tithes is so ample and various, that, for the sake of distinctness, we shall consider it under the following heads:—

First, the negative; secondly, the presumptive or probable; and, thirdly, the positive evidence for their continuance.

I. In regard to what we take leave to designate as the negative evidence for the perpetual obligation of tithes, we remark,

1. That it affords no evidence that the obligation of tithes was intended to cease, because it was recognised and enjoined under the Mosaic dispensation. For the same was the case in regard to the Sabbath, the duty of public worship, and prayer—the lasting obligation of which is acknowledged by all. We remark,

2. That it affords no evidence that an obligation was temporary, because the institution in which it was embodied was typical, or partook of a typical character; for the fact of an obligation being embodied in an institution of a typical character, merely proves that the form of it was designed to undergo a change. We remark,

3. That it affords no evidence that the obligation of tithes was intended to cease, because, as has been alleged, there is no passage enjoining the payment of them in the New Testament; for if so, it is only in the same condition with the argument, if not for the perpetuity of the Sabbath, certainly for the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, infant baptism, and the duty of a state countenancing and supporting the true religion.

To prove that any duty plainly enjoined under the former con-

tinues binding under the present dispensation, it is not necessary to adduce distinct passages in which it is mentioned. It is enough if it can be shown obviously to follow from principles which are clearly laid down in the Word of God. And that there are not only such principles, but also passages, in which, if it be not expressly asserted, yet from which it may be very clearly inferred, that tithes were designed to be of perpetual obligation, we hope to be able presently to show. Meanwhile, supposing the allegation to be correct, we remark, that several reasons may be assigned for the omission.

(1.) There was no necessity to enjoin what was universally acknowledged to be binding.

(2.) Had the payment of tithes been expressly enjoined, it would have interfered with existing institutions.

(3.) Christianity requires far more than a tenth. We remark,

4. That it affords no evidence that the obligation of tithes ceased, because, as has been alleged, there is no mention made of the payment of them during the first four centuries of the Christian era; for (supposing the allegation to be correct, which it can be shown not to be) it can be satisfactorily proved that, during that period, Christians consecrated far more than a tenth of their increase to God.

II. Having thus briefly noticed the negative, we now proceed to the presumptive or probable evidence, and here we remark,

1. That the period of the institution of tithes affords a strong presumption that they were designed to be of perpetual obligation. They were instituted under the patriarchal dispensation—a dispensation all the institutions of which were designed to be of universal use at the time, and several of which, it is admitted by all, were designed to be of perpetual obligation. We remark,

2. That the manner in which tithes are uniformly spoken of affords a strong presumption that they were designed to be of perpetual obligation. Frequently do we find God speaking of the sacrifices of the ancient economy in a manner plainly showing that they were designed to cease. Thus, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God"—"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats."