



## THE ORIGIN AND DESIGN OF THE APOSTLESHIP.

BY REV. HENRY BLEBY.

**E**ARLY in his public ministry our Lord had a considerable number who followed and learned of him as his disciples. On one occasion we are informed how he commissioned and sent forth seventy of these disciples, two and two, to preach his word, and prepare his way, in "every city and place whither he himself would come." "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."

Luke x, 17. Out of this body of disciples, or followers, our Lord selected his apostles, who were called, by way of eminence and distinction, "THE TWELVE."

In the Gospel by St. Luke we have the record of this transaction; and it is said to have taken place on a mountain, and under circumstances peculiarly solemn and impressive; for before performing this act, which was pregnant with such mighty influences and results to the world, the Redeemer spent the whole night in prayer to God. None knew better than he the magnitude and importance of those functions which he was about to delegate to the chosen twelve, and that they were only men, weak and frail; and he knew also the fiery trials and persecutions and sufferings, the human and the infernal hatred and opposition, to which they would be exposed in discharging the duties of the office he was about to confer upon them, and hence this earnest and protracted appeal to his heavenly Father. "It came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all

night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor." Luke vi, 12-16.

It does not appear, from the record of the Evangelists, that he gave them any particular or extraordinary duty to perform at this time. He chose and set them apart for duties which were to arise in the future. Neither does it appear that he conferred upon them any special power or authority. "He named them *apostles*." There was a work to be done for Christ, a work of special and paramount importance to the destinies of mankind—a work too which, though of immense difficulty and suffering and danger, was fraught with undying honor and glory to those who should do it faithfully. And these were the men whom

he selected from among all his followers and disciples, and gave them a solemn delegation to this work. It appears probable, from subsequent indications, that they did not themselves know at this time the peculiar character of the work to which they were appointed, nor had any correct apprehension of the difficulties and the honor which it involved.

These men—"the twelve"—our Lord kept with him continually, in intimate companionship, teaching and training them for that career of greatness and usefulness which lay before them, molding them, as it were, under his own hand. It is often said that the apostles were unlearned and ignorant men. Doubtless they were so, when Christ called them away from the lowly vocations in which most of them were found; but they did not and could not continue so, at least to the same extent, under such a teacher. For two or three years they took in inspirations of wisdom from the greatest and most perfect teacher the world ever saw, who instructed and trained them with special reference to the work he

had given them to do, and the result is patent to the world. When the time came, and they were endued with power from on high, they stood forth men skilled in the highest wisdom—men of majestic mind, and mighty power in the truth of God, prepared to face and stand against the world and all its sages and philosophers.

Here we have the *origin* of the apostolate. The twelve were chosen by Christ, and of this he frequently reminds them: "Have not I chosen you twelve," he said, "and one of you is a devil?" John vi, 70. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." John xv, 16.

The *design* of the apostleship does not appear to have been so much the communication of any extraordinary or peculiar power or authority for governmental purposes in the Church, as to provide a sufficient body of competent, intelligent, reliable witnesses of the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

This great crowning miracle of Christianity is of infinite importance. Paul represents it

as a fundamental truth, upon which the verity or falsehood of the whole Christian system depends: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God." 1 Cor. xv, 14, 15. It is impossible to overestimate its importance. It is to Christianity what the corner-stone is to the foundation—the sun to the solar system. On this fact the entire fabric of the Christian religion was designed to rest. It was, therefore, essential that it should be testified and confirmed to the world in such a manner as to set all contradiction and cavil at defiance—so testified as to render it impossible, with such testimony, that it should not be true.

Here we see the true vocation of the apostles—the grand and worthy design of the institution of the apostolic office. The twelve were chosen and delegated by Christ to establish, as *his* witnesses, this great truth to the world—to proclaim it as *eye-witnesses* of the fact and thus lay broad and deep and sure the foundations of the Christian Church.

They were the master-builders. Upon them was conferred the privilege and the glory of laying the foundation of that Church of the living God, of which Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, is the chief corner-stone. In this view how significant is that symbolical and beautiful description given of the Gospel Church, already alluded to as the city of God descending out of heaven from God, and having the glory of God, and the twelve foundations of which are represented as having in them "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb!"

The foundations of the Gospel Church were indeed securely laid by them when, in Jerusalem, and Judea, and abroad through the world, they gave witness, which could not be contradicted, that they had seen him alive, and conversed with him in the flesh. On this fact rests the whole superstructure of the Christian religion.

It is the crowning evidence of the Divinity of Christ—the seal of heaven, affording full and undeniable proof of the truth of his doc-

trine and the Divinity of his person. Thus it is said, he is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Rom. i, 4. It shows the acceptance of his atoning sacrifice, as a satisfaction to Divine justice for the sins of the world; and proves that "Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us," (Heb. ix, 11, 12;) and that within the veil "He ever lives to make intercession for us." It is the pledge of our own deliverance from the bondage of corruption and death—that "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality," (1 Cor. xv, 53;) that "the Lord Jesus Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even



to subdue all things unto himself." Phil. iii, 20, 21. And it is God's assurance to the world of the truth and certainty of the last judgment: "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Acts xvii, 31.

All these grand and important results follow the establishment of the fact of the Saviour's resurrection. If that fails in proof, all these great fundamental truths and doctrines of our holy religion fail with it, and our faith in them is vain and baseless; but that established, these are established also, and the Church of Christ rests on a sure foundation—an immovable rock; and "the gates of hell can never prevail against it."

This was the one peculiar function of the apostleship. On the apostles' testimony this great fact and doctrine was made to rest. There were many witnesses of the Saviour's resurrection—hundreds who were in a posi-

tion, having seen him alive, to give evidence of the fact; but theirs was mere collateral evidence. Not on the testimony of any or all of these was it to depend in any degree, but on that of the apostles alone. They were *his* witnesses, chosen, qualified, and delegated to do this work for Christ. The passages of Scripture are numerous in which the apostles are represented in this distinctive character, as the witnesses for Christ of his resurrection. We will examine some of these.

In the Acts of the Apostles Christ is represented, after his resurrection and before his ascension, as sending forth the apostles to be witnesses unto him in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them

forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts i, 1-8.

Peter shows clearly how he understood this commission intrusted to the apostles by Christ; for he said, when he stood up to propose that a successor to Judas should be elected, "Wherefore of these men which have com-

panied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection," (Acts i, 21, 22;) and it is remarkable that a distinction is made between the ministry and the apostleship: for "they prayed, and said, thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." Verses 24, 25.

In Peter's memorable sermon on the day of Pentecost he dwells largely on the resurrection of Christ, and says, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts ii, 32.

So, after Peter and John had healed the impotent man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and had been imprisoned by the rulers and elders and scribes, and released, it is said, "With great power gave the apostles

witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”  
Acts iv, 33.

When, after the death of Ananias and Sapphira, some of the apostles were imprisoned, and the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and set them free, and they were again apprehended and brought before the high priest, and commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, “Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”  
Acts v, 29-32.

When preaching to Cornelius and his company at Cesarea, Peter said, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil;

for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Acts x, 38-41.

Paul at Antioch, discoursing of Christ and his death at Jerusalem, says: "But God raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people." Acts xiii, 30, 31.

The same is clear in choosing Paul to the apostleship. Ananias said to him, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." Acts xxii, 14, 15.

In the account of his own conversion given

before Agrippa, Paul represents the Lord Jesus as saying, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Acts xxvi, 15, 16. Here again is that remarkable distinction made between the ministry and the apostleship, "To make thee a *minister* and a *witness*," etc.

As chosen witnesses of Christ to bear testimony for him through all the world that he was risen from the dead—

*They were sufficiently numerous for the purpose.* The testimony of twelve men of good reputation, given to the same fact—a fact evident to their senses—would be sufficient to satisfy any court or jury in the world. And here we have twelve men of sound character and intelligence and credibility testifying the same thing, that they were eye-witnesses of the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead.

*They were competent witnesses,* having all

possible facilities for ascertaining the truth, so that they could not be deceived. Eleven of them were perfectly familiar with him before his death, having been intimately associated with him for many months; and after his death, Christ "showed himself alive to them by many infallible proofs," extending over a term of forty days. He conversed with them; he ate and drank with them; and they handled him: some of them putting their fingers into the print of the nails by which he had been fastened to the cross, and thrusting their hands into his side where it had been pierced by the soldier's spear; so that it was impossible they could be deceived. They knew him to be the same Jesus with whom they had been familiar, the same whom they had seen expire in shame and agony on the cross. Moreover, they were present when he ascended up on high, and the heavens received him out of their sight.

Paul, it is true, was not with them on these occasions; but he saw Christ in his glory, and heard his voice saying, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He was, therefore, as com-



petent as the others to bear witness that Jesus was alive from the dead.

*They were cautious witnesses*, not credulous and easily imposed upon. It was with difficulty, and only upon the most palpable evidence, they could be brought to believe the fact themselves. The incredulity of some of them was very remarkable. The testimony of the women who first went to the sepulcher and saw the risen Saviour, "*seemed to them as idle tales.*" One of them refused to believe until he not only saw for himself, but put his finger into the prints of the nails, and thrust his hand into the Saviour's side. Christ "upbraided them for their unbelief." It is evident, therefore, that they were not too eager to believe—not too ready to credit the fact on the report of others; and that nothing but the most satisfactory evidence convinced them of the truth.

*They were credible witnesses*, men whose character for integrity and moral excellence could not be called in question, and rendered it most improbable that they should agree to

palm a falsehood upon the world. We have in them the brightest examples of moral purity, of the beauty of holiness, of disinterested, earnest, self-sacrificing zeal for the welfare and happiness of others, that the world ever saw. Never did the sun shine upon any twelve men whose life and character gave them a stronger claim to be believed in any testimony they were agreed in than the twelve apostles of our Lord. Like him, they went about doing good; and every virtue and excellency that can adorn, and give luster and dignity to the human character, shone forth in them.

*Their testimony was delivered under circumstances which impressed it with the stamp of truth.* On the spot, in Jerusalem, where Christ died and was buried, and in the presence of the men who had persecuted and hunted him to his death, they proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. Not in any far-off land, not among strangers, but there in the guilty city, where, had contradiction been possible, they could have been at once confronted with it, did they deliver their apostolic testimony.

*Their testimony was borne in the face of suffering and persecution, imprisonment and death.* With nothing earthly to gain by it, but every thing to lose, before persecuting magistrates and kings and emperors, they persevered in the same story, maintaining in torture and in death the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

*Their testimony was confirmed and sealed by the exercise of miraculous powers, carrying irresistible conviction to the hearts of beholders that these men were witnesses for the truth.* On the day of Pentecost strangers in Jerusalem, from many foreign countries, heard these witnesses for Jesus, endowed with the miraculous gift of tongues, declare in their own languages—languages which the apostles had never learned by any ordinary process—the wonderful works of God.

Here, then, was the proper and peculiar function of the apostles. They were delegated to perform this duty for Christ. To them was given the high and distinguished honor of being the founders of his Church, and thus

was secured to the fishermen of Galilee and their associates imperishable renown. Theirs are names that will never die. Immeasurably above those of monarchs, statesmen, poets, philosophers, and heroes, the names of the apostles of Jesus, lowly as they were in their origin, will be had in remembrance and honor through all ages and generations, and in every part of the world. These names will be surrounded by a halo of glory, which will continue to wax brighter and brighter until time shall cease to be. And in the perfect Church of the redeemed in heaven, when the angels shall have gathered together the "elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"—the great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and people, and kindred, and tongue, "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"—even there they shall be stars of the first magnitude, and shall forever and ever "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

That there was any thing else peculiar in

the apostleship, any duty or authority delegated to them which is not common to those who succeed them in the ministry of the Gospel, does not appear from the testimony of Holy Scripture. Some have made a distinction between what they pleased to say was *ordinary* and what was *extraordinary* in the apostleship. This is altogether gratuitous, and without any warrant from God's word, which is the only rule to guide us in such a case as this; and it is by such means that a bad cause is attempted to be bolstered up, and support given to assumptions which have no foundation in the Scriptures, and which have never been otherwise than a source of injury to religion and to the world. The fact appears to be, that the twelve received a twofold commission, in different places, at different times, and of different import; the one in Galilee, when the Lord "came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii, 18-21. This involved all that is comprised in the ordinary exercise of the Christian ministry—preaching, baptizing, administering the Lord's Supper, ordaining and keeping up a succession of ministers, and the government of Christian Churches, "*unto the end of the world.*" The other commission, given to them specially as apostles, appears to have been imparted on the way to Bethany, immediately before he was parted from them and ascended to heaven, when he instructed them that they should "not depart from Jerusalem until they had received the promise of the Father," and said unto them, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth;" (Acts i, 8, 9;) thus delegating them to an office which, in its nature, functions, and qualifications, was alto-

gether distinct, extraordinary, and temporary, and could not be transmitted by them to others. Even Bishop Taylor, one of the highest of High-Church pretenders, says, "In the extraordinary privileges of the apostles they had no successors; therefore, of necessity, a successor must be constituted in the ordinary offices of the apostolate." These ordinary offices he assumes to be "preaching, baptizing, consecrating, ordaining, and governing;" but without one shadow of proof to show that they belonged to the apostleship as such, and not to the ordinary evangelical ministry. The distinction between the apostleship and the ordinary functions of the Christian ministry is sufficiently marked in the word of God to show us that, as all Christian teachers were not apostles, so in the twelve themselves the offices of apostles and ministers are not to be confounded, and that the ministry in them was distinct from their apostleship. Thus, when Paul received his twofold commission, the distinction was strongly marked by the great Head of the Church: "I have appeared

unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou *hast seen*," (he had then only seen that Jesus was alive and glorified,) "and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Acts xxvi, 16. The pretense that any thing pertaining and peculiar to the apostleship has been handed down to successors, is a pure assumption for which not a single passage of Scripture can be adduced, and, in the absence of such authority, the assertions of uninspired men, whoever they may be, have not the slightest weight. The opinions and decisions of bishops, popes, councils, and fathers of the Church, apart from the Bible, are on such a subject no more than the small dust of the balance.

---

NELSON & PHILLIPS, 805 Broadway, New York.

TRACT DEPARTMENT.