

This is neither the time nor place to speak of the merits of the case, but, inasmuch as very incorrect ideas of church discipline for so-called "heresy" have been recently set forth by part of the secular press, a few general remarks may not be inappropriate, even though they repeat in part the thought of the previous article.

1. What right has a Church Court to sit in judgment in such cases. "By what authority doest thou these things and who gave thee this authority."

The answer, very simple yet often obscured, is, that they are not sitting in judgment upon any man, but upon certain utterances, and are doing so for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not they are prepared to endorse them and be responsible for them.

While the Church of Christ is composed of all who are united to Him by the bonds of faith and love of whatever color, class, or creed, most professing Christians are banded together in organizations for the work of extending that Church. A number of them who believe the word of God to contain certain doctrines, and who believe these doctrines to be for the betterment of mankind, have organized themselves on the basis of their common belief, into a body, called the Presbyterian Church.

This organization means mutual obligation between that Church and its members. On the part of the individual it means that having voluntarily professed his belief in the doctrines of the Church, as a condition of being received by it, he is morally bound, so long as he claims to belong to it, to maintain and teach these doctrines.

On the other hand, the church, having, on his profession of its doctrines, received him as a member, endorses his teaching, and becomes responsible for it. When he teaches he does so in the name and by the authority of the Church. Thus, organization involves mutual responsibility. It is a voluntary compact in which the individual is responsible to the organization, and the organization becomes responsible for the individual.

When any member of such a body is reported to have changed his teachings, and in this way failed in fulfilling his obligations to the body, it is the right of that body, a right, which they have in common with the members of any organization, secular or sacred, to consider such utterances, and to say whether or not they are willing, as members of the Church, to be responsible for them, whether they can lend to them the name of their organization.

2. In exercising their right, and voting to sustain a charge of false teaching against any member, what does a church court do? What does such a vote mean?

It does not mean interference in any way with any personal rights, liberties, or convictions which the accused may have. It means simply that those who thus vote do not wish their convictions misrepresented, by having such teachings given forth in the name of their Church, that they do not wish to assume responsibility for what they believe to be wrong.

Votes of this kind are sometimes spoken of as cruel dealing with the person affected by them. Such a view utterly misrepresents the facts. Intolerance is abhorrent. No matter what religious opinions a man may hold and teach, be they Christian or anti-Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan or Hindoo, he should have fullest liberty to hold them, and to teach them to all who may be willing to listen to him, but the spirit of liberty which demands for every man the right to hold and teach as he may list, demands at the same time that the responsibility for that teaching should rest upon himself alone, that others should not be compelled to accept responsibility for it: and the vote in such cases is merely the statement that as members of the Church they cannot take this responsibility.

3. A third question that arises from the foregoing, is, What liberty of teaching should there be in the Presbyterian Church?

As already seen, the visible Church is a voluntary organization based upon certain principles with a view to a certain end, viz., the advancement of religious truth, the extension of Christ's kingdom.

From this it is manifest that principles or doctrines which do not interfere with the attainment of that end, even though such doctrines be not in the basis of organization, may reasonably be allowed.

But where the departure of any member, in his teaching, from the commonly received basis of organization, is such as other members think will hinder in some measure the attainment of the end for which that organization exists, then it is not fair or reasonable to expect that they will hold themselves responsible for such departure by continuing to it the sanction of the name of their organization.

4. A fourth question. May it not be better, even though the teaching be erroneous, to take no notice of it? Though men may think certain doctrines to be hurtful to Christ's cause, will not the very effort to remove them from the Church, spread them the more widely? May it not be wiser tacitly to endorse them by saying nothing, than to bring them to public notice and thus help to spread them more widely abroad?

In reply it may be said that no honest search for truth can result in evil. If doctrines that are claimed by a church court to be heretical, be really true, as their exponents claim, then there can be no harm done. The more widely they