

of the Church. Of this system the fundamental principle is that the power of the keys is, by the Lord Jesus Christ, vested primarily and essentially in the Catholic or Universal church, which "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God." The powers thus attributed to the Church at large, are a common investment for the benefit alike of all the members. These hold their interest in it, not by a joint, but several title; so that where distance, diversity of nation, or other cause, precludes a common organization and joint use of its privileges, those who can thus associate are fully endowed with all the prerogatives of the keys, and assured of the presence and sanction of the Head of the Church, to their proper exercise of ecclesiastical functions. Ministerially, these functions are exercised by officers whose several qualifications and duties are defined in the Scriptures; and who are called and designated to this service by the Church, acting under the promise and guidance of the Spirit of Christ, leading her to the choice of such persons as he has qualified and prepared for her service. Thus, the powers exercised by church officers, are not theirs primarily and essentially, but only mediately and representatively. In their several spheres they minister in the name of the Church, acting as its representatives, and under responsibility to its ultimate authority. "Unto the Catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world."

The services which the ordinary exigencies of the Church and its members demand are of two kinds, namely—pastoral care and supervision of the flock of Christ; and the management of temporalities. Hence arise two classes of officers,—elders or bishops, who, according to their several gifts and qualifications, labor in word and doctrine, and in the exercise of government and discipline;—and deacons, whose office it is to take charge of the temporal affairs and dispense the charities of the Church. Although the functions and services of these officers appertain to the Church at large, yet as their labors are ordinarily, by the nature of the case, confined to specific fields of more or less limited extent, so are they called and set apart to their work through the intervention of particular congregations, or associations of them; in this, as in all other proceedings, acting under the constant supervision and corrective authority of the whole body; to whose final decision all disputed questions of whatever kind are ultimately brought.

The number, names, and particular distribution of functions, in the series of courts which normally grow out of these principles, are entirely immaterial to the integrity of the Reformed system. They are determined, according to the exigencies of each particular case, by what is found requisite, in order to the exercise of an efficient and active supply and supervision of every part of the body. The Scotch church possessed as pure and complete an organization, when it had no intermediate court between the church session and the General Assembly, and our American church, when it had only the sessions subordinate to the general presbytery, or when the latter body had interposed a system of classical presbyteries between it and the sessions, as does either body as now expanded, with its gradation of sessions, presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly. The Waldensian church does not fall below the purest standard of Presbyterian order, because its organization contains but the two elements of the parochial session and the synod; nor, on the other hand, would it involve any deviation from the same standard, should our church in the United States find it expedient to interpose a system of provincial synods between the particular synods now existing, and the supreme court. In this respect the principles which control the system are,—unity in the body, the source of all the func-