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Abraham Booth's Ordination, 1769.

IN Volume 1 of Dr. Whitley's *Baptist Bibliography*, entry 19 of 1769 is as follows :

ABRAHAM BOOTH of Prescott Street
Confession of faith delivered at his ordination
with charge by B. Wallin and sermon by S. Stennett.

The confession, charge and sermon can be seen at various Libraries, as indicated in the *Bibliography*, but in 1916, when Volume 1 was published, it appeared probable that the introductory discourse of William Nash Clarke, who presided at the ordination, had not been printed. A copy of this introductory discourse has, however, recently come into my possession. It is contained in a printed booklet of ninety pages, and precedes the confession, charge and sermon. The title page is as follows :

A
C H A R G E
and
S E R M O N
together with an
Introductory Discourse
and
Confession of Faith
Delivered at the
O R D I N A T I O N
of the
Rev. Mr. Abraham Booth
Feb. 16, 1769, in Goodman's Fields
Published at the request of the church

L O N D O N,
Printed for G. Keith, *Gracechurch Street*; J. Buckland,
Pater-noster-Row; W. Harris, *St. Paul's Church-Yard*;
B. Tomkins, *Fenchurch-Street*; J. Gurney, *Holborn*, 1769.
(Price One Shilling)

William Nash Clarke at this time was minister of the Unicorn Yard Church, and the same year received the Hon. A.M. degree from Rhode Island. His introductory discourse, now printed in full below, reveals something of the procedure at an ordination service 170 years ago.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE

BY

WILLIAM CLARKE

AS we are assembled together, in the presence of GOD, to ordain a bishop or overseer in this christian church, and to be witnesses of that solemnity; methinks there are various reflections which may naturally occur to our minds upon so serious and important an occasion.

WHILE we are led to acknowledge the sovereign grace of GOD, manifested in raising to himself a people out of the ruins of the fall; we have also the highest occasion to adore the wisdom and goodness of the great head of the church, in forming those, whom he has thus made the happy subjects of his grace, into particular societies, whereby they become subservient to each other's welfare, and are instrumental in promoting the common cause of the dear Redeemer.

THE church of CHRIST is fitly represented by the similitude of a body. As a body is composed of different members, and each member hath not the same office; so the church of CHRIST consists of a number of persons, who are designed to answer various purposes, each of which is connected with the good of the whole.

WE are laid therefore under additional obligations to acknowledge the wisdom and grace which the blessed GOD has expressed in his conduct towards us, in appointing pastors and teachers, for the edifying the body of CHRIST. Very important are the ends of a gospel ministry. It is the more ordinary means of the conversion of sinners, and of the gathering those who are not already gathered; whereby the interest of CHRIST is promoted, and christian communities continued in their church state, when those who have served their generation are called home. By the word and ordinances of the gospel good men are fed with knowledge and understanding, their views of divine things are brightened, their graces are strengthened, and they fitted for the service of GOD here, and the enjoyment of him in glory.

so important are the ends designed to be answered by the pastoral office, that, while those who sustain it have reason to adopt the language of the apostle, *Who is sufficient for these things?* the church of CHRIST hath abundant cause to consider itself under special obligations to the great shepherd and bishop of souls, for continuing a succession of men, who are in some degree qualified and disposed by his grace for the arduous services of that office. Blessed be GOD, that in this our day, there are a number of such persons—persons who are possessed of a sincere regard for the honour of CHRIST, an affectionate concern

for the welfare of precious souls, and are intrusted with talents for public usefulness!

OUR obligations to the LORD JESUS CHRIST are also further increased, for the gracious assurance of his presence with his ministers to the end of time. And as we have thus always reason to acknowledge, with grateful sentiments, the constant care and kindness which he exercises towards his people; so more especially when he is pleased to interpose in the behalf of a community, by providing them a pastor to go in and out before them, and break the bread of life unto them.

WITH all cheerfulness therefore I congratulate you, my brethren and friends, upon the present joyful occasion. You have had reason to sing both of mercy and judgment, and may this day set up your Ebenezer, and say *Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*. It is not many years since Providence removed from you a very eminent servant of CHRIST; whose memory is still held in very high esteem. Under that afflictive dispensation your faith and patience were long exercised. At last GOD appeared, and you were again blessed with a very valuable pastor, whom you justly esteemed, and the LORD greatly owned. In the midst of his usefulness, and when every thing did wear the most promising aspect; He, who has a right to dispose of his servants as seemeth good in his sight, removed him from you. A gloom covered your faces, and sorrow filled your hearts. In your distress you cried unto the LORD; he heard your cries—answered your requests—and has directed you to one, whose settlement among you may be considered as a fulfilment of that gracious promise, *I will give them pastors after mine own heart*. In this fresh and gracious appearance of Providence in your favour we heartily rejoice with you; and as we are now, at your request, to separate our dear brother to the office to which you have called him, give me leave to offer a few things relative to the service of ordination.

THE inquiries which naturally fall under our consideration upon this subject, relate to the persons who are to appoint officers in the church, and to the manner in which they are to be appointed.

IF we attend to the scripture-account of the choice and appointment of proper officers to take care of the civil affairs of the church, we shall find that the brethren chose the persons, and that the apostles appointed them: *Wherefore brethren, say the apostles, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*¹ *The prophets and teachers, who were at Antioch, were directed by the Holy Ghost to separate Barnabas and Saul*

¹ Acts vi. 3.

for the work whereunto he had called them.² And Titus was left in Crete to ordain elders in every city.³ From whence it appears that the persons who appointed or ordained officers in the church, whether as deacons, or pastors, and teachers, were the apostles, and more ordinary ministers of the gospel.

THE other inquiry that falls under our notice, respects the manner in which the officers in the church are to be appointed. When the brethren had chose out of their number proper persons to take care of the civil affairs of the church, they set them before the apostles; *who prayed and laid their hands on them.*⁴ In the account which we have of the separation of *Barnabas* and *Saul* for the work to which they were called, we find that the prophets and teachers *fasted, prayed and laid their hands on them.*⁵

THE common objection made to the practice of laying on of hands in the service of ordination is, that it was a rite used with a view of conveying extraordinary gifts; and that as these gifts are ceased, the medium that was appointed for the conveyance of them doth cease likewise.

IN answer to this I would observe, that it doth not appear that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were always bestowed when imposition of hands was used. We are informed that *Stephen*, full of faith and power, did great wonders; but it is not mentioned as the effect of the laying on of the hands of the apostles; nor is it improbable but that he had the power of working miracles before he was separated to his office by the imposition of hands; for it is said of him, that he was a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost; a phrase used in the second of Acts, to denote a person possessed of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. Nor does it appear that *Barnabas* and *Saul* did receive the power of working miracles by the laying on of the hands of the prophets and teachers. They had been already sometime ministers of the gospel, but now being called to more public work, they were solemnly set apart thereto by fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands: which account we have without any intimation of extraordinary gifts being received or intended by this method of separation.

IF it could be proved, which I think I may say it cannot, that in the times of the apostles, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit did always accompany imposition of hands; yet even this would not set aside the validity of the practice of laying on of hands, unless it could also be proved, that this was the only design of it. May we not well suppose, that prayer was made for all those supplies of grace and wisdom which the nature of

² Acts xiii. 2.

⁴ Acts vi. 6.

³ Titus i. 5.

⁵ Acts xiii. 6.

their work did require, and for that success which the important ends of their office rendered desirable, and that the laying on of hands was a solemn pointing out the person, whom they separated to the work to which they were called, and on whom they implored divine blessings whether of an ordinary or extraordinary nature?

FORASMUCH therefore as we find in the sacred writings, that the separating those who were called by GOD to office in the church devolved upon the ministers, and that it was done by prayer and imposition of hands; and as it does not appear that the practice of laying on of hands was confined to the conferring the peculiar gifts of the Holy Ghost; and we have no intimation of its being laid aside; we are now come, at the desire of this church, to separate Mr. *Abraham Booth* to the pastoral office in this community, according to the primitive manner, by prayer and imposition of hands. In order to which, give me leave for the satisfaction of this assembly to make the few following requests.

SINCE it cannot but be considered as a matter of great importance in the settlement of a pastor, that a conscientious regard be had to the word of GOD, and the leadings of Providence; I beg leave to request that one of the members of this church, in the name of the whole, would give an account of the steps which have been taken by this community in order to its obtaining a pastor.

Which was accordingly done by a brother of the church.

As you, the members of this church, have invited Mr. *Abraham Booth* to be your pastor, permit me to desire you, both the brethren and sisters, publicly to recognize your invitation by lifting up your right hand.

Which was accordingly done.

As this church have invited you, my brother, to take the oversight of them in the LORD, and have now publicly recognized their invitation; be pleased to give us an account of the steps which you have taken relative to their call, and also to declare your acceptance of the same.

Which was accordingly done. And Mr. Booth then proceeded to deliver a confession of his faith.