

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

FIRST GENERAL PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL

CONVENED AT EDINBURGH, JULY 1877.

WITH RELATIVE DOCUMENTS

BEARING ON THE AFFAIRS OF THE COUNCIL, AND THE STATE OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

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heard Dr. Chalmers with great eloquence dilate on this idea, and ask, How could the Congregationalist expect the Episcopalian at one leap to descend to his level, or the Episcopalian expect by one pull to drag up the Congregationalist to his lofty eminence? Presbytery was the meeting-point—"a midway station given for happy spirits to alight betwixt the earth and heaven." The idea thus humorously presented by one whose name must be ever sacred in an assemblage like this, has been already largely carried into accomplishment. We have seen Episcopacy in the colonies, in Ireland, and even in Britain assimilate itself more and more to Presbyterian usages. We have seen Congregationalism in its unions and conferences become more and more concentrated. We have seen Methodism prepared to crown its wonderful history and its many approaches to Presbyterian doctrine by a virtually Presbyterian government. We have seen Lutheranism becoming more Synodal, and the Continent rallying its returning spiritual life in this direction. Let us, for the sake of this life—the life in Christ—to which alone as ministering the unity of Presbyterian organisation is of real worth and value, hail these tokens; and let us pray that the great words spoken at first of Church order may be thus fulfilled, as in every other region, by the growing presence of our ever-living Lord and Saviour—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Amen.

The REV. A. A. HODGE, D.D., of Princeton, read the following paper on the

ADAPTATION OF PRESBYTERIANISM TO THE WANTS AND TENDENCIES OF THE DAY.

It is evident that this formula embraces two distinct subjects, each of which may legitimately claim the attention of the present Council. *First*: How, and with what specific adjustments is Presbyterianism, as a concrete form of ecclesiastical organisation, adapted to the great work of evangelising the world under the conditions of modern society? *Second*: What is the significance and importance of the great principles embodied in historical Presbyterianism in their bearing upon the moral and social and political interests of men, under the peculiar conditions of modern society? I propose to confine this essay to the consideration of the second question, and consequently will attempt a brief statement (1.) Of the principles which constitute the essence of Presbyterianism; (2.) Of those general characteristics of modern society which determine its relation to Christianity, and the influence of the present stage of transition upon the future moral

and religious destiny of the race; and (3.) Of the vital importance of Presbyterian principles to the welfare of human society under its modern conditions.

I. What are the great Principles which constitute the Essence of Presbyterianism?

Presbyterianism is a form of Christianity, distinguished by the special emphasis of certain great theological principles, which principles are historically embodied in an appropriate form of ecclesiastical organisation.

1. The theological principles which, from the position they are made to sustain, or from the special emphasis assigned to them, form the essence of Presbyterianism are, of course, the characteristic elements of the Calvinistic or Reformed Theology, and may be briefly stated thus:—

(1.) *As to God*.—God, because of his own transcendent perfections, and because of his relations to the world and to men as creator, immanent upholder and moral governor, is an absolute sovereign. His immutable perfections determine and find expression in his will; hence his world-plan is one all-comprehensive, immutable purpose; unconditioned, because determining all conditions, as well as all that is conditioned; his law is supreme, uniform, and unrelaxable, and his inspired Word is, for all men, in all their relations, the ultimate rule of all religious and moral faith and practice. Hence Presbyterian Theology emphasises alike the justice and the grace of God. The moral law is unrelaxable. Sin cannot be forgiven without an adequate expiation. The expiation can only be graciously provided, and graciously accepted, and graciously applied to sinners at once destitute of all rights and of all spiritual powers. All relative moral obligations among men are duties to God. He alone is Lord of the conscience, and his Word alone is the ultimate law which binds the conscience, the ultimate informant, and absolute authority, alike supreme over reason and hierarchical dictation. All men are equal before the majesty of Jehovah, and he reigns through and over all magistrates as well as over all subjects. And this power over the world, physical and moral, as well as over the Church, is now in the hands, and subject to the immediate administration, of the Incarnate Word, as Mediatorial King.

(2.) *As to Man*.—His apostasy was complete, and the spiritual depravity of his nature total. Before God all men are equal, and in respect to his government, by reason of the fall, they have neither rights nor powers. The family, including the relations of husband and wife, and of parent and child; the State, including all the forms of human society; and the Church,—are divine in-

stitutions, all equally constituted and legislated for in the inspired Word, and all alike designed, conserved, and administered as instrumentalities for the upbuilding of the mediatorial kingdom of Christ.

2. These general Theological Principles necessarily embody themselves in an appropriate form of ecclesiastical organisation, and also determine the moral and religious relations of all forms of human association. The practical principles involved may be stated thus:—

(1.) God alone is Lord of the conscience, and his revealed Word the supreme law of man as a moral agent in all his relations and modes of activity.

(2.) Since the Ascension of Christ the supreme authority over the race is vested in the Incarnate Word as Mediatorial Prince; over individual families, nations, and churches, he reigns "King of kings and Lord of lords."

(3.) Civil government is a divine institution, resting ultimately upon no "social contract," nor on the "consent of the governed," but upon the constitution and perpetual will of God, who hath "ordained the powers that be." Hence, obedience to the legitimate authority of the State is obedience to God, and the revealed will of the Divine King is in every department of civil and political life the fundamental law to which magistrates and citizens are alike under obligation to conform.

(4.) The Lord Jesus is the only and the immediate Head of the Church, which he has constituted with a jurisdiction, with officers and laws, distinct from that of the State. The Church, therefore, is a theocracy, all authority descending from the Divine Sovereign, all principles of order and law being revealed in his Word; and all the power delegated by him to his Church being simply declarative and ministerial.

(5.) The principles of Church organisation which, when taken together, constitute organic Presbyterianism, are—(a.) The highest permanent officers of the Church are presbyters, whose functions are limited to teaching and ruling, *i.e.* expounding and executing the inspired law. The Pope is excluded because Christ ever lives, and is ever present in his Church by his Spirit. Apostolical prelates are excluded, because inspiration, and the authority consequent upon it, has ceased to exist. (b.) Christ has committed all Church power not to any class, but to the body of the Church, which is the temple of the

Holy Ghost. Which power, however, the Church is to exercise, not as a disorganised mass, but through regular officers, associated in regularly constituted courts, composed of presbyters and elders, the "representatives of the people."

(c.) The whole Church is one, each part subject to the whole, and the administrative authority of the whole executed over each part through the constitutional courts.

These practical principles emphasise equally LIBERTY and ORDER. The Incarnate God is supreme Lord, and the immediate living source of all law and authority among men. All men are equal before him. Yet he has ordained the family, civil government, and the Church, and the magistrates, presbyters and elders thereof, and he administers his government through and over them by means of his Word, and his Spirit, and his immanent providence.

It is an historical fact, acknowledged by such impartial witnesses as Sir James Mackintosh, Froude, and Bancroft, that these Presbyterian principles revolutionised western Europe and her populations, and inaugurated modern history. As to their influence upon civil as well as religious liberty, and upon national education, it is only necessary to cite the post-reformation history of Geneva, Holland, the history of the Huguenots of France, the Puritans of England, the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the founders of the American Republic, where, for the first two hundred years of its history, almost every college and seminary of learning, and almost every academy and common school, was built and sustained by Calvinists, and where the federal constitution, providing for local self-government with national union, is evidently an historical growth from the same root which bore the ecclesiastical constitution elaborated by the Westminster Assembly.

In the original conflict, these principles were brought into antagonism with absolutism, both in Church and State. They first, though at the sacrifice of countless martyrs, especially in France, Holland, and Scotland, broke the power of the hierarchy and conquered liberty in the sphere of religious faith and practice. More gradually, but by inevitable consequence, they secured popular liberty in the sphere of civil and political life. The conditions of modern times, to "the wants and tendencies" of which it is our task to adjust and apply Presbyterian principles, are largely the outcome of the influence exerted, during the past three hundred years, upon the

life of European nations by these Presbyterian principles themselves.

II. What are the special conditions of modern times to which our problem refers ?

From the Reformation, for two hundred years, these principles stood in antagonism to absolutism of hierarchy in the Church, and of personal government in the State. In modern times the conditions are materially changed, and a triangular contest has been inaugurated between Presbyterian principles of human equality subject to divine sovereignty, and of liberty under the supremacy of the written Word, at the apex, and the ancient foe of absolutism and the modern foe of license at the opposite angles.

1. As to the contest between our principles and their ancient antagonist absolutism, it need only be remarked that, while the victory has been finally won in the sphere of civil government, the conflict has become all the more direct and intense in the sphere of religion and the Church. By the definition of the Immaculate Conception, the Syllabus, and the Dogmatic Constitutions and Canons of the Vatican Council, the true character of our great adversary is uncovered, and the pending controversy reduced to its ultimate terms. The Virgin has been practically substituted for the Godhead as an object of worship, and for the God-man as a source of redemption. The Word of God, as the supreme rule of faith and duty, has been rendered obsolete by the Papacy, which has been erected into an ever-living organ of infallible knowledge and authority. State, as well as Church, family, and school, the bosoms of the living and the graves of the dead, lie subject at the feet of this absolute despotism—absolute because subject to no superior, and limited neither as to sphere, nor extent, nor duration, either in this world or that which is to come.

2. But the pre-eminent characteristic of modern times is the tendency in various degrees among all peoples of European descent to carry the reaction against authority inaugurated at the Reformation to the destructive extreme of license. The insurrection of reason against traditional superstitions and the usurped authority of the hierarchy, has been succeeded by the illegitimate insurrection of reason against all supernatural revelation and spiritual illumination. Rebellion against absolutism in civil government has been perverted by anarchical and anti-social principles, and been succeeded by the assertion of independence of the authority of God.

So universal is this tendency, that in its incipient movements and more subtle forms, it carries with it the sympathies even of many true Christians. In the supposed interests of charity, the supreme importance of distinctive theological and ecclesiastical principles is depreciated. Even truths essential to the integrity of the gospel are sacrificed, and in the instinct of liberty, the exclusive normal authority of the Word of God in all matters of faith and worship is denied.

The reaction from the historical union of Church and State is leading to a demand for the entire separation of religion from the sphere of civil government. The principle is asserted that civil government lies entirely beyond the realm of Christ's mediatorial kingdom, and is not included in the legislation recorded in the Scriptures. Of all such questions as those pertaining to marriage and divorce, the civil Sabbath, the punishment of crime, as distinct from the reformation of the offender, and even those pertaining to the education of the youth of a nation, it is claimed that they are to be practically decided by the light of natural reason alone, informed by experience.

As God's mind is explicitly revealed upon all these subjects in his Word, as they are all of them essentially religious in their nature, while they all also, obviously, come under the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate, it is manifest that the doctrine of the absolute non-religious character of the State, necessarily precipitates a conflict between Christianity and the non-religious State, between the indomitable conscience of Christians, and the heterogeneous mass which, under the name of majorities, control civil government. It is evident that the logical tendency of modern national education is to centralisation and uniformity, to the comprehension and systematic unification of all grades of schools from the common school to the university; to a uniformity of course, method, text-books, literature, qualification and character of teachers, the whole enforced by law, and rendered compulsory. If to these imperial schemes we add the principle of the absolutely non-religious character of civil government, and its independence of Scripture and of the Mediatorial authority of Christ, it is evident that a new literature must be created, purged of all religious thought or sentiment; dictionaries expurgated of religious words; history rewritten, with all traces of Providence, grace, or faith eliminated, and philosophy, mental and moral,

reduced to a department of molecular mechanics. This system, already emerging in contemporaneous history, and almost everywhere foreshadowed, is a new thing upon the earth, and promises to be the consummate instrument of Satan for the propagation of atheism and practical irreligion, and ranks equal to the greatest of the many anti-christs.

III. As to the bearing of Presbyterian principles upon the general conditions and tendencies of modern society.

We must ever keep in mind the triangular nature of the conflict which has just been indicated. The advocates of the universal sovereignty of Christ and his Word must ever keep in mind the bearing of their principles in all directions, in the rear and on the sides, as well as in front. All error, from its partial and exaggerated character, is liable to violent reactions from one extreme to another, and is capable of the most incongruous and unexpected compromises and alliances. Thus traditionalism and rationalism, superstition and freedom of thought, priestly absolutism and licentious liberty, not only give place unexpectedly to one another as the result of mutual reactions, but they coalesce and co-operate in their common war upon the kingdom of Christ.

The loyal advocates of the truth, however, must admit no compromise with error of any kind, even when, upon occasion, she appears under the guise of an ally, and offers her assistance in resistance to a common foe. When fighting for liberty we must never admit the aid of license. When opposing traditionalism we must never consent to the co-operation of a shallow rationalism, which is really in insurrection against the authority of God, and, with characteristic want of principle, in reality proposes the exchange only of one form of human authority for another. If, in reconstructing, or in developing, our national systems, we oppose the papal subordination of the State to the infallible Church, or, on the other hand, the Erastian subjection of the Church to the civil authority, we must never accept the easy but fallacious solutions which imply that the State is any the less subordinate to Christ than the Church, or any the less subject to his personal supremacy, or to his law as revealed in his Word.] If we are laying the foundations of the great system of national education, which is to form the character of future generations, in opposing sectarian education in a papal or a prelatical sense, we must never consent to compromise with the principles,

or to co-operate in the methods, of those whose real purpose it is to render all education absolutely secular, under the absurd pretence that religion can be ignored, and yet not be denied, and that education can be simply non-religious, and yet the whole mass of human knowledge not be rendered positively antitheistic.

The same principles of historical Presbyterianism, which in the past have effectually combated human traditions and hierarchical absolutism, remain their only effective opponent in the present, and at the same time the only hopeful agency for resisting the false humanitarianism and heathen rationalism which constitute the chief peril of modern times.

The immutability and absolute perfection of the Divine nature, and hence the universality, supremacy, and inexorable claims of the moral law; the supreme and universal empire of Immanuel, as Mediatorial King over the physical and moral universe, and especially over men in all their relations and forms of organisation; the normal authority of the inspired Scriptures over all human life, and their power to bind the conscience in all questions upon which they express the Divine mind; the religious character and function of the State within its own sphere, distinct from but co-ordinate with the State, as different provinces of the same empire; or rather as different spheres of administration of the same supreme law; the equality of all men before God, and their subjection to his absolute lordship; universal liberty guaranteed and limited by Divine law, and the sacred rights of marriage and parentage; the religious character of every relation and function of human life, and especially of education, the most important and the most religious of all: these principles antagonise at once absolutism and license, the reign of superstition over the conscience, and the false claim of reason to be the only light of the world. They secure, at once, liberty and order, independence for the Church and religion for the State, the dignity of woman and the Divine order of marriage, the universality and the unsectarian character of national education, and yet its essential Christianity. They reconcile reason and faith by the assertion of the supreme authority of God's Word, in revolt against the restrictions of the hierarchy on the one hand, and on the other against the license of godless speculation; and they reconcile personal liberty with the authority of law by bringing magistrate and priest and

people all together as common subjects to the feet of the one supreme and perfect King Jesus.

The Rev. Dr. STUART ROBINSON of Louisville read the following Paper on—

THE CHURCHLINESS OF CALVINISM:
PRESBYTERY *JURE DIVINO* ITS LOGICAL
OUTCOME.

THE venerable Dr. Hodge of Princeton once related to the writer how, on a certain occasion pressing Dr. J. Addison Alexander to write a brief treatise on the Church, as he had some time previous promised to do, under the title, "Presbytery tested by Scripture," that remarkable man responded in his peculiar blunt way, "If you will write the first chapter, and tell me what the Church is, I will finish the book." Such answer from so profound a scholar and thinker as Dr. Alexander is very significant, as indicating that three centuries after the Protestant Reformation the leaders of Protestantism have not yet determined what the Church is, though they had so clearly determined three hundred years ago what *it is not*, in overthrowing the monstrous spiritual corporation which Rome had set up under a so-called vicar of Christ, and declaring it to be no Church but the synagogue of Satan. The suggestion of the Princeton Professor goes to confirm the observation of the philosophic German thinker, who before had suggested that of the four great departments of revealed truth—Theology, Anthropology, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology—the first three had been developed successively by the labours of Athanasius, the second of Augustine, and the third of Luther and Calvin, leaving the fourth yet to be developed. And it is a noteworthy fact, in confirmation of both suggestions, that while Evangelical Protestantism, or what may be called the original Protestantism, has since the Reformation period been in the main a unit in regard to Theology, Anthropology, and Soteriology, and a unit also in the protest against the Ecclesiological theory of Rome, there has been little unity in regard to the question of the visible Church, nor indeed much toward settling the idea, nature, functions, and relations of the Church of Christ on earth. No broad platform of Ecclesiology had yet been found upon which all Protestants may stand as substantially agreed.

It is not the purpose of this Essay to point out the several causes of the diversities of Protestantism in the matter of the Church as

organised and visible, nor to inquire particularly why the remarkable doctrinal *Consensus* on other great points of theology of the Churches of the Reformation should not long since have led to a like *Consensus* in regard to the doctrine of the Church. Yet it may be proper to refer in passing to certain secondary causes which have tended strongly against such a *Consensus*. Among these may be cited, in chief, the fact that the secular governments of Europe, having themselves first been emancipated from the Papal tyranny, were very jealous of all spiritual power; and very imperfectly comprehending the religious rights of men, would not suffer the organisation, within their limits, of the Gospel Church as a "Free Christian Commonwealth," nor recognise the autonomy of the Church as a "kingdom not of this world." On the other hand, Protestants, assailed by the Pope with the legions of Caesar at his back, were obliged to take shelter behind their civil governments, and to sacrifice, in consideration of such shelter, the spiritual independence of the Church. They were constrained to admit the authority of the sovereign, to a greater or less extent, in regulating the form and prescribing the functions of the Church. Thus the Protestant Churches became national Churches, modified as to their structure and functions to suit the views of their political protectors. In consequence of this, usages, statutes, and institutions, binding the Church more and more closely to the secular governments, gathered around these Reformed bodies. These in turn gave rise to civil enactments, Erastian in their spirit, until the standard authorities on public law in Europe came to reason with Vattel that "*a nation ought to be pious, and its rulers should choose for the people the best religion, and prohibit the teaching of any other.*" This became the source of most of those diversities and sects which have furnished colour for the Papal clamours against the "variations of Protestantism," and its supposed inherent tendency toward a multitudinous sectarianism.

Yet, while all this is true, it is by no means the whole truth as to the causes of the failure of the Churches of the Reformation to develop fully the doctrine of the one Catholic Church as organised and visible. It will be found, upon a careful examination of the Confessions of that era, that though some of the fathers of the Reformation caught glimpses, and others clear views, of the Church visible, as the development in time of the body elect of God in the purpose of redemption—