



SECOND
GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

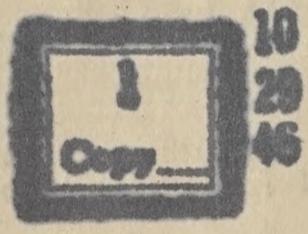
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EDITED BY

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piration is what gives legitimacy, and I venture to say gives high dignity, to these most earnest studies that have been directed to the ascertainment of the facts. An English critic, recently deceased, who has edited an edition of the New Testament, said that had he not believed the doctrine of plenary inspiration, or even verbal inspiration, his soul would not have sustained his weak body in his protracted labors. We are frequently reminded, as against this doctrine, of the idiosyncrasy of the several inspired writers. We are told, but, of course, everybody knows that, that the soul of Paul is not the soul of John, and the soul of Peter is not the soul of either. They say "if you have the human element so distinctly upon the surface of Scripture, where is your ground for asserting plenary inspiration? You must modify that doctrine." To my mind Dr. Humphrey has put the matter most admirably. He has said that it is all human and it is all divine; and I will not allow any man with his critical instincts to run through the Bible and analyze it mechanically, and determine that so much is human and so much divine. I hold that, just as order interpenetrates life, you have a divine *Logos* penetrating every part of Scripture, so that from the beginning to the end of it, it is an intensely human book, and it is absolutely a divine book. These are the two points I beg permission to state in the Council; and I cannot but express not simply my intellectual satisfaction, but my deep gratitude before God, at the profound and earnest views which have here been offered from all quarters upon this great subject.

The Council then adjourned until 2½ o'clock in the afternoon.

September 24th, 1880, 2.30 P. M.

The Council was called to order and prayer offered by the REV. THOMAS S. PORTER, D.D., LL.D., of Easton, Pa., President.

The Committee on "Credentials" reported. (See p. 24.)

The REV. PROF. SAMUEL J. WILSON, D. D., LL. D., of Allegheny City, read the following on

THE DISTINCTIVE PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

From eternity God chose a people for himself. The idea of the Church rests upon and springs out of the eternal purpose of Jehovah

In the working out of this eternal purpose the divine thought assumes form and visibility in time. The true people of God as they are known to him throughout all the ages, those who have been, and those who will be redeemed, constitute the Invisible Church. But since man can only judge as to who are the people of God by a credible profession, "all those who profess the true religion, together with their children," constitute the visible Church. The Church, therefore, in its idea and necessity, rests upon no tradition or expediency, not upon apostolical authority alone, not upon an happy after-thought of God, but upon his blessed, eternal purpose according to the counsel of his own will. As to churchism—if we must have it of all dimensions, high, low and broad—here is churchism which in its "breadth and length and depth and height" is commensurate with the "love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

In the government of a God "whose bosom is the home of law," which law is voiced in the harmony of the world; this visible Church must have a form, an organization. It is a body. The earth which is preserved from fire for the sake of the Church, swings through the ranks of marching suns to the *music* of the *spheres*. This God of order would not leave his highest creation—the Church—to go on at random, or in anarchy. Here naturally and presumably we should expect the highest type of law and order and government; of power regulated; rights guarded; order maintained with all due liberty of thought and action.

I. Presbyterianism maintains therefore, that *there is a Church*, that there *has been a Church* from the beginning of human history; that the plan of the Church lay in the mind of God before the foundations of the world were laid. *This is high churchism of the right kind.*

II. This Church, then, has a founder, a lawgiver, a governor, a king, a head; and this king, lawgiver and head is Christ. Presbyterianism maintains, always has maintained, and always will maintain so long as true to herself, the supreme headship of Christ. To his Church Jesus Christ has given laws and a form of government. To him alone is the Church responsible for what she does in her legitimate and appropriate sphere. These laws given by Christ to his Church are contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which Scriptures

III. Presbyterianism holds to be the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice; the Bible, the Bible alone, and the whole Bible. To this principle Presbyterianism has always been loyal; always "following God's word," as the immortal Rutherford has it.

Richard Hooker—*nomen clarum et venerabile*—in his ecclesiastical polity begins the discussion at very long range, concerning law in general, law of nature, of angels, of reason, etc., then Scripture. On the other hand, Presbyterianism begins, continues and ends with Scripture—with all Scripture. After we have learned what the Scripture saith it is time enough to consult antiquity, history, canons, nature or logic. The Old Testament and the New Testament are not

antagonistic nor contradictory, nor inconsistent the one with the other; the one is not a supplement to the other, nor is the New Testament a feeble apology for the Old, but both alike are the word of God. The Church is one throughout the ages. Thus going to the word of God, to the whole word of God, reverently to learn what form of government Christ has given to the Church, and pressing out the very essence of all dispensations, and lifting the name right from the sacred page, with the breath of Jehovah upon it, we exclaim, Presbyterian!

What then is Presbyterianism?

1. First and most obviously it is a Church government in the hands of Presbyters (elders); and of these there are two classes, viz., teaching elders and ruling elders. Every ordained teaching Presbyter has authority to discharge all ministerial functions, viz., to preach the Word, to administer the sacraments, to dispense discipline. There are no orders in the ministry such as characterize Prelacy—Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons. Each Presbyter in the New Testament was, and by right is, a Bishop—a Bishop in the sense of an overseer of the flock, not an overseer of his brethren. Associated with the Presbyters, who, besides ruling, “labor in word and doctrine,” are others whose peculiar function it is to rule; hence called Ruling Elders.

These ruling elders are not laymen, but are chosen from among laymen, and are ordained to a spiritual office, and in ecclesiastical courts represent the people; and in these ecclesiastical courts have equal powers with the teaching elders. It is conceded on all hands that the office of ruling elder is perpetual, and in logical Presbyterianism the exercise of this spiritual office should no more expire by limitation of time, than the exercise of the spiritual office of a preaching elder should expire by limitation of time; or than the exercise of a man’s spiritual gifts and graces should expire by limitation of time.

Each congregation is governed by a bench of elders. From the lowest court to the highest the *power of the keys* is in the hand of Presbyters, and this *Presbyterian authority is Episcopal*. We have no controversy with *Episcopacy*. We hold it, believe it, teach it, practice it, defend it. Each Presbyterian minister is a bishop—is indeed the only scriptural kind of bishop; an *episcopos*, overseer of the flock, but not a lord over his brethren. We are *Episcopalians*, truer ones than those who arrogate the name to themselves, for they have but few bishops, whereas we have many. *Prelatists* are they, but *scriptural Episcopalians* they are not. We are Episcopalians but not Prelatists. Prelacy has no foundation in the word of God. It is a human device; a human invention, a human after-thought.

The government of the church is, by elders; and,

2. This government by elders binds the church together organically. Each court is subordinate to a higher court—the Church Session to the Presbytery, the Presbytery to the Synod, the Synod to the General Assembly. The power of the church is *not in the whole body of believers* but *representatively* in these church courts, but it is in these courts.

There is no scriptural example of ordination by one presbyter, but by Presbytery; so there is no scriptural example of authority exercised by one bishop but by an assembly of bishops, Presbyters. Thus order, decency, discipline in the house of God are secured and at the same time the rights of every member are carefully guarded. The proceedings, conclusions, findings and judgments of all lower courts are subject to review by the higher courts, and this review carries with it *control*. No congregation is or can be *independent*, but is an integral part of the Presbytery, and the Presbytery is an integral part of the Synod, and the Synod of the General Assembly. An independent Presbyterian Church is an anomaly—a monstrosity. Thus we have:

3. *Unity*: Many members forming one body, and the body in subjection to the head; a living organism, not a unity secured by arbitrary power, not the unity of iron bands which make the chariot wheel one. but the plastic power of an informing inner life which makes the cedar of Lebanon one, or the oak of Bashan one, with many members. There is a strong government, but this government is only ministerial. The church can make no laws to bind the conscience. She can only administer the law as laid down in the word of God. It is constitutional government, government according to the divine constitution.

And, 4, this unity is *Catholic*.

If Presbyterianism be *jure divino*, it is and must be Catholic. "We believe in the Holy Catholic Church;" and besides this, Presbyterianism is the only form of government which can really give scriptural expression to this catholicity. Papacy or Prelacy can no more do this than Napoleonic imperialism could give expression to the catholicity of human freedom. Catholicity, moreover, is an *instinct* of Presbyterianism. In the Book of Discipline of the Kirk of Scotland, as early as 1581, it is declared: "Beside these assemblies, there is another more general kind of assembly, an universal assembly of the Church of Christ in the world, which was commonly called an œcumenic council, representing the universal Church, which is the body of Christ."

Rutherford in "Divine Right" declares that "œcumenic and general councils should be, *jure divino*, to the second coming of Christ." (58.)

Gillespie says: "Besides provincial and national synods, an œcumenical or more truly a general, or, if you please, an universal synod." Prop. 36.

(a) This scheme of government therefore is logical and symmetrical. Each part fits to its fellow without jar or friction; the body develops naturally and harmoniously into full, rounded proportions, without excrescences or monstrosities; "the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

(b) It is logical and symmetrical because it is scriptural. It claims to be *jure divino*. Normal, healthy Presbyterianism—Presbyterianism which has the breath of life in its nostril, the pulse-beat of life in its wrist—has never abated a jot or a tittle of that claim. If the system be not *jure divino*, if it be not scriptural, let us know it and let us

have done with it. Let us understand ourselves, brethren, and then the world will understand us. Our right to be here as a General Presbyterian Council rests on the fact that our system in government as well as in doctrine is *jure divino*. Our catholicity is not to be maintained by a dilution of our Presbyterianism; we are not to reach comprehension by beating out the gold of the sanctuary until it becomes so thin that it can be put to the base purposes of tinfoil. If our system be not *jure divino*, we as Presbyterians, especially as a Presbyterian General Council, have no right to exist. Let us not be ashamed of our birthright: above all let us not sell at Esau's price.

Boast they of apostolical succession! We claim patriarchal succession. Presbyterianism is older by millennia than the apostles. The apostles only take their place in the unbroken line of Presbyterianism, which had been in successful operation for thousands of years before Peter cast his first net or caught his first fish. At Horeb, in the light of the burning bush, *nec tamen consumebatur*, Moses received his great commission, which ran thus: "Go gather the elders of Israel together." Jehovah sent Moses down to Egypt to convene the Presbytery. Through the elders, the representatives of the people, he was to act, and through them he did act. From the burning bush at Horeb Moses went to Presbytery. There were Presbyterians ages before Peter was born, or Rome was builded, or Prelacy or Papacy was ever heard or dreamed of. We date far beyond apostolic times. One purpose runs through the ages. The Church is one in all dispensations. There is but one plan of salvation. Abel was saved through the blood of the Lamb. At Sinai, and during the sojourn in the desert, the elders represented the people. The establishment of the monarchy left the Presbyterial government of the Israelitish Church intact. Let it be borne in mind that the Israelitish Church and State were not identical. Gillespie and Rutherford set that at rest forever.

The government of the synagogues was Presbyterian. The death of Christ abolished the Temple service, which was sacrificial and ritual. There was no more need for altar, or priest, or sacrifice. Christ fulfilled the law by taking the place of the types. When the Temple service was thus abolished, there remained the form and service of the synagogue; and the first converts being Jews the synagogue model was ready to hand. There was no revolution; when ritualism was abolished by the sacrifice of Christ the Presbyterianism of Moses remained. There is not a scintilla of evidence for any other form of government in the New Testament. Diocesan Bishops are unknown to the New Testament. Neither is there any trace of independency or congregationalism in Judaism.

The lines of the covenant run from one dispensation to another unbroken, only expanding so as to embrace all who shall believe, of all nations, together with their children.

The system is scriptural, and because scriptural it is logical and symmetrical. It is not first made logical, and Scripture made to square with it, but it is drawn directly from the word of God, not

cunningly framed to meet some exigency or expediency, not according to any prepossessions. The eternal thought of Jehovah takes form and visibility in just and due proportion. Presbyters are identical with bishops in New Testament usage. On this point there is an unbroken chain of authorities from Augustine to the present Bishop Lightfoot.

Paul called presbyters of the Church of Ephesus bishops (Acts xx. 17-28).

The apostles ordained them elders in every church (Acts xiv. 23).

Peter, himself an elder, charges elders as bishops, overseers and pastors of the flock, but not "lords over God's heritage."

Presbyters were ordained by the laying on of hands of the Presbytery (1 Tim. iv. 14).

An accusation against a presbyter could not be entertained except in and by Presbytery before two or three witnesses. (1 Tim. v. 19.) A presbyter is entitled to a fair trial by his peers. That was Paul's presbyter, according to the glorious Sam'l Rutherford. Throughout the Bible from end to end the Church is Presbyterian, from the times of Moses to and through the times of the apostles; from the Shechinah of the burning bush to the Apocalypse of John. Jehovah sent Moses to the elders of Israel, and in the Apocalypse the elders, together with angels and cherubim, worship and preach and sing the new song in company with the countless multitude before the throne. In the visions of John there are no prelates, but the elders are, and are there representatively. From the household of the ante-diluvian patriarch to the worship of the Apocalyptic Church in heaven, the thought and scheme and spirit of the Bible is Presbyterian.

(c) And being scriptural it is historical.

That apostolical Presbyterianism was in the third century superseded by Prelacy is only too obviously true, but this Prelacy came not by the door of scripture authority, but, like a thief and a robber, climbed up some other way. From Judaism and Paganism it crept in, bringing with it altars, priests, sacrifices, and the elaborate ritual appropriate to these ideas.

During the Middle Ages, whenever and wherever a witness for the truth arose, who by the study of the word of God had been instructed and quickened, and who, thus instructed and quickened, desired to lead the Church back to apostolical simplicity and purity, there we find a Presbyterian. This is true of all the fore-runners of the Reformers, and of all the Reformers; and in every country the Reformation was conducted on Presbyterian principles except in England. Prelatists say Presbyterianism is not historical; but it is historical in apostolical times and in the best ages in the world's life. If it ever is submerged it is in the days of the deepest corruption, when it is confessed that Prelacy held the field.

Nor is Presbyterianism simply a form of ecclesiology, but going as it always does to the word of God, it there finds a system of doctrine which is much more important and precious than any form of polity. Excellent as our form of government is, it is withal only

the casket which contains and conserves the treasure of sound doctrine. We put doctrine first, form of government secondary; the form only to give proper expression and efficiency to the doctrine. So that with all its strength and clearness of conviction Presbyterianism is catholic and charitable in spirit and in sympathy.

Presbyterianism, then, is not a mere form, or badge, but a system of doctrines and principles, the form being appropriate to the doctrines, the history of which can be traced back along a line of fire to the Apostle Paul, and thence to the burning bush at Horeb. The true line of succession does not consist in the unbroken continuity of empty, extra-scriptural forms and ceremonies, but in the continuous holding forth and passing forward of the vital doctrines of the gospel, accompanied by the spirit and power of true godliness. The line passes on from Abel, the first martyr, to Enoch, the seventh from Adam; from Enoch to Noah, the preacher of righteousness; from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Paul, from Paul to Augustine, from Augustine to Claudius of Turin, from Claudius to the Waldenses in their Alpine fastnesses, to Succat, commonly known as St. Patrick, a good sound Presbyterian; from Succat through the Culdees, thence through every witness of the truth during the Middle Ages, thence through the Reformers. Along the whole line stakes and fagots have blazed, and along the whole line Presbyterian blood has sprinkled, and ashes of martyred Presbyterians have been scattered.

“Kings, Prophets, Patriarchs, all have part
Along the sacred line.”

This system is scriptural, logical and symmetrical. The form is not a mere shell, but is a body for vital forces which live, and move and work; which work, moreover, within prescribed limits according to established laws. We are not dealing with dead forms, but with living principles. For example:

1. The headship of Christ as held by Presbyterians renders Papacy impossible. Christ is King alone, and has on earth no vicar. He has no deputy and needs none, and he who usurps such an office presumptuously puts himself in the place of God. Christ has no vicar, but he as King sends out his ambassadors, his ministers, and they declare his will, they preach the word. They are not to minister at an altar, not to parody the one infinite sacrifice of the Son of God; nor are they sent to amuse or astonish the people with the fancies and crudities of their own imaginations, but to declare the will and counsel of the ever-living, all-ruling King. This will of the King has been written, put on record for us in his word, and this is our rule, our only rule, our sufficient rule.

This sound, simple principle sweeps utterly away all theories of tradition, all theories of “*quod semper, quod ubique et quod ab omnibus,*” and all theories of development.

All intelligent and honest Papists and Prelatists know that their

systems are not found in the Bible, and on that account they scout the idea of the sufficiency of Scripture; hence they base these systems on expediency, decency; then they have fallen back on tradition, antiquity, church history, the *consensus* of the ante-Nicene fathers; but being ignominiously routed from these positions by advancing scholarship, Maehler suggested, and Cardinal Newman elaborated a theory of development which can account for the Papacy apart from apostolic authority. Is it not suggestive, is it not decisive against them that all these extreme Prelatic theories, and just in proportion to their intensity, discredit the sufficiency of Scripture? In the magical hands of Newman this development performs the most wonderful feats. He makes the incarnation to be the antecedent of the doctrine of mediation, this develops into the doctrine of the atonement, and that into the doctrine of the mass and the worship of saints. In other words the divinity and incarnation of our Lord develop into the worship of saints and relics. From the same source he draws the sacramental principle, and this develops into the seven sacraments, the unity of the Church, the Holy See, authority of Councils, sanctity of rites, veneration of holy places, shrines, images, furniture, vessels and vestments. "The doctrine of the sacraments leads to the doctrine of justification; justification to that of original sin; original sin to the merit of celibacy." With such a theory he only needs the last law of development which he lays down, viz.: "Chronic Continuance," to be able to achieve anything by development without either Scripture or history, and for that matter without reason or common sense.

The headship of Christ is potent against Popery, so also against Erastianism. To the Church is given no sword, but the power of the keys. The State bears the sword, the Church the keys, and Christ alone the sceptre.

Ministerial parity as a principle is sharp, keen, distinctive, and far-reaching in its sweep and power. It is a two-edged plowshare which cuts up by the roots Prelacy, and the very beginnings of hierarchical order, distinction, supremacy. As a principle this is the touch-stone of Presbyterianism. Departure from this simple principle, early in the history of the Church, laid the foundation for the astounding claims and achievements of the Papacy, of Hildebrand; and departure from it, however slight, is always fraught with danger.

Ministerial parity implies a ministry. Presbyterianism holds no uncertain views on this subject, but sound, scriptural views, which the world greatly needs to hear. There is a Christian ministry, *jure divino*, and the sacred functions of this office—preaching the word and administering the sacraments—are not to be assumed or usurped by any one's taking this honor to himself; but men are to enter this office according to the order laid down in the word of God.

If a man be called to preach, he is called of God, and called according to the divine ordinance. Here again we find in Presbyterianism a plowshare, which cuts up by the roots the pestiferous weeds

of Plymouthism, and all forms of ecclesiastical insubordination and anarchy: and may God speed the plowshare!

The office of Ruling Elder gives the people a representation in all ecclesiastical courts, and the people having a right to choose their own officers, the heart of the Church is thus brought near to the people, and the heart of the people is kept near the Church.

Presbyterianism is an impregnable bulwark against spiritual oligarchy, and spiritual monarchy; and also against sacerdotalism, sacramentarianism, and ritualism. A church truly Presbyterian can never become ritualistic, because ritualism is extra-scriptural. Even on the theory that the Christian Church is modelled after the Temple service, it by no means follows that the Church must be prelatic, but, on the contrary, it is quite true that the Levitical priests were not prelates, nor was the system in any of its features prelatic. But the Temple service was abrogated by the one infinite sacrifice, offered once for all by our Great High Priest. Priesthood, altar, sacrifice, types, all vanished in the presence of the Anti-Type. He is a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek, not after the order of Aaron. He has no successor in office. Who now dares obtrude himself into the sanctuary as priest? who dares to build again Jewish altars, and to usurp the prerogatives of the one High Priest, who, in the heavenly sanctuary, ever lives to intercede?

What a pitiable spectacle it is to see a poor mortal, tricked out in his vestments, manipulate a wafer, and call it a sacrifice! With this sacerdotal idea comes ritualism in all its modes, degrees, and extremes. Presbyterianism knows but one King and Head of the Church, and but one High Priest and Mediator, who "hath made us kings and priests unto God." The dowry through his blood is the universal priesthood of believers. This is Presbyterian sacerdotalism.

Presbyterianism gives strength and security just where these are needed, and gives this strength and security on scriptural foundations. It has liberty with strength as against the Papacy, and strength with liberty as against Independency. "Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." We are not ashamed of our polity and form of government. We are not ashamed of its origin, of its history, of its past, of its present, of its hopes for the future.

Presbyterianism is liberal, charitable, unchurching no one, attaching more importance to purity of doctrine and of life than to any form of government, and is ready always with a good conscience to fellowship with all who "hold the Head;" and so in controversy she has always been on the defensive; but when attacked she has always shown that she is able to take care of herself and the precious interests committed to her. We are willing and anxious to live in peace and in charity and good-will toward all men, but if *prelatists persist* in unchurching us, and in spurning Presbyterian ordination, we retort by saying, "*Your prelacy is unwarranted* by Scripture, and if you have nothing better than this figment of apostolical succession, then your bishops are no bishops, and your Church is not a true Church." We are *Episcopalians*, true *Presbyterian Episcopalians*.