

THE FIVE POINTS OF PRESBYTERIANISM

Every denomination of Christians has certain distinctive principles, which serve to differentiate it from other branches of the visible Church, and which constitute its *raison d'être*—the ground more or less substantial of its separate organic existence. In proportion as these principles are vital and fundamental, they vindicate the body that becomes their exponent from the charge of faction or schism, and justify its maintenance of an organization separate and apart from that of all who traverse or reject them.

We are met today as Presbyterians. We have come to commemorate the first settlement of Presbyterianism in Kentucky. You have listened to the eloquent addresses of those who have traced the history of our Church in this commonwealth for a hundred years. They have told you of the first planting in this Western soil of a tender branch from our old and honored Presbyterian stock, of the storms it has encountered, of the rough winds that have beaten upon it, and yet of its steady growth through summer's drought and winter's chill, until what was erstwhile but a frail and tender plant, has become a sturdy oak with roots deep-locked in the soil, with massive trunk and goodly boughs and widespread branches overshadowing the land.

You have heard also, the thrilling narratives of the lives of those heroic men by whose personal ministry the Church was founded; of the toils they underwent, of the perils they encountered, of the hardships they endured that they might plant the standards of Presbyterianism in these Western wilds.

The question arises with especial emphasis under circumstances like these: What are the peculiar principles of the denomination whose centennial is celebrated with so much enthusiasm today? Is there anything in these principles that justifies such sacrifices and toils as were made by

the noble men whose biographies have been read? Is there anything in the distinctive doctrines and polity of this Church to render its settlement in Kentucky a hundred years ago, and its perpetuation and development through a century of conflict and struggle, a matter worthy of such joyous, grateful commemoration as we give today? Is there anything in these creeds and symbols, venerable with years, which we have received from our forefathers, which makes them an inheritance meet to be transmitted in their integrity and purity, with increasing veneration, to our children and to our children's children forever?

These, Christian friends, are the questions that, through the kindness and partiality of my brethren, I am to endeavor to answer today. And in the fulfillment of my task, I invite you to walk with me for a little while about this, our ancestral Zion, to "mark well her bulwarks and consider her palaces that ye may tell it to the generation following."

The Distinctives of Presbyterianism

And first, let us endeavor to get a clear idea as to what constitute the distinctive principles of Presbyterianism, as to what there is that is peculiar in its doctrine and polity. Confining myself strictly under the head of doctrine, to the department of ecclesiology or the doctrine of the Church, and viewing the polity of Presbyterianism in its only proper light as basing itself distinctly upon, and adjusting itself most accurately to that form of doctrine delivered in Scripture, I may say that, just as in our doctrine of Redemption, there emerge the historical *five points*, over which controversy has waged since the days of the Synod of Dort, so in our doctrine of the Church there are five points, constituting five distinctive principles of Church government, each one of which places our Church polity in sharp contrast with that of other Churches around us, and all of which together make up a system as unique as it is beautiful, as scriptural as it is complete,

having nothing comparable to it in any other organization in the world.

Let us take up these five points of Presbyterianism successively, and endeavor to engrave them as clearly as possible upon our memories and upon our hearts.

Church Power in the People

The first fundamental principle of Presbyterianism is that Church power is vested not in officers of any grade or rank, but in the whole corporate body of believers. Our doctrine is that Christ, who is the great Head of the Church, the alone fountain and source of all its power, has not vested this power primarily in a single officer who is the visible head of the Church and the vicar of Christ, as in the Roman Catholic Church, or in the body of Bishops or superior clergy as in the Episcopal Church, or in the whole body of the clergy as in the Methodist and some other churches, but in the people, the whole body of the people, so that no man can attain to any office, exercise any authority, or wield any power in the Church, except he is called to that office, invested with that authority and clothed with that power by the voice of the people.

Here, then, is a grand, fundamental difference between the Presbyterian Church and all those churches that are prelatical or hierarchical in form, in that ours is a government in which Christ rules through the voice of his people, his whole redeemed people, and not through any privileged class, any spiritual nobility, or aristocracy of grace.

Representative Rule

The second fundamental principle of Presbyterianism is that this power, though vested in the people, is not administered by them immediately, but through a body of officers chosen by them, and commissioned as

their representatives to bear rule in Christ's name. The offices that are to be filled have been ordained of Christ, and none may be added to those which he has ordained. The officers who fill these offices are chosen by a vote of the whole membership of the Church over which they are to rule, and yet are to be chosen under such special prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church, that whilst the outward vocation to office is from the Church, the inward call and commission to each officer is to be recognized as from Christ Himself, the great invisible and spiritual head. The only power, therefore, immediately exercised by the people is this most important and fundamental power, that of vocation. They choose those who shall administer the government over them. These rulers act as their representatives and so the government is a representative government, as distinguished from a pure democracy or a government of the people by themselves.

This principle separates us from all churches that are congregational in form, as the first from all that are prelatial or hierarchical. This last distinguishes us, therefore, from the Congregational churches of England and of this country, from all churches of the Baptist faith and order, and from those churches around us that call themselves the Christian, or Reformed, in all of which questions of doctrine and discipline are decided by a direct vote of the whole congregation, whilst in ours these questions are settled by the voice of those officers who are chosen to bear rule.

One Office of Rule

The third fundamental principle of Presbyterianism is that the whole administration of government in the Church has been committed to a single order of officers, all of whom, though having in some respects different functions to perform, are of co-ordinate and equal authority in the Church. It is true that the Presbyterian Church, after the pattern of Scrip-