

**WHAT IS PRESBYTERIANISM? AN
ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE
PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL
SOCIETY AT THEIR ANNIVERSARY
MEETING IN PHILADELPHIA, ON
TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 1, 1855**

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What is Presbyterianism? An Address Delivered Before the Presbyterian Historical Society at Their Anniversary Meeting in Philadelphia, on Tuesday Evening, May 1, 1855 by Rev. Charles Hodge

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REV. CHARLES HODGE

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BY THE

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REV. CHARLES HODGE, D. D.



PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
NO. 260 CHESTNUT STREET.

WHAT IS PRESBYTERIANISM?

BRETHREN :—We are assembled this evening as a Presbyterian Historical Society. It has occurred to me that it would not be inappropriate to discuss the question, What is Presbyterianism? You will not expect from me an oration. My object is neither conviction nor persuasion; but exposition. I propose to occupy the hour devoted to this address in an attempt to unfold the principles of that system of Church polity which we, as Presbyterians, hold to be laid down in the word of God.

Setting aside Erastianism, which teaches that the Church is only one form of the State; and Quakerism, which does not provide for the external

organization of the Church, there are only four radically different theories on the subject of Church Polity.

1. The Popish theory, which assumes that Christ, the Apostles and believers, constituted the Church while our Saviour was on earth, and this organization was designed to be perpetual. After the ascension of our Lord, Peter became his Vicar, and took his place as the visible head of the Church. This primacy of Peter, as the universal Bishop, is continued in his successors, the Bishops of Rome; and the apostleship is perpetuated in the order of Prelates. As in the Primitive Church, no one could be an apostle who was not subject to Christ, so now no one can be a Prelate who is not subject to the Pope. And as then no one could be a Christian who was not subject to Christ and the apostles, so now no one can be

a Christian who is not subject to the Pope and the Prelates. This is the Romish theory of the Church. A Vicar of Christ, a perpetual College of apostles, and the people subject to their infallible control.

2. The Prelatical theory assumes the perpetuity of the apostleship as the governing power in the Church, which therefore consists of those who profess the true religion, and are subject to apostle-bishops. This is the Anglican or High-Church form of this theory. In its Low-Church form, the Prelatical theory simply teaches that there was originally a three-fold order in the ministry, and that there should be now. But it does not affirm that mode of organization to be essential.

3. The Independent or Congregational theory includes two principles; first, that the governing and executive

power in the Church is in the brotherhood; and secondly, that the Church organization is complete in each worshipping assembly, which is independent of every other.

4. The fourth theory is the Presbyterian, which it is our present business to attempt to unfold. The three great negations of Presbyterianism—that is, the three great errors which it denies are—

1. That all church power vests in the clergy.
2. That the apostolic office is perpetual.
3. That each individual Christian congregation is independent.

The affirmative statement of these principles is—

1. That the people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church.
2. That presbyters, who minister in word and doctrine, are the highest ~~governments~~ ^{*} officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order.
3. That the outward

* permanent

and visible Church is, or should be, one, in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole. It is not holding one of these principles that makes a man a Presbyterian, but his holding them all.

I. The first of these principles relates to the power and rights of the people. As to the nature of Church power, it is to be remembered that the Church is a theocracy. Jesus Christ is its head. All power is derived from him. His word is our written constitution. All Church power is, therefore, properly ministerial and administrative. Everything is to be done in the name of Christ, and in accordance with his directions. The Church, however, is a self-governing society, distinct from the State, having its officers and laws, and, therefore, an administrative government of its own. The power of the

Church relates, 1. To matters of doctrine. She has the right to set forth a public declaration of the truths which she believes, and which are to be acknowledged by all who enter her communion. That is, she has the right to frame creeds or confessions of faith, as her testimony for the truth, and her protest against error. And as she has been commissioned to teach all nations, she has the right of selecting teachers, of judging of their fitness, of ordaining and sending them forth into the field, and of recalling and deposing them when unfaithful. 2. The Church has power to set down rules for the ordering of public worship. 3. She has power to make rules for her own government; such as every Church has in its Book of Discipline, Constitution, or Canons, &c. 4. She has power to receive into fellowship, and to exclude