

**PRESBYTERIANISM: THE TRULY PRIMITIVE AND
APOSTOLICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST. PP. 5-98. INFANT
BAPTISM, SCRIPTURAL AND REASONABLE:
AND BAPTISM BY
SPRINKLING OT AFFUSION, THE MOST
SUITABLE AND EDIFYING MODE. PP.5-122**

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PRESBYTERIANISM
THE
TRULY PRIMITIVE
AND
APOSTOLICAL CONSTITUTION
OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

✓
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PHILADELPHIA

PRESBYTERIAN TRACT AND SUNDAY SCHOOL SOCIETY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Manual has been prepared at the particular request of the Tract Society of the Synod of Philadelphia. A polemical spirit in the Church of God is by no means commendable. And even when different denominations of professing Christians are compelled, either in public teaching, or in social intercourse, to recur to the points in regard to which they differ, it ought ever to be done with as much mildness and inoffensiveness as can be reconciled with fidelity. It is doing no more than justice to Presbyterians to say, that they have ever been remarkable for their freedom from a proselyting spirit. Assuredly, there is no denomination of Christians in the United States, from whose pulpits so little is heard of the nature of running their own claims, or impeaching the peculiarities of others, as in those of the Presbyterian Church. Seldom is a sentence uttered in their public assemblies adapted to invade the tenets of any evangelical Christian; almost never, indeed, unless in defending themselves against the attacks of other denominations.

In the meanwhile, several other numerous and respectable denominations habitually act on a different policy. Their preaching, their ecclesiastical journals, and their popular Tracts, are characteristically and strongly *sectarian*. Of this no complaint is made. We live in a free country, where all denominations, in the eye of the civil government, stand upon a level. May it ever continue to be so! But there is a point, beyond which silence in respect to our peculiarities, may be censurable. We are bound to defend ourselves against unscriptural attacks, not merely for our own sakes, but for the sake of others. It is incumbent on us to show to those within our pale, or who may be inclined to unite with us, that we "have not followed cunningly devised fables."

This, and this only, is the design of the following Manual. It is not intended to invade the precincts, or assail the members of other religious communities; but solely for the instruction of Presbyterians; and to satisfy them that the system by which they are distinguished, is, throughout, truly primitive and apostolic. Inquiries are frequently made by young people and others of our denomination, why we differ, as to a variety of particulars, from some other churches. Is it wrong; can it be deemed inconsistent with the most seraphic Christian charity, and even delicacy, to provide a manual calculated to answer these inquiries? Surely, this is a debt which we owe to our children. And as Presbyterian ministers are seldom heard to preach on the peculiarities by which our beloved and truly scriptural Church is distinguished, there seems to be the more propriety in putting into the hands of our youthful and less instructed members, a summary of the arguments by which they may be enabled to meet the attacks, and repel the insinuations, of those unwearied worshippers of sect, who cease not to insist that they alone are entitled to the character of true Churches.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1835, by Dr. A. W. Mitchell, in the office of the Clerk of the District Court, of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

PRESBYTERIANISM.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THE Church of God, in the days of the Apostles, as is well known, was not divided into different denominations. Even then, indeed, there were parties in the Church. The restless and selfish spirit of depraved human nature soon began, in different places to display its unhallowed influence, either in the form of judaizing claims, philosophical speculations, or turbulent opposition to regular ecclesiastical authority. In the Church of Corinth, though planted and nurtured by "the chiefest of the Apostles," there were factious and troublesome members, who contended among themselves, and said, one to another, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Still the Church was one. The names, "Presbyterian," "Episcopalian," "Congregationalist," &c. &c., were unknown. All professing Christians, "though many, were considered as one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." The only popular distinction then recognised, as far as the professed followers of Christ were concerned, was between the Church and the heretics.

Not long after the Apostolic age, when heresies had become numerous, when each of them claimed to belong to the Church, and when convenience demanded the adoption of some term which might distinguish between the true or orthodox Church, and the various sects of errorists—the title of Catholic (or general, as the term Catholic signifies,) was applied to the former; while the latter were distinguished by various names, derived either from the nature of their distinguishing opinions,

or from the original authors or promoters of those opinions. It is well known, indeed, that the blinded and superstitious followers of the Bishop of Rome claim the title of Catholic, as exclusively applicable to themselves. In their own estimation, they are *the Church*, the *only true Church*, the *Catholic*, or *universal Church*; and all the other classes of nominal Christians, throughout the world, are *heretics*, out of the way of salvation. This claim, however, in the estimation of all enlightened Christians, is as presumptuous as it is vain. That department of nominal Christendom, instead of being the only true Church, is considered by many as too far gone in corruption to be comprehended under the Christian name at all; and instead of there being no salvation out of her communion, the danger of eternal perdition is rather to those who are found within her pale. It is not doubted, indeed, that there are many pious individuals within that pale; but it is believed that they are placed in circumstances deplorably unfavourable to their growth in grace; and that the multitudes around them, in the same communion, are immersed in darkness, superstition, and dreadful error, which place them in the utmost jeopardy of eternal perdition. This is that "Antichrist," that "Man of sin," and "Son of Perdition," who exalteth himself above all that is called God, and who is yet to be "destroyed with the breath of Jehovah's mouth, and with the brightness of his coming."

No particular denomination of Christians is now entitled to be called, by way of eminence, the Catholic, or universal Church. There are Churches, indeed, which bear a nearer resemblance to the Apostolical model than others; and which deserve to be favourably distinguished in the list of Christian communities. But the visible Catholic Church is made up of all those throughout the world, who profess the true religion, together with their children. The Presbyterian, the Congregationalist, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Episcopalian, the Independent, who hold the fundamentals of our holy religion, in whatever part of the globe they may reside, are all members of the same visible community; and, if they be sincere believers, will all finally be made partakers of its eternal blessings. They cannot, indeed, all worship together in the same solemn assembly, even if they were disposed to do so. A physical impossibility forbids it; and, in many cases, prejudice and folly widely separate those who ought to be entirely united. Still, in spite of all the sects and names by which professing Christians are divided, there is a *visible Church Catholic*. There is a precious sense in which the

whole visible Church on earth is *one*. All who "hold the Head," of course belong to the body of Christ. Those who are united by a sound profession to the same divine Saviour; who embrace the same precious faith; who are sanctified by the same spirit; who eat the same spiritual meat; who drink the same spiritual drink; who repose and rejoice in the same promises; and who are travelling to the same eternal rest—are surely *one body*:—*one* in a sense more richly significant and valuable than can be ascribed to millions who sustain and boast a mere nominal relation.

But while we thus maintain the doctrine of the unity of the visible Church Catholic; and while we rejoice in the assured belief, that sectarian names, as they were unknown in the Apostolic age, so they will be unknown among the members of the Redeemer's glorified body; still, in this militant state, there *is* a separation, not merely nominal, but real and deplorable; a separation which interferes most deeply with the communion of saints, and which lamentably mars those precious opportunities of proximity and intercourse, which too often, alas! become incentives to contention and strife, rather than to Christian love.

Amidst this diversity of sects and names, it becomes, to every intelligent and conscientious Christian, a most interesting question—Which of the various denominations which bear the name of Christian Churches, may be considered as approaching nearest to the New Testament model? We freely acknowledge, indeed, as Churches of Christ, all who hold the fundamentals of our holy religion, and consider it as our duty to love and honour them as such; carefully avoiding all treatment of them that tends to the increase of strife and division, and that is contrary to "godly edifying." Still, it cannot be doubted, by any rational man, that *some one* of these denominations is nearer to the Apostolic model, as a Church of Christ, than any of the rest. Which of the whole number this is, is a most serious question in the view of every one who wishes to know the will of Christ, and who desires to be found walking in that way which was trod by inspired Apostles, and in which they left the Church harmoniously walking, when they ceased from their labours.

It is the sincere belief of the writer of these pages, that the *Presbyterian Church*, as it now exists in these United States, entirely unconnected with the civil government, and taking the word of God as its "only infallible rule of faith and practice," is more truly primitive and apostolical in its whole constitution, of *doctrine, worship, and order*, than any

other Church, now on earth. An humble attempt to evince the truth of this position, will occupy the following pages.

For the fulfilment of the purpose in view, I shall endeavour, very briefly, to consider the *History* of Presbyterianism; its *doctrine*, its *order*, or *form of government*; its *worship*; and its *comparative advantages*. In each of these respects, unless I am deceived, it will be easy to show that it approaches nearer than any other Christian denomination, to the Apostolical mode.

To prepare the way more fully for the ensuing discussion, it may be proper to state, that there are four distinct forms of Church order, each of which claims a scriptural warrant; the Papal, or spiritual *monarchy*—the Episcopal, or spiritual *prelacy*—Independency, or spiritual *democracy*—and Presbyterianism, or spiritual *republicanism*. The first maintaining the necessity of one supreme, universal, infallible Head of the whole Christian body throughout the world, as the authorised vicar of Christ. The second, contending for an order of clerical prelates, above the rank of ordinary ministers of the Gospel, who are alone, in their view, empowered to ordain, and without whose presiding agency, there can be no regular Church. The third, holding that all ecclesiastical power resides in the mass of the Church members, and that all acts of ecclesiastical authority are to be performed immediately by them. While in the fourth and last place, Presbyterians believe, that Christ has made all ministers who are authorised to dispense the word and sacraments, perfectly equal in official rank and power: that in every Church the immediate exercise of ecclesiastical power is deposited, not with the whole mass of the people, but with a body of their representatives, styled Elders; and that the whole visible Church Catholic, so far as their denomination is concerned, is not only one in name, but so united by a series of assemblies of these representatives, acting in the name, and by the authority of the whole, as to bind the whole body together as one Church, walking by the same principles of faith and order, and voluntarily, yet authoritatively governed by the same system of rule and regulation.

Presbyterianism, then, is a term which primarily refers to the form of Church government. That is a *Presbyterian Church*, in which the *Presbytery* is the radical and leading judicatory; in which Teaching and Ruling *Presbyters* or *Elders*, have committed to them the watch and care of the whole

flock ; in which all ministers of the word and sacraments are equal ; in which Ruling Elders, as the representatives of the people, form a part of all ecclesiastical assemblies, and partake, in all authoritative acts, equally with the Teaching Elders ; and in which, by a series of judicatories, rising one above another, each individual church is under the watch and care of its appropriate judicatory, and the whole body, by a system of review and control, is bound together as one homogeneous community. Wherever this system is found in operation in the Church of God, there is *Presbyterianism*. Though there may be much diversity in the names of the several judicatories ; and though, in the minuter details of arrangement, some variety may exist, still it is essentially the same. Thus the Reformed Churches in France, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and Geneva, are all Presbyterian, notwithstanding some minor varieties in the names and regulations of their judicatories. Wherever ministerial parity ; the government of the church by Elders, instead of the mass of the communicants ; and the authoritative union of churches under courts of review and control, are found, there we have that ecclesiastical system which it is the object of the following pages to explain and recommend.

But although the term Presbyterian has a primary reference to the form of Church government ; yet Presbyterian Churches were originally agreed, and have been commonly, in all ages agreed, in a variety of other matters, which we believe are all warranted by the Holy Scriptures. It is to the whole system, then, of doctrine, government, and mode of worship, which now distinguishes the Presbyterian Church in the United States, that the attention of the readers of these pages is requested ; and which, it shall be my aim to show, is set forth in the Word of God, "the only infallible rule of faith and practice."



CHAPTER II.

HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM.

The essential principles of Presbyterian Church order were of very early origin. Those principles are the authoritative binding of the whole Church together as one body ; and conducting this government, not by the entire ecclesiastical popu-