

ARTICLE VI.
PRESBYTERIANISM.

“And as they ministered unto the Lord and fasted the Holy Ghost said: Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had prayed and fasted, they laid their hands on them and sent them away.” This passage is a record of fact throwing light incidentally upon the great transition period when the Church was passing from one regime to another. The period of that transition ran over a space of ninety years, including the whole of the New Testament record, a period in which the Church of God made its escapement from an elaborate system of symbols, some of them specially oriental and archaic, and therefore having a special adaptation to earlier ages and modes of thought; some of them typical, and therefore carrying in them their own limitation of time; some of them of apt and universal significance, and therefore, though Jewish, of universal application.

We say it without unkindness to any who may differ from us, that the Presbyterian Church most truly represents this transition period, has brought away whatever was integral to the Church of God under the old dispensation and left behind whatever deserved desuetude; that her genealogy of Church government, of ordinances, and of doctrine, runs back to the original constitution of the Church, and that she most thoroughly antagonizes the attempt now too prevalent in some quarters to underrate the Old Testament writings.

1. The Old Testament Church government was essentially Presbyterian. It was a government by elders. The position of Moses was that of a medium or agent to inaugurate and set in motion. He was not an element of the organic system, just as the Apostolate was not an organic element in the New Testament revival of Church government. The priesthood was chiefly typical of Christ, and therefore fell when he came. The ceremonial, being adumbratory mainly, had its bounds set to it beyond which it could not pass. But the interior and permanent government

of the Church was by elders in body. We read everywhere of elders of the people, elders in the gate, elders of the city, elders of the congregation; in fact, of elders of Egypt, and elders of the tribes before the organisation. He was a most natural and necessary man, the first formulated idea of organised society, entering into the Senate of all nations, the Sheik of the Arabs, and the Patrician of the Romans, the original Alderman or Elderman of the English. He was a natural growth, and had come down from original patriarchal times before the Flood. When the Church was organised fully, he was not *created*, but *appropriated*: lifted into a higher position and endorsed; just as circumcision and anointing, long known and practised, were lifted into the position of Church ordinances. At the Mosaic organisation these officers were utilised, were distributed into higher and lower courts, and a bench of seventy of them erected into a Senate, the highest tribunal of the Church. Then arose the famous General Assembly of the Jews, which never died out until fifteen hundred years after, when the first General Assembly of the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem, A. D. 46. When the New Testament record opens, it opens upon the Jewish Church in full running order. The "Great Synagogue" of rulers was sitting. We read of rulers of the synagogue, elders of the synagogue in every city. When Paul came to Antioch in Pisidia, the elders of the synagogue there gave him permission to preach. When Jesus was taken in Nazareth to the brow of the hill, it was by the orders of the rulers of the synagogue. Now when the Apostles are spoken of as ordaining elders in every church, without saying what the business of that officer was, the conclusion is irresistible that they were, with silent consent, just giving to them the same old functionary with whom they were familiar—just setting apart to the well known eldership new incumbents of that office, in the place of those who were found hostile to the gospel, as they usually were. When one of these rulers was converted, as in the case of Sosthenes, the chief ruler or moderator of the bench of rulers at Ephesus, he probably exercised his office in the new church without re-ordination. For the whole record seems to speak of the Church order of the time not as a new thing

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but an institute *resuscitated*. Converted Jews went to work in the old tracks of Church activity. Hence little specific instruction is given about Church offices. It would have been a false history. It would have implied that the office was not known to the people. Of the office of elder little is said, because that office was not changed; of his moral and spiritual qualifications much is said, because the old officers had lost their spirituality. It is for this reason that Church government, in its organic elements, is only incidentally taught in the New Testament, since the model of Church government had been long before given and had been long in use. Now it was this work of putting new life into an old frame, of breathing on the same dry bones of the valley, that yet had all the articulations and fitnesses for motion when again strung with sinews and muscles, that gives to the work of the apostolic missionaries so little of the appearance of formality. And if this work was essentially a resuscitation of all that was valuable or abiding in the Church order of the old Church, and if the bench of the ordinary or particular synagogue ran up into the great synagogue, the ruling power of the Church lay in the ruling elders. Ruling was the trunk from which preaching and teaching grew as branches. There was no place for a higher order or rank of officers, as *bishop* is by some understood to imply. Nor is there any reason for this opinion, because the terms *bishop* and *elder* are used in the New Testament interchangeably. In the church of Philippi a plurality of bishops is expressly mentioned. That could not have been one diocese, much less a plurality of them. When you have shown that the ruling elder is the generic church officer of the Apostolic Church, you have shown that Presbyterianism is the true succession from the old to the new dispensation.

2. What has been said of Church government as a descent from the Jewish economy is equally true of the ordinances of the Church. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are lineal descendants of the old Church; the paschal lamb being dropped for obvious reasons, and the bread and wine of the Jewish supper retained for equally obvious reasons; the circumcision and personal ablutions of the earlier economy being dropped as having their meaning

better expressed in the one Church ordinance in which they all culminated, the baptism of sprinkling. Our Baptist friends, in all their arguments upon this latter ordinance, proceed on the assumption that Christianity is an entirely new movement; that as the apostolic record is in a new language, and in speaking of the subject of baptism employs a new term, they are warranted in breaking the connexion between the old and the new economy. They depend upon the surroundings of the transition period for their interpretation of the ordinance. It is here that their great mistake is made. For the New Testament treats the subject incidentally in running narrative, without a word of explanation, precisely as it speaks of elders. It would have been a false history to have *explained* baptism—it being simply one, and the simplest and most sacred one, of the purifying ordinances of the old Church. Now the fundamental doctrine of this ordinance and the doctrine of which the Presbyterian Church is the true conservator is: that the Church of God, the kingdom of heaven, is a *succession* from generation to generation, and that its charter, “I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee,” secures this succession. In fact, the charter with its privileges was meant for the children of believers as their natural successors. Were there no heirs to the estate, the covenant would have no perpetuating quality, and each generation of adults would require for the continued existence of the Church a new charter. Considered as an estate, there could be no natural descent of its franchises except by the operation of express law. God meant this succession to be *natural*. To this end he adapted the great religion to earthly law, that the channel of its transmission might be natural rather than extra-natural. For the natural transmission is from parent to child: the extra-natural by adult conversions, which sometimes proves a stumbling-stone to the Church. The addition of men to the Church by adult conversions is only a secondary and provisional arrangement, for which, as Malachi tells us, “God reserved the residue of the spirit.” But the primary law is through the institute of the family, in which God made them one (*i.e.*, the man and his wife,) that, as Malachi tells us again, “he might seek a godly seed.” Now if we recognise this

normal and natural law of perpetuation of the kingdom of heaven throughout the generations of men, we shall understand that the child inherits the franchises guaranteed to his parents. He may forfeit them by misconduct, yet by birth he comes into covenant possession. He is a part and continuation of the parent in all interests, personal, governmental, and religious. Our definition of the Church therefore is: that it consists of believing parents and their children. The Church is in reality not an aggregation of individuals, but of families. And the whole history of the introduction of Christianity into countries shows it to be naturally an association of families. In the New Testament record this doctrine of succession is quietly assumed, and the blessings of the kingdom assured to parents and their children with scarcely any reference to the mode by which that assurance is sealed. Whatever be the mode, children of believers are by birth entitled to it. The family is the integer, and if all the children are adults, yet if they are under parental representation they are baptized. But the whole New Testament narrative, with all the special cases of baptism in it, just quietly assumes that the *mode* was an element of the Jewish ritual, one of its purifications, understood by everybody in Judea, and therefore no explanation is anywhere attempted. It would have been an indirection unworthy of the noble indifference of the sacred narrative. That mode, there can be no doubt, was the final and most prevalent sanctuary mode *baptism by sprinkling*, the mode to which the whole terminology of the Bible on related subjects conforms. Now it is the doctrine of succession, as most perfectly held by the Presbyterian Church, that controls the subject of baptism. As the constitution of the Church comes to be more and more understood, the lines will close around immersion more and more. It will be understood that fanciful arguments drawn from little versatile prepositions "into," "out of," etc., still more versatile in Greek than in English, are frail things on which to build an ordinance of the Church of God. It will be understood that the majestic indifference of the New Testament narrative as to modes, and that at a juncture when the Church of God was making its escape from a system of modes, rebukes the absolutism which cannot be satisfied with anything short of mode.

3. And as we have traced the genealogy of Church government and the genealogy of the ordinances to the original institution of the Mosaic Church, so might we trace every one of the doctrines of the faith to the same source as being less articulately and didactically stated, it is true, but not less really and substantially contained in the record. The doctrine of predestination, for example, of which the Presbyterian Church has been the chief exponent through all the ages of its history, runs like a strong cordon throughout the Old Testament writings, binding together its parts and binding indissolubly the Old and New Testaments together. The words of Jacob, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from his feet, till Shiloh come," was a veritable predestination that came duly to its maturity. The captivity and thralldom of the children of Israel in Egypt four hundred and thirty years; their deliverance, their march into Canaan; the desolating sweep with which they brought the doomed inhabitants to lick the dust; their actual possession of the land of milk and honey—was, every step of it, a stern predestination. The man who burnt the bones of the priests of Jeroboam fulfilled a predestination uttered three hundred and fifty years before by a nameless prophet. Both his deed and his name were predestinations. Every promise, and every prophecy, every type, every adumbration, and every historical prefigurement. involved predestination. Everything in the Old Testament that looked to futurity in the New was a predestination. It has been the special honor of the Presbyterian Church to hold up this great but mysterious truth before the world, and to combat legions in defence of it.

4. But not only has the Presbyterian Church conserved whatever was substantive of the Church and doctrine of God through the great transition from dispensation to dispensation, but it has also the honor of a veritable historical succession from the apostles down to our own time. The Church of Rome has long claimed such a succession unbroken. The Church of England has long claimed it. But Thomas Macaulay, the great historian and a member of the Church of England, has demonstrated that such a succession cannot be made out. Many of the learned

divines of that Church have fairly abandoned the claim. We know where the Methodist Church as an organisation originated. The Baptists also have claimed a succession. But the late Dr. Williams, Professor of Church History in Greenville, S. C., says: "There can be no doubt in the world that in our so-called histories of the Baptists, sects are claimed as Baptists, which if now reproduced, would not be acknowledged as such; as Novatians, Paulicians, Donatists." "Those Baptists," says he, "who urge our claims on the ground of a historical succession, are doing us harm with all intelligent and well read people." Drs. Northrop and Buckland, also of the Baptist Seminaries at Rochester and Chicago, unite in saying that a Baptist succession is a sheer historical picture.

We have not insisted upon it, being content to find the lineaments of our organisation on the pages of the Bible. Yet the Presbyterian Church has such a succession. One presentation of the argument is found in a little book by Dr. T.V. Moore on the Culdee Church. The theory is this: the Celts, the original inhabitants of Northern and Western Europe, called by the Greeks Keltai, by the Romans Galli, settled a section of Asia Minor, which was styled after them Galatia. To this people Paul preached and wrote an epistle. Converts from among these Asiatic Celts carried the gospel in their trading expeditions, and in the movements of the Roman armies across the continent of Europe. One line of them through the Roman armies, which were invading Britain from A. D. 43 to 80, carried Christianity to England, from which sprang the Culdee Church. From these a succession can be traced to the present time. Very briefly the main facts are these: Tertullian, A. D. 200, says, that "the inaccessible parts of Britain are subject to Christ." The *inaccessible parts of Britain* mean Scotland. *Subject to Christ* means that Christianity was prevalent and had been introduced a good many years earlier, while the Apostles were yet preaching, and before the invasion of Britain under Claudius A.D. 43. Baronius says that Christianity was carried to Britain A.D. 35, three years after the death of Christ. Greek names, Alexander and Andrew, were found in Scotland before the invasion. The

conquest of Britain began A.D. 43, continued to A.D. 80. But Scotland was never subdued by the Romans. During that campaign of forty years it would have been scarcely possible that Christians among the Roman armies should not disseminate the story of the cross, and even the Epistles, during the lives of the Apostles. Here is Christianity in Scotland, and perhaps Ireland, while the Apostles were yet preaching. But where is Presbyterianism? Here: Milman says: "The early Scotch and Irish missionaries held an uninterrupted succession of their tradition from the Apostles." Mr. Jones says: "The gospel from its first planting by the Apostles was never extinguished from Britain." Stillingfleet says: "If we may believe the antiquaries, the Church of Scotland was governed by their *Culdei*, as they called their presbyters or elders, without any bishop over them." He uses the word *bishop* in the sense of prelate. This was Presbyterianism. Joannes Major says: "The Scotch were instructed in the faith without any bishop, by priest and monks." He speaks from a Romish standpoint, *priest*, the only name that a Roman Catholic knew for minister and *monk*, for a churchman. Thus he gives us the preaching and the ruling elder. Here was Presbyterianism. Dr. d'Aubigné says: "Their candidates were ordained to the ministry by the laying on of hands of the elders after the apostolic manner." Archbishop Ussher says: "St. Patrick founded three hundred and sixty-five churches, ordained three hundred and sixty-five bishops, and three thousand elders. Here was one bishop to about ten elders. This was Presbyterianism. Now when you remember that a theological seminary was established on the Island of Iona about A. D. 560, which sent out its missionaries for a century or more over England, Norway, and other countries, long before the Romish Church was shaped into Popery, and by what strategy the Romish Church finally gained the ascendancy; that when it was established in Scotland, it was the forcible act of the government and not the choice of the people; that when it was established it had to be done by an importation of rulers from France ; how from the earliest time that people have been characterised by their desperate struggles against a foreign religion, and how, when

the choice was given them, they flew to their beloved Presbyterianism again, there seems to be no doubt that through the Scotch Church, Presbyterianism is traced by an uninterrupted succession up to New Testament days, the same that has been imported to these shores and constitutes the American Presbyterian Church. As a denomination, we have never insisted on a historical succession. Amid the fluctuations of human society many a people may drift wide of Bible doctrine and recover Christianity again and be as good Christians as if they had a lineal genealogy. The Jews had a perfect genealogy from Abraham, a line that took in Christ. Yet that Church became so corrupt that God said to the pious, "Come out of her, my people." It is the glory of the Protestant Church that she heard that voice and came out. Yet it is one of the honors of the Presbyterian Church that she has not been under the necessity of seceding from the Great Apostasy. She stood, by a desperate and forlorn struggle, in the valleys of Piedmont and of Scotland, successfully against the absorption. If there is any Church that can claim a succession through all time, through the chasm of fifteen hundred years from Luther to Paul, and over the other dismal chasm, from John the Baptist, our Great Sprinkler, to Moses, fifteen hundred years more, it is the Presbyterian Church. It has fought all the great battles of time, and is still holding its way. It has occupied, we may proudly and thankfully say, the forefront of the war of time, for the great fundamental doctrines of the faith. It has held them against statesmen and kings, against philosophers and fanatics, against the sword that persecuted unto death. Its names are escutcheoned with the many of whom the world was not worthy. Its record, its sublime succession, is on high. And yet it has never been a Church of dogmatic bigotry. It has never given its sympathy to absolutism. It shakes hands with all Christians, and counts their institutions valid, if not scriptural. It has always accounted substantive doctrine and principle more valuable than ritual, and has, therefore, always been patient of the fanaticism that wastes itself on modes. It has none of the *esprit de corps* of the zealot, because it has an evangelical sympathy too wide to be confined within the limits of a denomination. It is generous

to a fault. It gives without stint its material to make other communions, but never compasses sea and land to make one proselyte. It blocks out the truth from the quarry, and throws with generous hand the pabulum of thought to every people. Popular manipulators appropriate and adapt it to their uses. Still she abides by her quarry work, her grand mission to feed the world with truth, rejoicing and continuing to rejoice that “nevertheless every way Christ is preached.” This is noble. But has not the time come, when we must train our children and ourselves to a more cohesive loyalty to the Presbyterian Church? Has not the time about come when we should more perfectly popularise the two great fundamentals of Presbyterianism, the *elder* and the *family*, and take the field as well as abide by the foundry? Nay, the Presbyterian Church in this country owes it to Christ and to herself more perfectly to unfurl her banners, and instead of a popular literature, to hold up to the world the sturdy religion of Knox and of Murray, of Calvin and Coligny, of Augustine and Paul. Let us honor the faith which it is our honor to possess.

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