

PLAIN GROUNDS

O F

Presbyterian Government,

Briefly Propos'd for the Instruction of

COMMON PEOPLE.

The Desires of some, from their observing the Ignorance of several well-meaning People in this Point, have produced this short and hasty Essay, which is likewise sent abroad to excite some abler Person to do it better.

I. **T**HE Light of Reason, and the Nature of all Human Societies; prove, That there ought to be a Government in the Church.
II. As *Moses* was Faithful, as a Servant in the House of GOD, in appointing a Government over the Jewish Church, according to the Pattern shewed him, so CHRIST, as a Son, was no less Faithful over his own House, *Heb. 3. 5, 6.* in appointing a particular Form of Government therein. He hath Set some in the Church, *First, Apostles: Secondly, Prophets: Thirdly, Teachers — Helps, Governments — 1 Cor. 12. 28.* Whoever be understood by these Governments, yet 'tis plain, That GOD hath Set them in the Church. The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven are given to Church Officers, as Stewards in an House, to open and shut, to admit and exclude, *Matth. 16. 19.* And a Power or Authority was given by the Lord CHRIST, the only King and Head of his Church, to the Apostles, for Edification, as the End of Church Government, *2 Cor. 10. 8.* Rulers are mentioned in Scripture, and such as watch for Souls, *Heb. 13. 7, 17. 1 Thess. 5. 12.* and Rules are given them for the right Management of their Trust. It is therefore evident, 1. That CHRIST hath established a particular Form of Government in his Church. 2. That it is not left to the Will of Civil Magistrates, to set up in the Church what Government they please: For tho the Magistrat, as a Nursing Father, *Isa. 60. 10, 16.* and as the Minister of GOD for Good, *Rom. 13. 4.* is to protect, defend and maintain the Church, and to take Care, That all things be done in the House of the GOD of Heaven according to Scripture-Pattern, as the Godly Kings of old did in a Civil Way; Yet the Proper, Spiritual, Internal and Formal Power of Church Government is not given to the Magistrat, ev'n tho a Christian; neither is he any where reck'ned among Church Officers, to whom the Keyes of Doctrine and Discipline are entrusted. Nor did the Church of CHRIST want its Government, and the Exercise thereof in all its Parts, before the Magistrat became Christian, which was not till about Three Hundred Years after CHRIST.

III. This Government in the Church is committed by CHRIST to his own Officers and Rulers, which he hath Set in the Church, *1 Cor. 12. 28.* And GOD hath Set some, *&c. Eph. 4. 11.* He gave some Apostles — These extraordinary Office-Bearers Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists being ceased, the Government and Exercise thereof remains in Pastors and Teachers, the ordinary standing Officers, who must continue till their End be attained, till the perfecting of the Body of CHRIST, that is, Till Time shall be no more. These are they who are exhorted to take heed to the Flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them Overseers, *Acts 20. 28.* They are called Stewards, *1 Cor. 4. 1.* Ambassadors, *2 Cor. 5. 20.* Rulers over you in the Lord, *1 Thess. 5. 12.* Their Qualifications are propos'd, *1 Tim. 3. 2 — 8. Tit. 1. 6 — 10.* And they are not only to Preach the Word, and Administer the Sacraments, but to Ordain Ministers, *1 Tim. 4. 14.* and authoritatively to inflict Censures, *1 Cor. 5. 4. 1 Tim. 5. 20.*

IV. The Lord JESUS hath committed both the Keyes of Doctrine and Discipline to all his Servants in the Ministry jointly and alike, that is, He hath equally entrusted them not only with dispensing Word and Sacraments, but with the Power also of Governing the Church: They are therefore to Act in Parity, or with equal Jurisdiction, and none to usurp Dominion, Prelacy, or Superiority of Power over others. Our Lord checks the Affectation of Lordship in his Ministers, *It shall not be so among you, Mat. 20. 26.* He delivers the Keyes to them all alike, *Job. 20. 21, 23.* and gives them their Commission alike, *Mat. 28. 19, 20.* and they are to

feed the Flock, and not to be Lords over GOD's Heritage, but, in all Humility, to be subject one to another, *1 Pet. 5. 2 — 5.* The Fewer must be determined by the Greater Number. There must be a Subordination of Judicatories, but a Parity of Persons; and all Superiority of Power is contrary to Scripture: For, 1. The Name Bishop or Over-seeer is common to all CHRIST's Ministers, *Phil. 1. 1. Tit. 1. 5 — 7.* 2. The Office it self, even the whole Episcopal Power of Ruling and Governing, as well as of Preaching, is committed to the Elders of *Ephesus*, *Acts 20. 17 — 28.* who are called to over-see and feed the Flock. 3. Neither is there any different Commission given to Prelats in Scripture, nor are they mentioned in any Catalogue of Church Officers, which the Spirit of GOD had not omitted, if any such had been Set in the Church. 4. The End of the Ministry, which is the Perfecting of the Saints, and the Edifying of the Body of CHRIST, *Eph. 4. 12.* hath been and is attained without Bishops over Ministers, therefore there is no need of them. 5. The Apostles, as also *Timothy* and *Titus*, were extraordinary Officers, and their Work, in so far as extraordinary, ceased with them. 6. The Angels of the Churches (beside that many things in the *Revelation* are to be taken mystically) were not single Persons, for He of *Thyatira* is spoken to in the Plural, *Rev. 2. 24. But unto You I say, and the rest in Thyatira.*

V. That there were Ruling Elders distinct from these, who laboured in the Word and Doctrine, *1 Tim. 5. 17. Rom. 12. 6, 7, 8. 1 Cor. 12. 28.* and Deacons appointed to help Ministers and Ruling Elders, in taking Care of the Poor, appears from *Acts 6.* To them the Apostle directs, *Philip. 1. 1.* and their Qualifications are set down, *1 Tim. 3. 8 — 14.* From all which it is evident, That Presbyterian Government in the Church, and the Discipline thereof, are CHRIST's own Institution and Ordinance.

VI. The present Question about the Church's Intrinsic Power, with Relation to the Meeting and Acting of her Judicatories, may be seen in what follows, 1. The Magistrat may not only advise with Synods and General Assemblies, when they are met, but may, by his Authority, occasionally, and *pro re nata*, indict a General Assembly of the Church's Delegating and Nomination, *Act August 27. Sess. 23. Gen. Ass. 1647.* 2. The General Assembly of the Church of *Scotland* hath a lawful Privilege to meet once a Year at least, or oftner *pro re nata*, the Place and Time of their Meeting being signified to the Magistrat, *Act 114. Parl. 12. Ja. 6.* 3. The Church of *Scotland* (as every other Church of CHRIST) hath an Intrinsic Power, or an Inherent Right, to meet in a General Assembly, as often as the Necessity of the Church doth require, Time and Place being first signified to the Magistrat, in order to the obtaining of his Countenance and Protection: Which being denyed, and the Exigence of the Church so requiring, it is their Duty to meet, tho they should suffer for so doing. 4. The Meeting of the Assembly is not to be postponed or delayed by Proclamation, or other Act of the Magistrat: They are to continue, when met, until such Affairs of the Church, as shall happen to come before them, be fully expedited; and their Adjournments *de die in diem*, during the Currency of an Assembly, is in their own Power and Ordering, (otherwise the Magistrat should have a Negative upon them:) As also, the Indiction of a subsequent Assembly belongs to them, they in Duty acquainting the Magistrat therewith, if present, before their concluding of the same. 5. Matters concluded by the Church, do carry their full Ecclesiastical Authority and Obligation upon all the Members of the Church, albeit they should want the Civil Sanction; And no Church Judicatory ought to be restricted in Matters Ecclesiastical to be handled by them.

F I N I S.

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