

ORTHODOX  
PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY

*An Anthology*

EDITED BY

JOHN R. MUETHER

&

CAMDEN M. BUCEY

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# EDITORIAL NOTE

Capitalization has been preserved as it appears in the original sources; as a result, variations in style will be evident across chapters and reflect the conventions of their respective periods. Punctuation has been revised only where necessary for clarity. Roman numerals have been converted to Arabic numerals for the reader's ease.

Scripture quotations remain as found in the original texts and may reflect a range of translations—including the ASV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, RSV, or paraphrastic renderings. These have not been standardized to a single version. References to Scripture and the Westminster Standards have been checked for accuracy. Where needed, corrections or clarifications are noted in brackets [ ] within the text.

# PREFACE

Since its founding, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) has chronicled its journey through primary source documents—pamphlets, periodicals, and essays—which scholars and church historians have subsequently contextualized and interpreted. As historians of the OPC and instructors for our church’s Ministerial Training Institute (MTIOPC), we have observed an enduring interest in the denomination’s history alongside a practical challenge: the essential primary and secondary sources remained scattered across various publications and sometimes difficult to access.

This anthology evolved from reading materials initially compiled by John Muether for the MTIOPC course on OPC history and expanded when Camden Bucey joined as co-instructor in 2023. We are pleased to offer this anthology as a published resource in one collected volume, making these essential documents accessible to a wider audience. These readings offer more than chronology—they reveal the struggles and aspirations of a denomination born from controversy and dedicated to the Reformed faith. From J. Gresham Machen’s prophetic critiques of modernism to thoughtful reflections on cultural engagement and ecclesiastical distinctives, these selections provide essential theological and historical insights for ministers, elders, and church members. We hope this anthology will serve not only as a course reader but as an enduring resource for education and reflection within the church.

John R. Muether  
Camden M. Bucey

*“So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”*

—Gamaliel  
Acts 5:38–39 ESV

# SHALL THE FUNDAMENTALISTS WIN?

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK

**T**HIS MORNING WE are to think of the Fundamentalist controversy which threatens to divide the American churches, as though already they were not sufficiently split and riven. A scene, suggestive for our thought, is depicted in the fifth chapter of the book of the Acts, where the Jewish leaders have before them Peter and other of the apostles because they have been preaching Jesus as the Messiah. Moreover, the Jewish leaders propose to slay them, when in opposition Gamaliel speaks: "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (ASV).

One could easily let his imagination play over this scene and

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\* A sermon preached at First Presbyterian Church, New York, May 21, 1922.

could wonder how history would have come out if Gamaliel's wise tolerance could have controlled the situation. For though the Jewish leaders seemed superficially to concur in Gamaliel's judgment, they nevertheless kept up their bitter antagonism and shut the Christians from the synagogue. We know now that they were mistaken. Christianity, starting within Judaism, was not an innovation to be dreaded; it was the finest flowering out that Judaism ever had. When the Master looked back across his heritage and said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill," he perfectly described the situation. The Christian ideas of God, the Christian principles of life, the Christian hopes for the future, were all rooted in the Old Testament and grew up out of it, and the Master himself, who called the Jewish temple his Father's house, rejoiced in the glorious heritage of his people's prophets. Only he did believe in a living God. He did not think that God was dead, having finished his words and works with Malachi. Jesus had not simply a historic, but a contemporary God, speaking now, working now, leading his people now from partial into fuller truth. Jesus believed in the progressiveness of revelation, and these Jewish leaders did not understand that. Was this new gospel a real development which they might welcome, or was it an enemy to be cast out? And they called it an enemy and excluded it. One does wonder what might have happened had Gamaliel's wise tolerance been in control.

We, however, face today a situation too similar and too urgent and too much in need of Gamaliel's attitude to spend any time making guesses at supposititious history. Already all of us must have heard about the people who call themselves the Fundamentalists. Their apparent intention is to drive out of the evangelical churches men and women of liberal opinions.

I speak of them the more freely because there are no two denominations more affected by them than the Baptist and the Presbyterian. We should not identify the Fundamentalists with the conservatives. All Fundamentalists are conservatives, but not all conservatives are Fundamentalists. The best conservatives can often give lessons to the liberals in true liberality of spirit, but the Fundamentalist program is essentially illiberal and intolerant. The Fundamentalists see, and they see truly, that in this last generation there have been strange new movements in Christian thought. A great mass of new knowledge has come into man's possession: new knowledge about the physical universe, its origin, its forces, its laws; new knowledge about human history and in particular about the ways in which the ancient peoples used to think in matters of religion and the methods by which they phrased and explained their spiritual experiences; and new knowledge, also, about other religions and the strangely similar ways in which men's faiths and religious practices have developed everywhere.

Now, there are multitudes of reverent Christians who have been unable to keep this new knowledge in one compartment of their minds and the Christian faith in another. They have been sure that all truth comes from the one God and is his revelation. Not, therefore, from irreverence or caprice or destructive zeal, but for the sake of intellectual and spiritual integrity, that they might really love the Lord their God not only with all their heart and soul and strength, but with all their mind, they have been trying to see this new knowledge in terms of the Christian faith and to see the Christian faith in terms of this new knowledge. Doubtless they have made many mistakes. Doubtless there have been among them reckless radicals gifted with intellectual ingenuity but lacking spiritual depth. Yet the

enterprise itself seems to them indispensable to the Christian church. The new knowledge and the old faith cannot be left antagonistic or even disparate, as though a man on Saturday could use one set of regulative ideas for his life and on Sunday could change gear to another altogether. We must be able to think our modern life clear through in Christian terms, and to do that we also must be able to think our Christian life clear through in modern terms.

There is nothing new about the situation. It has happened again and again in history, as, for example, when the stationary earth suddenly began to move, and the universe that had been centered in this planet was centered in the sun around which the planets whirled. Whenever such a situation has arisen, there has been only one way out: the new knowledge and the old faith had to be blended in a new combination. Now the people in this generation who are trying to do this are the liberals, and the Fundamentalists are out on a campaign to shut against them the doors of the Christian fellowship. Shall they be allowed to succeed?

It is interesting to note where the Fundamentalists are driving in their stakes to mark out the deadline of doctrine around the church, across which no one is to pass except on terms of agreement. They insist that we must all believe in the historicity of certain special miracles, preeminently the virgin birth of our Lord; that we must believe in a special theory of inspiration—that the original documents of the scripture, which of course we no longer possess, were inerrantly dictated to men a good deal as a man might dictate to a stenographer; that we must believe in a special theory of the atonement—that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning

sinner; and that we must believe in the second coming of our Lord upon the clouds of heaven to set up a millennium here, as the only way in which God can bring history to a worthy denouement. Such are some of the stakes which are being driven, to mark a deadline of doctrine around the church.

If a man is a genuine liberal, his primary protest is not against holding these opinions, although he may well protest against their being considered the fundamentals of Christianity. This is a free country and anybody has a right to hold these opinions, or any others, if he is sincerely convinced of them. The question is: has anybody a right to deny the Christian name to those who differ with him on such points and to shut against them the doors of the Christian fellowship? The Fundamentalists say that this must be done. In this country and on the foreign field they are trying to do it. They have actually endeavored to put on the statute books of a whole state binding laws against teaching modern biology. If they had their way, within the church, they would set up in Protestantism a doctrinal tribunal more rigid than the pope's. In such an hour, delicate and dangerous, when feelings are bound to run high, I plead this morning the cause of magnanimity and liberality and tolerance of spirit. I would, if I could reach their ears, say to the Fundamentalists about the liberals what Gamaliel said to the Jews, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (ASV).

That we may be entirely candid and concrete and may not lose ourselves in any fog of generalities, let us this morning take two or three of these Fundamentalist items and see with reference to them what the situation is in the Christian church-

es. Too often we preachers have failed to talk frankly enough about the differences of opinion that exist among evangelical Christians, although everybody knows that they are there. Let us face this morning some of the differences of opinion with which somehow we must deal.

We may well begin with the vexed and mooted question of the virgin birth of our Lord. I know people in the Christian churches—ministers, missionaries, laymen, devoted lovers of the Lord and servants of the Gospel—who, alike as they are in their personal devotion to the Master, hold quite different points of view about a matter like the virgin birth. Here, for example, is one point of view; that the virgin birth is to be accepted as historical fact; it actually happened; there was no other way for a personality like the Master to come into this world except by a special biological miracle. That is one point of view, and many are the gracious and beautiful souls who hold it. But, side by side with them in the evangelical churches is a group of equally loyal and reverent people who would say that the virgin birth is not to be accepted as an historical fact. To believe in virgin birth as an explanation of great personality is one of the familiar ways in which the ancient world was accustomed to account for unusual superiority.

Many people suppose that only once in history do we run across a record of supernatural birth. Upon the contrary, stories of miraculous generation are among the commonest traditions of antiquity. Especially is this true about the founders of great religions. According to the records of their faiths, Buddha and Zoroaster and Lao-Tzu and Mahavira were all supernaturally born. Moses, Confucius, and Mohammed are the only great founders of religions in history to whom miraculous birth is not attributed. That is to say, when a personality arose

so high that men adored him, the ancient world attributed his superiority to some special divine influence in his generation, and they commonly phrased their faith in terms of miraculous birth. So Pythagoras was called virgin-born, and Plato, and Augustus Caesar, and many more.

Knowing this, there are within the evangelical churches large groups of people whose opinion about our Lord's coming would run as follows: those first disciples adored Jesus—as we do; when they thought about his coming they were sure that he came specially from God—as we are; this adoration and conviction they associated with God's special influence and intention in his birth—as we do; but they phrased it in terms of a biological miracle that our modern minds cannot use. So far from thinking that they have given up anything vital in the New Testament's attitude toward Jesus, these Christians remember that the two men who contributed most to the church's thought of the divine meaning of the Christ were Paul and John, who never even distantly allude to the virgin birth.

Here in the Christian churches are these two groups of people, and the question that the Fundamentalists raise is this: shall one of them throw the other out? Has intolerance any contribution to make to this situation? Will it persuade anybody of anything? Is not the Christian church large enough to hold within her hospitable fellowship people who differ on points like this, and agree to differ until the fuller truth be manifested? The Fundamentalists say not. They say that the liberals must go. Well, if the Fundamentalists should succeed, then out of the Christian church would go some of the best Christian life and consecration of this generation—multitudes of men and women, devout and reverent Christians, who need the church and whom the church needs.

Consider another matter on which there is a sincere difference of opinion among evangelical Christians: the inspiration of the Bible. One point of view is that the original documents of the scripture were inerrantly dictated by God to men. Whether we deal with the story of creation or the list of the dukes of Edom or the narratives of Solomon's reign or the Sermon on the Mount or the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, they all came in the same way and they all came as no other book ever came. They were inerrantly dictated; everything there—scientific opinions, medical theories, historical judgments, as well as spiritual insight—is infallible. That is one idea of the Bible's inspiration. But side by side with those who hold it, lovers of the Book as much as they, are multitudes of people who never think about the Bible so. Indeed, that static and mechanical theory of inspiration seems to them a positive peril to the spiritual life. The Koran similarly has been regarded by Mohammedans as having been infallibly written in heaven before it came to earth. But the Koran enshrines the theological and ethical ideas of Arabia at the time when it was written. God an Oriental monarch, fatalistic submission to his will as man's chief duty, the use of force on unbelievers, polygamy, slavery—they are all in the Koran. When it was written, the Koran was ahead of the day but, petrified by an artificial idea of inspiration, it has become a millstone about the neck of Mohammedanism. When one turns from the Koran to the Bible, he finds this interesting situation. All of these ideas, which we dislike in the Koran, are somewhere in the Bible. Conceptions from which we now send missionaries to convert Mohammedans are to be found in the Bible. There one can find God thought of as an Oriental monarch; there too are patriarchal polygamy, and slave systems, and the use of

force on unbelievers.

Only in the Bible these elements are not final; they are always being superseded; revelation is progressive. The thought of God moves out from Oriental kingship to compassionate fatherhood; treatment of unbelievers moves out from the use of force to the appeals of love; polygamy gives way to monogamy; slavery, never explicitly condemned before the New Testament closes, is nevertheless being undermined by ideas that in the end, like dynamite, will blast its foundations to pieces. Repeatedly one runs on verses like this: "it was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you"; "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son"; "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent"; and over the doorway of the New Testament into the Christian world stand the words of Jesus: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." That is to say, finality in the Koran is behind; finality in the Bible is ahead. We have not reached it. We cannot yet compass all of it. God is leading us out toward it. There are multitudes of Christians, then, who think, and rejoice as they think, of the Bible as the record of the progressive unfolding of the character of God to his people from early primitive days until the great unveiling in Christ; to them the Book is more inspired and more inspiring than ever it was before. To go back to a mechanical and static theory of inspiration would mean to them the loss of some of the most vital elements in their spiritual experience and in their appreciation of the Book.

Here in the Christian church today are these two groups, and the question the Fundamentalists have raised is this:

shall one of them drive the other out? Do we think the cause of Jesus Christ will be furthered by that? If he should walk through the ranks of this congregation this morning, can we imagine him claiming as his own those who hold one idea of inspiration, and sending from him into outer darkness those who hold another? You cannot fit the Lord Christ into that Fundamentalist mold. The church would better judge his judgment. For in the Middle West the Fundamentalists have had their way in some communities, and a Christian minister tells us the consequence. He says that the educated people are looking for their religion outside the churches.

Consider another matter upon which there is a serious and sincere difference of opinion between evangelical Christians: the second coming of our Lord. The second coming was the early Christian phrasing of hope. No one in the ancient world had ever thought, as we do, of development, progress, gradual change, as God's way of working out his will in human life and institutions. They thought of human history as a series of ages succeeding one another with abrupt suddenness. The Greco-Roman world gave the names of metals to the ages—gold, silver, bronze, iron. The Hebrews had their ages too—the original Paradise in which man began, the cursed world in which man now lives, the blessed Messianic Kingdom some day suddenly to appear on the clouds of heaven. It was the Hebrew way of expressing hope for the victory of God and righteousness. When the Christians came they took over that phrasing of expectancy and the New Testament is aglow with it. The preaching of the apostles thrills with the glad announcement, "Christ is coming!"

In the evangelical churches today there are differing views of this matter. One view is that Christ is literally coming, ex-

ternally on the clouds of heaven, to set up his kingdom here. I never heard that teaching in my youth at all. It has always had a new resurrection when desperate circumstances came and man's only hope seemed to lie in divine intervention. It is not strange, then, that during these chaotic, catastrophic years there has been a fresh rebirth of this old phrasing of expectancy. "Christ is coming!" seems to many Christians the central message of the gospel. In the strength of it some of them are doing great service for the world. But, unhappily, many so overemphasize it that they outdo anything the ancient Hebrews or the ancient Christians ever did. They sit still and do nothing and expect the world to grow worse and worse until he comes.

Side by side with these to whom the second coming is a literal expectation, another group exists in the evangelical churches. They, too, say, "Christ is coming!" They say it with all their hearts; but they are not thinking of an external arrival on the clouds. They have assimilated as part of the divine revelation the exhilarating insight which these recent generations have given to us, that development is God's way of working out his will. They see that the most desirable elements in human life have come through the method of development. Man's music has developed from the rhythmic noise of beaten sticks until we have in melody and harmony possibilities once undreamed. Man's painting has developed from the crude outlines of the cavemen until in line and color we have achieved unforeseen results and possess latent beauties yet unfolded. Man's architecture has developed from the crude huts of primitive men until our cathedrals and business buildings reveal alike an incalculable advance and an unimaginable future. Development does seem to be the way in which God works. And these Christians, when they say that Christ is coming,

mean that, slowly it may be, but surely, his will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions, until "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

These two groups exist in the Christian churches, and the question raised by the Fundamentalists is: shall one of them drive the other out? Will that get us anywhere? Multitudes of young men and women at this season of the year are graduating from our schools of learning, thousands of them Christians who may make us older ones ashamed by the sincerity of their devotion to God's will on earth. They are not thinking in ancient terms that leave ideas of progress out. They cannot think in those terms. There could be no greater tragedy than that the Fundamentalists should shut the door of the Christian fellowship against such.

I do not believe for one moment that the Fundamentalists are going to succeed. Nobody's intolerance can contribute anything to the solution of the situation we have described. If, then, the Fundamentalists have no solution of the problem, where may we expect to find it? In two concluding comments let us consider our reply to that inquiry.

The first element that is necessary is a spirit of tolerance and Christian liberty. When will the world learn that intolerance solves no problems? This is not a lesson which the Fundamentalists alone need to learn; the liberals also need to learn it. Speaking, as I do, from the viewpoint of liberal opinions, let me say that if some young, fresh mind here this morning is holding new ideas, has fought his way through, it may be by intellectual and spiritual struggle, to novel positions, and is tempted to be intolerant about old opinions, offensively to condescend to those who hold them and to be harsh in judg-

ment on them, he may well remember that people who held those old opinions have given the world some of the noblest character and the most rememberable service that it ever has been blessed with, and that we of the younger generation will prove our case best, not by controversial intolerance, but by producing, with our new opinions, something of the depth and strength, nobility and beauty of character that in other times were associated with other thoughts. It was a wise liberal, the most adventurous man of his day—Paul the apostle—who said, “‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up.”

Nevertheless, it is true that just now the Fundamentalists are giving us one of the worst exhibitions of bitter intolerance that the churches of this country have ever seen. As one watches them and listens to them, he remembers the remark of General Armstrong of Hampton Institute: “Cantankerousness is worse than heterodoxy.” There are many opinions in the field of modern controversy concerning which I am not sure whether they are right or wrong, but there is one thing I am sure of: courtesy and kindness and tolerance and humility and fairness are right. Opinions may be mistaken; love never is.

As I plead thus for an intellectually hospitable, tolerant, liberty-loving church, I am of course thinking primarily about this new generation. We have boys and girls growing up in our homes and schools, and because we love them we may well wonder about the church that will be waiting to receive them. Now the worst kind of church that can possibly be offered to the allegiance of the new generation is an intolerant church. Ministers often bewail the fact that young people turn from religion to science for the regulative ideas of their lives. But this is easily explicable. Science treats a young man’s mind as

though it were really important. A scientist says to a young man: "Here is the universe challenging our investigation. Here are the truths we have seen, so far. Come, study with us! See what we already have seen and then look further to see more, for science is an intellectual adventure for the truth." Can you imagine any man who is worth while, turning from that call to the church if the church seems to him to say, "Come, and we will feed you opinions from a spoon. No thinking is allowed here except such as brings you to certain specified, predetermined conclusions. These prescribed opinions we will give you in advance of your thinking; now think, but only so as to reach these results." My friends, nothing in all the world is so much worth thinking of as God, Christ, the Bible, sin and salvation, the divine purposes for humankind, life everlasting. But you cannot challenge the dedicated thinking of this generation to these sublime themes upon any such terms as are laid down by an intolerant church.

The second element which is needed, if we are to reach a happy solution of this problem, is a clear insight into the main issues of modern Christianity and a sense of penitent shame that the Christian church should be quarreling over little matters when the world is dying of great needs. If, during the war, when the nations were wrestling upon the very brink of hell and at times all seemed lost, you chanced to hear two men in an altercation about some minor matter of sectarian denominationalism, could you restrain your indignation? You said, "What can you do with folks like this who, in the face of colossal issues, play with the tiddledy winks and peccadillos of religion?" So now, when from the terrific questions of this generation one is called away by the noise of this Fundamentalist controversy, he thinks it almost unforgivable that men should

tithe mint and anise and cummin, and quarrel over them, when the world is perishing for the lack of the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith.

These last weeks, in the minister's confessional, I have heard stories from the depths of human lives where men and women were wrestling with the elemental problems of misery and sin—stories that put upon a man's heart a burden of vicarious sorrow, even though he does but listen to them. Here was real human need crying out after the living God revealed in Christ. Consider all the multitudes of men who so need God, and then think of Christian churches making of themselves a cockpit of controversy when there is not a single thing at stake in the controversy on which depends the salvation of human souls. That is the trouble with this whole business. So much of it does not matter! And there is one thing that does matter—more than anything else in all the world—that men in their personal lives and in their social relationships should know Jesus Christ.

Just a week ago I received a letter from a friend in Asia Minor. He says that they are killing the Armenians yet; that the Turkish deportations still are going on; that lately they crowded Christian men, women, and children into a conventicle of worship and burned them together in the house where they had prayed to their Father and to ours. During the war, when it was good propaganda to stir up our bitter hatred against the enemy, we heard of such atrocities, but not now! Two weeks ago Great Britain, shocked and stirred by what is going on in Armenia, did ask the government of the United States to join her in investigating the atrocities and trying to help. Our government said that it was not any of our business at all. The present world situation smells to heaven! And now

in the presence of colossal problems, which must be solved in Christ's name and for Christ's sake, the Fundamentalists propose to drive out from the Christian churches all the consecrated souls who do not agree with their theory of inspiration. What immeasurable folly!

Well, they are not going to do it; certainly not in this vicinity. I do not even know in this congregation whether anybody has been tempted to be a Fundamentalist. Never in this church have I caught one accent of intolerance. God keep us always so and ever increasing areas of the Christian fellowship: intellectually hospitable, open-minded, liberty-loving, fair, tolerant, not with the tolerance of indifference as though we did not care about the faith, but because always our major emphasis is upon the weightier matters of the law.

# SHALL UNBELIEF WIN?

CLARENCE E. MACARTNEY

**T**HERE APPEARED RECENTLY in a number of the religious papers, and has since been distributed in pamphlet form, the copy of a sermon, entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" preached by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church, New York. The sermon has all the lucidity of thought and outline, and all the charm of word grouping which have won for Dr. Fosdick a well-deserved popularity. It is also free from the intolerance and arrogance which sometimes mar the writings of the so-called "liberal" school of theologians, and whose illiberality and churlishness of spirit speak much more loudly than

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\* Originally published as Clarence E. Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win?" *The Presbyterian* (July 13 and 20, 1922).

anything else they say.

This sermon by Dr. Fosdick will be read with varying emotions. Those who agree with the position held by Dr. Fosdick will hail it with delight as a sort of declaration of principles and eloquent setting forth of the Fourteen Points of modernistic theology, a manual by which all on that side can march and drill and fight. Persons who are a-theological in their thinking, but who always applaud the revolt against what has been held, taught and believed in the Church, will also rejoice in it. But there are not a few others, who do not think of themselves as either "Fundamentalists" or "Modernists," but as Christians, striving amid the dust and the confused clamor of this life to hold to the Christian faith and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, who will read this sermon with sorrow and pain. The Presbyterians who read it will deeply regret that such an utterance, so hopelessly irreconcilable with the standards of belief required by the Reformed Churches, could be made by the stated occupant of a Presbyterian pulpit, and apparently without any protest or wonder on the part of the Session of the Church, or the Presbytery to which the Church belongs. I have just read a letter from a minister in the West in which the writer expresses the earnest hope that Dr. Fosdick will awaken to the inconsistency of his position and the non-Christianity of his views, and return, like many another wanderer, to the Cross of Christ. In this pious wish I am sure that all right-minded ministers who differ with Dr. Fosdick will join. One of his own school of thought, in conversation with me, declared that Dr. Fosdick must be retained to the Church because of his splendid emphasis on the social side of Christianity. None would deny that emphasis. But why not keep him for a greater service, for an emphasis upon the redemptive side

of Christianity, the truth that takes in all else? We may feel that there are few instances of men who have gone as far from historic Christianity as he has gone ever returning to the faith. But what about Romanes? What about Reginald Campbell and his "New" Theology, now long since recanted? The citation of these names gives on hope that Dr. Fosdick too may yet speak accents which will rejoice the hearts of believers instead of causing them anxiety and sorrow.

But a sincere desire for the return of Dr. Fosdick to evangelical faith, and the sense of pain and anxiety which his sermon occasions, must not be permitted to stand in the way of an emphatic and earnest rejoinder on the part of those who hold the opposite views, and who believe that the views held by Dr. Fosdick are subversive of the Christian faith. The greatest need of the Church today is a few men of ability and faith who are not afraid of being called "bigots," "narrow," "medieval" in their religious thought. I do not mean to infer that Dr. Fosdick ever so thinks of those who repudiate his views, for he goes out of his way to rebuke those of his side who indulge in this childish pastime. But more and more there is a tendency to brand as illiberal, medieval, and narrow any man who differs from the current of popular religious thought, and declares it to be non-Christian in its tendencies. There is a great discussion in the pulpit and out of it as to what the Church is to do or not to do. The state of opinion on this subject is singularly chaotic at present. But with all the diversity of opinion as to the work of the Church, there seems to be a pretty general agreement as to the one thing which the Church is not to do; Whatever the Church is to do or not to do, it is not to defend the faith; it is not to point out the errors and inconsistencies of those who stand as the interpreters of Christianity. This amazing agree-

ment would have struck the Christian believers of almost any age in Church history, save our own, as a very extraordinary one. The writer of this articles dissents entirely from this popular view, that when a Christian man hears or reads an utterance of Christian teachers and leaders which he believes to be irreconcilable with the Gospel the thing to do is to do nothing. Certainly this is not the course followed by those who are blasting at the Rock of Ages, and consciously or unconsciously, adulterating distinctive and New Testament Christianity with the conclusions and vagaries of this world's life and thought. I do not believe in letting them hold the field all to themselves. I believe that in this day one of the greatest contributions that a man can make to the success of the Gospel is to contend earnestly and intelligently and in a Christian spirit, but nevertheless, **CONTEND**, for the faith.

Whatever one's theological position may be, one cannot but feel glad that Dr. Fosdick has spoken so frankly as he has. He, at least, cannot be charged with the offense of subtly corrupting Christian doctrines by pretending to honor them, while all the time evacuating them of their meaning. The recent book by Dr. Sterrett on *What Is Modernism?* is a good example of the fog and bog of much of the rationalistic movement in the Church. One is puzzled to know just what the man does believe. As an elder in one of our Presbyterian churches said of his own minister: "I really do not know what our minister believes!" He knew it was something strange, something perhaps out of harmony with historic Christianity, but just why or how, he could not tell. But none can charge Dr. Fosdick with such obfuscation. Both rationalistics and evangelicals, therefore, will rejoice that Dr. Fosdick in this sermon leaves no reader or hearer in the least doubt as to what he believes, or disbelieves,

about the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Fosdick uses the name "Fundamentalist." It is a grand name, and the man who claims it certainly puts the burden of proof on those who differ from him. But in recent years the name has come to be applied to a group, who indeed hold to conservative views, but whose chief emphasis is upon the premillennial reign of Christ on this earth. In this sense we are not interested in the controversy, for we do not believe that any opinion, conviction or expectation as to the time of the second Epiphany of Christ is a fundamental of the Christian faith. Historic Christianity has been wisely guided here, for no great body of the Christian Church has ever made an opinion about the TIME of Christ's advent an article of its creed. In any recent controversy between rationalists and evangelicals there has been a tendency on the part of the former to use chiliasm as a sort of smoke screen and raise the cry of "premillenarian," whereas they know that the strongest and most influential currents of thought in conservative Protestantism run in an altogether different direction. The Princeton "school" of theology, for example, as summed up in Charles Hodge's famous eight reasons against premillennialism, has never had any chiliastic leanings whatever. But, as we shall see, Dr. Fosdick not only, and with some cause, protests against the premillenarian propaganda, but goes far beyond that and reduces the great New Testament teaching of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ to a "glittering generality."

Let us now take up, one by one, the different Christian doctrines mentioned in the sermon, and see how Dr. Fosdick views them. His claim is that a group of "Fundamentalists" are drawing a "dead line" in theology across which no man may step and live. In stating the views of the so-called "Fundamentalists,"

which is of little consequence, Dr. Fosdick states his own views and those of his school of thought, and this is of the greatest consequence, for it clears the atmosphere and let us see the religious chaos which reigns in rationalistic circles. They who, above all others, ought to read this sermon, are not the conservatives and not the rationalists, but the middle-of-the-road people who are fondly hoping that these schools are divided only by a difference in words and names, and that the two positions can and will be reconciled. Dr. Fosdick's sermon shows the impossibility and the non-desirability of such reconciliation. If Dr. Fosdick is right, his views ought to prevail, and the creed of the Presbyterian Church and of every other Church in Christendom, save the smaller humanitarian bodies like the Unitarians, and which are really creedless, as to either a written or unwritten creed, ought to be revised. If this is truth, then let it prevail, no matter how many churches sink into oblivion. But whether he is right, or whether the evangelical position is right, one thing all must now admit: both positions cannot be right; one **MUST** be wrong.

### I. The Virgin Birth

Dr. Fosdick does not accept the Virgin Birth as an historic fact. He rejects what he calls "a special biological miracle" as the explanation for the way in which Christ came into the world. The Virgin Birth to him is merely an effort on the part of religious devotion and faith to account for the manifest superiority of the character and person of Jesus. But lest I should do him any injustice in my summary of this paragraph of his sermon, let me quote his own words:

To believe in virgin birth as a explanation of great personality

is one of the familiar ways in which the ancient world was accustomed to account for unusual superiority. Many people suppose that only once in history do we run across a record of supernatural birth. Upon the contrary, stories of miraculous generation are among the commonest traditions of antiquity. Especially is this true about the founders of great religions. According to the records of their faiths, Buddha and Zoroaster and Lao-Tsze and Mahavira were all supernaturally born. Moses, Confucius, and Mohammed are the only great founders of religions in history to whom a miraculous birth is not attributed. That is to say, when a personality rose so high that men adored him, the ancient world attributed his superiority to some special divine influence in his generation, and they commonly phrased their faith in terms of miraculous birth. So Pythagoras was called virgin born, and Plato, and Augustus Caesar, and many more. Knowing this, there are within the evangelical churches large groups of people whose opinion about our Lord's coming would run as follows: those first disciples adored Jesus—as we do; when they thought about his coming, they were sure that he came specially from God—as we are; this adoration and conviction they associated with God's special influence and intention in his birth—as we do; but they phrased it in terms of a biological miracle that our modern minds cannot use. So far from thinking that they have given up anything vital in the New Testament's attitude toward Jesus, these Christians remember that the two men who contributed most to the Church's thought of the divine meaning of the Christ were Paul and John, who never even distantly allude to the virgin birth.

This speaks for itself. There was no Virgin Birth. The opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke are pure myth, and

the alleged facts and acts of those pages are merely a pious, devout, and natural effort of believing men to account for the personality of Jesus, in much the same way that the followers of Buddha, Zoroaster, Lao-Tsze, and Mahavira tried to account for them. Not only does he repudiate the Virgin Birth, but he states that opinions on the subject are of little importance, in no way affecting vital Christianity. In this connection he makes the stock remark of the rationalists about the two great teachers of Christianity, St. John and St. Paul, never even distantly alluding to the Virgin Birth. I have often been asked if Dr. Fosdick believes in the divinity, or better, the deity, of our Lord. I hope that he does, and even if in our New Testament we did not have the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the deity of Jesus Christ would everywhere confront us. We must grant, too, that God becoming flesh is a mystery which the Virgin Birth only partially explains. Nevertheless, that is the explanation given in the Gospels, and the only explanation given. Moreover, if we are to take that part of the Gospels as mere pious musing and guessing, will it not weaken our regard for the other parts? If for example the stories of the nativity of Jesus are mere human effort to account for a personality who defied human classification, then who can find fault with the man who says that the accounts of the Crucifixion of Jesus are merely imaginations on the part of His followers who wished to have Him die a glorious and sacrificial death? Or that the accounts of the Resurrection are merely the tributes of devotion and admiration, not the records of fact, but stories arising out of the conviction that Christ was too great and holy a man to be held of death, and thus in keeping with other tales of the reappearance and reincarnation of great men? And so with the Ascension and the Second Epiphany. The moment we take

this view of the account of the Virgin Birth, do we not prepare the way for the repudiation of any other part of the Gospel story by any man who wills to do so?

No intelligent Christian is disturbed by the reference that neither John nor Paul “even distantly allude” to the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It is partly amusing and partly irritating, the way the rationalists make use of Paul and John. When they are talking on the Virgin Birth of Jesus they cite Paul and John as the great authorities of the Church, and yet men who are silent on this subject. But when they are on a subject such as the Atonement, or the fate of the unbelievers in the next world, there John and Paul appear in an altogether different light. Now no one knows whether John wrote the Gospel that bears his name—probably not—and as for Paul, he took the simple teachings of the Galilean peasant and grafted upon them a mess of doctrines about sin and atonement and justification by faith which are entirely foreign to true Christianity. For this reason it is amusing to hear them cite John and Paul as on either side when it comes to the Virgin Birth. The fact is that both St. John and St. Paul above all other writers of the New Testament teach the Incarnation of God in Jesus and the supernatural manner of the entrance of the Son of God into this world. The fact that Paul, for example, while he says that Christ was born of a woman, does not say that He was born of a virgin, in no way invalidates the authority of Matthew or Luke, or implies that he had never heard of the birth of “that holy thing” in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

J. A. MacCulloch, in the article on Virgin Birth in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, points out that in the case of Zoroaster and Buddha, to which Dr. Fosdick adverts, actual physical generation through father and mother is implied in the

birth stories of Buddha, and in the birth stories of Zoroaster we have his "actual physical generation." Supernatural elements are added, but as Dr. MacCulloch clearly points out, there is no ground whatever for saying that the stories of the births of Zoroaster and Buddha and comparable to the New Testament account of the Virgin Birth of Jesus. But this is a field into which it is not necessary for me to go, for even if there did exist stories of the births of great religious leaders through a virgin and without ordinary process of generation, this would in no way repudiate or invalidate the sublime account of the conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Birth was universally accepted in the early Church, and it can hardly be denied that to reject the Virgin Birth is to break with historic Christianity. The first denials of the Virgin Birth came mainly from deistical writers in the eighteenth century. This rejection on the part of the deists is now revived by their lineal descendants, the rationalists. It is important to note that while Matthew and Luke are the only Gospels which give the account of the Virgin Birth, these two Gospels are also the only Gospels which profess to record the events of the birth of Jesus. If in John and Mark we had a narrative of the events of the birth of Jesus, and among those events we should find no mention of the Virgin Birth, then the omission would indeed perplex and trouble us. But John and Mark do not profess to record the events of the birth of Jesus, and therefore their omission of the Virgin Birth is insignificant. Certainly no one would be justified in drawing the inference which Dr. Fosdick seems to draw, namely, that because John and Mark are silent on the subject they did not accept the fact of the Virgin Birth.

As for St. Paul, it is well to remember that he makes hardly

any reference to the earthly life of Jesus beyond the facts of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. In his work on the Virgin Birth of Christ, Dr. J. Orr points out the indisputable fact that St. Paul regarded the entry of Christ into the world as no ordinary event, and that in speaking of it Paul always employs "some significant peculiarity of expression," such as, "God sending His Son" (Romans 1:3; 5:12); "becoming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7); and the unusual Greek form in Galatians 4:4, "born of a woman." The simple and yet majestic accounts of Matthew and Luke are integral parts of the narratives and cannot be regarded as interpolations; neither can they be compared, as one would infer Dr. Fosdick compares them, with the pagan myths of miraculous generation. The reader knows that he moving in a different world.

One would gather from Dr. Fosdick's sermon that belief in the Virgin Birth is of no matter, even to an evangelical Christian, and that it is quite possible to believe in the divinity of Christ without believing in the Virgin Birth. If we put the matter this way, and imagine the New Testament to stand as it is, minus the narrative of the Virgin Birth, that is, that none of us had ever heard of the Virgin Birth, then, of a truth, we could still believe in the divinity of Christ. But when one says, "May I not dismiss the Virgin Birth and still believe in the divinity of Jesus?" the only sensible and logical answer is, "No." And for this reason: The man who rejects the tremendous miracle given in the Gospels as explanation for the entry into this world of Jesus Christ shows thereby that although he may claim to believe in the divinity of Christ, his idea of that divinity must differ from that of those who accept the Virgin Birth. By their fruits ye shall know them, and the real test is the practical test. Applying this test we discover that the great number of those

who reject the Virgin Birth also reject the divinity of our Lord. Theoretically, the rationalists might argue that they could still believe in the divinity of Christ, although rejecting the Virgin Birth; but as matter of fact and history, the great number of those who repudiate the Virgin Birth also repudiate the divinity of our Lord. If a man really accepts the wonderful fact of the Son of God becoming flesh and entering our humanity he will not stumble at the only New Testament account of the manner of that entry, but will find in it a ground of faith and an instance of the marvellous condescension of the God of all grace. If we had the story of the Son of God without the story of His Virgin Birth, certainly men would outdo the pagans in the wild dreams and guesses as to the manner of His coming. But against all that God has provided by giving us the revelation of the fact that Jesus was “conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.”

Dr. Fosdick is not a Presbyterian, but he stands in a Presbyterian pulpit and gets his bread from a Presbyterian congregation. In view of this fact how can his holding the purely naturalistic account of the stories of the birth of Jesus be in harmony with his preaching in the pulpit of a Church whose Creed, never revoked, declares (The Confession of Faith, 8.2), “The Son of God—when the fulness of time was come did take upon Him man’s nature—being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance”? This article of the creed may be impossible for the “modern” mind to hold; it may be myth or rubbish. But myth or fact, truth or rubbish, it is a solemn declaration of the Church from which Dr. Fosdick takes his bread.

## II. The Inspiration of the Bible

Dr. Fosdick describes two ideas of the inspiration of the Bible, neither of which, however, are held by a great number of intelligent and devout Christians. On the one side there is what he calls the "static [note the word, for it is the word of the rationalists, and should it go out of currency, we know not what they would do] and mechanical theory of inspiration." According to the theory, all the parts of the Bible from the *Dukes of Edom* to the thirteenth chapter of *First Corinthians* were inerrantly dictated by God to men a good deal "as a man might dictate to a stenographer." We pass by the irreverence of this statement, with its offense not so much against orthodoxy as against good taste, and remark that those who hold the New Testament idea of inspiration, that holy men of old "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," have never thought of the Holy Ghost dictating to Moses, Isaiah, or St. Paul, as Dr. Fosdick, for instance, to use his own illustration, might dictate one of his sermons to a stenographer. Nor have the multitudes of Christians ever felt that for Paul to remind Timothy to fetch the cloak which he left at Troas, in the house of Carpus, required the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or any kind of inspiration save that of the gloom and damp of the Mamertine dungeon. But there are places in the writings of St. Paul where he makes the most careful and solemn claim to divine inspiration, and that what he declares, that is, his magnificent interpretation of the Gospel of Christ, has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Every intelligent Christian knows that it is not correct to say that Christianity depends upon the Scriptures in the historical sense, for Christianity had established itself in the world as a conquering and regenerating power before there was any New Testament. The New

Testament was the expression of that Christian life and faith and the record of its establishment. Therefore, every intelligent Christian knows too that while Christianity came before the New Testament, if the New Testament is false, Christianity also must be false. The great question at issue is not any peculiar theory of inspiration, but the credibility and authority of the Bible. Personally, I have never been troubled by the controversies which have raged over the question of inspiration, ranging all the way from harsh, petrified, and illogical theories which would make a genealogical catalogue with its graveyard of names of equal authority with St. Paul's statement of the redeeming and reconciling love of God in Christ—all the way from that to Dr. Fosdick's rationalistic theory, namely, that God revealed Himself, or rather misrevealed Himself, in crude and false ways in time past, sanctioning and approving much that was false, but gradually drew away from the misrepresentation and gave a clearer knowledge of Himself in the New Testament, but which representation will undoubtedly be much improved on in the future, since there is no reason to believe that this "progressive" revelation came to a sudden stop with St. John or St. Paul. For me the great question is this: Can we rely upon the Bible as giving us the great facts as to what God requires of man, and that plan of redemption which God has revealed through Jesus Christ? Does it contain the way of Life Eternal? If so, it is inspired of God. Theories of inspiration are of little consequence, for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is like the wind—thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

But although there is such a thing as accepting the inspiration of the Bible and not being sure as to how it was inspired, that is an altogether different thing from a theory of inspi-

ration which breaks down the whole authority of the book. Whenever we hear men speak as Dr. Fosdick does about the Bible, the question of a mode of inspiration sinks out of sight, and the greater question emerges: Do these men believe that the Bible has any special authority? Do they believe that God spake in times past by the prophets to the fathers in any clearer note than He did to Socrates, Confucius or Buddha? Do they really believe the prophets, to quote the words of Dr. Gore in his recent and notable book, *Belief in God*, “were in touch—as other men were not—with reality, with the real God; and that in a long and continuous process, more or less gradual, He was really communicating to them the truth by which men could live, both about the Divine nature and purpose and about human nature?” The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church commences with a declaration about the Scriptures which says:

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased God to reveal Himself and declare His will unto His Church.

One puts down a sermon of Dr. Fosdick and all his school with the impression that the light nature was sufficient for the salvation of men, and that the Bible is but a reflection of that light of nature, coming from man only, and not from God.

I am sure that even the most emancipated modernists will regret Dr. Fosdick’s unhappy comparison of the Bible with the Koran, and all believers in the Bible, and who not only talk about it but read it, will indignantly repudiate his assertion

that most of the repulsive ideas which are taught in the Koran are taught somewhere in the Bible. I deny that the Bible teaches that "God is an Oriental monarch, fatal submission to his will men's chief duty, the use of force on unbelievers, polygamy and slavery." When we come to appalling statements such as this, the best plan is not to argue but to deny.

## Part II

### III. The Second Advent

I have already intimated that I do not adhere to the premillennial school of the New Testament interpretation. I do believe that the Church has been inexcusably silent and negligent in its teaching as to the future chapters in the drama of Divine redemption, and that this wide neglect has prepared the way for much of the extravagance of the popular premillenarian. Thoughtful conservatives are not a little perplexed over the attitude of some premillenarians, and sometimes feel that their defense of historic Christianity is not altogether a helpful one; and when we hear our premillenarian brethren dwell with more emphasis and zeal upon the mechanism of the temporal kingdom that is to be set up here upon this earth than they do upon the redeeming love of Christ and the conquest of human nature through the mild reign of the Holy Spirit, we are tempted to become impatient with them and to cry out as the princes of the Philistines did, when, about to campaign against Israel, they saw David and his men in their ranks, and said to Achish, "What do these Hebrews here?" But there is one thing about the premillenarian concerning which there is no doubt, and that is his loyalty to the Person and the claims of Jesus Christ. However much he may be tempted to write

history before it has been made, his absolute loyalty to the Deity of Jesus, His Atonement, and His reign of righteousness and judgment, is never questioned. This far more than we can say about the rationalists. And the modernists. We feel that it is but a poor Christ that they have left us, and only a shadow of the tremendous personality of the New Testament.

If perchance the premillenarian has been a little too sure in his exegesis and in casting the horoscope of the Church and the race, the rationalist has gone to the other extreme and has reduced the great doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ to a mere figure of speech. So Dr. Fosdick regards it, for he says,

They [that is, the rationalists and modernists] they, too, say 'Christ is coming!' They say it with all their hearts, but they are not thinking of an external arrival on the clouds. They have assimilated as part of the Divine revelation the exhilarating insight which these recent generations have given us, that development is God's way of working out his will. Man's music has been developed from the rhythmic noise of beaten sticks; man's painting from the crude outlines of the cavemen; man's architecture from the crude huts of primitive men. And these Christians, when they say that Christ is coming, mean that slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions, until He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied!

The best possible comment on this idea of the Second Advent of Christ and the final jurisprudence of our species is to set it alongside the mysterious yet mighty utterances of Jesus in the last part of Matthew's Gospel, or the equally mysterious and tremendous utterances of St. Paul and of St. Peter. Whatever Christ or Paul or Peter mean or do not mean, we

can be sure of this, that they imply a process of progress and arrival at perfection which is something far different from Dr. Fosdick's mild working out of the tangles of life. The Bible teaches progress and development and a final arrival at a state of universal peace and righteousness, but it also teaches that crisis and cataclysm play their part in bringing the great goal which seers, prophets, and poets have saluted afar off and contemplated through their tears. The first advent of Christ was not accounted for by any long-drawn-out natural development, although it did come in the "fulness of time," and it is quite possible that the Second Advent will be just as much of an intervention and interruption as the first advent was. The rationalists do not do justice to this plain portion of the eschatological teaching of the Bible. And even were their absurd dream to come true, even should the world by the slow working out of the powers and principles now lodged in humanity arrive at moral perfection, still the goal would not have been reached, for there would yet remain a fearful contrast between this perfect creature and his environment. So Father Tyrrell, a much more thoughtful modernist than those who today are so vocal, asks: "Shall progress ever wipe away the tears from all eyes? Prolong life as it will can progress ever conquer death, with its terrors for the dying, its tears for the surviving? Can it ever control the earthquake, the tempest, the lightning, the cruelties of a nature indifferent to the lot of man?" What Father Tyrrell meant by these questions was that not only man, but man's environment, the platform of his civilization and life, must be changed and reconstructed. Have Dr. Fosdick and his fellow-rationalists any prescription for the securing of that great end? They have not, and they know that they have not. Thus, even if it had not been revealed in Scripture, common

sense and common experience would demand some such intervention and summing up of human affairs as is involved in the doctrine of the Second Advent.

Then we shall have not only a Messianic race of redeemed men, but a Messianic world, in which there shall be complete and blessed peace not only between man and God, and between man and man, but between man and the beast and between man and the earth. This was the age saluted by rapt Isaiah when he sang,

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the sucking child shall lay on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

The great error of the Rationalists in their sketch of the future and in their dealing with the New Testament teaching of the coming of Christ, is that they confine themselves to laws and principles, and forget that there is something beyond this. "And these Christians," writes Dr. Fosdick, meaning himself and other Rationalists, "when they say that Christ is coming, mean that slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions, until He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." Evangelical, New Testament Christians, believe that too. But they believe that the coming of Christ means more than just the establishment of justice in the earth. To them it means also the beatific vision; it means the Presence and the com-

panionship of Him Whom, not having seen, we yet love; on Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable. This and scores of passages like it in the New Testament can have only one meaning, namely, that rich and precious though the present relationship of the believer with Jesus Christ is, there is something yet greater in store. When, according to the old legend, Jesus appeared to Thomas Aquinas and said to him, "Thomas, thou hast written well of Me; what wouldst thou have?" the great schoolman replied, "Thyself, Lord!" "Thyself, Lord!"—that is the consummation of the Christian life and experience. Here we have it in faith and anticipation, but when Christ comes the second time we shall have it in glorious reality.

Righteousness is to come, and the Church is to be vindicated, and sinners are to be judged, and crooked ways made straight, and rough places plain; but it ought not to be necessary, yet apparently is, to remind the rationalists that Christ is more than a principle of righteousness and justice, and that the coming of Him upon Whose breast John leaned at the Supper, Who said to the fishermen of Galilee, "Follow Me!" to Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" and to Paul, "Why persecutest thou me?"—the coming of this Christ must mean nothing less than a personal and blessed and glorious manifestation of Himself to those who have believed on Him, and who, amid the shadows and trials of this world, have followed Him as Lord and Master. To the Rationalists this blessed consummation of the Christian experience seems to mean nothing. They talk about Christ as if He were only a name for a principle, and seem not to know that Jesus to Whom Thomas cried out, "My God and my Lord!" And when Christ comes, how shall they greet Him who in this life, and even as His minister, have spoken of

Him in such a way as to lead men to believe that He was not conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary; that He did not take our place and bear our sins on the cursed tree; that He did not rise again from the dead, and that He will not come again in glory? How shall they greet Him, and what shall they say to Him? To talk acceptably to skeptical university boys, or persons inclined to unbelief, and write for rationalistic papers, is one thing; it is another thing to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Now those great swelling words about “progressive” revelation, “dynamic” Christianity, “the modern mind,” etc., etc., sink and shrivel and disappear. No minister should preach or write a sermon which he would not be willing to place in the hands of Jesus should appear in person. Could the authors of these rationalistic sermons, sermons which tend to destroy men’s faith in the Eternal Son of God as their alone Redeemer, meet Christ with confidence, and would they feel like placing in His hands the sermon which has denied Him before men?

#### IV. The Atonement

Dr. Fosdick does not dwell at length on this central doctrine of Christianity, but in the very sentence in which he caricatures the traditional evangelical belief in the Atonement, he reveals his complete and profound aversion to the New Testament teaching on that great and mysterious subject. He thus describes the theory of the Atonement as held by the Evangelical School: “That the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, placates an alienated Deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner.”

Every Christian know that there is a difference between the fact of the Atonement and any theory of it. But it is inconceiv-

able that any man should receive the fact of the Atonement, the death of Christ for sin, and not be interested in the explanation of that fact. The rationalists now write of the theology of St. Paul as an intelligent man's honest effort to give some rational explanation of how he is saved, and how it is that the death of Christ makes possible the forgiveness of sin. Why, may we ask, are the rationalists not interested in giving some explanation of the Atonement? If the great primary fact of Christianity, the death of Christ for the remission of sins, is the rock upon which their feet stand, their refuge, and their hope, why are they not more interested in the meaning of that fact? Why is it that the only time they talk about the Atonement is when they are assailing the traditional views of historic Christianity? Why is it that the only interest they betray in the Atonement is to deny the explanations of other believers? St. Paul, whom Dr. Fosdick quotes as one of the two great Christian teachers, made the death of Christ, and substitutionary and vicarious explanation of that death, the one grand theme of his preaching. To the Corinthians he said, "I delivered unto you, first of all, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Is there in the whole world today a rationalist or a modernist who can say that to any city or church where he has preached?

At the close of his sermon Dr. Fosdick says, "It is almost unforgivable that men should tithe mint and anise and cummin, and quarrel over them, when the world is perishing for the lack of the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith." He thus likens the question of the Virgin Birth of our Lord, the Inspiration of the Bible, the Second Advent of Christ, and the Atonement to mint, anise, and cummin. To me this seems an almost unpardonable flippancy on the part

of one who speaks as a teacher of Christianity. Especially astounding it is to hear a man so speak of opinions about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Francis Turretin, whom Dale calls the greatest of Calvinistic theologians, evidently thought differently about the Atonement, for he wrote of it as

the chief part of our salvation, the anchor of Faith, the refuge of Hope, the rule of Charity, the sure foundation of the Christian religion, and the richest treasure of the Christian Church. So long as this doctrine is maintained in its integrity, Christianity itself and the peace and blessedness of all who believe in Jesus Christ, are beyond the reach of danger; but it if is rejected, or in any way impaired, the whole structure of the Christian faith must sink into decay and ruin.

Our chief complaint against the rationalist and modernist is not their writings and saying about the Deity of our Lord, the Bible, the Second Advent, but their rejection of the one great truth of Christianity, that through His death we have remission of our sins and are justified with God.

Dr. Fosdick contends against a conspiracy on the part of those whom he calls "Fundamentalists," and who perhaps so name themselves, to put out of the Church all those who do not agree with them in every particular. I have not heard of such a conspiracy and have never been asked to join it. At the same time, I believe that as long as the Presbyterian Church has not abandoned and repudiated its Confession of Faith, any man in any of its pulpits holding and declaring the views of Dr. Fosdick occupies an anomalous and inconsistent position. Their "New" Theology seems to carry with it a "new" morality also. As for putting them out, that could easily be done, for they are a small minority in the Church; although at present

the vocal minority. But I am coming to think less and less of excision and excommunication as means of preserving the Church from false teaching, not because of any base and ignoble fear on the part of those who might so proceed of being called "heresy hunters," "medieval," etc., but because I am convinced that the far more useful course to pursue is to declare the whole counsel of God so clearly and fearlessly that the whole world may know that there is a difference between what is Christianity and what is not Christianity. However Dr. Fosdick and his companions may worry about processes of excision and ecclesiastical trial, and so being put out of the Church, the sad thing is that in the minds of thousands upon thousands of Christians they are already out of the Church, and no act of an ecclesiastical court could make the fact more real. Our duty is to pray that they may be brought back into the Church and help to build up and adorn where hitherto they have only wounded His mystical Body, which is the Church.

In his celebrated autobiography, John Stuart Mill, in describing the attitude of his father towards Christianity, says that he looked with indignation upon the identification of the worship of the Christian God with Christianity. The son confesses the same aversion, and thinks the day will come when we shall have a Christianity with God left out. For me this sums up better than anything I have ever read the menace of the rationalistic and modernist movement in Protestant Christianity. The movement is slowly secularizing the Church, and if permitted to go unchecked and unchallenged, will ere long produce in our churches a new kind of Christianity, a Christianity without worship, without God, and without Jesus Christ.

# THE AUBURN AFFIRMATION

*An Affirmation Designed to Safeguard the  
Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church  
in the United States of America*

**S**UBMITTED FOR THE consideration of its ministers and people.

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, feel bound, in view

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\* In January 1924, a group of ministers circulated the Auburn Affirmation as a strategic counter to the 1923 General Assembly's determination to affirm the five fundamentals of the General Assembly of 1910. They perceived this action to be an infringement upon the unity and liberty of the church. Initially signed by 150 ministers and emanating from Auburn, New York, home to Auburn Theological Seminary, this document represented a concerted effort to protect diverse theological perspectives within the church. By May 5, 1924, the number of signatories had swelled to 1,291, indicating that more than one-tenth of the church's ministers were in support of the Affirmation, thereby challenging the necessity of strict adherence to core beliefs of the Christian faith as dictated by the General Assembly.

of certain actions of the General Assembly of 1923 and of persistent attempts to divide the church and abridge its freedom, to express our convictions in matters pertaining thereto. At the outset we affirm and declare our acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith, as we did at our ordinations, “as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” We sincerely hold and earnestly preach the doctrines of evangelical Christianity, in agreement with the historic testimony of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, of which we are loyal ministers. For the maintenance of the faith of our church, the preservation of its unity, and the protection of the liberties of its ministers and people, we offer this Affirmation.

## The Church’s Guarantees of Liberty

### (1) Concerning the Interpretation of the Confession of Faith

I. By its law and its history, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America safeguards the liberty of thought and teaching of its ministers. At their ordinations they “receive and adopt the Confession of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” This the church has always esteemed a sufficient doctrinal subscription for its ministers. Manifestly it does not require their assent to the very words of the Confession, or to all of its teachings, or to interpretations of the Confession by individuals or church courts. The Confession of Faith itself disclaims infallibility. The authors would not allow this to church councils, their own included: “All synods or councils since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have

erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both" (Conf. XXXI, iii). The Confession also expressly asserts the liberty of Christian believers, and condemns the submission of the mind or conscience to any human authority: "God alone is lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also" (Conf. XX, ii).

The formal relation of American Presbyterianism to the Westminster Confession of Faith begins in the Adopting Act of 1729. This anticipated and provided for dissent by individuals from portions of the Confession. At the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in 1788, the Westminster Confession was adopted as the creed of the church; and at the same time the church publicly declared the significance of its organization in a document which contains these words: "There are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these they think it the duty, both of private Christians and Societies, to exercise mutual forbearance towards each other" (Declaration of Principles, v).

Of the two parts into which our church was separated from 1837 to 1870, one held that only one interpretation of certain parts of the Confession of Faith was legitimate, while the other maintained its right to dissent from this interpretation. In the Reunion of 1870 they came together on equal terms, "each recognizing the other as a sound and orthodox body."

The meaning of this, as understood then and ever since, is that office-bearers in the church who maintain their liberty in the interpretation of the Confession are exercising their rights guaranteed by the terms of the Reunion.

A more recent reunion also is significant, that of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in 1906. This reunion was opposed by certain members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, on the ground that the two churches were not at one in doctrine; yet it was consummated. Thus did our church once more exemplify its historic policy of accepting theological differences within its bounds and subordinating them to recognized loyalty to Jesus Christ and united work for the kingdom of God.

## (2) Concerning the Interpretation of the Scriptures

With respect to the interpretation of the Scriptures the position of our church has been that common to Protestants. "The Supreme Judge," says the Confession of Faith, "by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (Conf. I, x). Accordingly our church has held that the supreme guide in the interpretation of the Scriptures is not, as it is with Roman Catholics, ecclesiastical authority, but the Spirit of God, speaking to the Christian believer. Thus our church lays it upon its ministers and others to read and teach the Scriptures as the Spirit of God through His manifold ministries instructs them, and to receive all truth which from time to time He causes to break forth from the Scriptures.

There is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept “from error.” The Confession of Faith does not make this assertion; and it is significant that this assertion is not to be found in the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed or in any of the great Reformation confessions. The doctrine of inerrancy, intended to enhance the authority of the Scriptures, in fact impairs their supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ. We hold that the General Assembly of 1923, in asserting that “the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error,” spoke without warrant of the Scriptures or of the Confession of Faith. We hold rather to the words of the Confession of Faith, that the Scriptures “are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (Conf. I, ii).

### Authority under the Constitution for the Declaration of Doctrine

II. While it is constitutional for any General Assembly “to bear testimony against error in doctrine,” (Form of Govt. XII, v), yet such testimony is without binding authority, since the constitution of our church provides that its doctrine shall be declared only by concurrent action of the General Assembly and the presbyteries. Thus the church guards the statement of its doctrine against hasty or ill-considered action by either General Assemblies or presbyteries. From this provision of our constitution, it is evident that neither in one General Assembly nor in many, without concurrent action of the presbyteries, is there authority to declare what the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America believes and teaches; and that the assumption that any General Assembly has

authoritatively declared what the church believes and teaches is groundless. A declaration by a General Assembly that any doctrine is “an essential doctrine” attempts to amend the constitution of the church in an unconstitutional manner.

### Action of the General Assembly Regarding the Preaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York City

III. The General Assembly of 1923, in asserting that “doctrines contrary to the standards of the Presbyterian Church” have been preached in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, virtually pronounced a judgment against this church. The General Assembly did this with knowledge that the matter on which it so expressed itself was already under formal consideration in the Presbytery of New York, as is shown by the language of its action. The General Assembly acted in the case without giving hearing to the parties concerned. Thus the General Assembly did not conform to the procedure in such cases contemplated by our Book of Discipline, and, what is more serious, it in effect condemned a Christian minister without using the method of conference, patience and love enjoined on us by Jesus Christ. We object to the action of General Assembly in this case, as being out of keeping with the law and the spirit of our church.

### The Doctrinal Deliverance of the General Assembly

IV. The General Assembly of 1923 expressed the opinion concerning five doctrinal statements that each one “is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards.” On the constitutional grounds which we have before described, we are

opposed to any attempt to elevate these five doctrinal statements, or any of them, to the position of tests for ordination or for good standing in our church.

Furthermore, this opinion of the General Assembly attempts to commit our church to certain theories concerning the inspiration of the Bible, and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the Continuing Life and Supernatural Power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all hold most earnestly to these great facts and doctrines; we all believe from our hearts that the writers of the Bible were inspired of God; that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh; that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and through Him we have our redemption; that having died for our sins He rose from the dead and is our everliving Saviour; that in His earthly ministry He wrought many mighty works, and by His vicarious death and un failing presence He is able to save to the uttermost. Some of us regard the particular theories contained in the deliverance of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of all confidence and fellowship.

### Extent of the Liberty Claimed

V. We do not desire liberty to go beyond the teachings of evangelical Christianity. But we maintain that it is our constitutional right and our Christian duty within these limits to exercise liberty of thought and teaching, that we may more effectively preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World.

## The Spirit and Purpose of This Affirmation

VI. Finally, we deplore the evidences of division in our beloved church, in the face of a world so desperately in need of a united testimony to the gospel of Christ. We earnestly desire fellowship with all who like us are disciples of Jesus Christ. We hope that those to whom this Affirmation comes will believe that it is not the declaration of a theological party, but rather a sincere appeal, based on the Scriptures and our standards, for the preservation of the unity and freedom of our church, for which most earnestly we plead and pray.

# THE SEPARATENESS OF THE CHURCH

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

*“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” —Matthew 5:13*

**I**N THESE WORDS our Lord established at the very beginning the distinctness and separateness of the church. If the sharp distinction is ever broken down between the church and the world, then the power of the church is gone. The church then becomes like salt that has lost its savor, and

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\* This was a sermon preached in the chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary on Sunday, March 8, 1925.

is fit only to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

It is a great principle, and there never has been a time in all the centuries of Christian history when it has not had to be taken to heart. The really serious attack upon Christianity has not been the attack carried on by fire and sword, by the threat of bonds or death, but it has been the more subtle attack that has been masked by friendly words; it has been not the attack from without but the attack from within. The enemy has done his deadliest work when he has come with words of love and compromise and peace. And how persistent the attack has been! Never in the centuries of the church's life has it been altogether relaxed; always there has been the deadly chemical process, by which, if it had been unchecked, the precious salt would have been merged with the insipidity of the world, and would have been thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

The process began at the very beginning in the days when our Lord still walked the Galilean hills. There were many in those days who heard Him gladly: He enjoyed at first the favor of the people. But in that favor He saw a deadly peril; He would have nothing of a half-discipleship that meant the merging of the company of His disciples with the world. How ruthlessly He checked a sentimental enthusiasm! "Let the dead bury their dead," He told the enthusiast who came eagerly to Him but was not willing at once to forsake all. "One thing thou lackest," He said to the rich young ruler, and the young man went sorrowful away. Truly Jesus did not make it easy to be a follower of Him. "He that is not with me," He said, "is against me." "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children . . . , he cannot be my disciple." How serious a thing it was in those days to stand for

Christ!

And it was a serious thing not only in the sphere of conduct but also in the sphere of thought. There could be no greater mistake than to suppose that a man in those days could think as he liked and still be a follower of Jesus. On the contrary the offense lay just as much in the sphere of doctrine as in the sphere of life. There were "hard sayings," then as now, to be accepted by the disciples of Jesus, as well as hard commands. "I am the bread which came down from heaven," said Jesus. It was indeed a hard saying. No wonder the Jews murmured at Him. "Is not this Jesus," they said, "the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus did not make the thing easy for these murmurers. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." At that many even of His disciples were offended. "This is a hard saying," they said; "who can hear it?" And so they left him. "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him." Many of them went back—but not all. "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus was the precious salt preserved.

Then came the gathering clouds, and finally the cross. In the hour of His agony they left Him and fled; apparently the movement that He had initiated was hopelessly dead. But such was not the will of God. The disciples were sifted, but there was still something left. Peter was forgiven; the disciples saw the risen Lord; the salt was still preserved.

One hundred and twenty persons were gathered in

Jerusalem. It was not a large company; but salt, if it truly have its savor, can permeate the whole lump. The Spirit came in accordance with our Lord's promise, and Peter preached the first sermon in the Christian church. It was hardly a concessive sermon. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." How unkind Peter was! But by that merciful unkindness they were pricked in their hearts, and three thousand souls were saved.

So there stood the first Christian church in the midst of a hostile world. At first sight it might have seemed to be a mere Jewish sect; the disciples continued to attend the temple services and to lead the life of Jews. But in reality that little company was as separate as if it had been shut off by desert wastes or the wide reaches of the sea; an invisible barrier, to be crossed only by the wonder of the new birth, separated the disciples of Jesus from the surrounding world. "Of the rest," we are told, "durst no man join himself to them." "And fear came upon every soul." So it will always be. When the disciples of Jesus are really faithful to their Lord, they inspire fear; even when Christians are despised and persecuted and harried, they have sometimes made their persecutors secretly afraid. It is not so, indeed, when there is compromise in the Christian camp; it is not so when those who minister in the name of Christ have—as was said in praise some time ago in my hearing of a group of ministers in our day—it is not so when these who minister in the name of Christ "have their ears to the ground." But it will be so whenever Christians have their ears, not to the ground, but open only to the voice of God, and when they say simply, in the face of opposition or flattery, as Peter said, "We must obey God rather than men."

But after those persecutions, there came in the early church a time of peace—deadly, menacing, deceptive peace, and peace more dangerous by far than the bitterest war. Many of the sect of the Pharisees came into the church—false brethren privily brought in. They were not true Christians, because they trusted in their own works for salvation, and no man can be a Christian who does that. They were not even true adherents of the Old Covenant; for the Old Covenant, despite the Law, was a preparation for the Saviour's coming, and the Law was a schoolmaster unto Christ. Yet they were Christians in name, and they tried to dominate the councils of the church. It was a serious menace; for a moment it looked as though even Peter, true apostle though he was at heart, was being deceived. His principles were right, but by his actions his principles, at Antioch, for one fatal moment, were belied. But it was not God's will that the church should perish; and the man of the hour was there. There was one man who would not consider consequences where a great principle was at stake, who put all personal considerations resolutely aside, and refused to become unfaithful to Christ through any fear of "splitting the church." "When I saw that they walked not uprightly," said Paul, "according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all. . . ." Thus was the precious salt preserved.

But from another side also the church was menaced by the blandishments of the world; it was menaced not only by a false Judaism, which really meant opposition of man's self-righteousness to the mysterious grace of God, but also by the all-embracing paganism of that day. When the Pauline churches were planted in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world, the battle was not ended but only begun. Would the little spark of new life be kept alive? Certainly it might have

seemed to be unlikely in the extreme. The converts were for the most part not men of independent position, but slaves and humble tradesmen; they were bound by a thousand ties to the paganism of their day. How could they possibly avoid being drawn away by the current of the time? The danger certainly was great; and when Paul left an infant church like that at Thessalonica his heart was full of dread.

But God was faithful to His promise, and the first word that came from that infant church was good. The wonder had actually been accomplished; the converts were standing firm; they were in the world but not of the world; their distinctiveness was kept. In the midst of pagan impurity they were living true Christian lives. But why were they living true Christian lives? This is really the important question. And the answer is plain. They were living Christian lives because they were devoted to Christian truth. "Ye turned to God," says Paul, "from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." That was the secret of their Christian lives; their Christian lives were founded upon Christian doctrine—upon theism ("the living and true God"), upon Christology ("his Son . . . whom he raised from the dead"), and upon soteriology ("which delivered us from the wrath to come"). They kept the message intact, and hence they lived the life. So it will always be. Lives apparently and superficially Christian can perhaps sometimes be lived by force of habit, without being based upon Christian truth; but that will never do when Christian living, as in pagan Thessalonica, goes against the grain. But in the case of the Thessalonian converts the message was kept intact, and with it the Christian life. Thus again was the precious salt preserved.

The same conflict is observed in more detail in the case of Corinth. What a city Corinth was, to be sure, and how unlikely a place for a Christian church! The address of Paul's First Epistle is, as Bengel says, a mighty paradox. "To the church of God which is at Corinth"—that was a paradox indeed. And in the First Epistle to the Corinthians we have attested in all its fulness the attempt of paganism, not to combat the church by frontal attack, but to conquer it by the far deadlier method of merging it gradually and peacefully with the life of the world. Those Corinthian Christians were connected by many ties with the pagan life of their great city. What should they do about clubs and societies; what should they do about invitations to dinners where meat that had been offered to idols was set before the guests? What should they do about marriage and the like? These were practical questions, but they involved the great principle of the distinctness and exclusiveness of the church. Certainly the danger was very great, the converts were in great danger, from the human point of view, of sinking back into the corrupt life of the world.

But the conflict was not merely in the sphere of conduct. More fundamentally it was in the sphere of thought. Paganism in Corinth was far too astute to think that Christian life could be attacked while Christian doctrine remained. And so pagan practice was prompted by an appeal to pagan theory; the enemy engaged in an attempt to sublimate or explain away the fundamental things of the Christian faith. Somewhat after the manner of the Auburn "Affirmationists" in our day, paganism in the Corinthian church sought to substitute the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul for the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. But God had His witness; the apostle Paul was not deceived; and in a great passage—the most important

words, historically, perhaps, that have ever been penned—he reviewed the sheer factual basis of the Christian faith. “How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” There is the foundation of the Christian edifice. Paganism was gnawing away—not yet directly, but by ultimate implication—at that foundation in Corinth, as it has been doing so in one way or another ever since. But Paul was there, and many of the five hundred witnesses were still alive. The gospel message was kept distinct, in the Pauline churches, from the wisdom of the world; the precious salt was still preserved.

Then, in the second century, there came another deadly conflict. It was again a conflict not with an enemy without, but with an enemy within. The Gnostics used the name of Christ; they tried to dominate the church; they appealed to the Epistles of Paul. But despite their use of Christian language they were pagan through and through. Modern scholarship, on this point, has tended to confirm the judgment of the great orthodox writers of that day; Gnosticism was at bottom no mere variety of Christian belief, no mere heresy, but paganism masquerading in Christian dress. Many were deceived; the danger was very great. But it was not God’s will that the church should perish. Irenaeus was there, and Tertullian with his vehement defense. The church was saved—not by those who cried “Peace, peace when there is no peace,” but by zealous contenders for the faith. Again, out of a great dangers, the precious salt was preserved.

Time would fail us to speak of Athanasius and of Augustine and the rest, but too were God’s instruments in the preservation of the precious salt. Certainly the attack in those days

was subtle enough almost to deceive the very elect. Grant the Semi-Arians their one letter in *homoiousios*, the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, and Christ would have been degraded to the level of a creature, mythology would have been substituted for the living God, and the victory of paganism would have been complete. From the human point of view the life of the church was hanging by a hair. But God was watching over His own; Athanasius stood against the world; and the precious salt was preserved.

Then came the Middle Ages. How long, and how dark, in some respects, was the time! It is hard to realize that eleven centuries elapsed between Augustine and Luther, yet such was the case. Never in the interval, indeed, was God altogether without his witnesses; the light still shone from the sacred page; but how dim, in that atmosphere, the light seemed to be! The gospel might have seemed to be buried forever. Yet in God's good time it came forth again with new power—the same gospel that Augustine and Paul had proclaimed. What stronger proof could there be that that gospel had come from God? Where in the history of religion is there any parallel for such a revival, after such an interval, and with such a purity of faithfulness to what had formerly been believed? A gospel that survived the Middle Ages will probably, it may well be hoped, never perish from the earth, but will be the word of life unto the end of the world.

Yet in those early years of the sixteenth century how dark was the time! When Luther made his visit to Rome, what did he find—what did he find there in the center of the Christian world? He found paganism blatant and triumphant and unashamed; he found the glories of ancient Greece come to life in the Italian renaissance, but with those glories the self-suffi-

ciency and the rebellion against God and the moral degradation of the natural man. Apparently paganism had at last won its age-long battle; apparently it had made a clean sweep over the people of God, apparently the church had at last become quite indistinguishable from the world.

But in the midst of the general wreck one thing at least was preserved. Many things were lost, but one thing was still left—the medieval church had never lost the Word of God. The Bible had indeed become a book with seven seals; it had been buried under a mass of misinterpretation never equalled perhaps until the absurdities indulged in by the Modernism of the present day—a mass of misinterpretation which seemed to hide it from the eyes of man. But at last an Augustinian monk penetrated beneath the mass of error, read the Scriptures with his own eyes; and the Reformation was born. Thus again was the precious salt preserved.

Then came Calvin and the great consistent system which he founded upon the Word of God. How glorious were the by-products of that system of revealed truth! A great stream of liberty spread from Geneva throughout Europe and to America across the sea. But if the by-products were glorious, more glorious by far was the truth itself, and the life that it caused men to live. How sweet and beautiful a thing was the life of the Protestant Christian home, where the Bible was the sole guide and stay! Have we really devised a substitute for that life in these days? I think not, my friends. There was liberty there, and love, and peace with God.

But the church after the Reformation was not to have any permanent rest, as indeed it is probably not to have rest at any time in this evil world. Still the conflict of the ages went on, and paganism prepared for an assault greater and more in-

sidious perhaps than any that had gone before. At first there was a frontal attack—Voltaire and Rousseau and the Goddess Reason and the terrors of the French Revolution and all that. As will always be the case, such an attack was bound to fail. But the enemy has now changed his method, and the attack is coming, not from without, but, in far more dangerous fashion, from within. During the past one hundred years the Protestant churches of the world have gradually been becoming permeated by paganism in its most insidious form.

Sometimes paganism is blatant, as, for example, in a recent sermon the burden of which was, “I Believe in Man.” That was the very quintessence of the pagan spirit—confidence in human resources substituted for the Christian consciousness of sin. But what was there blatant was found in subtler forms in many places throughout the church. The Bible, with a complete abandonment of all scientific historical method, and of all common sense, is made to say the exact opposite of what it means; no Gnostic, no medieval monk with his fourfold sense of Scripture, ever produced more absurd Biblical interpretation than can be heard every Sunday in the pulpits of New York. Even prayer in many quarters is made a thinly disguised means of propaganda against the truth of the gospel; men pray that there may be peace, where peace means victory for the enemies of Christ. Thus gradually the church is being permeated by the spirit of the world; it is becoming what the Auburn Affirmationists call an “inclusive” church; it is becoming salt that has lost its savor and is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

At such a time, what should be done by those who love Christ? I think, my friends, that they should at least face the facts; I do not believe that they should bury their heads like

ostriches in the sand; I do not think that they should soothe themselves with the minutes of the General Assembly of the reports of the Boards of the imposing rows of figures which the church papers contain. Last week it was reported that the churches of America increased their membership by 690,000. Are you encouraged by these figures? I for my part am not encouraged a bit. I have indeed my own grounds for encouragement, especially those which are found in the great and precious promises of God. But these figures have no place among them. How many of these 690,000 names do you think are really written in the Lamb's book of life? A small proportion, I fear. Church membership today often means nothing more, as has well been said, than a vague admiration for the moral character of Jesus; the church in countless communities is little more than a Rotary Club. One day, as I was walking through a neighboring city, I saw, not an altar with an inscription to an unknown god, but something that filled me with far more sorrow than that that could have done. I saw a church with a large sign on it, which read something like this: "Not a member? Come in and help us make this a better community." Truly we have wandered far from the day when entrance into the church involved confession of faith in Christ as the Saviour from sin.

The truth is that in these days the ecclesiastical currency has been sadly debased. Church membership, church office, the ministry, no longer mean what they ought to mean. But what shall we do? I think, my friends, that, cost what it may, we ought at least to face the facts. It will be hard; it will seem impious to timid souls; many will hurt. But in God's name let us get rid of shams and have reality at least. Let us stop soothing ourselves with columns of statistics, and face the spiritual facts; let us recall the paper currency and get back to the stan-

dard of gold.

When we do that, and when we come to God in prayer, with the real facts spread before Him, as Hezekiah spread before Him the letter of the enemy, there will be some things to cheer our hearts. God has not left Himself altogether without His witnesses. Humble they may often be, and despised by the wisdom of the world; but they are not perhaps altogether without the favor of God. In China, in Great Britain, and in America there have been some who have raised their voices bravely for their Saviour and Lord.

True, the forces of unbelief have not yet been checked, and none can say whether our own American Presbyterian Church, which we love so dearly, will be preserved. It may be that paganism will finally control, and that Christian men and women may have to withdraw from a church that has lost its distinctness from the world. Once in the course of history, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that method of withdrawal was God's method of preserving the precious salt. But it may be also that our Church in its corporate capacity, in its historic grandeur, may yet stand for Christ. God grant that it may be so! The future at any rate is in God's hand, and in some way or other—let us learn that much from history—the salt will be preserved.

What are you going to do, my brothers, in this great time of crisis? What a time it is to be sure! What a time of glorious opportunity! Will you stand with the world, will you shrink from controversy, will you witness for Christ only where witnessing costs nothing, will you pass through these stirring days without coming to any real decision? Or will you learn the lesson of Christian history; will you penetrate, by your study and your meditation, beneath the surface; will you recognize in

that which prides itself on being modern an enemy that is as old as the hills; will you hope, and pray, not for a mere continuance of what now is, but for a rediscovery of the gospel that can make all things new; will you have recourse to the charter of Christian liberty in that Word of God? God grant that some of you may do that! God grant that some of you, even though you be not now decided, may come to say, as you go forth into the world: "It is hard in these days to be a Christian; the adversaries are strong; I am weak; but thy Word is true and thy Spirit will be with me; here am I, Lord, send me."

# WHY THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

JOHN P. GALBRAITH

## I. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

On June 11th, 1936, a new sun arose on the religious horizon. From the shores of New Jersey to the coast of California ministers with all or part of their congregations, ministers without their congregations, congregations in part without their ministers, and individuals had separated themselves from the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. because of its official declarations in opposition to the truth of God and had banded together in a new church organization.

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\* This account was published in booklet form by the Committee on Christian Education of the OPC in 1939.

The First General Assembly of this new organization—by no means an irresolute body of believers—met in Philadelphia and there displayed, in its first official action, its opposition to all Modernism and other forms of unbelief now sweeping our nation. This action was a declaration of solemn adherence to the infallibility and divine authorship of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Though not an irresolute body, neither may this church, though comparatively small, justifiably be called a sect or group of bigots, for at that same moment, by the adoption of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as its secondary standards, it proclaimed itself to be in the direct line of the purest of the great Presbyterian tradition, purposing to carry on the faith from which the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had departed. Its founders, therefore, gave to it the name, the Presbyterian Church of America, but due to prosecution in the civil courts this name was changed in 1939 to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With each passing year this new organization has grown. Groups of Christians have been organized into particular churches; presbyteries throughout the country have been set up; committees on Christian Education, and Home and Foreign Missions, have been organized; missionaries have been sent out with the blessed tidings of Christ's death as the substitution for sinners; by the grace of God souls have been saved from the wrath to come; believers within the Church have grown in the grace and knowledge of their Savior, and Christians in many parts of the world have received encouragement in the battles against the unbelief which they, too, face in their denominations.

In the brief characterization of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church given above it was said that it is neither "irresolute" nor

a “sect.” It takes its stand squarely upon the Bible as the Word of God and as its only infallible rule of faith and practice, and upon the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as the most faithful interpretation of the Bible known to man.

The chief characteristic of this new denomination is, then, that it is unequivocally, unashamedly, and positively Christian. In this day of the popularity of Modernism, which rejects the divine authority of the Scriptures, and so necessarily the finality of the things which those Scriptures teach, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stands firmly upon both. Believing that God inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments so as to keep them from error, this church then must and does accept as truth what the Bible teaches. The Liberal, or Modernist, as he is commonly called, though he may wear clerical robes which are traditionally Christian, and though he may preach from a pulpit of historic Christian heritage, cannot truthfully be said to be a Christian for the simple reason that he rejects the Christian Scriptures. This is self-evident. A Christian may not truthfully be said to be a Mohammedan. Why? Basically because he rejects the Mohammedan Koran. Just as clearly is an individual not a Christian who rejects the Christian Bible. And yet the Modernist will join others in an organization known as “The Federal Council of the Churches of *Christ* in America” (italics ours).

To the Modernist monotheism—the doctrine that there is only one God—is a product of the Jewish mind formed after years of study and evolutionary thinking. To him the Christian doctrines of the deity of Christ, His substitutionary death for sinners to satisfy divine justice, His performance of miracles, and His bodily resurrection from the dead, are only some men’s theories. To the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,

however, these doctrines at the very heart of Christianity are the absolute truth; they are the revelation of God; they are essentials of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is, then, definitely a Christian Church.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, therefore, holds to what it believes to be the “purest” form of Christianity. It is not Baptist, or Methodist, or Lutheran, or yet Episcopalian. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church differs from these denominations in that it believes what is known as the “Reformed Faith.” This is the historic faith of Presbyterians—from Machen back through Warfield and Hodge of Princeton, Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands, John Knox of Scotland, John Calvin of Geneva, and (the Orthodox Presbyterian Church believes) the Apostle Paul. It is, then, not something in addition to Christianity, but it *is* Christianity—Christianity in its most glorious and consistent form.

To give a brief but faithful characterization of the Reformed Faith is both difficult and necessary. But a fair conception of what the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stands for may be had by observing its governing principle and a few of its distinctive doctrines. (It is to be remembered that these doctrines are held in addition to the so-called “generally Christian” doctrines, as, for example, those contained in the Apostles’ Creed—the Trinity; creation; deity of Christ; virgin birth of Christ; His atoning death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and glorious return to earth.)

The principle which governs the Reformed Faith is the Sovereignty of God. According to this principle, in all realms—physical or spiritual, past, present or future, earthly or heavenly, from creation to salvation—God is truly God. That is to say, all things find their source in God, all things are ordained by

God, and all things are ordained for God's own pleasure and glory. That is precisely what the Scriptures mean when they say, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever" (Romans 11:36).

The doctrines which are commonly used to set forth the distinctiveness of the Reformed Faith are known as "the five points of Calvinism."

The first of the "five points" is the Total Depravity of Man. This teaching means that every man, unless born again, is "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." The doctrine is taught in such Scripture passages as Rom. 8:7, "... the carnal mind is enmity against God . . . "; Gen. 8:21, "... the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"; Rom. 3:11, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God"; Eph. 2:1, "You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins"; Gen. 6:5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

The second point is Unconditional Election, the belief that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death." A few of the many Scripture passages which provide the basis of this doctrine are: Eph. 1:4, 5, 11, "... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Christ Jesus to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will . . . in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will";

Prov. 16:4, “The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

The third point is the Definite Atonement. This doctrine refers to the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and means that Christ designed, by His substitutionary death, to save a definite number of people—all those and only those whom He had chosen from before the foundation of the world. This is supported by, among others, the following passages. Matt. 1:21, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins”; John 10:15, “. . . I lay down my life for the sheep”; John 10:26, “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep . . .”; John 17:9, “. . . I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.”

The fourth point, which teaches that a person believes and is saved only because God the Holy Spirit has made him willing and able, is Efficacious Grace. First Peter 2:9, “. . . show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”; Titus 3:5, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost”; Col. 2:13, “and you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

And finally, there is the doctrine of the Eternal Security of believers, which simply means “once a Christian, always a Christian.” This doctrine is clearly taught in many passages, such as John 6:51, “I am the living bread . . . ; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever”; John 10:28, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand”; Phil. 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you,

will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"; Rom. 8:38–39, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

These doctrines, to repeat, are distinctive of the creeds of Presbyterian churches. To them, all who take ordination vows in those churches must subscribe. And with all these doctrines the Orthodox Presbyterian Church most sincerely agrees. The question, then, and a most logical one indeed, arises in the minds of many: "Why is a new church necessary?" They reason: "If these people believe in the Bible as the Word of God, and the truth which it teaches, and if they believe in the same doctrines that are taught in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., why should they leave it? Certainly, we see that they couldn't belong to a Methodist or Lutheran Church, but why can't they belong to any Presbyterian church?" This question was asked before June, 1936, when the formation of such a church appeared to be imminent. And it has been asked since that time. It is to this question—Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?—that the present paper would provide the answer.

The events which were the immediate occasion for the separation from the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. of these Christians who formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had occurred in Syracuse, N.Y., during the 148th General Assembly of that body, meeting from May 28th to June 3, 1936. They were events of a most extraordinary—yes, unique—character. The General Assembly had suspended a man from the gospel ministry for daring to organize a Bible

conference whose speakers were not allowed to be appointed by the Church. It had ordered another minister's pastoral relation with his congregation to be severed because he would not ask his people to support the Boards of the Church without regard for their teachings. And it had suspended still others from preaching in the denomination because they, through a board independent of the Church, had sought to send out missionaries to preach the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ's atonement. Such actions were, as the Rev. Dr. Clarence E. Macartney (tragically silent since then) said in the Syracuse (N.Y.) *Post-Standard* for June 3, 1936, "unthinkable." Dr. Macartney drew attention to the suspension of the Rev. Dr. J. Gresham Machen as an example. The reason for the suspension was not that Dr. Machen was an unbeliever, for the very opposite was true. He had written such books as *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, *What Is Faith?* and *Christianity and Liberalism*, and in each of these and in all his other writings Dr. Machen had steadfastly upheld the gospel. His voice had become the outstanding voice of his generation throughout the world in defense of orthodox Christianity. What Dr. Macartney found "unthinkable," therefore, was that "a man known throughout the Christian world as a defender of the Christian faith has been suspended from the Christian ministry." Unthinkable! But an historical fact!

## II. History of the Decline of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

The ejection of men because they stood for the Truth was up to that time a phenomenon. But it was not an unpredictable phenomenon. No building collapses without some previous internal decay. Thus the process of internal disintegration can

be traced as far back as the year 1801! We shall profitably trace the process of events within the church from that time, and see the gradual but steady decline of that church's witness to the gospel. Furthermore, we shall see that those momentous events at Syracuse were but the logical outworking of that defection from the faith. They were the climax of the church's departure from the Truth.

Presbyterianism in the United States may be traced back as far as the early Puritans, but it received no real impetus until about 1660 when Scotch-Irish immigrants began arriving from Ulster. The spread of Presbyterianism was not rapid, though it was steady. The first presbytery to be set up, the Presbytery of Philadelphia, had its first meeting in 1705. Growth continued. New presbyteries came into being, and they were organized into the Synod of Philadelphia in 1717. In 1741 there was a withdrawal to form the Synod of New York. The synods continued to expand until in 1788 they met and constituted, with new synods and presbyteries, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Candidates for the ministry were required to subscribe to the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms—the “generally Christian” doctrines and the Calvinistic doctrines.

In the year 1801 a plan of union was adopted whereby the General Assembly and the General Association of the State of Connecticut (Congregational) should work together, rather than in conflict. This union marks the discernible beginning of the decline of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., for those Congregational churches were under the influence of what is variously known as “Hopkinsianism” or “New School Theology”—a school of thought which differed from the Presbyterian creeds mainly in two respects: (1) it opposed the

Reformed reaching of Adam's federal headship of the human race, i.e., that the guilt of his sin is imputed to every person born into the world, and (2) it taught a universal atonement by Christ in contrast to the Reformed doctrine of the definite atonement of Christ. The flood gates had now been opened to liberal theology.

Thirty-six years later, in 1837, the General Assembly abrogated this union. As a result the "New School" group at once withdrew from the church—some 533 congregations with 100,000 communicant members—almost half of the Church. Undoubtedly it was thought that the Church was now sound, and there was nothing to fear. But the damage had been done and its results were far-reaching.

Among other things, Auburn (N. Y.) Theological Seminary had been founded to teach the New School Theology; Albert Barnes, a proponent of it, had been called to the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, and a group of the adherents of this liberal belief had united to found Union Theological Seminary of New York.

So great, in fact, had been the weakening influence of the New Theology in the Church that only thirty-two years later, in 1869, the Liberals were allowed to return—lock, stock, and barrel. Despite the vigorous and continued opposition of Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian, the vote was so overwhelming that only nine ballots were cast against the action—truly a "corporal's guard"! With the Assembly's enthusiastic reception of the Liberals another step in the downward trend had been taken.

However, about twenty years later two events took place which heartened conservatives in the Church. First of all, in 1889 an attempt was made to liberalize the Confession of

Faith. The General Assembly even went so far as to appoint a committee on the subject. But when the 1892 Assembly finally sent the proposed changes down to the presbyteries for concurrence they were rejected. The conservatives were led by the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, and as was to be expected they opposed the changes because they represented departures from the Bible. The liberals, uniting with the conservatives, also opposed the revisions, but for reasons far different—the revisions simply didn't go far enough! A hollow victory for the conservatives, indeed.

In the meantime Professor Briggs, of Union Seminary in New York, had been brought to trial for heresy. Among other things, he denied the infallibility and sufficiency of the Scriptures. He had been acquitted by his presbytery; but upon an appeal to the General Assembly of 1893 he was finally convicted and suspended from the ministry. On similar charges Professor Smith of Lane Seminary in Cincinnati was convicted by his presbytery and the Assembly sustained the conviction. However, these actions, commendable though they were, now are seen to have been merely a meteor-like flash of orthodoxy across a darkening Liberal sky.

A brief decade later another point in the descent was reached. A movement was on foot to unite the Church with a smaller Presbyterian body, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. This was "descent" because although the latter was Presbyterian in government, it was not Reformed in doctrine, whereas the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. was supposed to be Reformed.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church had been founded in 1810 by a group which separated from the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. on doctrinal grounds. Around the turn

of the century there had been a great increase in membership due to a revival, and ministers having both the educational and doctrinal qualifications required by the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. were at a premium. In fact, there were not enough. Those, therefore, who were soon to form the Cumberland Church urged that the requirements for ministers be lowered. When the General Assembly refused to change the ministerial requirements the dissenting group left the Church body and, setting up their own standards, formed the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Though the reason for this group's lack of insistence on the doctrinal soundness of their ministers had been apparent from the first, the evidence was incontrovertible when they adopted their doctrinal standards in 1813. They used the Westminster Confession of Faith with, they said, the fatalism left out. In other words they were an Arminian, not a Reformed church.

Accordingly, in 1903, in order to prepare the way for union with that body, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. revised its doctrinal standards so as to satisfy the Arminian church. To the original Westminster Confession of Faith they added two chapters and a "Declaratory Statement," and altered three chapters. These changes may be found in any copy of the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. published since that time.

It is well, perhaps, to make a brief examination now of these revisions. They are very important, for by them the Church made it possible for Arminians to be ministers, elders, and deacons in good standing in the Church. In other words, the Church was no longer uncompromisingly Reformed. These are serious charges, but they are verified in the first place by the willingness of the Cumberland Church to unite after the

revisions were made. The union was consummated in 1906, but let us examine the revisions ourselves. We shall just note a few of the details briefly.

There is then, first, a change in Chapter 16, Section 7, on the works of unregenerate men. The section deals with the total depravity of man. The original form says that though the works of unregenerate men may be “of good use both to themselves and others” they are nevertheless “sinful and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God.” The revised form of the section both omits the statement that the works of unregenerate men are “sinful, and cannot please God,” and also says that these works are not only useful, but also “praiseworthy.” It is quite patent that a thing which is not pleasing to God is certainly not praiseworthy. Then, too, the revised form fails to do justice to the omission of these works. It says merely that that is “sinful and displeasing unto God,” whereas the original form more accurately said they are “more sinful, and displeasing unto God.” The effect of the change is a weakening of the force of God’s condemnation upon the works of the unregenerate man. It can be seen how this new form was more acceptable to the Cumberland Church than the old.

Of the two chapters which were added to the Confession—Chapters 34 and 35—the latter is perhaps the more important. Chapter 34, “Of the Holy Spirit,” is dangerous because of what it does not say, rather than for what it does say. That is, what it says is all right; it simply does not say enough. This omission is significant in view of the clearer statements in the rest of the Confession. The omissions are obviously purposeful; they are to create ambiguity, thus permitting either a Calvinistic

or an Arminian interpretation. The purpose of all these revisions of 1903 must always be kept in mind, viz., union with the Arminian Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Chapter 35 is entitled "Of the Love of God and Missions." It is pure, unadulterated Arminianism. There is not one statement in it which could not receive the most wholehearted support of the most ardent Methodist or Lutheran. Though indeed God loves "the world" and gave His Son "that whosoever believeth in him might have everlasting life," yet it would seem that if the doctrine of election were to be brought in anywhere it would be in connection with a chapter dealing with God's love and missions, for the proof of God's love is that He "hath chosen us . . . before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Also the reason the great missionary Paul was told to remain longer in Corinth to preach on his second missionary journey was that God had "much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). As to the redemptive work of Christ, the standard Arminian position is taken in this chapter. It says that Christ merely "provided" a way of life and salvation for all. The manner in which that salvation is to be applied to the individual is left entirely open. In fact, the plain implication is that redemption is to be applied by man's free choice. The Westminster Confession says that Christ's elect people are "by him . . . redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified," and that "to all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same." The Scriptures say, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

In examining the "Declaratory Statement" we find the same weakness and tendency. The "Statement" is made as a "formally expressed . . . disavowal" of some inferences drawn from the Confession of Faith. Among other things it attacks Chapter 3,

which deals with “God’s Eternal Decree.” Instead of the forthright declaration of the predestination of some to everlasting life and others to eternal death contained in Chapter 3, there is here employed an ambiguous reference to God’s eternal decree being held “in harmony with the doctrine of His love to all mankind.” The Arminian can subscribe to this also.

It is obvious, therefore, that these 1903 revisions provided for the entrance, in good standing, of an Arminian ministry, thereby driving home the wedge of naturalism within the Church. Calvinism alone goes the whole way in declaring a supernatural Christianity. For the Calvinist, and according to the Westminster Confession, salvation is all of God. For the Arminian, and according to these revisions of the Confession of Faith, salvation is part of God and part of man. God, he says, provided it; man must apply it. Man is, then, in the last analysis, sovereign. By these revisions of its creed the Church has thus effected a compromise with naturalism. We shall see what fruit the grafted tree bears, and that without changing the creed further the “compromise” has become “adoption.”

The effect of these changes was then allowed to work itself out in the life of the church until by 1918–20 the spirit of compromise had so permeated the denomination that a “plan of organic union” with other Protestant bodies, presented at that time by the Rev. Dr. J. Ross Stevenson, was passed by some 100 presbyteries—or over one-third of the Church. This may not at first be shocking to some, but when the basis of this proposed union is seen its appalling character will be plain. Having compromised in 1903 on certain distinctively Reformed doctrines, the movement now had grown to the point where the Church would compromise on the “generally Christian” doctrines. The credal basis of the proposed union

had become so inclusive that any liberal, even the so-called “high priest of Modernism,” Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, could subscribe to it readily.

This creedal basis was the “desire to share, as a common heritage, the faith of the Christian Church, which has from time to time found expression in great historical statements”; and a common “belief in God our Father; in Jesus Christ His only Son our Savior; in the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Comforter; in the Holy Catholic Church, through which God’s eternal purpose of salvation is to be proclaimed and the kingdom of God is to be realized on earth; in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing God’s revealed will; and the life eternal.”

What could be a more loose statement of truth than this? Many people who are not Christians mistakenly think God is their Father. The Modernist will say that Jesus was the most divine of all men and thus can be called the “only Son,” and he will call Christ his Savior because He taught him to save himself. The Liberal can interpret the phrase “the kingdom of God is to be realized on earth” so as to warrant the preaching of a purely moralistic religion. And to say that the Old and New Testaments *contain* God’s will is a far cry from saying that the Old and New Testaments *are* God’s will. Almost any Modernist will say the former. None will say the latter. The plan of union provided for the presence of these unbelievers in the fellowship of the Church. In 1903 Arminians had been admitted. Now, in 1918–20, more than one-third of the Church was ready to receive those who were at variance with historic Christianity.

These things, however, were not unobserved by some of the watchmen on Jerusalem’s walls. They saw that the Church was

fast decaying, and that if the process were allowed to continue the Church would crumble into complete ruin. Something must be done to stem the tide of Modernism threatening to undate the Church. It was no longer just a defense of Calvinism against Arminianism that was needed; that time had passed, and the Arminians had won. What was now needed was a defense of the very essentials of the Christian faith. Preaching in the First Church, New York City, Dr. Fosdick had denied some of these essentials and had left that pulpit because of this. However, there was an unmistakable undercurrent of sympathy for his position throughout the denomination.

Accordingly, in 1923 the General Assembly felt it necessary to reemphasize the necessity of its ministry holding to the basic truths of Christianity. It did this by singling out five particular doctrines—the infallibility of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, Christ’s bodily resurrection, and His miracles—and saying that each is “an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards.”

Now it might be thought that this declaration by the Assembly would have been received with rejoicing and gladness by every person in the Church. And most certainly it would be so received by every true Christian. But was that the case? No! On the contrary, within a year there appeared a nefarious document signed by over 1300 of the ministers in the Church which protested against the staunch witness of the 1923 General Assembly to the gospel and declared that the five verities were but men’s “theories,” not necessarily the teaching of God’s Word.

Indeed, the Affirmation explicitly says in the last paragraph of Section 1 that “there is no assertion in the Scriptures that

their writers were kept from error"! The Bible's claim to be the Word of God, however, patently rules out any form of error. But not satisfied with the statement of Section 1, the Affirmationists go beyond that and tell us that this doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is actually a dangerous thing, for it "impairs their supreme authority for faith and life." The paragraph from which we have just quoted dealt solely with the Scriptures. Section 4, however, takes up all these doctrines together: ". . . we are opposed to any attempt to elevate these five doctrinal statements, or any of them, to the position of tests for ordination or for good standing in our Church."

In 1903 a definite cleavage had appeared in the Church between Calvinists and Arminians. But now in 1924 a new cleavage, though actually existing before, had been revealed. It went to the very heart of Christianity. The Affirmationists were definitely heretics from the faith and at odds with the essentials of the Church's constitution. They should have been tried and expelled. But alas, the watchmen had fallen asleep. There was none to cry the alarm. Nothing was done. In 1893 the Church had suspended Professor Briggs for heresy; now the Church had so degenerated that it embraced fondly over 1300 of her ministers who boldly vaunted their heresies. Over thirteen per cent of the Church's ministry! Moreover, the 1300-odd names did not represent the total number of such ministers, for many others who held the same views, including some of the best known and unashamed Modernists in the Church, did not sign the Affirmation. Thus there were now two armies in the Church, drawn up for combat. The one, Orthodox, with the message of everlasting life; the other, Modernists, with a message bringing eternal death. Which was to be the victor? Each held to mutually exclusive religions. Which would determine

the Church's message in the future? These were questions to which history alone would give the answer. That answer was not long in coming.

In 1924 one of the leaders of the orthodox army, the Rev. Dr. Clarence E. Macartney, had been elected Moderator of the General Assembly, and the 1925 Assembly declared that the New York Presbytery had erred in licensing two candidates who were unable to affirm belief in the Virgin Birth of our Lord. But Dr. Macartney's election was the last appearance of a champion of the orthodox cause in the Moderatorial chair, and never since 1925 have the orthodox forces been in control of the Permanent Judicial Commission, which tries questions of discipline. Not once in the decade and a half since then to the present time has there been an uncompromisingly orthodox Moderator or Permanent Judicial Commission!

The Church organization, then, had come into the hands of the Modernists. Would the Modernists, therefore, determine the future message of the Church? The orthodox group was declaring the message of the Bible from its pulpits; the Modernists were preaching their message from their pulpits. Because their messages were diametrically opposed they could not long remain together. Which was to replace the other?

The ministry of the church was of course trained in the seminaries which were under the control of the denomination. Some of them, like Auburn and Union (N. Y.) had been weak from their founding. In fact, the very reason for their inception was that Princeton was too orthodox. But there were other seminaries which had been mainly orthodox but had gradually grown weaker. Of the thirteen seminaries in existence at this time Princeton Seminary alone stood out strongly and firmly for the orthodox position. With men on its faculty like

William Brenton Greene, Robert Dick Wilson, Casper Wistar Hodge, Geerhardus Vos, William Park Armstrong, J. Gresham Machen, and Oswald T. Allis, it was a veritable Gibraltar which had withstood the pounding of the seas of unbelief since the time of its first professor, Archibald Alexander. From its halls had poured forth the main supply of the orthodox ministry in the church. And if the school continued in its traditional line of teaching there would still be filtering into the church each year 40 or 50 orthodox young men who, though they represented only about one quarter of each year's total, were nevertheless, a sizeable number.

Therefore, with the wisdom of a serpent but not the harmlessness of a dove, a movement was begun to reorganize that great institution so as to introduce different theological views through professors newly appointed to its faculty, to pass these views thence to the students, and finally into the church's ministry. By this time the Modernist forces had grown so much in number and power that in 1929 the reorganization was actually brought about. Men were put on the Board of Trustees who were favorable to the position taken in the Auburn Affirmation. In fact, two of the members of the Board were themselves signers of the Affirmation. To the faculty were then called men whose teachings were a serious departure from historic Christianity. The latest appointments of that kind were of Emil Brunner, and E. G. Homrighausen. The opposition of Brunner (a theologian even more liberal than Karl Barth) to such major Christian doctrines as man's creation and fall as historical events, was well known at the time of his invitation to be guest professor in the department of Systematic Theology for the year 1938–39. The appointment of Homrighausen to the chair of Christian Education was the

appointment of a liberal whose many theological fluctuations, though they do not reflect an unsound mind, unmistakably evince an unsound theology. The addition of these men to Princeton's faculty reflects the success of the reorganization performed in 1929. A storm, such as had never arisen before, had torn away the foundations of the lighthouse, and it had crumbled and slipped into the sea. The question as to which forces would determine the future message of the church had been answered. From now on, nowhere within the seminaries of the church could a young man, preparing for the gospel ministry, receive a thorough orthodox training.

In this deplorable fact lies the explanation of the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, in the early autumn of that year. This institution was independent of the jurisdiction of the church so as to be free to teach to its students the doctrines for which "old" Princeton had so staunchly stood, and for which the "new" Princeton had no sympathy. From Princeton's faculty to this new seminary came the brilliant gifts and scholarship of Robert Dick Wilson, J. Gresham Machen, and Oswald T. Allis, and others of equally sound convictions from other sources. Among those coming to its Board of Trustees from the old Princeton's Board of Directors were its first president, the beloved Rev. Dr. Frank H. Stevenson, and Dr. Clarence E. Macartney. The watchmen on the walls had awakened.

Then followed in quick succession a series of portentous events. In 1932 appeared a book entitled *Re-Thinking Missions* which was actually a report by an interdenominational committee about foreign mission work. This book revealed its authors to have no conception of the finality and exclusiveness of Christianity set forth in John 14:6, "no man cometh unto

the Father, but by me.” Instead, the report favored an eclectic religion composed of the good parts of all religions. One quotation will serve to give the central thrust of the book. The writers say of the missionary, he “will look forward not to the destruction of these religions (of Asia), but to their continued coexistence with Christianity, each stimulating the other’s growth toward the ultimate goal, unity in the completest religious truth.” Yet though among the Presbyterian representatives on the committee responsible for this book were two members of the Board of Foreign Missions, nothing was done to remove them.

The book, however, served one good purpose. It aroused the watchmen to further action, and, in particular, the one who was to become the leader of the orthodox forces in the church, the Rev. Dr. J. Gresham Machen, world-famed as a defender of the Christian faith, and Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary.

He felt that something had to be done to stem the fast-rising tide of unbelief in the church. Accordingly, in the year following the publication of *Re-Thinking Missions* (1933) Dr. Machen proposed to his presbytery an overture to be presented to the General Assembly asking that the members of the Board of Foreign Missions be believers in the absolute exclusiveness of Christianity and in the “five essentials” mentioned in the declaration of the 1923 General Assembly. He showed conclusively that both on the Board and among the missionaries were incontrovertible instances of Modernism. But seemingly he asked too much, for the proposed overture was turned down successively by Presbytery and General Assembly. Others, orthodox like Dr. Machen, uncovered further evidence of unbelief among the missionaries and on the Board, but nothing was

done. Neither was anything done about removing Modernists from positions on the field and on the Board even when the Rev. Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse returned from a world tour of the Church's mission stations with a verified report that only "the vast majority of our missionary body is personally devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ." A "vast majority" is not enough for a true Christian Church! Dr. Barnhouse furthermore admitted that the Modernism which he was able to discover was not nearly the total sum of such belief, because many would not make their views known to him. Two signers of the Auburn Affirmation were on the Board and their policies were being followed closely; the Modernists were to be allowed to remain, and any resignations of such missionaries were to be accepted "with regret"! Modernism having gained control after a struggle of 125 years was certainly not going to relinquish its hold.

Investigations of the other Boards of the Church by individuals followed. It was found that they were in an even worse state than the Foreign Board. That Board, with all its Modernism, was the best of the three. The Board of Christian Education was found to have three "Auburn Affirmationists" on it, and the Board of National Missions nine. Some have said, "Why appeal to the Auburn Affirmation for proof of unbelief in the Church? That happened 15 years ago; it is a dead issue." But as long as those who signed their names to that document do not retract their affirmation of unbelief, and remain in the church and its offices, it is a very live issue indeed! Its effect is clearly seen in the teaching promoted by the Boards. Within the last year the Rev. Dr. Paul C. Payne, an Auburn Affirmationist, has been made General Secretary of the Board of Christian Education. One need only examine the Sunday School materials being fed the children to realize its unchristian character.

One instance must suffice here. On September 17, 1939, the young people studied the life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer. In the lesson material he is held up for the acclaim of every Christian and called "one of the greatest and most Christ-like Christians of this generation." Yet he believes, he says in his autobiography, *Out of My Life and Thought*, that the historical Jesus must be accepted as "capable of error." Needless to say, the Board of National Missions, with nine Auburn Affirmationists on it, was at least equally corrupt.

We have seen, so far, that unbelief among the ministers of the Church had grown to such an alarming extent by 1933 that all the Seminaries in the Church, from which its future ministers would come, and all the Boards, which controlled much of the teaching of the Church, and the General Assemblies after 1924 were now in the hands, and under the control of the Modernists. There remained now but one more step to take before the Church would be in a state of thorough apostasy from the Christian religion. Let us have the picture clearly in mind. The church—seminaries, boards, and assemblies—was preaching a religion other than Christianity, though as yet Christianity had not been officially condemned. The Church was cooperating with the anti-Christian Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. It had allowed men within the Church, who denied the essentials of the Christian faith, to remain, and even put them in positions of honor, power, and trust. It had licensed and ordained new ministers who denied Christianity. It now remained for the Church to go one step further and condemn Christianity.

That final, fatal step was taken at the 148th General Assembly in Syracuse, N.Y., in June 1936.

While the investigation of the Boards of Christian

Education and National Missions had been going on, and after the organization of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions following the refusal of the Church to reform the official Board of Foreign Missions, the Church had instituted disciplinary action against certain ministers in the Church. Some were directed against members of the "Independent Board" which was claimed to be illegal. Dr. Machen had been one of these members. He and his colleagues had been condemned because they had not obeyed a mandate issued by the 1934 General Assembly which said that it was as obligatory for a Christian to give to the official boards of the Church, no matter what they taught, as to partake of the Lord's Supper. The mandate declares: "A church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church is in exactly the same position with reference to the constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper . . ." This is clearly an elevation of the word of man to equality with the Word of God. When Dr. Machen realized that to support the Modernist-riddled Board would be to commit sin, and chose rather to obey the Word of God, the Church suspended him from the ministry. The church had again refused to condemn falsehood. Instead, it condemned Truth.

There were, however, two other cases of at least equal importance. The Rev. John J. DeWaard, then of Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, was tried, and his relation with his congregation dissolved, because he would not recommend to his congregation that they support the Foreign Board's Modernism. Furthermore, the late Rev. Arthur F. Perkins was tried and suspended because he had organized a Bible conference which

could not be influenced by the Modernism of the Church!

In each one of these cases the men had been condemned, not because of opposition to Christ and His Word, but because they “stood for the Lord and His Teaching that “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” The borderline between a true Christian Church and a false one, after a struggle which began in 1801, had finally been reached and passed. The tree had brought forth fruit.

It is interesting now to note, in closing this brief sketch of the decline of the Church to its death, that instances of departure became more and more frequent during the passage of the years, as unbelievers grew in numbers and power in the Church. It is like the infrequent firing of a cannon by an inexperienced crew, but increasing in frequency with each shot until finally the shells come forth almost with machine-gun rapidity. A table conveniently shows this, beginning with the first defection:

1801	Union with General Association of the State of Connecticut
1869 (68 years later)	Union with New School group
1903–06 (34 years later)	Revision of Confession of Faith Union with Cumberland Presbyterian Church
1918–20 (15 years later)	Plan of organic union
1924 (6 years later)	Auburn Affirmation
1929 (5 years later)	Princeton Seminary reorganized

1933 (4 years later)	Refusal to abolish Modernism from Foreign Missions
1936 (3 years later)	Conviction of Bible defenders
1937 to the present	Continual elevation of Modernists to high position

From this hasty survey of the decline and fall of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. it has been seen that the history of that denomination often referred to as “glorious” is not so glorious after all. Certainly its climax was most inglorious, as well as sad.

### III. Is the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Apostate?

It has been seen that the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is corrupt from the core outward. Because of this corruption, what should be done? Certainly something should be done, for Christians must never sit idly by in the presence of sin. There are clearly only two alternatives from which a Christian in that church may choose. Either he should seek to purge the church of its sin, or he should separate himself from the church. Both alternatives aim ultimately at the same thing, namely, the separation of the individual Christian from sin. This is a proper motive. But are both alternatives legitimate means to that end? It will be the purpose of the next few pages to show that in this case both are not legitimate means. It will be shown that the church is apostate—a false church—and therefore that a Christian, in obedience to the commands of God, must leave the church. This will be proved by showing what the duty of a Christian Church is, and then that the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. performs the very opposite function.

Among professing Christians throughout the world there is no disagreement on the position that a Christian must not belong to an apostate church. The difference of opinion enters with the question, When is a church apostate? To put it another way, When must a Christian separate himself from his church?

Three answers usually are given to these questions. The first is that a church is apostate when it is irrevocably committed to falsehood. But there is no such church. The Protestant Church exists today because we believe that the Roman Catholic Church is apostate. This belief was the cause of the Reformation. But under the above definition not even that Church is apostate, for "with God, all things are possible."

The second answer says that a church is apostate when it has altered its creed. This position, too, is untenable, for what is it that makes a church a church? Is it not the fact that it is composed of human beings? A written creed without a group of adherents is not a church, but a group of Christians without a written creed may be a church. A creed is nothing more or less than a statement of what the individuals in the church claim to be and believe. The professions of our mouths, however, do not make us what we are, but as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he." No one would be foolish enough to say that a sack marked "WHEAT" is a sack of wheat if it is full of barley. So also, a church's character is sometimes indicated by its label, but never determined by it. The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is no less apostate because it has not changed its creed.

The third answer to the question, When is a church apostate?, is that it is apostate when it forces its members to sin. The very genus of Christianity is that Christ's people should be delivered from sin both in "the life that now is and that

which is to come.” A church, therefore, whose practices contravene that purpose by forcing members to commit sin, is not a true Christian Church. That is why Martin Luther, after having striven bravely to reform the Roman Church, finally had to leave: the Pope would have forced him to teach things against God’s word.

Calvin speaks clearly on this subject of the true and false church: “As soon as falsehood has made a breach in the fundamentals of religion, and the system of necessary doctrine is subverted—the certain consequence is the ruin of the church, as there is an end of a man’s life when his throat is cut, or his heart is mortally wounded . . . Besides, if the true church be ‘the pillar and ground of the truth,’ that certainly can be no Church where delusion and falsehood have usurped the dominion” (*Institutes* 4.2.1). In sections 9 and 10 of the same chapter he shows why it is sinful to remain in such a church by drawing an analogy to the corrupt priesthood in the time of Jeroboam, king of Israel. He acknowledges that the prophets then “neither offered up sacrifices apart from others, nor held separate assemblies for prayer.” The reason was that they had the express command of God to assemble in Solomon’s temple. But he then points out two very important factors: first, that in doing this the prophets “were not constrained to join in any superstitious worship; on the contrary, they engaged in no service that was not of divine institution;” and secondly, that when “frequently their assemblies [the Jews’ and Israelites’] were iniquitous meetings (Isa. 1:13–14), a concurrence in which were as criminal as a renunciation of God . . . [they] found themselves under a necessity of withdrawing from all connection with those assemblies.” Further, in section 7 Calvin asks, “Who would dare to give the appellation

of a Church, without any exception, to that society where the Word of God is openly and fearlessly trampled under foot?" Though written nearly 400 years ago, and against the Roman Catholic Church, these principles apply to the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. today.

The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. represents itself as a branch of Christ's church. As Calvin said, Christ's Church is supposed to be the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., however, is undermining the truth. In that Church "delusion and falsehood have usurped the dominion"; in fact, not one conservative can be found in a place of power in the councils of the church-at-large. Certainly no one is foolish enough to hold that there is no orthodoxy in the church—even Calvin admitted that of the Roman Catholic Church; but by rejecting the Word of God and even persecuting those who defend it the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. has "openly and fearlessly trampled under foot the Word of God," and continues to do so today.

For every individual member of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. the importance of this is that he is cooperating in these sins whether he knows it or not. He "is constrained to join" in false worship. If he contributes to the Board of Christian Education he aids the publication of literature which denies that Christ gave His life a ransom to satisfy the justice of God and redeem from their sins all those that call upon Him. If he contributes to the Board of National and Foreign Missions he helps support Modernistic missionaries. Even if he designates his money to sound missionaries, the financial setup of the Boards is such that even his careful designations release to the support of Modernists, money which would otherwise be used for the conservatives to whom the

money was designated. Furthermore, just as much as a man's wife bears his name, so does each member of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. bear the name of that denomination; so also are the actions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. the responsibility of each member. What the denomination does, each member does, whether or not he is a Christian, or a member of a conservative congregation or Presbytery. When the church refused to remove from the Foreign Board and the mission fields those who denied the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, every member of the church who did not fight that action gave his silent but certain assent, for Jesus said, "He that is not for me is against me." And the church ejected those who did fight against the Christ-crucifying refusal. Since every member is a part of "the Church," every member had his part in condemning those men who stood for Christ and His Word. When the Church refused to condemn sin, every member participated. When the church condemned the good, every member participated. The church had forced every member to sin, and does so every day. To remain in the Church in order to reform it would be to commit sin that good might come. In Romans 3:8, God expressly forbids this, no matter how extenuating the circumstances. We must never sin. A Christian Church points out deliverance from sin, but the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. brings sin upon its members. "Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

#### IV. Objections

There are, as is well known, many true Christians, ministers as well as other members, who are still in the Presbyterian

Church in the U. S. A. Some may wonder why! One of the principal reasons is that these Christians do not realize the extent to which unbelief has gone in their church, that the denomination has reached a state of apostasy. But there are other reasons—reasons presented by those who knew at least some of the facts, and even by some who in times past have attacked the unbelief of the Church. These reasons may be classified as “objections” to leaving the church. There are objections purporting to be based on Scripture, and objections simply based on expediency, with no regard for what the Bible says.

Under the former group comes, first, Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43, which says that the tares (unbelievers) growing among the wheat (believers) should not be torn up for fear of tearing up the wheat also. It is said that this parable teaches that the church should be allowed to contain both wheat and tares. But in verse 38 Jesus says he is talking about the “world” not the church. The passage, therefore, does not apply at all. The second passage is Rev. 3:1–2, in which the “angel of the church of Sardis” is told to “be watchful and strengthen the things which remain.” It is said that this command applies to any situation whether to obey leads to disobedience to other commands of the Bible. But God’s Word does not contradict itself. The extreme to which this interpretation can lead may be seen from the fact that one minister who held this view said that he would see nothing wrong with accepting a call to a Catholic church if he could preach what he wanted. A third reference to the Scriptures is the instance of the priests and prophets in the time of Jeroboam with which we dealt earlier in this paper. The fourth passage is 2 Cor. 6:17, “Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate.” It is said that this refers to a specific situation—idolatry in Corinth—and consequent-

ly has nothing to do with us. If this were a true principle we could not use the Gospels because Jesus was talking to the people of that time, and we could not use Paul's epistles because he wrote them to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and others. It disregards the facts that God uses particular situations to set forth general principles, and that His principles are eternal.

Finally, there are those who disregard what the Scriptures say, and maintain that for some reason or other they should remain in the church. This is pure expediency, and expediency often leads to sin since sin is determined by God's holy law, and nothing else. For example, there are those who say, "But look at the fine building we would have to relinquish," and "Think of the endowments we would have to turn over to the modernist machine if we left," and "I would be giving up a big field of service here." All that can be said to these objections is, if they cannot trust God to supply what they would give up for devotion to Him, how can they trust Him to save their souls? What God wants above all other things is obedience (1 Sam. 15:22). Then there are some who, disregarding all history, think the church will get better; there are others who say they are in a "conservative" Presbytery; and there are still others who assert that they "have felt led" to stay in and reform the church. But what has been the progress of the Roman Catholic Church toward betterment? How much better is the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. today than in 1900? Is not the "conservative presbytery" a part of the denomination which is apostate? Furthermore, is not the Bible our only source of guidance? The Bible leads us, whether we "feel" led or not. Let us never depend on our feelings; let us depend only on God and His Word with a wholehearted devotion!

It is asked, Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? Because the members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church believe that God's Word is Truth. Because the members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms interpret that Truth most truly. Because the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. forces each of its members to cooperate in teachings and actions opposed to God's Truth. Because, in other words, to be a member of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is to commit sin. "Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord"!

Would that every Christian in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. might have Philippians 3:8 burned into his very soul, and put aside all other considerations than humble submission to God's Word and say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ!"

Would that they all might sing with the Martin Luther of 1529 and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of 1939,

Let goods and kindred go,  
 This mortal life also;  
 The body they may kill:  
 God's truth abideth still;  
 His kingdom is forever! Amen!

# DISCONTENT!

PAUL WOOLLEY

**E**IGHT YEARS HAVE passed—it seems longer—since those glorious days in 1936 when the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was born. It is not difficult to recapture in spirit the great enthusiasm of that June day in Philadelphia when the church was first constituted. The fervor was high and it rose ever higher because the church was committing itself to an ideal that had been tested and proved through the centuries—the ideal of a Biblical church, its divinely ordained principles drawn directly from the Bible and its modes of operation in matters not Biblically prescribed based upon the experience of the Reformed churches through

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\* Originally published as Paul Woolley, “Discontent!” *The Presbyterian Guardian* 13, no. 14 (July 25, 1944): 213–14.

the ages.

No fads, no newly evolved novelties, no pet ideas of leading individuals were to characterize this church. It was not to emphasize strange notions which had not stood the test of time in relation to the Bible. Its gates were to be as wide as the gates of the new Jerusalem and its path as narrow as the way that leadeth unto life. Its doctrine and its ethics had no other standard than the Word of God.

It was only a year later that a group, which wanted to narrow the stand of the church and make it more intolerant than our Lord and His Word, left its fellowship. It was a sad occasion, and one which neither principle nor history can justify. Perhaps the children will be wiser than the fathers. So it is to be hoped. Thus God preserved the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at its very beginning from un-Biblical fanaticism.

The years that have followed since 1937 have seen slow and constant growth of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Its stability has been tested and proved. Its love of the Word has been manifest. Its steady attention to the privilege of preaching the gospel and ministering to the saints has been demonstrated.

But there is now, in this year 1944, discontent within the church. Now discontent can be of two kinds—healthy and malignant. This discontent is of the second kind as well as of the first.

An American writer has recently pointed out that sooner or later any organization or entity in human society will be seized upon by persons bent upon exploiting it for purposes other than that for which it was originally intended. One of the great sources of discontent in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—malignant discontent—is the lack of numerical growth. The church does not increase rapidly. This is true. The church was

not founded for the purpose of growing rapidly. The Bible gives no warrant for believing that a church in this day and age should grow rapidly. But rapid growth is an American enthusiasm; it is a national sport. Other churches—freak churches, specialty churches, personal churches—grow rapidly. Therefore let us bend all our energies, say these friends, to make the Orthodox Presbyterian Church grow rapidly. Not only should it grow rapidly itself, they hold, it should also grow rapidly by joining other organizations. Not only should it grow by joining other organizations, it should also grow by swallowing up other organizations.

Now as the writer referred to above has indicated, Gresham's law applies in spiritual matters as well as in monetary affairs. It is doubtless a result of the sinfulness and depravity of man that this is so. Gresham's law says that when debased money is put into circulation along with good money it will soon drive the good money out of use. So here. The urge for numbers, for growth, will drive the great, important, spiritual, Biblical principles out of mind and out of action. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church exists to perpetuate, maintain and propagate the principles of the Bible. The Bible contains no principle which emphasizes large numbers, or rapidity of growth, as a criterion of a true church or as a major aim for such a church.

When these factors become major aims of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the church may be assured that the really valuable results from the church will immediately begin proportionately to decrease.

The question is really a very simple one. Does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have a growing revival of the preaching, teaching, and application of the Biblical and

Reformed Faith in these United States in the year 1944? Or does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have many members and much money and read about itself often in the newspapers? It can have one, but it cannot have both.

There is a healthy discontent, as well as a malignant one, within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is concerned with two things: lack of enthusiasm for the Reformed Faith, and lack of completeness in its presentation.

In the eighteenth century, enthusiasm meant practically what emotional fanaticism means now. But modern enthusiasm is a different thing. It is essential to the propagation of any enterprise. Did a man's love ever mean anything to a girl if it was not enthusiastic? The question she asks him (mentally if not aloud) is: Do you think I am the most important girl in the whole world? If he does, he has her on his mind constantly, and is doing things for her or about her. It ought to be the same way with the Reformed Faith among the ministers and ruling elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The maintenance and propagation of the Reformed Faith should be their chief love. I think there is reason for a healthy discontent here. We have not yet reached this standard, I fear. Let us make the faith the love of our hearts.

There is also room for real progress in the completeness with which the faith is preached in our pulpits. Obviously, the degree of well-rounded presentation that is attained varies with every pulpit. I have made no statistical study of the preaching in Orthodox Presbyterian pulpits. I have sent out no questionnaire. But from my conversations with them I can say that there are many people in our pews who have no notion of the faith as a system. Has it ever been put together for them? Do they realize the glorious truth that everything that

happens happens in accordance with the eternal plan of God? Nothing has been left at loose ends. God is in control. That seems to me one of the most needed truths of our day.

Do our people hear, for example, about the mystical union of the believer with Christ, about the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Scriptures, about the meaning of the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper, about the personal return of our Lord and the events connected therewith? I would not be surprised if preaching on these subjects would round out the faith for many.

The times are serious. The church is in a dangerous position. Can we concentrate our discontent on the healthy side, on increasing our enthusiasm and comprehensiveness? If not, I tremble for the usefulness of this particular instrument of God's grace. But if so, God's abundant blessing is awaiting us. The Apostle said, "For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).



# WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

R. B. KUIPER

I WAS ASKED TO deliver an historical address on this occasion. It is clear that a sermon is not expected. It is also clear that, while in a general way my subject has been assigned, its formulation was left to me.

It occurred to me to speak on "Birth Pangs and Growing Pains." That subject has much in its favor. It surely would be

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\* Kuiper's "What is Right with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" was first published (in two parts) in the PG 15:21 (November 25, 1946) 323-24, 333 and 15:16 (December 10, 1946) 341-42, 343. It was also reprinted in *The Presbyterian Guardian* in PG 35:5 (June 1966): 76-80.

true to fact. It might be judged, however, to be somewhat lacking in dignity. So I dismissed it.

For just a moment—no more than a moment—I thought of speaking on the question, “What’s Wrong with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” That theme would have proved easy to develop because much is wrong with our church, but it is exceedingly trite. Our enemies have worked overtime at it, and some of us have worked at it almost as hard. Besides, while a measure of introspection is good, and even necessary, for both an individual and a church, concentration on one’s faults and weaknesses can be overdone. I have known persons who overdid it to the point of morbidity and even insanity. May God forbid that our church should head in that direction.

I have chosen rather to discuss the question, “What’s Right with Our Church?” And since, as I said, this is to be an historical address, my precise theme is: “What Is Historically Right with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?”

A great many things are right with our church, so many that I cannot possibly enumerate all of them. It is a foregone conclusion that, when I have finished, some of you—perhaps all of you—will think of things that I might have said, and perhaps should have said, but did not actually say. I have two excuses to offer: first, I cannot think of everything; second, I cannot say everything I think.

The right things about our church that I propose to name may conveniently be brought under two heads:

1. Our Church Is Broad in the Good Sense of That Term.
2. Our Church Is Narrow in the Good Sense of That Term.

The question arises at once whether the term *narrow* can be

used in a good sense and whether the term *broad* can be used in any but a good sense. Nowadays hardly anybody wants to be narrow; almost everybody wants to be broad. A great many folk regard narrowness as an unmitigated evil, broadness as an unqualified good. It occurs to me, however, that Jesus once spoke of a narrow way and a broad way, and said that the narrow way leads to life, the broad way to destruction. Surely, it follows that narrowness is not always an evil, nor is broadness always a good. And so I am on solid ground when I speak of both narrowness and broadness in the good sense of these terms.

## A Broad Church

When saying that our church is broad in the good sense of that term, I have several things in mind. I shall select three.

It has been said that there are present in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church three traditions—the American Presbyterian tradition, the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, and the Dutch Reformed tradition. Who will deny the fact?

But when it is intimated that the presence of these three traditions in one denomination constitutes a liability to that denomination, I beg to differ sharply. I rather consider it a distinct potential asset. Does it not present the opportunity to combine all that is best in these three traditions? Surely, very few churches, if any, have ever had such an opportunity. I do not hesitate to call it golden.

May I remind you that Dr. Machen was responsible for the presence of these three traditions among us? He took a leading part in choosing, among others, a true-blue Scot and three men of Dutch ancestry for the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary. And it was he who not only invited

these men into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but urged them, pleaded with them, to come in. Will you pardon a very brief personal reference? One of the last things Dr. Machen told me before his lips were sealed in death was that I should enter the Orthodox Presbyterian Church without delay. When the overwhelmingly sad news of his untimely decease reached me, I could no longer deny his wish.

And may I not remind you of the incomparably more significant fact that Calvinism is cosmopolitan? It cannot help being, for it is consistent Christianity, and Christ is the Savior of the world. Calvinism partakes of Christian universalism. The earliest history of Calvinism bears this out. In the Reformation period Lutheranism remained confined by and large to Germany and the Scandinavian countries, but Calvinism spread from Switzerland through France to the Low Countries, and across the channel to Great Britain, and at the same time it fanned out eastward through Germany to Hungary and Bohemia. Calvin himself was born, neither in Holland, nor Scotland, nor yet in America, but in France, and most of his labors he performed in Switzerland. Calvinism far transcends all national boundaries. It is supranational.

What then shall we do about these traditions? Shall we fight each for his own, and against the others? God forbid. Shall we tolerate one another's peculiarities? I suppose so, but that will not suffice for true unity. Nothing short of love will hold us together. Let me remind you of pagan Cicero's distinction between friendship and love. He defined friendship as a benevolent attitude toward those who are like us, and love as a benevolent attitude toward those who differ from us. If that is a correct description of the love which flows from the common grace of God, what differences will not Christian love

surmount?

Also, let us refuse to be traditionalists. Traditions may be valuable—some are and some are not—but traditionalism is an evil. Did not Jesus rebuke the scribes and Pharisees of his day for their traditionalism? Instead of clinging tenaciously to views and customs handed down to us by our elders, let us settle our differences in the light of the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Then we shall indeed be in a position to combine all that is best in our differing traditions, and thus our church will be greatly enriched.

## Christian Liberty

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has repeatedly acknowledged the principle of Christian liberty and has thus manifested itself to be broad in the good sense of that term.

The mere mention of Christian liberty causes some of you to worry. You see smoke and smell liquor, and you wonder whether I may not be about to utter some awful indiscretion. Forget it. Christian liberty is something big. It is truly broad.

It has reference to doctrine. Within the Reformed faith there is an area which has room for differences of opinion. To be sure, this area has its boundaries, but its existence may not be denied. For instance, infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism have flourished alongside each other in the Reformed churches, and their respective adherents have usually found it possible to bear with one another. Much the same thing is true of premillenarianism, amillennialism, and supernaturalistic postmillennialism.

Does this mean that, after all, the Reformed churches have been willing to compromise a little with error—that they have been tolerant of error, provided error was not too serious? I

say with all the emphasis at my command that it means nothing of the kind. All error is serious. To compromise with any degree of error is sin. I have heard it said that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church tolerates premillenarians. Although I am not myself a premillenarian, I resent that statement. If I were a premillenarian, I should not want to be tolerated in this church nor in any other. A stigma attaches to being tolerated. Would you know why premillenarians, amillenarians, and supernaturalistic postmillenarians stand and labor shoulder to shoulder in our church? The reason is very simple. It is not at all that we are willing to condone a mild type of heresy, but that, whatever our individual convictions may be, as a church we have not yet arrived at certainty that any one of these groups is a hundred percent right. Our church is still seeking more light. Obviously this type of Christian liberty has nothing in common with doctrinal indifference.

Christian liberty also concerns the Christian life. There are practices concerning the propriety of which there have historically been differences of opinion among serious-minded Christians and, more specifically, among Reformed moralists. In the field of Reformed ethics, as in that of Reformed doctrine, there is an area in which there is room for differences. To be sure, this area too has its boundaries, but its existence must be recognized. I hardly need to name any practices that lie within that area. All of you are familiar with some, and no doubt every one of you engages in some. The difference among us is not that some of us engage in such practices while others abstain, but that some of us engage in some, others in other of such practices.

Does this mean that we are tolerant of so-called little sins? God forbid. Calvinism is not a whit less insistent on purity

of life than on purity of doctrine. But in such matters as were alluded to, we of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church respect each other's consciences, refrain from judging one another, recognize that each of us stands or falls to his own master, take heed not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh, and aim so to live in love as not to offend anyone.

That, too, is broadness in the good sense of the term.

## Our Mission

What is the function of the Christian church? Some say: to bring the gospel to the unsaved. Others reply: to build up its members in the faith. If you give either of these answers to the exclusion of the other, you are narrow in the evil sense of that term. If you give both answers, you may be credited with a measure of broadness in the good sense of that term.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has ever given both answers.

It is a sad but undeniable fact that some who helped found our church had little doctrinal background. The reason was that they came from the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., which for many decades had almost completely neglected the indoctrination of its members. To be sure, they were not so blind as to fail to recognize the blatant heresy pervading that church. Yet their doctrinal eyesight was not keen. Awareness of this situation prompted Dr. Machen to say that it was the solemn duty of our church to educate a whole new generation of Christians. We have tried and are trying to perform this arduous task. Most of our preachers do much doctrinal preaching. All of them should. And, by the way, there is no good reason why doctrinal preaching should be dry as dust and abstract. There is every good reason why it should be

thoroughly practical and scintillatingly interesting. In most of our churches there is not only a Sunday school, but systematic doctrinal instruction is given the children of the covenant in Catechism classes. That should be done in all of our churches. At least a few of our pastors conduct classes in doctrine for communicant members. The rest of our pastors should follow suit. As a denomination we are rapidly becoming conscious of the necessity of Christian day schools for our children. Several of such schools have already been established by voluntary associations of Orthodox Presbyterian parents, and more are in the immediate offing.

That our church is strong for missions is a matter of common knowledge. As was already pointed out, zeal for truly Presbyterian missions became the immediate occasion of the founding of our church. And ever since its founding it has conducted a full missionary program. I have no statistics available, and I am not greatly interested in statistics, for they are often misleading, but I seriously question whether there is a denomination on this continent, or for that matter on any continent, which for its size and its strength is more active in missions than is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Right now we have mission fields on three continents: America, Asia and Africa. Small and weak though we are, utterly insignificant in the eyes of almost all other churches, we count the world as our field. During the recent war those of our ministers who served as chaplains in the armed forces—and many did— encircled the globe. We are bending every effort to hasten the day when the kingdom of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and when an innumerable multitude will sing, “Thou, O Lamb, wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and

nation.”

That again is broadness in the good sense—may I not say, in the best—of that term.

## A Narrow Church

When saying that our church is narrow in the good sense of that term, I have reference especially to the matter of doctrine. Was not the Orthodox Presbyterian Church conceived and born in doctrinal controversy? Doctrinal issues were the occasion of its origination.

Historically, our church has opposed doctrinal error. It has refused even to compromise with error. How Dr. Machen used to din into our ears the behest never to compromise with error. Compromising truth was to his mind equivalent to denying truth. He himself consistently refused to compromise even a little. A certain character has gone down in the history of our country as “the Great Compromiser.” Dr. Machen may well go down in the history of our church as the great noncompromiser.

Positively expressed, our church has historically striven hard to exemplify the biblical description of Christ’s church as “pillar and ground of truth.” What is the meaning of that expression? What is the function of a pillar and of the ground? Obviously, to uphold things. Christ brought his church into being in order that it might uphold the truth. In this world so full of falsehood, that cannot be done without opposing error. Therefore our church has ever been militant in its defense and proclamation of the truth of God. It has declared the truth, both controversially and constructively. It has made the truth in all its whiteness stand out boldly against the black background of error.

In a word, our church is intolerant of error. Intolerance is frequently condemned as a grave sin, while tolerance is advocated as a great virtue. The fact is that the term *tolerance* is a neutral one. Whether tolerance is good or evil depends on that which is tolerated. To tolerate sin is an evil. To tolerate error is sin. But intolerance is usually regarded as evidence of narrowness. It may well be that. Only remember that intolerance of error is evidence of narrowness in the good sense of that term.

## The Birth of the OPC

Where did the Orthodox Presbyterian Church originate? You say that it originated at this very place, in the New Century Club of Philadelphia, on the eleventh day of June in the year of our Lord 1936. That is true in about the same sense in which it is true that the Protestant Reformation began on the thirty-first of October, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his famous ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg. But everybody knows that the roots of the Reformation lie far back of that date. It is equally clear that the roots of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may be traced behind 1936. It is not amiss to say that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was conceived when the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. became tolerant of error. And that happened long ago. Let no one suppose that the church just named was relatively sound and pure until a decade or two before 1936. He who thinks that betrays an utter lack of historical sense. The decadence of a church is a process, usually very slow—almost imperceptibly slow—at first and then gradually accelerated. To name but one date, 1870 is significant in this connection. In that year the Old and New School Presbyterians were merged into one

body, and that merger involved compromise with error.

The doctrinal decadence of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. came to a head in 1924, when some twelve hundred leaders in that denomination affixed their names to the Auburn Affirmation. That infamous document denounced the infallibility of Holy Scripture as a "harmful" doctrine. It also stated as the conviction of the signers that it was unnecessary for a minister in the church to believe in the virgin birth of Christ, his bodily resurrection, or the miracles of the Bible generally. The precious doctrine that Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice by which he expiated sin and satisfied divine justice was further decried as but one of many theories of the atonement and nonessential to the faith. The church was now divided into three parties: the Modernists on the one hand, the Conservatives on the other, and between them the middle-of-the-roaders or indifferentists. The last-named party was by far the most numerous, and more despicable even than the first.

It was inevitable that this doctrinal controversy in the church should affect its seminary at Princeton. And so in the twenties a battle royal was waged at that institution. It has been said that this battle concerned a mere matter of administration. Princeton Theological Seminary was controlled by two boards: a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees. There were those who felt that in the interest of efficient administration these two boards should be merged; others thought otherwise. And that was all there was to it. A more misleading understatement is hardly imaginable. President J. Ross Stevenson had advocated an "inclusive" policy for the seminary. He wanted it to represent not only the conservative wing of the church, but the church as a whole. Now the Board of Directors, which had

much to say about the constituency of the faculty, was conservative, while the Board of Trustees was not. Clearly, it was in the interest of Stevenson's policy of inclusiveness that the former board should be swallowed up by the latter. Precisely that happened. In a word, the issue was a doctrinal one. The conservatives went down to defeat. Princeton Theological Seminary, that erstwhile bulwark of American orthodoxy, was taken over by Modernists and indifferentists. *Ichabod* was written over its doors.

Thus it came to pass that in 1929 Westminster Theological Seminary was founded as the continuation of old Princeton. In a very real sense the seminary which had been put to death at Princeton was resurrected in Philadelphia. Westminster began with a faculty of seven men, four of whom had taught at Princeton. The four were Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, Dr. Oswald T. Allis, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, and Dr. Cornelius Van Til. This seminary contributed incalculably to the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936.

For some time the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had been under fire because of modernism in the board and among its missionaries. Pearl Buck, for instance, once served under this board as missionary in China. It was she who expressed the opinion that, if the bodily resurrection of our Lord should be definitely disproved, that would not matter, for the spiritual values of Christianity would persist just the same. When at last she resigned under conservative fire, the board accepted her resignation with regret. Complaints against the modernism of the Board were lodged with the courts of the church. However these complaints fell on deaf ears. Then conservatives in the church found themselves compelled to organize

the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. This was in 1933.

Before long several members of this board were brought to trial. I do not exaggerate when I assert that their trials constituted one of the greatest travesties of justice in ecclesiastical history. In 1934 the church made the astounding declaration: "A church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church, is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (*Manual of Presbyterian Law for Church Officers and Members*, published by the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. in 1936, p. 115). On that made-to-order and much worse than flimsy ground the defendants were condemned. But never once were they permitted to say in their defense why they had organized the Independent Board. The issue was patently doctrinal, but every doctrinal reference was consistently ruled out by the court as irrelevant.

Here let me quote a significant statement by a Unitarian in the Boston *Evening Transcript* of April 6, 1935. The reference was to the trial of Dr. Machen, the president of the Independent Board, which trial had just been concluded and had resulted in an order for his suspension from the ministry. Said Albert C. Dieffenbach: "No matter what may be said in slovenly contempt about doctrines—that they do not count—the fact is that they are the only things at last that do count. It will always be so. Every great issue in religion throughout history has been in the realm of belief. The weakness, the incoherency and the ineffectualness of any church can be attributed to its lack of great rooted ideas and convictions to give ultimate

meaning to the life of man.” How grave an indictment by a Unitarian of an avowedly Presbyterian church! And how just!

Those members of the Independent Board who had been adjudged guilty by the lower courts of the church appealed to the 1936 General Assembly, which convened in Syracuse, N. Y. When their appeal was brushed aside lightly, it was clear as broad daylight that the time for drastic action had arrived. The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had unmistakably come under the control of modernism and indifferentism. By accepting that control it had denied the truth. This situation demanded drastic action. Any action short of drastic would have betokened compromise and cowardice. On the eleventh day of June, 1936, The Presbyterian Church of America was founded, the church which today is known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

How clear that the beginnings of our church were doctrinal, It came into existence because of the doctrinal collapse of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Basically, the one and only issue that gave rise to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the issue of doctrine. Its founders were intolerant of doctrinal error. They were narrow in the good sense of that term.

## Doctrinal Controversy

The whole story has not been told.

It cannot be doubted that some who united with our church in its early days expected it to be broadly evangelical. It seems not to have occurred to them that this church would insist on being specifically and strictly Reformed or Presbyterian. Nor did they realize that, in order to combat modernism effectively, it would have to be distinctively Reformed, for the reason that of all Christian systems of theology only Calvinism has con-

sistently refused to compromise with naturalism, and hence Calvinism alone is in a position to assail modernism all along the line. It was nothing strange, therefore, that doctrinal differences already emerged at the Second General Assembly of our church in the fall of 1936.

That Assembly concerned itself with adopting the doctrinal standards of our church. Prominent among these standards, of course, is the Westminster Confession of Faith. But the question arose in what precise form the Confession was to be adopted. In the year 1903 the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had, to put the case mildly, watered it down. Negotiations had been under way for union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. A stumbling block was encountered. The Cumberlanders were Arminian in doctrine and therefore objected to the rigorous Calvinism of the Confession. In order to meet them, perhaps less than halfway but nonetheless part of the way, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. adopted certain Arminianizing amendments to the Confession. At our Second General Assembly the question arose whether the Confession of Faith should be adopted with or without these amendments. The Assembly was sharply divided. Lengthy debate ensued, some of it a bit acrimonious. But finally Dr. Machen made a ringing and convincing speech against the Arminianizing amendments. This plea won the day.

A significant development must here be recorded. Little more than half a year later, at the 1937 General Assembly, practically all who had favored the retention of the 1903 amendments parted company with our church. The reason for their departure was avowedly another, and I do not wish to call their veracity into question; but that there were Arminian tendencies among them may be set down as an indisputable

fact, and that these Arminian tendencies may have had some bearing on their departure must be recognized as at least a possibility.

Another doctrinal matter that received attention at the Second General Assembly was the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible. While the Assembly issued no official doctrinal pronouncement on the subject, it is no exaggeration to say that modern dispensationalism—mind you, I did not say premillennialism—was discredited.

How clear that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in its early days was tremendously insistent on sound doctrine and firmly refused to compromise with doctrinal error. It was narrow in the good sense of that term.

In 1936 our church named itself The Presbyterian Church of America. Through the civil courts the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. compelled us to change our name. In 1939 a General Assembly was called for the sole purpose of choosing another name. After lengthy debate, our present name—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—was adopted. How significant a name! Had our doctrinal consciousness been less than strong at the time, we could hardly have chosen it. And by choosing it, we committed ourselves to the strictest orthodoxy for the indefinite future. Failure at any time to live up to that name will make our church a laughingstock. To put it popularly, we stuck out our necks in 1939. I do not say that one should never stick his neck out, but surely, he should never do so without being ready to take the consequence, if need be, of having his head chopped off. As a church, we solemnly vowed in 1939 that we would be willing to be decapitated if we should not adhere strictly to sound doctrine, or should become indifferent to it. So long as we bear our present name,

we shall remain committed to that vow.

Let me bring the matter up to date. For some two years now a doctrinal controversy has been in process in our church. It originated in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and has since become denominational in scope. Now, don't worry. I am not going to say anything indiscreet. I shall not be so ungracious as to take advantage of my present opportunity to make propaganda for my own convictions on this subject, however strong those convictions may be and actually are. But I do want to make one statement. Our willingness to debate doctrine, and our unrelenting refusal to desist from doctrinal debate until truth and error have come clearly to light are evidence that as a denomination we have not yet succumbed to the temptation of doctrinal indifference and have not yet ceased being narrow in the good sense of that term.

## Conclusion

What is right with our church? Much in every way. But may we never forget that we are what we are by the grace of God alone. All that we have, we have received. Let us then give all the glory to God and take none for ourselves. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

May we also remember that we have our God-given treasures in earthen vessels. How earthen we are! Then we shall put our trust for the future solely in the almighty Head and King of the church at the right hand of God.

Again, may we ever be mindful that much will be required of those to whom much has been committed. Our responsibility is exceedingly heavy.

I conclude with applying to our church the exhortation which he who walks among the seven golden candlesticks and holds the seven stars in his right hand addressed to the

church of Philadelphia in Asia Minor, which, like ours, had little strength but had kept his word and had not denied his name: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11).

# ANOTHER FOUNDATION

## *The Presbyterian Confessional Crisis*

EDMUND P. CLOWNEY

**F**OR THE FIRST time in three centuries, Presbyterians are adopting a new confession of faith. Concerned Christians, within and without the United Presbyterian Church, are weighing the meaning of the new creed.

Constitutional change is serious business for Presbyterians; three successive General Assemblies and every presbytery in the church must answer for the new creedal structure. Rightly so, for every minister, elder, and deacon in the church has subscribed before God to the Westminster Confession and

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\* First published as Edmund P. Clowney, *Another Foundation: The Presbyterian and Confessional Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), 1965.

Catechisms, the present standards of the church. A change in these standards changes the witness of every officer and member.

What is the meaning of the change? Its advocates claim that it is a charter for church renewal. The treasures of orthodoxy are preserved, they say, in the “Book of Confessions,” and the is added to concentrate on the doctrines that need sharpening for this century.

To examine this claim, it is necessary to consider not merely the Confession of 1967 but the whole program presented by the special committee to the Assembly of 1965 and now being acted upon in the church.

The program contains three proposals:

1. That a “Book of Confessions” be adopted including five creedal statements prior to the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism, and one modern confessional statement (the Barmen Declaration of 1934).
2. That a contemporary confession be added to this “Book,” the Confession of 1967.
3. That the form of subscription required of ministers and church officers be revised.

As each of these proposals is examined the design of the whole program will become apparent.

## The Book of Confessions

### **1. This proposal constructs a creedal museum.**

It might appear that the addition of historic creeds antedating the Westminster Confession must amplify and strengthen the doctrinal position of the church. The committee rightly claims

that the variety of expression in these creeds offers richness rather than deviation (p. 23).

But a strengthening of the church's confession would result only if the inclusion of these creeds in the Book of Confessions were an assertion of the cumulative truth of them all. In such a case one creed could supplement another and all would be confessed as true. Any statement not regarded as true would then have to be removed or altered.

This is not the procedure proposed by the committee. It recommends no amendments whatever in the Westminster Confession or the Shorter Catechism. These documents are to be kept unchanged not because they are true, but because they are historic: "In the view of the Committee, it is more fitting and more demonstrative of the actual process of confessional utterance in the church to have the ancient doctrines stand in their original form and in historical sequence" (p. 23).

The words are not to be altered because they are put under glass. They do not demonstrate the faith of the church but the "process of confessional utterance." The Book of Confessions is made an historical repository of the past struggles of the church to witness to the truth. The doctrines confessed are now to be seen as "ancient doctrines." The framers of the report do not allow for the possibility of a "timeless truth" to be asserted with one voice through the ages. Truth cannot "hover above history" (p. 19). Rather, truth is always inescapably conditioned by the language in which it finds expression. We do not therefore join with the church of all ages in confessing the unchanging truth of the apostolic faith. Rather we are to be guided by a sympathetic scrutiny of the way in which the faith was once confessed in order to judge better how we may now confess it.

It is clear that the effect of this change is not to enrich the confession of the church but to assert a historical relativism concerning all confessions prior to the one now being made. The present function of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the constitution of the United Presbyterian Church is to assert truth that is believed. In the proposed Book of Confessions the Westminster creed will assert truth as it was believed in the seventeenth century.

**2. This proposal revises all previous creeds by the Confession of 1967.**

Still more is implied by the addition of the theological declaration of Barmen and the Confession of 1967 to the Book of Confessions. These documents contain assertions that flatly contradict statements in the Westminster Confession of Faith. This is recognized and even emphasized by the committee. The committee asserts that the section on the Bible in the proposed creed “is an intended revision of the Westminster doctrine, which rested primarily on a view of inspiration and equated the Biblical canon directly with the Word of God” (p. 29). Indeed, the desire to correct the Westminster Confession is plainly a major factor in the whole report of the committee. To show the need for a new confession, a member of the committee writes: “The Auburn Affirmation and the long controversy over it, were consequences of this mistaken policy of professing to be a confessional church while evading the difficulties of making a genuinely relevant confession” (p. 18).

This reference to the Auburn Affirmation touches upon the quick of the issue. That Affirmation, signed by some 1300 ministers of the Presbyterian Church, rejected the last creedal deliverance of a General Assembly. In 1923 the Assembly

reaffirmed a five-point doctrinal deliverance asserting the infallibility of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, His miraculous ministry, substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection. Each of these points was declared to be “an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards.”

The Auburn Affirmation held, to the contrary, that these essential doctrines were only theories which Presbyterians need not believe.

Now there can be no doubt that these doctrines are taught in the Bible and in the Westminster standards. The virgin birth of Christ, for example, is clearly taught in Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 2:30–35. The Westminster Confession summarizes this Scriptural teaching by affirming of the Son that he was “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance” (8:2).

How can a new and “genuinely relevant confession” prevent controversy of the kind stirred up by the Auburn Affirmation? Conceivably it could reaffirm these essential doctrines, contrast their truth with contemporary unbelief, and show that we, no less than our fathers, must hold fast the pattern of sound words in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:13).

The new confession does not do this. It follows the opposite course. The fallibility of the Bible is asserted, the *virgin* birth and *physical* resurrection of Christ are doctrines conspicuous by their absence, no miracles of Christ are confessed, and the substitutionary atonement is described as the “image” of a truth that remains beyond the reach of theory.

In short, the new confession corrects the old by freeing men from faith in precisely those essential doctrines required by the deliverance of 1923. It grants creedal tolerance to the unbelief of the Auburn Affirmation.

This end is accomplished without the necessity of an explicit denial of the virgin birth or the physical resurrection. It is enough to provide in the Book of Confessions a contemporary confession that fails to require these doctrines as essential. The Confession of 1967 is designed to cull out of the Christian past that which “needs most to be said and most to be reformulated for the sake of the church’s confession in our day” (p. 27). Its silences as well as its reformulations have revisionary force. The minister of the church who enthusiastically endorses the new creed may have all manner of doubts about the old ones and still profess to be “guided” in his ministry by the Book of Confessions.

If the Confession of 1967 did not reformulate the older creeds, its adoption could perhaps leave their force untouched. Since it not only reformulates but presents a new theological basis, it leaves nothing untouched, but rather offers another foundation for the church. The chairman of the committee asserts: “The Westminster teaching about the Bible itself *on which the whole document depends* is notably a seventeenth century formulation” (p. 19, italics added). It is this doctrine of the Bible that the Confession of 1967 deliberately changes. One may well ask, What remains?

## The Confession of 1967

### 1. The Theology of Reconciliation

The motif of the Confession of 1967 is the theology of “reconciliation.” The passage in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 is referred to. Yet the Confession nowhere defines precisely what it understands reconciliation to mean. It describes God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ as a mystery and cites some of the scrip-

tural terminology with which the mystery is described (lines 61–68). But the Confession does not draw from the scriptural statements any formulation of the biblical teaching on reconciliation. Rather, it brackets the scriptural descriptions under the title of “images” and asserts that the truth of reconciliation remains beyond the reach of all theory. By this construction the Confession avoids endorsing the very statements of the Scriptures themselves.

An exposition of the Corinthians passage to which the Confession appeals would make clear what the scriptural doctrine of reconciliation is. The alienation that is overcome by reconciliation is not the alienation of men’s feelings of estrangement, but the alienation of God’s holy wrath against sin. Paul describes reconciliation by saying that God, in reconciling men to himself, does not reckon unto them their trespasses (2 Cor. 5:19). The act of reconciliation takes place through the death of Christ as the Sin-Bearer. The trespasses that are not reckoned to men are reckoned to Christ; “Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21 ASV).

The Confession dismisses the biblical theology of reconciliation when it describes the “vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty” as a figurative concept (lines 64, 65). There is no ground in the Bible for distinguishing between the act of reconciliation and the meaning of the act as it is given in the same passage. If the meaning is a mere figure, so is the act. When reconciliation as a doctrine is detached from the scriptural description of what it is, it becomes an empty vessel to be filled with such new content as may prove appealing to the modern mind.

It is true that the richness of God’s reconciling work in-

cludes more than is expressed in any one statement about it. But we may never on that account refuse to receive the truth of particular statements. To speak of legal penalty in God's judgment against sin is not to extend to divine justice an inappropriate concept derived from the history of human jurisprudence. It is to speak of a divine reality on which human justice is patterned because man is made in God's image.

One may ask, Why does the doctrine of reconciliation recommend itself as the appropriate emphasis for a contemporary confession? Is it because the framers of the Confession of 1967 wish to impress upon men the reality of God's holy wrath against sin, the terror of the judgment and of everlasting destruction? Is it because they would beseech modern men to receive the gospel message of deliverance from the wrath of God and of restoration to his favor through the atoning work of Jesus Christ? This is surely not the emphasis of the new confession. The one reference to the wrath of God declares that it is the expression of his love (line 97). Paul preached reconciliation knowing the fear of the Lord, "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Paul knew that as he preached the gospel he was a savor of life unto life or death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16). He declared that the end of the false teachers would be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:15). Paul the apostle himself cried out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16).

The apostle's holy urgency in preaching reconciliation to sinners under the wrath of God is not the emphasis of the Confession of 1967. The theme of reconciliation has clearly been chosen for other reasons. Principal among these reasons

is the emphasis which the Confession wishes to place on what must still be called the social gospel. In describing the ministry of reconciliation the Confession states; "This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares his labor of healing the enmities of mankind" (lines 208, 209). Paul's fervor in beseeching the Corinthians to be reconciled to God leads him directly into the plea, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15 ASV). If the Corinthians are genuinely reconciled with God he will be their God, they will be his people. "Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17). By the compromise of their fellowship with unbelievers the Corinthians showed they did not understand what the reconciliation of God meant.

This scriptural perspective is reversed in the Confession of 1967. The practical result of reconciliation is fellowship among men quite apart from the saving difference of the gospel message. The mission of the church is not described as the proclamation of the message which saves men from hell but as an ambassage of peace to seek the good of man in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture and economics (lines 165, 166). The travail of Paul's ministry of reconciliation appears in his pleadings for a choice at Corinth, a choice between Jesus and another Jesus, between the gospel and a different gospel, between the Holy Spirit of God and another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4). Such passion is washed away by the implied universalism of the Confession of 1967.

The whole human race is reconciled, according to the

Confession (lines 298, 299), and the ministry of reconciliation is to bring men to know that they are one reconciled family, accepted by God in spite of what they are (line 151), and free to find fulfillment in human life (lines 120–123).

Because the Confession of 1967 asserts universal reconciliation it does not look upon the human race as under the judgment of everlasting destruction. The apostolic passion that besought men to be reconciled to God is gone because men are regarded as already reconciled. They are not without God and without hope in the world. Wrath and love, judgment and redemption are rather to be asserted together. The kingdom of God is already present in the world, “stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption” (lines 405, 406). This is the familiar pattern of Barthian theology. Men are not to be divided at last into saved and lost; instead, all men are both lost and saved.

The urgency of the church’s mission according to the new Confession is therefore not to plead with lost sinners, “Be ye reconciled to God,” but to promote the reconciliation of estranged races and nations.

## 2. The Theology of Revelation

The New Testament doctrine of salvation, then, is boldly modernized in the Confession of 1967. A yet deeper reconstruction is the recasting of the theology of revelation. The report of the committee itself stresses the importance of the section on the Bible (lines 174–201). This, we are told, is an intentional revision of the Westminster Confession (p. 29). The importance of this section justifies quoting it in full:

## B. The Bible

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears witness in many ways. The church has received the Old and New Testaments as the normative witness to this revelation and has recognized them as Holy Scriptures.

The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. The Old Testament is received in the church as Holy Scripture which bears witness to God's faithfulness to Israel and points the way for fulfillment of his purpose in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

God's word is spoken to his church today where Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.

The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The words of the Scriptures are the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought-forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current, and the understanding of them requires literary and historical scholarship. The variety of such views found in the Bible shows that God has communicated with men in diverse cultural conditions. This gives the church confidence that he will continue to speak to men in a changing world and in every form of human culture.

The section presents succinctly the outlines of the Barthian theology of the Word. Under the guise of exalting Christ above the Bible, this theology abolishes the rule of Christ in his church through his written Word. The reformation principle of *sola scriptura* is set aside. The Confession of 1967 states that the one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate. The Scriptures are said to be the normative witness to this revelation, but they are not in themselves the Word of God.

This doctrine of the Confession of 1967 contrasts with the Westminster Confession, which defines Holy Scripture as “the word of God written.” It contrasts with the deliverances of earlier General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church, which declared, “It is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error.”

But, most seriously, this refusal to recognize Scripture as the infallible Word of God denies the claim that Scripture makes for itself.

The proposed Confession says that the words of the Scriptures are the words of men (lines 192, 193). The Apostle Paul says, “But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:12, 13).

The Bible speaks of itself as the Word of God (Ps. 119:105; Matt. 15:6), and the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1, 2); its words are often quoted as the words of God or of the Spirit of God (Matt. 19:4, 5; Heb. 1:7, 8; 3:7). Not only are the human au-

thors of Scripture said to be borne along of the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21) but that which they have written is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16) and may be ascribed to God directly, for God speaks by the mouth of inspired men (Luke 1:70; Matt. 1:22; 2:15).

God’s speaking in Scripture is no minor part of biblical theology. Whenever God speaks his word has creative power. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made . . . For he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9). God speaks his word of power in the future tense and it becomes his word of promise. That revealed word of promise determines history; the promised salvation will come to pass because “the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” The recorded word of God becomes a testimony that before it came to pass God had spoken it (Isa. 44:6–8).

Witness and Scripture are not related in the Bible itself as they are in the Confession of 1967. The Confession thinks of witness as a fallible human activity. God acts—that is revelation; man responds—that is witness. But the biblical concept of witness is rooted in God’s covenant. God’s witness is first; he is the supreme Witness to his covenant. Scripture is given by God as part of his witness: the book of the law is God’s witness against Israel (Deut. 31:26). Indeed, it is the emphasis on the objectivity of God’s witness that leads to the first writing of Scripture in the Old Testament. Human kings made covenants with vassal peoples in those days. The treaty of the sovereign would be recorded and stored in the sanctuary. If a question arose as to covenant faithfulness the written text could be read.

So God made his covenant with Israel, in a form strikingly similar to the royal covenants of the time. He wrote the

covenant document with his finger on tablets of stone (Exod. 24:12; 32:16) and the written covenant was placed in the ark. That record was God's witness to his promises and his claim. In the biblical theology of the Old Testament, written Scripture is God's act, God's Word, God's witness.

To be sure, Moses and the prophets were made instruments in bringing God's Word to men. Israel could not bear to hear the voice of God from heaven, and God spoke to Moses who brought God's words to the people (Exod. 20:19; Deut. 5:27–33). Yet Scripture continues to be God's witness. Even when Moses by inspiration sings to God in praise, the song is furnished by God to bear witness to God's people (Deut. 30:19).

In the gospel of John, God is presented as the great Witness who bears witness to the Son (John 5:37–39). The words and deeds of Christ are given to him by the Father to constitute a further witness (John 5:36). Christ himself is the faithful Witness (Rev. 1:5) and it is the Holy Spirit who fulfills his role as Paraclete by bringing to the remembrance of the apostles the things that Jesus did and said (John 14:26; 16:13). The witnessing of the apostles is to teach men "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The Bible does not set word against event or meaning. Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). He declared that he gave to the apostles the words that were given him of the Father (John 17:8).

If, as the proposed Confession asserts, the Scriptures bear witness to Christ, the Word of God incarnate, we may ask. What witness does Christ himself bear to the Scriptures? He said that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), and because even his enemies acknowledged this, he pressed upon

them the implications of individual statements (Matt. 9:13; 19:4, 5; 22:29–32), incidents (Matt. 12:5, 40), and even words (Matt. 22:43–45). He warned that those who would not receive the writings of Moses would not receive his words (John 5:46, 47). Moreover, not only did his teaching constantly assert “It is written”; he himself patterned his whole ministry by the Scriptures he came to fulfill. His obedience to death was an obedience to prophetic Scripture: he went to the cross as it was written of him (Matt. 26:24; Mark 9:12); the Scripture must be perfectly fulfilled (Luke 4:21; 22:37; John 19:28).

Modern scholars may not share Jesus’ view of the absolute authority of the Old Testament as the Word of God, but they can scarcely deny that he held it. If the witness of the Bible to Christ is fallible, then Christ’s witness to the Bible is also fallible. The words of Christ and of the Bible stand or fall together.

In the theology of the new creed they fall together. The words of Jesus are also human words; if human words only witness to revelation, then Jesus’ words cannot be spoken as words given him of the Father, by which the world shall be judged (John 12:48–50; 17:8). On the Mount of Transfiguration the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him” (Mark 9:7). He who hears the Son hears the Father. God speaks from heaven to bear witness to his Son; God speaks on earth through his Son.

The biblical concept of revelation includes revealed words. God commands us to hear his Son, for God who spoke of old in the prophets has at the end of the days spoken in his Son (Heb. 1:1). If we neglect what has been spoken by the Lord Jesus and confirmed unto us by them that heard (Heb. 2:3) our judgment must be even greater than that of those who neglected the revelation mediated through prophets.

The issue is not whether a seventeenth century view of the Scriptures can be maintained in the church today. The issue is whether our Lord's view of the Scriptures can be maintained. The Confession adopts the modern viewpoint that truth is necessarily relativized by its historical expression. The Bible adopts a quite different viewpoint: God as the Lord of history is able to speak from heaven in human language, to inspire men with both thoughts and words by his Spirit, and to shape history itself to provide precisely that form for expression that he chooses.

The "normativity" of Scripture that continues to be asserted by the Confession is called in question by its own structure. The last sentence of the paragraph on the Bible is particularly important (lines 199–201). It is asserted that the church has confidence that God will continue to speak to men in a changing world and in every form of human culture. What is the ground of this confidence? The astonishing answer of the *Confession*: it is the variety of the understanding of life, history, and the cosmos found in the Bible. How can the church gain assurance that God will speak today from the diversity of biblical revelation? Only one explanation appears to be possible: Had God spoken in one final or climactic way in the Bible we would have every reason to believe that God need not continue to speak in our day. This is the doctrine of the Westminster Confession. But if God did not speak in a final and climactic way in the Bible, if instead the Bible expresses many conflicting theologies and viewpoints, then one may assume that no unity, no climax is possible and that diversity will continue. Contemporary theologies must then conflict with one or more of the theologies found in the Bible because such unending diversity is the form of revelation.

No objective normativity can be left to Scripture under the terms of this theology of revelation. One who seeks to interpret the “normative” Scripture is not dealing with the words of God, but with the words of men spoken in witness to the Word of God. He interprets these words of men with a realization that they contain many errors in the understanding of life and history (lines 192–196). He uses to interpret these fallible and erroneous words the concept of God’s reconciliation in Christ articulated in the Confession of 1967. (Under the new formula of subscription the minister agrees to be guided by this *Confession* and in this way he interprets Scripture.) Gone is that liberty from men established by the written Word of God. Individual subjectivity (when does the Scripture become God’s word to me?); the tyranny of the experts (“literary and historical scholarship”); the power of the church—all will forge chains for the man who no longer holds Christ’s law of liberty.

This brings us to notice the care with which the “normativity” of Scripture is linked to the authority of the church in the proposed Confession. “The church has received the Old and New Testaments as the normative witness to this revelation and has recognized them as Holy Scriptures” (line 177–179). With this statement may be contrasted the statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 4: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” The Westminster Confession subjects the church to the authority of God speaking in Scripture. The Confession of 1967 finds normative force in the Scripture only

in the sphere of the church. This is shown also by the revised form of subscription for ministers and other officers: "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the normative witness to Jesus Christ *in the Church catholic*, and by his Spirit God's word to you?" (Italics added.) Not only is the subjectivity of this formulation evident, its ecclesiasticism is not less so. The introduction to the *Confession of 1967* should be plain enough: "The function of the Bible is to be the instrument of the revelation of the Word in the living church" (p. 29). The qualification of the authority of Scripture by an ecclesiastical context is a change from the *Westminster Confession* that grows out of the changed doctrine of inspiration. If the Scripture is the Word of God it has objective authority in itself. If the Scripture is only a normative witness to the Word of God, it can have no objective authority in itself but only as it is interpreted. That interpretation then takes place in the preaching and confessing of the church.

The new doctrine of Scripture advanced in the *Confession of 1967* is nothing less than a new foundation for the faith of the church. Holding fast to the Word of Christ the church of past ages has built upon the rock. There is no other foundation. Remove the authority of God's Word and all is sand.

The new *Confession* itself only begins to trace the consequences of building on another foundation. Much is immediately implied, but much more will quickly emerge. The *Confession* has already been described by impatient liberals as an "early Barthian" document. They feel that the theology of this *Confession* lags behind the new wave of thinking in the seminaries.

Beneath the new doctrine of Scripture there yawns an unbridgeable gulf between faith and history. To hold that God's

revelation cannot come in sentences is a way of saying that God's truth is locked outside of history. It cannot enter man's world. Follow that assumption and the Christ of faith is also locked outside. Nothing that the Jesus of history said or did can possibly reveal God. If the written Word cannot come in history, neither can the Incarnate Word. The old Christian language may be kept for a time to describe some abstract "ground of being" beyond history, but the floods and winds will come and even the shell of empty words will collapse in the sand.

### 3. The Theology of the Church

In the second part of the Confession of 1967 the mission and equipment of the church are discussed. The emphasis in this section falls on what the church is to do, not on what the church is. The definition of the status of the church is found in lines 150–153 in connection with the description of the new life in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Significantly the new life is described first in terms of the new creation in a universal context. The church is the community in which the new life takes shape. It is defined as the community "in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are" (lines 150, 151 ). This statement stands in the sharpest contrast with the doctrine of the church in the Westminster Confession. The Westminster Confession declares that: "The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof . . ." (Chapter 25.1). The studied looseness of the expression in lines 150, 151 of the Confession of 1967 is precisely adapted to the contemporary functionalistic definition of the church. According

to this view the church is not to be defined as a number of the elect or a company of the redeemed but rather as those who understand what has taken place in Christ for all men. This view found pointed expression when a missionary writer declared that evangelists must ask not, "Are you saved?" but rather "Do you know that Jesus Christ is your Saviour?"

The ministry of reconciliation which is the mission of the church is characterized in terms of social renewal (lines 213–224). By this social gospel the pattern and form of the life of the church is established: "So to live and serve is to confess Christ as Lord" (lines 226–227). The evangelism of the church is therefore found in the action of the members of the church in dispersal, that is, in the daily action of the members of the church in the world, rather than in the church as gathered (lines 237–243).

The social ethic which guides the church's action in the world is developed from the basis of the reconciliation of the human race, which is said to create one universal family (lines 298, 299). On this universalistic basis all men are to be regarded as though they were brethren in Christ. Obviously if this were true the effects of the new birth would leave little need for the use of the sword of the state to punish the evildoer (Rom. 13:4). The Confession of 1967 declares that the function of the church as the community of reconciliation is to call all men to accept one another as persons and to share life on every level, in work and play, in courtship, marriage, and family, in church and state (lines 300–303). This is not the ethic of Paul's doctrine of reconciliation. According to Paul the doctrine demands not the sharing of marriage by believer and unbeliever but the avoidance of its unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14).

The same underlying error distorts the teaching of the

Confession on race relations, armaments, and welfare programs (lines 298–335). The New Testament eloquently insists that all conflict and alienation among men is overcome in the body of Christ. Christians deny Christ if they reject the least of his brethren, if they fight against one another, or if they fail to care for the poor in his name (Matt. 25:40, 41; James 4:1–4; 1 Cor. 6:1–4; Acts 6:1; Rom. 12:13).

But the assumption that the law of Christian love is already established among men outside of Christ leads to a double confusion. First, the state is regarded as though it were the church. The right of the state to take the sword is challenged (lines 307–315). Conflict by the state does not necessarily deny justice, as the Confession asserts (line 307). It may enforce it. Second, the church is regarded as though it were the state. It is assigned establishing in the world the discipline of the house of God. The call of the Church becomes a call to the common welfare rather than a call to Christ (lines 327–329).

This matter is by no means peripheral since the emphasis of the new creed on the ministry of reconciliation is completely within the social sphere. The section of revelation and religion rather strangely speaks of the church as “a religion.” The difficulties of the theory of revelation adopted come to pointed expression here. It is said that God’s revelation to Israel gave rise to the religion of the Hebrew people and that God’s revelation in Christ brought the response of the Christian religion. It must be noted that every concrete word and deed in history is part of this response and is therefore subject to the judgment of the gospel. On this construction Christianity lies under the judgment of the gospel no less than Islam or Buddhism. As has often been pointed out, this dialectic carries an opposite implication. If the “no” of God can be expressed

against all religion, the “yes” of God may also be expressed upon all religion. Revelation cannot enter history at any point: why may it not impinge upon history at all points? On this reasoning the New Testament itself is under judgment as an expression of the Christian religion. What then is the gospel that stands above judgment? Presumably it is the affirmation of this dialectical theology itself: the new creed’s theory of reconciliation.

#### 4. Eschatology

The third section of the Confession of 1967 deals with the fulfillment of reconciliation. This section speaks of a final triumph of God but leaves this triumph completely undefined. It points only to biblical visions and images (lines 399–402) so that once again the revelation of Scripture is placed within brackets. Even the new heavens and earth and kingdom of God are “visions and images.” This creed makes no reference to a personal and visible return of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Again its thrust is to encourage the church in its fight with social evil: “With an urgency born of this hope the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world” (lines 407, 408).

### The Constitutional Revisions

In reviewing the position of the Confession of 1967 in the proposed “Book of Confessions” we have seen how placing a contemporary confession after a series of historic documents has the force of revising them. That revision, in the theology of the Confession of 1967 establishes another foundation for the faith and life of the church.

The third element in the proposals for constitutional revi-

sion defines the way in which the church is to be set upon the new foundation. Two key questions in the form used by ministers and officers to subscribe to the standards of the church are changed. Presbyterian polity has always required a profession of faith on the part of its ministers, elders, and deacons that is fuller than that expected of the church membership. The doors of church membership must be open to anyone who makes a creditable profession of faith, but teachers and leaders in the church need greater gifts of insight into the teaching of Scripture.

Among the questions now asked of those about to be ordained are the following:

- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

Every minister in the Church has not only answered affirmatively to these questions but has subscribed in writing in the records of his presbytery: “I do sincerely receive and subscribe to the above obligation as a just and true exhibition of my faith and principles, and do resolve and promise to exercise my ministry in conformity thereunto.”

Euphemisms of all kinds are being used to describe what has been happening as men have taken these vows. Some men say they have taken them with their fingers crossed. Others speak of “schizophrenia” in which the ministers say one thing but believe another. “Frankly, I’m uneasy about the way I took my vows,” is the comment of a prominent minister.

The best case that can be mustered for this dishonesty is to say that, since the church did not enforce the vows it administered they could not be held to mean what they say. Whether the winking of Presbytery can relieve the conscience of a man who makes this solemn declaration before God is another question. Everyone knows well enough why those questions were prescribed in the constitution.

At any rate, it is clear that the new form of subscription is designed to allow men who do not subscribe to the Westminster Confession to enter the Church. "It will make honest men of us," one minister is reported to have observed.

Here are the questions that will be asked according to the proposed revision:

- Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the normative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church catholic, and by his Spirit God's word to you?
- Will you perform the duties of a minister of the gospel in obedience to Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance of the confessions of this Church?

The effects of this revision are stunning. The objective authority of the Scriptures is removed. The Bible is granted a "normative witness to Jesus Christ in the church catholic" but it is no longer the infallible rule of faith and practice. Indeed, the Bible is not the Word of God in any objective sense. It may only, by Christ's Spirit, become God's word to the individual. According to the Westminster Confession the final appeal of the church in all controversies of religion is to the Scriptures. This is both possible and necessary because the Scriptures are

the Word of God. No church court can be set above Scripture, even to interpret it, for Scripture is its own interpreter. Christ, speaking in his Word, rules the church by his commandments.

The new form of subscription epitomizes the theology of the new Confession. Note the changes from the present subscription of the church to the authority of Scripture:

(1) Scripture is not accepted as sufficient. The Confession of 1967 asserts that God will speak in today's culture as he spoke in giving the Bible in ancient cultures (lines 200–201).

(2) Scripture is not said to be an inspired revelation. This is asserted in the phrase “Word of God” in the present subscription. The revised form, however, only asserts that the Bible is “by his Spirit God’s word to you.” On the Westminster view, there are two operations of the Spirit with respect to the Bible. First, the Spirit inspired the original authors so that they wrote (in most cases not by “dictation”) God’s Word, infallible revelation; not the traditions of men but the truth of God. Second, the Spirit illumines our sin-blinded minds to understand that written revelation. The Westminster Confession strongly acknowledges the second work of the Spirit (Chap. 1:6). But there is a crucial difference between the two. Inspiration removes all the effects of sin that might obstruct its purpose; the inspired writer sets down God’s word, not his own halting attempts to record it. Illumination, on the other hand, is part of the Spirit’s work of sanctifying us. We are given an infallible Word of God, but we are not given an infallible understanding of that Word.

It is clear that the new form of subscription does not intend to say that the Spirit conveys infallible revelation to the individual reading the Bible. No, a kind of illumination remains,

but inspiration as a distinct work of the Spirit is gone. We are left with a fallible understanding of a fallible book.

(3) Scripture is not assumed to be plain. The Westminster Confession has a paragraph on the “perspicuity” of Scripture. Not everything in the Bible is alike clear to all “yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded . . . that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (1:6).

In the present subscription, acceptance of the Scriptures as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice” confesses a rule that can actually govern both the individual and the church. The Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture can be understood and obeyed. In the new subscription the Scriptures are not a plain rule but a “normative witness” in the Church catholic. In our study of the Confession of 1967 we have seen what these qualifications mean. A “witness” is not infallible according to that document; further, the witness exists only in the Church catholic, not above it as the Word of God. The ministers to whom the Spirit is speaking may judge in the Church catholic what the Scripture’s fallible witness to Jesus Christ means for our day.

How little content remains in the word “normative” in such a context!

Further, the new subscription questions do not include either the receiving or the adopting of any confessional statement. Since the theology of the new Confession holds that there is no one system of doctrine taught in the Bible, this is not surprising. “Obedience to Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance of the confessions of this Church” is the engagement that replaces confessional sub-

scription.

After the qualifications that have been made in the preceding question (where the objective authority of Scripture is removed) the terms of this question provide for no regulative principle of scriptural authority. But to accept the guidance of the confessions of the church becomes a somewhat different matter. The structure of the Book of Confessions makes it clear that there is an important distinction between the historical interest attached to confessions of past years and the contemporary relevance of the Confession of 1967. The one document which appears to have a binding force upon the conscience of one who enters upon this form of subscription is the contemporary Confession of 1967 in which the church now speaks. Since this Confession denies or sets aside the biblical doctrines of Scripture itself, of salvation, of the church, and of the last things, any man who agrees to be guided by it is renouncing the system of doctrine taught in the Word of God. Can a church which adopts such a form of subscription and enforces it upon its ministers continue to claim obedience to Christ?

Another spirit is expressed by the Apostle Paul: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not: but having renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:1, 2).

The disaster that the program of revision proposes for the United Presbyterian Church lies not in the fact of change. It is perfectly true that a church must confess the truth of the gospel in today's situation and against today's errors. A tru-

ly united church could no doubt go beyond the Westminster Confession in testifying to the riches of God's truth. Nor is the vision for service to man a wrong emphasis in the creed. Conservatives have sometimes obscured their zeal for the gospel by so focusing on spiritual need that they seem blind to the physical and social needs of lost men. The concern evident in the new Confession warns against such imbalance.

Yet, the proposed program is a disaster, for at one stroke it opens the doors of the church wide to contemporary unbelief, takes the Bible down from its place of sole authority, and places a stumbling-block before the conscience of any evangelical who might in the future seek to enter its ministry.

# THERE IS GOOD REASON

*An Account of the Events Leading to the Formation  
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

EDWARD L. KELLOGG

SOMEONE HAS INTRODUCED you to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Now you are interested to know why this church exists and why it speaks so freely about the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is good reason.

In the 1800s and early 1900s the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. was, for the most part, a strong and faithful church. One could point to able theologians on its seminary faculties

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\* Edward L. Kellogg, *There Is Good Reason: An Account of the Events Leading to the Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, 1985. (Originally published in 1941 under the title, *Lest We Forget*.)

and gifted preachers in its pulpits. It was definitely holding forth a light in this world.

In the early 1900s doubts about the historical reliability of the Bible infected seminaries, and soon theological liberalism or modernism was heard from pulpits and in classrooms. One example appeared in the winter of 1922. Though the constitution of the church called for preaching that was true to the Bible and the subordinate standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms), the First Presbyterian Church of New York City engaged Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick to be stated supply. Dr. Fosdick, a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary and frequent radio speaker for the National Council of Churches, was a well-known modernist minister of the time. While serving as stated supply one Sunday in 1922, Dr. Fosdick aroused conservative Presbyterians by preaching a notorious sermon entitled, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

### Conservatives Call for a Reaffirmation of Faith

The conservatives in the Presbytery of Philadelphia responded to this sermon by bringing an overture to the General Assembly the following year, calling upon that body to require that the preaching of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City be in harmony with the constitution—in particular, the Westminster Confession of Faith. The General Assembly acceded to this request and ordered the Presbytery of New York to “take such action . . . as will require the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York to conform to the system of doctrine taught in the Confession of Faith. . . .”

In addition to this order, the Assembly also reaffirmed a de-

liverance which it had made in 1916 concerning essential doctrines. This statement set forth five doctrines as necessary articles of faith: the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, his substitutionary atonement to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, the resurrection of Christ, and the reality of his miracles. Historically, these biblical doctrines had been firmly held by the Presbyterian church and were set forth in its standards.

### Modernists Respond with the Auburn Affirmation

One might have assumed that all Presbyterians would strongly support this affirmation of the church's faith. Instead, there was an immediate reaction. Eighty-five members of that Assembly signed a protest. An opposing declaration was issued after the Assembly by a committee of ministers meeting in Auburn, New York. It was known as the Auburn Affirmation and soon was signed by 1,293 of the approximately 10,000 ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

In effect, this statement was a contradiction of the doctrines affirmed by the General Assembly. It described the virgin birth of Christ, his substitutionary atonement and his resurrection, and miracles not as true facts of history but rather as theories. Furthermore, it claimed that a minister could be in good standing in the church whether he believed these teachings or not. The wide acceptance of this position made it clear that unbelief among the clergy of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had been developing for some time.

The Presbytery of Cincinnati immediately overtured the 1924 Assembly, asking that action be taken against the signers of the Auburn Affirmation. But the committee on Bills and

Overtures recommended no action, and the Assembly adopted its recommendation. The liberals of the church had won a victory, and their forward march continued as they gained important offices in the institutions and boards of the denomination.

### Princeton Seminary Compromise

There were many seminaries in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. training men to become ministers. One by one these became infected by the new, modern theology that explained away more and more of the supernatural in Scripture.

One seminary, however, had remained especially strong; and that was Princeton. It had been known throughout the world for its stand upon the Word of God. The names of Warfield, Hodge, Wilson, and Machen had graced its faculty. Its contribution to the cause of conservative Christianity had been incalculable. But Princeton, too, was vulnerable. In 1929 a reorganization occurred which was designed to make seminary policies and teachings inclusive enough to serve the liberals as well as conservatives.

### Westminster Theological Seminary Is Founded

Indicative of Princeton's policy for the future, two signers of the Auburn Affirmation were placed on the board of directors. These ministers had taken ordination vows declaring their agreement with the constitution of the church, but now they signed their names to a document that in effect denied the constitution they had vowed to uphold.

Those who had known and loved the old Princeton were greatly disturbed. Conferences were held in New York and Philadelphia, and in July of 1929 a group of Presbyterian

ministers and laymen decided that a new seminary ought to be founded. It was this decision that led to the organizing of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia with a faculty of eight full-time professors and instructors. On September 25, 1929, Westminster first opened its doors to receive students.

## The Missions Controversy

Another important series of events that played a significant role in the establishing of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had to do with missions. In 1932 a book entitled *Re-Thinking Missions* was published by the Commission of Appraisal of the Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years. On the Commission was a minister of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., and among members of the original Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry which appointed the Commission were two members of the Board of Foreign Missions of the church.

The book gained a wide circulation, and many inquiries came from individuals and missionary societies of the church concerning its truthworthiness. The report found in that book presented a view of the method and message of missions that was diametrically opposed to the standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. It was very important that the Mission Board respond to these inquiries in unmistakable terms and declare plainly its opposition to the views of the book, *Re-Thinking Missions*. Instead, the Board's vague answer showed deplorable weakness and compromise.

Once again conservatives of the church were aroused. The late Dr. J. Gresham Machen, then professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, determined to investigate the work of the Board of Foreign Missions. He discov-

ered that the candidate secretary of the Board—who had the important task of interviewing candidates for the foreign field and of encouraging or discouraging them in their high ambition—was a signer of the Auburn Affirmation. A member of the Board was also a signer of that document. The well-known novelist, Pearl Buck, was a missionary in good standing under the board, even though she was publishing in books and articles a view of the method and message of missions contrary to that of the Word of God.

Dr. Machen found that an official letter dated July 15, 1932, was sent by the candidate department to over a thousand students and others contemplating foreign missionary service. It recommended certain devotional books which, for the most part, were thoroughly liberal in their theology and very contrary to the doctrines contained in the constitution of the church.

Included in the list were books by the well-known modernist Fosdick, *Marks of a Christian* by Dr. Daniel Fleming, and J. H. Oldham's *Devotional Diary*. Fleming's book speaks of a perpetual incarnation of God in humanity rather than one incarnation when the second person of the Trinity partook of flesh. In Oldham's *Devotional Diary* we find these words, "Those alone understand the teachings of Jesus who know that it is not teaching at all, but simply the living utterance of one who had achieved rebirth in a new condition of life." Such were the books recommended to prospective missionaries.

What could be done to stop such practices? The constitutional method was to overture the General Assembly, and this Dr. Machen did. He prepared an overture which in effect asked the 1933 Assembly to bring the practices and policies of the Board of Foreign Missions into harmony with the consti-

tution of the church. To the overture was appended 106 pages of well-documented evidence, proving the need for such action.

What was the response of the General Assembly to this overture? Even though it had been shown that the Board accepted and sent out missionaries who proclaimed a false gospel and even though the Board urged prospective missionaries to read books which were opposed to the doctrines set forth in the Word of God, no corrective action was taken. The Assembly rejected the overture that called for a return to the church's constitution. In fact, it exonerated the Board of Foreign Missions and commended its work to the church.

### The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions Is Founded

What should a Christian do in this circumstance? Could one be a faithful steward and still support such an agency, knowing that although there were still some faithful missionaries, one's gifts would nevertheless support other missionaries who denied Christ? And could young men and women conscientiously go out to the mission field under such a Board and work hand in hand with missionaries who denied the gospel they were to preach?

Some members of the church were convinced that they could not follow such a course. Thus, both for a protest against the actions of the Board of Foreign Missions and in order that there might be an organization which would carry on truly Presbyterian missionary work in accordance with the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions was organized. The first missionary to serve under that board was

Henry W. Coray, who in time was stricken from the roll of ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. for serving under such an agency. Soon other missionaries were appointed, and the work of this new mission board prospered.

## Support of Denominational Agencies Demanded

The 1934 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. took an amazing action. It issued an official mandate stating that “a church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. . . .”

According to the church’s constitution, one who refused to take part in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was guilty of disregarding the command of Christ and therefore was subject to discipline. The mandate of the Assembly stated that one who refused to support the officially authorized missionary program of the church—regardless of whether that program spread the gospel of Christ or not—was just as truly a violator of the command of Christ and therefore just as subject to discipline. The 1934 Assembly also gave the following instruction with reference to the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: “All ministers and laymen affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., who are officers, trustees, or members of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, [shall] be officially notified by this General Assembly through its stated clerk, that they must immediately on the receipt of such notification sever their connection with

this Board and that refusal to do so . . . will be considered a disorderly and disloyal act on their part and subject them to the discipline of the church.” This Assembly also instructed the presbyteries to take action against any members who failed to obey this ruling within 90 days.

## Machen Brought to Trial

These unconstitutional actions of the Assembly aroused the indignation of many people. Rallies were held, and protests were issued. But the ruling stood, and disciplinary action was initiated—first of all against Dr. Machen. He appeared before a trial judicatory of the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

Acknowledged by many friends and foes to be the greatest scholarly contender for orthodox Christianity in recent years, Dr. Machen was being tried by a court of the church whose constitution declared that the Bible was the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Yet the moderator of the court had signed the Auburn Affirmation, a statement denying the very infallibility of that rule.

During the trial Dr. Machen sought to give his defense; but one illegal ruling after another was made, until no defense could be given. Questions of doctrine were ruled out. Questions relative to the rightness or wrongness of the action of the Assembly were ruled out. Dr. Machen was being condemned on the ground that he had disobeyed a lawful order, but he was not allowed to be heard when he offered to prove that the order was not lawful, but unlawful. He was being condemned for making false assertions against the Board of Foreign Missions of the denomination but was not allowed to be heard when he offered to prove that the assertions were not false, but true.

The trial came to a tragic conclusion when the verdict was rendered. Dr. Machen was found guilty—guilty of disturbing the peace of the church, when the very constitution of the church declared it was a sin to keep “silence in a just cause.” Sentence was pronounced: Dr. Machen was ordered suspended from the office of the ministry.

Other presbyteries then followed in the steps of the one which tried Dr. Machen. One person after another, both ministers and laymen of the church, received similar treatment and punishment. Immediately, most of those who had been tried appealed to higher church courts and finally to the general assembly itself. It was in the spring of 1936 that the appeals came before the Assembly which was meeting in Syracuse.

The Permanent Judicial Commission, to which appeals were referred for consideration and recommendation to the Assembly, was composed of seven ministers, in addition to certain laymen. Of these seven, four were signers of the Auburn Affirmation.

Here was an occasion of tremendous importance. The highest court of the church was ready to act. There was no higher court to which those who had been sentenced could appeal. The final, official action of the church was about to be made. The Commission recommended that the Assembly uphold the actions of the lower judicatories, the Assembly adopted the recommendations and the case was closed.

But what did it mean? It meant, first of all, that Dr. Machen and others were suspended from the gospel ministry and denied the privileges of performing the work of a minister. Until, of course, such time as they might repent of an action which they were convinced was right—until they might repent of an action which to repent of, in their judgment, would be sin. But,

more than that, it meant that the church had officially exalted its own commands above the commands of the only King of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ!

## Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union is Dissolved

The decision of the 148th General Assembly concerning the members of the Independent Board was rendered on June 1, 1936. An important meeting had already been scheduled for June 11th. It was the meeting of the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union. As the name might indicate, this organization was composed of certain conservative members of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. who had covenanted together to defend and maintain the constitution of the church in all its purity. Chapters of this Covenant Union had been organized in many parts of the country to study ways and means of purifying the church. Rallies were sponsored at which leaders of the movement informed people of the condition of the church and urged them to take a firm stand for the gospel.

Ever since the investigation of the Board of Foreign Missions was made by Dr. Machen, more and more facts indicating the spread of the poison of unbelief throughout the church were constantly coming to light. Investigations of the Board of National Missions and the Board of Christian Education indicated that their conditions were actually far worse than that of the Board of Foreign Missions. Bible teachers in denominational schools were found to be teaching that miracles recorded in the Bible were myths and that evolution was a fact. Literature on all sides was denying the deity of Christ with such statements as “unless Jesus’ method

of making himself divine can be imitated, his achievement is a mockery rather than a challenge.”

The trend in the church was so evident that conservatives in other communions were aware of it and exhorted the leaders in their denominations to mend their ways. Even avowed unbelievers were not deceived; an annual report of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism declared, “The forces of Modernism have won a sweeping victory in the last few years. Modernists now control the entire machinery and corporate life of the Presbyterian Church. . . . Much as we dislike Modernism because of its illogical compromising, we must recognize that for many it is but a stopover on the road to Atheism.”

Similar facts and statements were well known to the majority of Covenant Union members who attended the important meeting mentioned above. The covenant which they had signed consisted of two parts. First, they had covenanted to make every effort to bring about a reform in the existing organization and to restore the church’s clear and glorious Christian testimony. In the second place, if such efforts should fail, they covenanted to hold themselves ready to perpetuate the true, spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., regardless of cost.

The meeting was called to order and, following a devotional service, the executive committee made its report. It recommended that “in view of the fact that the efforts to reform the existing organization of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. have failed, and in view of the fact that the tyrannical policy of the present majority of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. has triumphed, as evidenced by the action of the

General Assembly . . . , it is now declared that the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union shall upon the adjournment of this meeting cease to exist and that the members of the Covenant Union are now free to carry on the true spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. in accordance with Section Two of the Covenant.”

## A New Denomination Is Formed

What was now to be done? Should the Covenant Union members return to their homes, despairing of any hope of purifying the church? Should they simply continue in its fellowship and do nothing more? God forbid! Such an attitude was impossible for anyone who was truly a soldier of the cross, truly worthy of the name Christian.

The church to which they belonged had ejected Christ from his rightful place as the only Head and King of the church by putting in the place of his commands the commandments of sinful men. To those who cherished the favor of God more than the plaudits of men, to those who truly cared for the doctrinal heritage which had been passed down from the Reformers (and which they in turn had received from the Word of God), there was only one possible answer and one course of action. That was to form a church which would stand squarely upon the Word of God.

The morning session came to a close, and the Covenant Union was disbanded; but the members did not leave. They had made a covenant, and they would see it through. Thus, on the memorable afternoon of June 11, 1936, some 200 persons rose to be constituted as the Presbyterian Church of America. Under the able moderatorship of the faithful and courageous Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the First General

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America (now the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) convened.

Christ is the Founder and the true Head of the Church. Any portion of the visible church which disregards his commandments and removes itself from the foundation of his Word is guilty of serious sin. This the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. had done, and its action has never been repudiated. Thus there is good reason for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Through these years—and to the present time—the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (later called the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.) has been an active member of the National Council of Churches. The pronouncements of this council have been largely related to matters of government rather than the church and have been strongly pro-socialist and pro-Marxist. The church also has been an active member of the World Council of Churches, well known for its anti-American declarations and its support of communist, terrorist groups.

In 1967 the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. adopted what is called the *Confession of 1967*. A good confession must set forth the doctrines of Scripture in an accurate and precise manner. It must also be sure to include those beliefs that are central to the Christian faith. In this confession, however, there is no clear statement concerning the fall of man, the nature of sin, the new birth, conversion, justification by faith or the deity of Christ. Though it stresses reconciliation, it does not present the biblical teaching on the subject. Professor Edward A. Dowey Jr. of Princeton Seminary, in the official document which introduced the *Confession of 1967*, describes the wonderful Westminster Confession of Faith—which had

been the doctrinal standard for so many years—as a monument marking the past rather than a tool for the present.

For many years a movement had been underway to unite the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. (Southern Presbyterian) with the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (Northern Presbyterian). In response to increased theological modernism in the former, several hundred congregations withdrew in the mid-1970s to form the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination which now has close ties with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Also, a group of more conservative congregations in the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. has withdrawn, and many of these congregations have united to form the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

In 1983 the union of the Northern and Southern churches was consummated to form the Presbyterian Church (U. S. A.). Many of the pronouncements and practices of this church show clearly that it is not adhering to the biblical requirements for a true church of Jesus Christ. It is important that those who are members either take definite steps to bring that church into accord with Scripture or to withdraw and unite with a biblically sound church.

By God's grace the Orthodox Presbyterian Church continues to be a church which is being built upon the Word of God. It welcomes into fellowship all who want to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's the reason for the church.



# THE PEA BENEATH THE MATTRESS

*Orthodox Presbyterians in America*

MARK A. NOLL

**I**N 1986 THE Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. Such an occasion is appropriate for reflecting on the place of the OPC in the larger world of Presbyterians and the Reformed. That task can be accomplished more generally by locating the American Presbyterianism, but also more specifically by examining the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian self-identity with respect to other Presbyterians in America.

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The only proper note on which to begin in consideration of America Presbyterianism late in the twentieth century is one of sobriety. Specific forms of measurement highlight the steadily eroding scope of organized Presbyterian and Reformed Christian faith in the United States. Since the mid-1960s the number of individuals belonging to the Presbyterian and Reformed family of churches in the United States has declined from over 4,000,000 to under 4,000,000, and that at a time when the population of the country has grown by about 40 million souls. For over twenty-five years the Gallup organization has been asking Americans for their religious affiliations with “Presbyterian,” but by 1984 that figure shrunk to less than 2.5 percent.

Comparative figures are equally sobering. The largest American denomination in the Presbyterian and Reformed family is the Presbyterian Church (USA), but its slightly more than three million members makes it only the eighth largest denomination in the country. Furthermore, the total of all the members of Presbyterian and Reformed bodies—including with the PC(USA) the other three such denominations with over 100,000 members (Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Presbyterian Church in America) as well as the smaller Presbyterian bodies—roughly equals the membership of the Church of God in Christ, of the Mormons, or the different Eastern Orthodox Churches in the United States. Together the entire Presbyterian and Reformed constituency amounts to less than half the number of United Methodists, one-fourth the number of Southern Baptist, and one-thirteenth the number of Roman Catholics in America.

To keep matters in perspective for just the more conservative Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, it is instructive to

note the other groups close to their size. Thus, the Reformed Church in America is somewhat smaller than the Armenian Church/American Diocese, the Christian Reformed Church is about the same size as the Free Will Baptist, and the Presbyterian Church in America is approximately comparable to the Unitarian Universalist Association. Groups roughly as large as the OPC include the Brethren in Christ, the Evangelical Church of North America, and the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference.

The meaning of these figures is not self-evident, but they do suggest that the story of Presbyterianism means something less to the story of America than once was the case. Yet to make such a reference to history has its compensations, for it reminds us how diverse and interesting the Presbyterian story on these shores actually has been.

From whatever angle we approach the history of Presbyterianism in America, matters of great consequence are at hand. Part of the ethnic heritage of America is its reception of Presbyterians and Reformed from Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Holland, Hungary, and other corners of Europe. And the story gets even more interesting as we observe that it was not, for example, simply Scottish Presbyterians who came to America but State-church Scottish Presbyterians, and Free-Church Scottish Presbyterians, or, to take another example that it made a great deal of difference whether Dutch Reformed immigrants to this country departed from Ost Friesland or Groningen and whether they arrived in the eighteenth century or the mid-nineteenth.

On matters more directly related to the history of churches, the story of Presbyterians in America has an arcane vocabulary all its own, with labels like New Side and Old Side, New

Light and Old Light, Cumberland, United, and Associate strewn across the landscape. Yet behind almost every label is an important, often moving, story of fervent theological discussion, heart-felt practical piety, stirring institutional courage, or faithful cultural involvement.

Also important has been the great role played by Presbyterians in our nation's history. In 1780 only the Congregationalists were more numerous than the Presbyterians. When the German Reformed and Dutch Reformed are added, however, the general Presbyterian and Reformed strength almost equal that of the Congregationalists. Presbyterians continue to grow rapidly throughout the nineteenth century. While the expansion of the Baptist, Methodists, and Catholics was faster, Presbyterians were still the third largest American denomination in 1829 and the fourth in 1860. And these Presbyterians exerted an influence on society far out of proportion to their size. A Presbyterian clergyman, John Witherspoon, the president of Princeton College, was the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. Anderson Jackson was only the most famous of several Presbyterian presidents in the country's early history. Abraham Lincoln never formally joined any local congregation, but he attended quite regularly two Presbyterian Churches pastored by Old School theological conservatives during the last fifteen years of his life. In the period before the Civil War, Presbyterians established as many schools, colleges, and seminaries as any other denomination. And Princeton Seminary by itself offered graduate-level instruction to more students than any other educational institution of any kind in the United States during the entire nineteenth century. A book like James Smylie's recent *American Presbyterians: A Pictorial History* shows clearly the

ways in which Presbyterian influence constantly, consistently, and constructively shaped public life in the United States well into the twentieth century. The OPC may now be a tiny branch on a somewhat withered tree, but it draws its historical nourishment from deep and strong roots.

At the same time, it is obvious that the story of the OPC is not simply the story of the American Presbyterianism writ small. The division of the Orthodox Presbyterians from the northern church in 1936 created a breach within Presbyterianism even as it created a new Presbyterian denomination. And so discussion is appropriate at this juncture concerning the relationship of the OPC to the other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed family in America.

The geographic heart of Orthodox Presbyterianism has always been Philadelphia. This year's OPC General Assembly, which met at Eastern College, was the twenty-sixth such gathering in Pennsylvania, the seventeenth in Philadelphia or its environs. The importance of J. Gresham Machen and of Westminster Seminary for the history of the OPC makes this a natural occurrence, but it is one that has had a long-term effect on the denomination. In early OPC General Assemblies, it was not unusual for more than half the delegates to be from the Presbytery of Philadelphia (55 percent at the second GA, 63 percent at the fourth). In 1939, 52 percent of the membership, 48 percent of the congregations, and 57 percent of the ministers came from the presbyteries of Philadelphia and New Jersey. Since its beginning the denomination has witnessed a steady redistribution throughout the northern part of the United States, with growing strength especially in California. But in 1985 the presbyteries of Philadelphia and New Jersey still accounted for about one-fourth of the denomination's

clergy, churches, and members.

The distribution of OPs bears some resemblance to the old Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) and to the old, Scottish-based United Presbyterian Church, but also differs considerable from that of other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies. Presbyterian in general, as a proportion of the population, are strongest in Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, and the rural Midwest. But some Presbyterian representation is present in almost all areas of the country. On the other hand, distribution of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church is much more localized, with greatest strength in New York and New Jersey, western Michigan, western Iowa, and California, but only scattered settlement in other areas of the country.

A state-by-state breakdown on the location of Presbyterians also helps us see where the OPC fits in. The following chart is a poor guide because of its skewed chronology, but in rummaging around in Presbyterian sources I ran across state-by-state figures from the mid-1950s for the Northern Presbyterian Church, and the old United Presbyterian Church. When this information is set against the distribution of churches in the OPC in 1985, we find the following:

## Geographical Distribution of Presbyterian Congregations

(PCUSA, PCUS, UPC from mid-1950s; OPC from 1985)  
 (five states with most congregations, plus ties)

PCUSA (Northern)		PCUS (Southern)		UPC		OPC	
PA	13.3%	NC	18.4%	PA	35.5%	PA	14.9%
NY	9.1	VA	12.6	OH	14.4	CA	4.9
OH	7.0	TX	9.8	NY	9.0	NJ	9.8
IL	6.3	SC	8.4	IA	6.5	FL	4.1
CA	5.1	GA	7.3	KS	6.0	NY	4.1
						WI	4.1
8,336 congregations		3,733 congregations		829 congregations		194 congregations	

Finally, the most recent Gallup figures for those identifying themselves as Presbyterians break down by regions as follows: 23 percent, East; 23 percent, Midwest; 31 percent, South; 23 percent, West.

More germane to the question of OPC self-identity than physical geography, however, is the question of ecumenical geography. Who are the OPC’s “significant others”? The minutes of the earliest General assemblies provide some help in answering that question since they note the groups that communicate with the new denomination in some way. The three General Assemblies held in 1936 and 1937 had some contact with several American groups, including the Reformed Episcopal Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church of the United States (i.e., Southern), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America, and the Spruce Street Baptist Church

in Philadelphia. From abroad came well wishes from the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Independent, of Sydney, Nova Scotia; the Irish Evangelical Church, which had divided from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1927; and the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

The OPC's subsequent ecumenical activity followed the lines of those earliest General Assemblies. While some contact continued with generally evangelical and antiliberal groups, the OPC has experienced closest fellowship with small, self-consciously Reformed bodies. Like the OPC, moreover, most of these groups have some history of combative division over their faithfulness to historical Reformed confessions.

From the first, the leadership exerted by Westminster Theological Seminary in the denomination helped to define the OPC's ecumenical partners as well. Thus, through John Murray, links were forged with the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. More important by far, however, was the bond with the Christian Reformed Church so visible in the presence of R. B. Kuiper, Ned B. Stonehouse, and Cornelius Van Til as mainstays of the Westminster faculty. When the Synod of the CRC sent a telegram to the first OPC General Assembly, extending an invitation for the new denomination to commission a fraternal delegate to its meetings, the Assembly appointed Cornelius Van Til to that task. Later in 1936 at the Second General Assembly, Van Til reported back on the cordial reception he had received from the CRC.

These early informal ties were cultivated through the years and eventually formed the basis for more permanent organizations, including the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, an international body founded under the leadership of the CRC in 1946, and the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council,

established in 1975.

In the end, however, the question of OPC self-identity has had much more to do with the Presbyterians from whom the OPC divided than with the Presbyterian and Reformed groups with whom it cooperated. That negative reference point has always been critical in defining the OPC. Yet in the earliest days of the denomination it was not clear exactly what that negative reference signified for the vision, the strategy, and the actions of the church.

The obvious enemy was a modernism which undercut the historic Reformed confessionalism of American Presbyterians. Members of the new denomination in 1936 knew that they were united in opposition to this modernism. None of the delegates to that first General Assembly had a particle of sympathy for the theological position of a Harry Emerson Fosdick or a Pearl Buck.

At the same time a second conviction bound the members of the First General Assembly together. This conviction was that personal opposition to liberalism was not enough. It was also necessary to break explicitly with the larger organization that tolerated liberalism. This second conviction was maintained at great cost, for it resulted in the disruption of bonds that had been cemented by a common loyalty to the Westminster Standards and by years of cooperative service. Members of the new denomination were forced out or came out while many friends who shared an opposition to liberalism stayed in. From the first, therefore, the self-identity of the OPC involved opposition not only to liberalism, but also to denominational pluralism.

There was yet a third conviction that served to define the new denomination, at least in its very early days. At the out-

set its leading spokesmen insisted that this was much more than just another new denomination. This was, rather, the old Presbyterian denomination stripped of its impurities and shorn of its compromisers. The new denomination chose a name—the Presbyterian Church of America—which indicated that this new group was ready to carry on for the old. The opening statement at the First General Assembly on June 11, 1936, by Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths made this crystal clear. They had gathered, said Griffiths, “to continue what we believe to be the true spiritual successions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., which we hold to have been abandoned by the present organization of that body.” The year before, members of the Constitutional Covenant Union, which conservatives had formed to defend adherence to the Westminster Confession, pledged themselves “to maintain the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., . . . making every effort to bring about a reform of the existing church organization, . . . but . . . if such efforts fail . . . holding ourselves to perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., regardless of cost.” Once the deed was done, J. Gresham Machen could say, “On Thursday, June 11, 1936, the hopes of many long years were realized. We became members, at last, of a true Presbyterian Church; we recovered, at last, the blessing of true Christian fellowship.”

The sense that this new, as yet tiny, group was the Presbyterian Church of America seems to have remained strong throughout the months before the Second General Assembly in November 1936. The committee charged with formulating the denomination’s constitution seriously considered proposing the Westminster Confession as revised by the PCUSA in 1903 as its doctrinal basis. It did so in part be-

cause of legal disputes over property, but also out of the desire to demonstrate continuity with the main body of American Presbyterians. The committee eventually proposed the unrevised Westminster Confession, but the desire to perpetuate “historical Presbyterianism,” as many put it at that time, was very strong.

At the Second General Assembly in November 1936 the hope that this would indeed become the Presbyterian Church of America remained alive. The statistical report was encouraging. In only five months the number of ministers had leaped from 34 to 108, and there were now congregations in sixteen states. The avalanche, perhaps, had begun. The tide within the Northern Presbyterian Church, perhaps, had begun to turn. Maybe now the great host in the PCUSA that shared an aversion to liberalism would overcome its toleration of pluralism and some out to fulfill the vision of the Presbyterian Church of America.

In late 1936 the self-identity of the new group hung at least in part upon the possibility that it might supplant the old denomination as the recognized heir of the great Presbyterian tradition, as the public expounder of the Westminster Standards, and as the acknowledged representatives in twentieth-century America of the faith of John Calvin, John Knox, and John Witherspoon. Yet it was not to be. The host did not come out. The big Presbyterian Church remained the big Presbyterian Church. The vision of the new group becoming in fact as well as in name the Presbyterian Church of America collapsed. The three main reasons for the collapse of that vision, from a human perspective, are quite clear.

First was the division of 1937. Even as the Second General Assembly in 1936 reported optimistic on the growth in min-

isters and congregations, long and acrid debate took place on the new body's stance toward premillennial eschatology. Other sensitive issues, including the question of drinking alcoholic beverages and the question of agencies independent of General Assembly authority, engendered controversy. These divisive issues soon broke the ranks of Westminster Seminary, the Independent Mission Board (which had been formed to funnel donations to conservative missionaries), and the denomination itself. In what historian George Marsden has shown to be an uncanny reprise of the 1837 Presbyterian schism, the "New School" and "Old School" parties in 1937 failed to agree on what it meant to be antimodernist and antipluralist as they formed the Presbyterian Church of America.

The division of 1937 certainly helped clarify the self-identity of those who remained as the OPC. They were antiliberal and antipluralist with their departed brethren, but they were also reformed in an Old School way not congenial to the mores or the doctrinal emphases of American fundamentalism. If the Westminster standards did not permit Dispensationalism, neither would they. If the Bible did not condemn all drinking, neither would they. The price of that clarification was a drastic slowing of momentum. Almost at the very inception of *the* Presbyterian Church of America came this division which mocked aspirations for a unified conservative church.

The second reason for the collapse of a grander vision was the death of J. Gresham Machen on January 1, 1937. Machen was the spearpoint, the standard, the inexhaustible source of energy for all of the major struggles. Other competent individuals could take his place to lead the denomination, but none were at hand to lead the Presbyterian Church of America.

Third, the failure of the conservative element in the PCUSA

to follow Machen out of the denomination sealed the death of the expansive vision. It did not take long to realize that if the new denomination was to have only hundreds and thousands while the old denomination kept its millions, it was the old denomination that would remain the Presbyterian Church of the U. S. A. The new group might claim a spiritual succession, but this—so far as American public life was concerned—was a nearly invisible spirituality.

Then insult was added to injury. The Northern Presbyterian church took the denomination to court over its name and won judgment forbidding the new group to call itself “The Presbyterian Church of America.” This circumstance brought out into the open the conundrum of self-identity. Yes, the new church was Reformed as defined by faithful adherence to the Westminster Standards. It was antimodernist. It was antipluralist. It was Old school rather than New school. But how did it fit in the American Presbyterian scene?

The fifth General Assembly of February 1939 wrestled with the question of self-identity as it considered what the denomination’s new name would be. Were they, as various ones suggested, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, The Presbyterian and Reformed Church of America, The North America Presbyterian Church, The Presbyterian Church of Christ, The Protestant Presbyterian Church of America, The Seceding Presbyterian Church of America, The Free Presbyterian Church of the World? In the end sentiment was divided nearly equally between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, with only lesser support for names retaining the word America. By one vote “Orthodox” prevailed over “Evangelical,” and so it has remained to this day. Most

significantly, the new name indicated a new perspective. No longer would the denomination aspire to be the Presbyterian Church of America.

At this point in the history of the denomination a matter arises which has always puzzled me. From reading old records and from not a few conversations with participants in these events, I have sought in vain for any hint that the new denomination ever considered simply disbanding and urging its ministers and congregations to seek membership in an already existing Presbyterian or Reformed denomination. At the time the logical choices would have been the PCUS (Southern), a group with many connections to Machen, or the CRC, with its manifold ties to Westminster Seminary. Naturally, substantial ethnic barriers stood in the way either group assimilating the Old School splinter of the PCUSA. On the one hand the “Southernness” of the PCUS was much more tangibly a reality in 1939 than it would later become. On the other, the “Dutchness” of the CRC was also a formidable barrier. Yet the CRC had earlier absorbed immigrant groups of German background and the PCUS had at least some churches in border states adjoining Pennsylvania. The puzzling thing to me is not so much that the OPC did not join with either the CRC or the PCUS, but that the question never seems to have come up.

Perhaps the answer is that once set out to be the Presbyterian Church of America, the denomination had committed itself to permanent existence, even after it had become clear that it would never achieve its original goal. It would now be an orthodox, Old School, Reformed denomination, anti-liberal and antipluralist, and, however small and however far from public influence and respect, it would at least remain its own denomination.

In any event, a great shift had taken place. The Presbyterian Church of America had become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Self-identity was now clearly in focus. This would be a purified, doctrinally precise remnant, not the great Presbyterian presence in America. The following is admittedly speculative, but it seems to me that at least four things flowed from the change from the Presbyterian Church of America to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

First, the denomination in effect conceded the public sphere to the PCUSA. This may have been a loss, or it may have been a gain, depending on the point of view. But the effect was obvious. It was the PCUSA, later the UPCUSA, and now again the PC(USA) that would be the church of presidents like Eisenhower; secretaries of state like Stimson, Dulles, and Rusk; business leaders like IBM's Thomas Watson or Sun Oil's J. Howard Pew; leaders of learning and the arts like Nobel laureate Arthur Holly Compton, poet Marianne Moore, or psychologist Karl Menninger; arbiters of mass culture like Henry Luce, DeWitt Wallace, James Stewart, and Mister Rogers; and even leaders of popular evangelism like Bill Bright and Leighton Ford. Influence in such spheres, for better or for worse, was not for the OPC.

Second, the change of vision from the Presbyterian Church of America to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church resulted also in changing attitudes toward culture at large. To modify terms which historian James Bratt has applied to the CRC,<sup>2</sup> the PCUSA by the early twentieth century included Optimistic Pietists, Confessional Pietists, Optimistic Transformers of

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2. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).

Culture, and Confessional Antitheticals. After the division of the Presbyterian Church in 1936 and the subsequent internal split in 1937, the OPC functioned as a Confessional Antithetical body. It stressed the norm of the confession, and it was separated by antithesis from the world. The effort to shape the culture for Christ was largely left to others, or at best remained a rhetorical goal. To be sure, heady discussion about the possibility of a Reformed Christian University under the leadership of Orthodox Presbyterians lingered into the 1940s, but the OPC as a denomination has never sponsored any systematic educational efforts, not even a college much less a university. The historical reasons for this are plain, but the effect was to forego a prominent feature of the American Presbyterian heritage, the persistent efforts to shape all of culture for Christ.

Third, the break with the idea of the Presbyterian Church of America made it easier to accept a new emphasis in theology. The apologetics of Cornelius Van Til are significant on strictly theological terms, but they are also very important in the history of the OPC. Van Til's presuppositional perspective represented a major shift away from the evidentialist apologetics that had prevailed at Princeton Seminary and among the Old School Presbyterians more generally. And it represented the introduction of some ideas popularized by Abraham Kuyper into an American denomination otherwise uninterested in instruction from the Continent. It is hard to imagine the new group adopting this imported stance in apologetics, whatever its intrinsic merits, had it not broken with the idea of maintaining the mainstream Presbyterian heritage in America. But Van Til's presuppositionalism did come to prevail in the denomination, offering a sturdy theological anchor and a ral-

lying point that perhaps helped compensate for the untimely loss of Machen. It is also meant, though, that the gap would widen between the OPC and the other seceding Presbyterians.

Finally, the decision to identify as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church meant several things for the internal life of the denomination. This was to be a doctrinally rigorous, procedurally precise body. Its glory was its faithfulness to Scripture and the heart-moving, intellectually satisfying system of doctrine embodied in the Westminster Standards. If this confessional loyalty led to obloquy from the wider world, if it sometimes encouraged a sectarian spirit, if it took the place of the desire to transform culture, all that was the necessary price to pay.

And so the denomination would go its way. It would defend Reformed confessionalism against much greater odds than ever faced the stalwarts at Old Princeton. It would uphold beliefs in God's sovereignty, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the uniqueness of salvation in Christ against torrents of scientism, hedonism, materialism, and anomie. But it would also be a minister's denomination, ever ready for recondite theological battle, uneasy with crowds, inexpert at feeling the pulse of modern America. In such a denomination with its concern for orthodoxy, bracing theological discussion flourished, but also did occasional disruptive warfare on the jots and tittles of the Law. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church stuck to its standards, and so against all odds a still small voice—insistently asking “what is man's chief end”—continued to be heard in post-Christian America. But even as it chose so firmly for orthodoxy and so clearly gave up its aspiration to be the Presbyterian Church of America, the denomination has experienced difficulty in adapting the glori-

ous cadences of its seventeenth-century confessions to the hot media of contemporary America.

We could well use metaphor to fix the image of the OPC in its historical setting in our minds. To steal a picture from secular literature, we might be tempted to say that the OPC is the pea beneath the mattress of American Presbyterianism. It is very small, but it is rock hard and undeniably there. Some Orthodox Presbyterians might be tempted to call the denomination a pearl of great price hidden away in a world of festering darkness. But that metaphor would exalt the OPC too highly and encourage it to forget the worldwide host without number who also have not cowed to Baal. In the end perhaps the inspiration of Numbers 22 will suffice. It may be enough to say that the OPC has renounced the iniquity of Balaam. It has not sold its soul to theological fashion or to the allure of wealth, power, and influence. It had not disobeyed the Lord. Rather, like Balaam's ass, though a thing naught and the humblest of all God's creatures, it has seen the angel of God and tried to heed his word.

# MACHEN, CULTURE, AND THE CHURCH

CHARLES G. DENNISON

**I**N 1920, H. L. Mencken, that irrepressible iconoclast from Baltimore, said that Southern civilization—undoubtedly the best that the Western Hemisphere had ever seen—had been ruined by the Civil War and had now fallen into the hands of plutocrats and Protestant barbarians. We might well guess who, according to Mencken, the Protestant barbarians were. It would be obvious, however, that as he became aware

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of the career of fellow Baltimorean, J. Gresham Machen, here was an exception. Not that Mencken had any real sympathy for Machen's religion or any interest in what he call "high and ghostly matters." Nevertheless, he saw in Machen not just another impressive intellect, but a responsive soul which, like his own, was melancholic for another world.

For Mencken, that other world was, by and large, the one of which J. Gresham Machen and he had seen vestiges in their youth. Artistically and intellectually assertive, it exhaled a wonderful spirit of freedom and individualism. Much to its credit, from Mencken's point of view, it was neither Puritanical nor Victorian; both terms he considered reprehensible—for him they were swear words. Mencken's "other world" was not overlaid with nostalgic sentimentality. He perceived it as a realism, a combative militance that fueled a fire deep within his heart. New money and its gospel of prosperity attended the emerging industrialism. But industrialism was heresy, and creeping standardization was its catechism. Bureaucrats—corporate and civil—were the new clerics. Canon law for this new world was a "melting pot" uniformity, a uniformity that Mencken judged lethal if for no other reason than it was dull—active, energetic, but trivial and deadeningly dull.

Still, developing urban centers had no monopoly on banality. As Mencken's contemporary, Sinclair Lewis described it, rural American life was boorish, repressively stupid, and hypocritical.

But whether urban or rural, the ugly culture of developing America was driven at its deepest level by materialism. Enter that sensitive poet of the previous generation, Sidney Lanier. He had excoriated the deception with words written in the 1870s.

Trade, trade, trade: pah, are we not all sick? A man cannot walk down a green alley of woods, in these days, without unawares getting his mouth and nose and eyes covered with some web or other that trade has stretched across, to catch some gain or other. 'Tis an old spider that has crawled over our modern life, and covered it with a flimsey web that conceals the Realities.

Ah! But what *were* "the Realities?" The older, fading world of Lanier's short life claimed to know them. Presumably Mary Day, Lanier's wife, knew them too, as did her lifelong friend, Minnie Gresham. These two gentlewomen lived lock-stepped. They were inseparable as girls in Macon, Georgia; and after their respective marriages, they found themselves together again in Baltimore. The year, 1881, however, saw them straightened with contrasting pains. In it Mary's husband died of tuberculosis in the Carolina mountains while Minnie presented her husband, Arthur Machen, with a baby boy, John Gresham.

The home into which John Gresham was born saw "the Realities" of which Lanier wrote, along straighter religious lines. For Lanier religion served a serene and aesthetic ideal. The grandest gospel, as his poem "The Symphony" (1875) suggests, was music—its power, humanity's hope. The Machens, however, revered the church. Still, to a certain degree (but a very definite degree), revered was the *idea* of the church, that idea not dissociated from a wide vision of culture. Not so much Calvinist as Presbyterian in more than any denominational sense. Only certain directions were possible ecclesiastically for a family of this standing. These directions transcended the peculiarities and difference that plagued others. The piety attached to them smacked more of respectability

than that of profound holiness. Here was an atmosphere, in the words of a Machen family member, far removed from life in one of those “small denominational churches.”

But precisely at this point we are faced with a severe perplexity. Not only was the world J. Gresham Machen knew in his early years fast dissolving, not only were its remaining bits and pieces religiously handicapped and suspect; but, following the excruciating struggles of the twenties and thirties, Machen himself (as if he were the main character in a farce) would father a group of those small denominational churches that the world of his family held in such disdain. Machen’s exile could not be more thorough. To be sure, he was admired from a distance by his old world, by a conservative cultural elite, but not followed—not even by those who professed Christian orthodoxy. Neither had he maintained any place for himself in the popular dominant culture and its well-tune, manicured, mainline, softly, safely liberal church.

By the thirties, the victory of the alien gospel was complete. Machen’s exile now was inevitable as the church grew progressively quiet or ambiguous in its stand for Christian truth. Transcendence gave way to immanence, particularism to universalism, eternal life to the better life, the uniqueness of the ordained ministry to an ecclesiastical egalitarianism, systematic theology (and the other branches of the theological science) to practical theology. Evangelicals and radicals embraced under a banner of establishmentarianism, exhibiting a common mind in their preoccupation with the immediate situation and present observable gains. The person of God, his redemptive work and worship, took a back seat to man, his experience and needs. Jesus became a paradigm for personal maturity and moral integrity; even a model for success. As divine Savior, he

was progressively nondescript. A firm doctrinal Christianity was beaten (much like the man on the road down from Jerusalem to Jericho) and left for dead by those, like Fosdick, who believed Christianity's essence to be found "in its abiding experiences," but never in its doctrinal content. Biblical givens and historical Christian convictions became optional "theories," confessional revision the agenda; organizational loyalty and productivity were canonized. Administrative law was law!

With all of this, we must not think that the church was driven from the field or shuffled into cultural irrelevance by the dawning of the "secular age." Rather the church adapted so well that in its own altered state it maintained, albeit more subtly, its dominant position in the emerging cultural consensus. It can be argued, of course, that the church had lost its influence and appeal and that, as proof, American society rescinded its Christian heritage. For example, while Machen teaches at Princeton Seminary, Princeton University produces a new kind of graduate, one who takes center stage in Scott Fitzgerald's semi-autobiographical character Amory Blaine. In the novel, *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald writes of Amory,

Long after the towers and spires of Princeton were visible with here and there a late-burning light—and suddenly out of clear darkness the sound of bells. As an endless dream it went on; the spirit of the past brooding over a new generation, the chosen youth from the muddled, unchastened world, still fed romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets. . . . A new generation dedicated more than the past to the fear of poverty and the worship of success, grown up to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken. . . . He stretched out his arms to the

crystalline, radiant sky. "I know myself," he cried, "but that is all!"

What deliberate egotism! How consistently immanentistic! Indeed, this side of paradise and always this side! Fitzgerald reacts to the predictability of Princeton grads with an indulgent wail of dissent. One would think that the church might be a little hard on the graduates, too, but much harder on Fitzgerald. However, the church also lives "this side of paradise." And while working to retain the polished Princetonian, it has simultaneously incorporated Fitzgerald's complaint. Thus, by easily expressing its sympathy for the skepticism, even agnosticism and atheism of the renegades, the church has guaranteed its relevance. A new synthesis takes place as does a new ministry, making room for unbelief, if not intent upon justifying its own unbelief. Here is not bare liberalism, but a conservatism and liberalism. The conservatism worked chiefly for executive and administrative uniformity; it is utterly intolerant. The liberalism parades placards of doctrinal breadth, so broad as to include denial, while overlaying its message with demonstrations of compassionate involvement.

The power of such a subtle and complex structure is difficult to overestimate, especially when we realize that such power was not gained apart from the culture but in concert with it. Machen stood against this structure and its power. The cost to him was great since in the end he was divested of not only his church but of a place within the culture of which that church was an integral part.

The story of Machen's stand carries us beyond his formative years proximate that world of Sidney Lanier and even his family. It covers, I believe, three distinct periods of his career. In each period he is excited to a greater precision; in each,

however, he experiences deeper isolation.

The first period moves from 1909 to 1919 and might well be called "The Church against the World." As yet, the denominational issues seem remote and references to Presbyterianism quite general. Nevertheless, certain things are settled about the church. The year 1909 marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvin's birth. Machen had a minor role in the celebration of that event at Princeton. But an address by Benjamin B. Warfield on Calvin's theology seems to have made a great impression upon him: "... it was ... certainly the finest thing ... that I have ever heard from Dr. Warfield," he wrote. Probably we go too far if we say there was an awakening in Machen to Calvinism at this point. At least, his Calvinistic sympathies are plain and, from here on, they must be assumed.

For Machen, however, the church that is Calvinistic must also maintain its commitment to an informed and intelligent ministry. In 1909 this also was brought into focus by the "Student Revolt" at Princeton Seminary. Demanded was a more *practical* curriculum. Machen replied:

We are able to do little for our generation, and can only hope to conserve a spark of learning for some future awakening in the church's intellectual life. Other seminaries have yielded to the incessant clamor for the "practical" ... I only hope the authorities will have the courage to keep our standard high, not bother about losses of students, and wait for better times. It is the only course of action that can be successful in the long run.

Machen's warning was in the interests of the church and sparing that church minister who was "pumped full of material which, without any real assimilation of any intellectual work

of any kind, they can pump out again on their unfortunate congregations.”

The church and the world came directly into view in Machen’s significant address, “Christianity and Culture.” A prepared ministry leads the church in no retreat from its cultural task; but neither does it lead in a pursuit of cultural dominance. Instead, it preaches a message of *consecration* of culture. No hiding behind an anti-intellectual pseudo-piety; seminaries party to such a thing leave the church unequipped to meet the intellectual challenges of and to the faith. But lest anyone think Machen an advocate of an easy cultural relevance, he excoriates the church that, in the name of relevance, majors in matters about which all are agreed. Needed is a church unimintimidated by the debate about sin, death, salvation, eternal life, and God—whose champions fight against spiritual and intellectual indolence, who stand up to the attitude that is forever adapting itself to the fashions of the day.

When he takes up the subject “History and Faith” in his 1915 inaugural, Machen clearly sets modern culture in its basic impulse over against the Bible. The church, however, wants both. The pagan direction of culture forbids this, and if the church persists, she must come to ruin. His message goes out, therefore; the church has a calling to consecration of culture, but not to compromise with it.

But certainly American culture is excepted? Or is it? Machen’s 1919 address entitled “The Church in the War” speaks in a shockingly blunt manner about postwar America and its church. It seems that even the church is Americanized. It makes common cause with the nation in sanctifying the war dead and wounded in a gospel proclaiming the sufficiency of men who sacrificed themselves. No word about human

unworthiness and sin; no message about Christ's unique and efficacious sacrifice for sinners. Lost in the synthesis of culture and church is atonement and confession. Asserted is an inherently pagan notion of self-satisfaction.

With the close of this first period, we find Machen in a precarious position. He has perceived the internal weakening of the church; he is clear about the opposition of the world to the truth and about the pagan character of culture. He sounds no retreat, only resolute articulate devotion to Christ and the Bible in advance of the church's task of consecration. But despite the forward posture, the patterns of isolation begin to appear as he places himself at odds with the structures of mutuality that bind together American cultural and ecclesiastical life.

The second period of Machen's struggle might be called "The Church against the Churches." It begins in 1920 and lasts through 1928. This is the time when Machen enters the ecclesiastical arena in earnest. If the previous period had at its center his insistence upon the church's separation from world, this era revolves around the uniqueness of the Presbyterian Church in the face of increased pressure to dismiss that uniqueness. Many Presbyterians may be selling their birthright, but Machen becomes the advocate for Presbyterianism and its claims.

The period begins with Machen attending his first General Assembly where he meets head-on the 1920 *Plan of Union*. This plan, spurred on by post-war cultural concerns as many ecumenical efforts tend to be, proposed the formation of a united church under the name, "The United Churches of Christ in America," composed of more than twenty denominations. Machen was shocked by the plan and insisted that the Presbyterian Church cannot, as the proposal suggests, dis-

miss its creed to “the level of purely denominational affairs.” What possibly surprises us in Machen’s opposition is the strength with which he asserts Presbyterian exclusivity. There is nothing reticent about him; his vision is of nothing less than Presbyterianism for the whole world.

The *Plan of Union* dies in the presbyteries, but the spirit that devised it burned on, and so did Machen’s opposition. Writing in 1927, for example, about what he called “the attack upon Princeton Seminary,” he says,

As over against . . . a reduced Christianity, we at Princeton stand for the full, glorious gospel of divine grace that God has given us in his Word and that is summarized in the Confession of Faith in our Church. We cannot agree with those who say that although they are members of the Presbyterian Church, they “have not the slightest zeal to have the Presbyterian Church extended through the length and breadth of the world.” As for us, we hold the faith of the Presbyterian Church, the great Reformed Faith that is set forth in the Westminster Confession, to be true; and holding it to be true, it is intended for the whole world.

We find Machen, therefore, pressing throughout this period for a “confessional” understanding of the church. If in the previous period the ministry was to be intelligent, in this period it is to be honest in terms of its vows. But more than a departure from historic Presbyterian doctrine is involved. As his popular book, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), and his famous 1925 sermon, “The Separateness of the Church,” make plain, a fatal cancer of unbelief has invaded the body. The Presbyterian Church must be preserved—the “crying need of the hour” is the health of this once virile denomination. Machen fears,

however, that the disease is too widespread; that it has compromised the boards and courts of the church. He poses the possibility of separation by those whose consciences cannot tolerate the situation, a situation aggravated by the grievous resolution of the Fosdick case and by toleration of the Auburn Affirmation.

Still it would be unfair to say that he is as yet wholly negative about his church. He remains committed, certainly determined to fight before the onslaught of denominational and confessional relativity and the insidious malignancy of liberalism. What is becoming clear, however, is just how much the church, even the Presbyterian Church, is moving in stride with the culture. It is also clear that Machen cannot follow.

The last epoch of Machen's career can be called "The Church against the Church." It stretches from 1929 to 1937. This is the time in which a true Presbyterian Church is the objective—prosecuted first in terms of the seminary (Princeton vs. Westminster), second in terms of missions (the PCUSA Mission Board vs. the Independent Board), and third in terms of the church as a whole (the mainline Presbyterian denomination vs. what would become known as the OPC). As we might expect, this period witnesses in Machen an increasing frankness about the Reformed faith. At its beginning, with the 1929 opening of Westminster Seminary, he refers, as has been his manner, quite generally to the Reformed content of the gospel. By 1936 he moves beyond generalities. His writings, but especially his radio talks, shimmer with a simple presentation of Reformed doctrine. Two books produced by those talks, *Christian Faith in the Modern World* and *The Christian View of Man*, serve as a systematic theology in miniature.

But very meaningful is Machen's last official public address

to the church, his sermon, "Constraining Love" delivered at the Second General Assembly of the new church (1936). In exegeting the phrase, "one died for all" from 2 Corinthians 5:14, he dismisses the universalistic and Arminian interpretation by way of an extensive defense of the limited atonement. Where in his earlier years, and even as recently as the inception of this particular era, Machen's Calvinism has been indirect, now it is explicit.

If this signals a maturation, it arrives apace—the maturation of his pilgrimage. Out of the old world, Mencken's other world, into the new world, with Machen opposed to both. The church preaches "another gospel" which is no gospel, from which little is excluded except the Calvinism that Machen preaches. No more distressing example of this fact exists than the visit of John McNaugher, UPCNA minister and President of Pitt-Xenia Seminary, to the 1934 PCUSA General Assembly. He has directed the UP side of the attempt at union between the UP and the PCUSA. On the floor of the PCUSA Assembly, he openly ridicules the Westminster Standards and is applauded. Things have moved far beyond the call to confessional revision. Calvinism is being shoved out the door.

Coming in by another way are those accusers whose case against the church is that it has been utterly naïve about evil. Needed is talk about reprobation and election, sin and atonement, death and resurrection. But is the church cowering? Will it return to orthodoxy and its Calvinist roots? Not at all! Besides, T. S. Eliot has converted and his 1930 poem "Ash Wednesday" means that transcendence and the supernatural are again acceptable possibilities. But has there been any real change, or is the omnivorous nature of the church and the new culture been displayed once more? The synthetic church em-

braces a synthesis of biblical language and post-Kantianism. Fosdick feels compelled to deliver a message entitled, "We must go beyond Modernism." Machen's gospel demanded repentance, but fewer and fewer listen.

Machen's isolation is complete. The "other world" of Mencken, in the end, offers him little but its sympathy. The new emerging world of American progress—church and culture alike—will not even offer that. Instead Machen receives the back of the hand.

He is, to be sure, shut out, but he also is shut up unto something else altogether. He is shut up unto the Bible and yet another world, at the center of which is abiding communion with God in heaven. He claimed in his writing that already this destination asserts itself in the true church of Christ. Because of the intensity of his vision, he was shut up unto insistence upon the church's purity. At the same time, he also shut up unto a rigorous Calvinism, judged anathema or expendable by the PCUSA in the interests of survival. And he was shut up to a little company of "small denomination churches," the scourge of the earth, disdainfully dismissed, hardly taken seriously by the "world shakers."

Machen's humiliation leaves him stripped. What does he have left on the plains of the Dakotas where he died? Certainly not the cultured world he knew in Baltimore or in Princeton. Not even much of that world he knew in Philadelphia. In the end he is left only with Christ and especially Christ's active obedience. For the sake of this Christ he counts loss his richest gain and pours contempt on all his pride.

Do you see it? The Orthodox Presbyterian Church begins where Machen ended and that is her secret, her genius, and her calling. She, too, has known his humiliation and isolation,

but also a glory that transcends the world and culture in which she finds herself. No mere American church, nor more of the same old Presbyterianism with an acculturated message. To be sure, the OPC continues to address the issues of “The Church and the Church,” “The Church and the Churches,” and “The Church and the World.” But in the culture, is she to dominate? Take over? Is she the purveyor of some sort of religious imperialism? Or is she to seek marriage with the world and become indistinguishable from it? No, in conclusion, the posture she and Machen don must be the same; it must be that of their Savior. The posture is one of a servant in the midst of a world that does not understand and in large measure does not care.

Machen, Culture, and the Church: here is a remarkable pilgrimage of incredible substance. Truly an incredible loss, but what an incredible gain!

# REALIGNMENT: AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

*Is Realignment a Biblical Option?*

JOHN M. FRAME

**E**ARLY THIS YEAR, New Life Presbyterian Church (OPC) of Escondido, California took its second and deciding vote to leave the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the Presbyterian Church in America. I serve on the session of that congregation. Our reason was as follows: Our congregation has gifts from God, a strategic location, a burden and a calling to plant churches in San Diego County. Most of the more gifted church planters in this area have preferred to

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\* Originally published in *New Horizons in the OPC* 10:6 (June/July 1989): 18.

work in the PCA rather than in the OPC. Thus we believed that we had good reason, indeed, a divine mandate of sorts, to switch denominations. Words like “disloyalty,” “betrayal,” “abandonment,” even “schism” have been used to characterize our action. Nevertheless, I believe that our decision can be justified biblically.

The term “schismatic” was used in the early centuries of the church to describe groups such as the Novatians and the Donatists who rejected the government of the one true church to begin their own churches, in effect, the OPC. Our action is provided for in the first denominations. Jesus Christ had groups of Christians and benefit from their gifts, we must cross denominational barriers. We want to work with some Christians who have developed an effective vision and plan for church planting; but we cannot work closely with them without crossing a denominational barrier. In some cases, such a move might be schismatic. A church might want to switch denominations because of contempt for the government of its own denomination. Perhaps it wishes to escape from discipline. Sometimes churches leave denominations out of little more than a prideful desire to be their own bosses.

### Moving from One Part to Another

On the other hand, there was evidently no problem in the New Testament period and later when people wished to move from one part of the church to another. Priscilla, Aquila, Paul, Timothy, Silas, Barnabas, Mark, and many others often moved from place to place in their missionary labors. Though there were sad partings (as in Acts 20:36–38), the missionaries moved on to spread the Word.

We live in a rather different situation. The church today is

not organizationally one as in the first centuries, but is divided into many denominations. Often, in order to work with other groups of Christians and benefit from their gifts, we must cross denominational barriers. We want to work with some Christians who have developed an effective vision and plan for church planting; but we cannot work closely with them without crossing a denominational barrier.

In some cases, such a move might be schismatic. A church might want to switch denominations because of contempt for the government of its own denomination. Perhaps it wishes to escape from discipline. Sometimes churches leave denominations out of little more than a prideful desire to be their own bosses.

## Reasons to Change

On the other hand, there are many situations where changing denominations is clearly not sinful. Church members often transfer from OPC to PCA and vice versa for many reasons, including location and better use of gifts. Ministers of one group have often accepted calls to the other group in order to follow God's calling. When individuals make such transfers, no one seems to complain that they are being schismatic or disloyal. It is well understood that these people are simply moving from one part of the church to another.

But when a congregation moves, the response is often very different. People in the original denomination sometimes become critical, even angry. But why should congregations be different than individuals? Congregations, like individuals, have God-given gifts and God-given callings.

New Life's action was not motivated by contempt for the government of the OPC. Our action is provided for in the

OPC Form of Government, and we are following that provision carefully. In the very act of withdrawal, we are seeking to be subject to our OPC brethren. We have no desire for autonomy, to be our own bosses; on the contrary, we are joining another presbyterian denomination which, just like the OPC, requires obedience to its standards and to its courts. We have no desire to be apart from our OPC brothers and sisters. Our fondest wish is that one day that denominational barrier (which, I believe, exists contrary to God's will) will be gone, and we will all be together in a united church.

I earnestly hope that we will learn to take that denominational barrier less and less seriously until it disappears altogether. You who stay in the OPC have no right, in the absence of compelling evidence, to judge the motives of those who wish to cross that barrier. Let God's Word temper your initial emotional reactions. There is no need for realignment to cause bitterness between us. We continue to love you, and we treasure your love and faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that that love and respect with be mutual.

# REALIGNMENT: AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

*“So I Said Good-Bye to Them  
and Went On to Macedonia”*

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.

**W**HAT DOES PAUL’S incidental comment at the end of 2 Corinthians 2:13 possibly have to do with the issue of individual congregations (and, in some instances, ministers) withdrawing from the OPC to join the PCA? “Much in every way!” the Apostle would likely say (Rom. 3:2). But more on that later.

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\* Originally published in *New Horizons in the OPC* 10:6 (June/July 1989): 19.

## A Move That Is Wrong

Much as we might wish otherwise, we have to adopt a negative rather than a positive approach to the question of withdrawal. All the reasons for withdrawing to the PCA are ultimately beside the point; the sole consideration is what rationale there is to offer for withdrawing *from* the OPC.

If there were no PCA or any other true church in existence except the OPC, would our congregation seek to withdraw? Any “yes” to that question, no matter how gracious or well-intended, would be schismatic; it would partake of the same spirit that entered the church centuries ago when unwarranted division first appeared. (Being forced out of the church, as in the developments that led to the origin of the OPC, is a different matter.)

How can the current fragmented state of the church provide legitimate options for the divisive spirit that was fundamentally wrong at its beginning? How can the existence of other true churches, like the PCA, sanction self-willed separation? There are occasions where it would be proper for a presbytery to dismiss a congregation or a minister to another denomination. But to withdraw unilaterally and for the reasons currently being given—frustration, preference, or presumed advantage—is to retrace those fatal steps that first divided Christ’s body.

## Not Simply a Denomination

There is some confused thinking circulating in our midst about the sinfulness of denominations. The existence of separate denominations within a given area is anomalous; such divisions are ultimately the result of sin and, where possible, every effort ought to be made to see them removed. But it hardly follows that to belong to a denomination is somehow sinful or even

that the denomination is unimportant or less important than the local congregation.

That may be the view of congregationalists. But we are *presbyterians*. However you label it, something like a denominational entity is necessary for a biblically based presbyterianism.

But the OPC is not simply a “denomination;” it is *church*, a church that exists by divine warrant. For presbyterianism the local congregation is the vital point of departure (and in that sense has priority). But surely the regional church (presbytery) and, by arguable extension of biblical principle, the national and perhaps even international church (denomination) are no less the church. Biblical presbyterianism has no place for loyalties torn between the denomination and the local congregation, or for greater loyalty to either one. An implicit congregationalism, it seems, controls much of the argumentation for withdrawing from the OPC.

## Attend to Unity

Back to 2 Corinthians 2 and the Apostle Paul. Verse 12 tells us that he “went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me” (NIV). Think of Troas—key seaport and major population center of the Mediterranean world, strategically situated in the northwest corner of Asia Minor—now open to the gospel, an open door “in the Lord,” no less! An evangelist’s and church planter’s dream! What more could Paul ask for? What higher priority could there possibly be in his apostolic “philosophy of ministry?”

Yet Paul does not seize this golden opportunity to preach the gospel. Instead, out of concern for the Corinthian con-

gregation(s) and the tensions that had disrupted his relationship with them (“I still had no peace of mind,” v. 13, NIV), he pressed on to Macedonia to find Titus and learn from him whether his efforts to be reconciled to them had succeeded (v. 4; see 7:5–7).

The correspondence between this incident and the current situation in the OPC is not exact. But what is instructive is the sense of priorities Paul displays—strange priorities, some may think, for someone intent on seeing the gospel “proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (Col. 1:23, NIV). We may have to let such opportunities pass, Paul is telling us, when the unity of the church is being damaged and strained relationships—no matter how burdensome and frustrating and seemingly counterproductive—deserve our attention.

Paul had his priorities straight because, as he later made clear to the Ephesian elders, he saw no tension between “the gospel of the grace of God” and “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:24, 27, RSV). He was too capable a pastor and theologian to allow himself to be maneuvered into a false choice between zeal for church planting and fervor for sound doctrine, or between the Great Commission and church order. Paul knew that commission encompasses “everything I have commanded you,” even matters like concern for the provisions of the Form of Government.

The strategy of withdrawing to the PCA is anything but an optional, basically indifferent matter; in fact, it involves a serious risk. In our present ecclesiastical maneuvering we need to be on guard—as 2 Corinthians 2 suggests, with a view to broken fellowship in the church—“in order that Satan might not outwit us” (v. 11a, NIV). We need to be sure that we are “not unaware of his schemes” (v. 11b, NIV).

# THE TIE THAT DIVIDES

*Presbyterian Ecumenism, Fundamentalism,  
and the History of Twentieth-Century  
American Protestantism*

D. G. HART

“NOTHING ENGENDERS STRIFE so much as a forced unity, within the same organization, of those who disagree fundamentally in aim.” Thus wrote J. Gresham Machen toward the end of his book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. On the surface this assertion looked common-sensi-

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\* A slightly altered version of this paper was originally given at the conference, “Methodism & the Fragmentation of American Protestantism, 1865–1920,” held at the Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center, Asbury Theological Seminary on September 29, 1995.

cal. The example Machen used made his point look even more obvious. Suppose that a Republican joined an Democratic organization, he conjectured, not because she had become convinced of Democratic policies, but because she wanted to subvert the work of such an organization and use it to promote Republican causes. Would such a plan be ingenious? Maybe. But would it also be dishonest? Of course.<sup>2</sup> Such elementary forms of logic applied to religion, a realm known more for hollow platitudes than concrete truths, won for *Christianity and Liberalism* the praise of a number of secular intellectuals. H. L. Mencken, for instance, wrote that Machen's argument had no flaw in it, and added that "if [Machen] is wrong, then the science of logic is a hollow vanity, signifying nothing."<sup>3</sup>

Yet this notion that two disparate parties could not co-exist in the same organization received from the Northern Presbyterian Church then the same kind of reaction that an ethnic joke would meet today at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (PCUSA). In other words, Presbyterians were not particularly persuaded by Machen's line of reasoning. In fact, the report of the committee appointed in 1925 to investigate tensions in the Presbyterian Church took a decidedly different reading of Presbyterian unity. In a statement that foreshadowed the recent arguments of multiculturalists, the committee reported that in spite of geographical differences, "varying racial roots," differences in residence, education, social-contacts, and living customs, the Presbyterian Church was a communion "with one heart

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2. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 167–170, quotation from 167.

3. H. L. Mencken, "The Impregnable Rock," *American Mercury* 9 (Dec. 1931), 411.

beating at the center of its corporate life, bound together by the firm ties of a shining record that embraces the sacrifices and triumphs of the past, of a faith and of a hope, yearning, but sure, and drawing into its stimulating experience the holy promise of a fairer future—bound into a unity which, we believe, our generation will not break.”<sup>4</sup> Never mind that some members like Machen did not find this “center of corporate life” all that inclusive or hospitable. The PCUSA was unified because a committee appointed by the highest court of the church had said so.

The reason for such a different reading of the situation than Machen’s was not sheer stupidity or outright deceit but concerned the very character of Presbyterian history for the five decades before the fundamentalist controversy. Historians have typically regarded the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a time when Presbyterians polarized neatly into two theologically antagonistic camps, one conservative and one modernist.<sup>5</sup> But while the roots of the fundamentalist conflict can be traced to the churches response to evolution, higher criticism and the Social Gospel, between 1870 and 1925 the Northern Presbyterian Church actually experienced a remarkable degree of organizational consolidation. Not only was the denomination itself transformed from a small collection of ministries rooted in the work of local churches and presbyteries into a corporate juggernaut where denomina-

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4. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (1926), 66.

5. The two best histories of fundamentalism and modernism remain George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism, 1875–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), and William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

tional agencies increasingly defined the identity and mission of the church. But Presbyterians took the lead in establishing a number of ecclesiastical fellowships the purpose of which were to promote church unity and interdenominational cooperation. For Machen to say that two distinct parties could not coexist in the same organization was tantamount to denying fifty years of church history.<sup>6</sup>

Still, Machen's assessment of the situation is instructive for evaluating the nature of theological fragmentation in the Presbyterian Church after the Civil War. Though the theological polarization that precipitated disputes between fundamentalists and modernists has prompted historians of twentieth-century Protestantism to emphasize a "two-party paradigm" of interpretation that divides the Protestant world between evangelicals and liberals,<sup>7</sup> this same historiography has missed the degree to which ecumenism itself contributed to fundamentalist controversy in the Northern Presbyterian Church. To borrow a phrase from Machen, could two parties exist within the Presbyterian Church? Could the center hold?

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6. See, for instance, Louis B. Weeks, "The Incorporation of the Presbyterians," and Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, "The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation," in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 37–54, 307–332 respectively; and James H. Moorhead, "Presbyterians and the Mystique of Organizational Efficiency, 1870–1936," in *Re-Imagining Denominationalism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Robert Bruce Mullin and Russell E. Richey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 264–287.

7. See Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger Jr., "Historiography of American Protestantism: The Two-Party Paradigm," *Fides et Historia* 25 (1993), 4–15 which faults the conventional dichotomization of Protestants into liberals and conservatives for lacking nuance and missing commonalities.

Or were the centrist sentiments of Presbyterian leaders specifically and mainline Protestants more generally actually responsible for dividing the church?

What follows is a survey of Presbyterian involvement in and reaction to ecumenical and interdenominational endeavors between 1870 and 1920. It begins with a description of late nineteenth-century Presbyterian ecumenism together with its ideology, then surveys the small party of Presbyterians who opposed church union, and shows how these differing outlooks contributed to the Presbyterian conflict of the 1920s. The argument here is that Presbyterian ecumenical efforts, as much as the standard litany of theological convictions and academic novelties—such as higher criticism, the Social Gospel, Darwinism, creationism, dispensationalism, and biblical inerrancy—contributed to the antagonism between fundamentalists and modernists. After considering ecumenism as a factor in the Presbyterian controversy, this essay attempts to explain why American church historians have neglected church union as a source of denominational strife, and why the two-party historiography of American Protestantism has dominated the field despite current efforts to find an alternative. What this perspective on the Presbyterian controversy implies is that the differences between Protestant cosmopolitans, those who favored church union, and denominational localists, those who opposed it, provide a more fruitful way for understanding twentieth-century American Protestant history than the standard liberal/evangelical taxonomy.

### Presbyterian Ecumenism

Hopes for church cooperation gained significant momentum with the 1869 reunion of the Old and New School branches

of northern Presbyterianism, a big piece in the larger ecumenical quilt. In 1837 and 1838 Presbyterians had divided over a number of issues provoked by the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. The specific concerns that split the Presbyterian Church were the compatibility of the theology of a revivalist like Charles Grandison Finney with the teachings of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the 1801 Plan of Union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, and Presbyterian participation in non-denominational voluntary associations for moral and religious reform. Over the course of these struggles and the division of 1838, Old School Presbyterians gained the reputation for being the more strict communion with regard to theology and church government, an image bolstered by the arguments of some of its leading theologians such as Robert Lewis Dabney, James Henley Thornwell, and Charles Hodge. Nevertheless, differences between the Old and New Schools looked decidedly different in the wake of the Civil War when Northern Presbyterians worked together on the same side in the struggle for union. Support for national union was an important ingredient in the arguments for ecclesiastical union among the Presbyterians. As George Marsden put it, “Disputes over moral depravity, limited atonement, and mediate imputation lost much of their urgency in the midst of national crisis.” Thus, despite opposition to the end by the likes of Charles Hodge because of concerns about the New School’s understanding of subscription, the wedding of the Old and New Schools went forward.<sup>8</sup>

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8. George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 211. In addition to the works by the theologians mentioned in this paragraph, readers interested

Lefferts A. Loetscher asked in his book, *The Broadening Church*, how long the Presbyterian honeymoon would last. For him this question implied that controversies within Presbyterian circles over liberal theology, biblical criticism and Darwinism would soon disrupt the bonds of reunion.<sup>9</sup> But the founding of the American branch of the Evangelical Alliance in 1867, and the Presbyterian Alliance in 1877 suggest that harmony and cooperation, rather than acrimony and division, were equally if not more important to Northern Presbyterians in the late nineteenth century. Loetscher's characterization of the reunion of the Old and New Schools sums up well the sentiments that led to so many cooperative endeavors among Presbyterians specifically and Protestants more generally. "Reflecting the spirit of the times," he wrote, "the Church was becoming increasingly responsive to everything that made for effectiveness of action, and correspondingly allergic to any theoretical considerations that might hamper its vigorous activism."<sup>10</sup>

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in Old School Presbyterianism should consult the following: Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 1 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963); James Oscar Farmer Jr., *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); John H. Leith, "James Henley Thornwell and the Shaping of the Reformed Tradition in the South," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1988), 424–447; and Louis Weeks, "Faith and Political Action in American Presbyterianism, 1776–1918," in *Reformed Faith and Politics*, ed. Ronald H. Stone (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 101–120.

9. Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), ch. 1.

10. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 8. For another perspective on postbellum Presbyterian history that stresses unity and denominational consolidation, see Richard W. Reifsnnyder, "Presbyterian Reunion, Reorga-

The Evangelical Alliance was founded originally in London in 1846 but failed to gain an American branch until almost three decades later. Its purpose was to bring “individual Christians into closer fellowship and cooperation on the basis of the spiritual union which already exists in the vital relation of Christ to the members of his body.”<sup>11</sup> Despite such pious rhetoric, American involvement in the Alliance drew upon nationalistic sentiments generated by the Civil War—thus, the significance of the date, 1867. Indeed, many Northern Protestants “assumed that America’s Christian civilization rested on an evangelical foundation whose pillars were religious and civil liberty.”<sup>12</sup> The birth of the America branch of the Evangelical Alliance reflected American Protestant assumptions about the interrelationship between evangelicalism and democracy. Though the right side had won in the Civil War, Northern Protestants still felt as if the prospects for Christian civilization in America were threatened. Cooperation among the churches and membership in the Evangelical Alliance pro-

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nization and Expansion in the Late 19th Century,” *American Presbyterians* 64 (1986): 27–38.

11. Samuel McCrea Cavert, *The American Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1900–1968* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1968), 25. Though designed as an outlet for individual Christians to cooperate, the Alliance’s nine-point doctrinal platform uncannily resembles that of the National Association of Evangelicals, an organization to which individuals and churches may belong. Compare, for instance, Allen C. Guelzo’s treatment of the Evangelical Alliance in *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of Reformed Episcopalians* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994), 117–128, to Joel A. Carpenter’s discussion of the NAE in “From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 3–16.

12. Philip D. Jordan, “The Evangelical Alliance and American Presbyterians, 1867–1873,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 51 (1973): 311.

vided ways to respond to that threat.<sup>13</sup>

The perils posed to Christian civilization in America were standard fare from the perspective of antebellum evangelical reformers.<sup>14</sup> Violation of the Sabbath, intemperate consumption of alcoholic beverages (with an emphasis on abstinence), and assaults to the stability of the Christian home were some of the reasons for participating in the Evangelical Alliance. These concerns for what James McCosh called “the moral improvement of mankind” only intensified in the decades after the Civil War as large-scale industrial development and the cheap labor such industry required made urban centers appear to be in even greater need of Christianity’s civilizing influences than they had been prior to the war. The fact that many of the new immigrants to the United States were Roman Catholic, combined with papal pronouncements against democracy and religious liberty in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) fanned anti-Catholic flames that so often burned among American evangelicals. The papacy’s display of authority and apparent Catholic unity during the First Vatican Council demonstrated especially to Protestants the dangers of a denominationalism which prevented the formation of a united front against what evangelicals regarded as “the Man of Sin.”<sup>15</sup> In sum, the dangers of materialism, skepticism, infidelity, and Catholicism

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13. Jordan, “Evangelical Alliance,” makes this point. For the larger connections between evangelicalism and democracy, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

14. For a recent study of antebellum reform that confirms this point, see Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

15. The progress and prospects of Christianity in the United States of America (London, 1851), quoted in Jordan, “Evangelical Alliance,” 311.

persuaded Protestants to work together on the basis of what they held in common.<sup>16</sup>

Leavening these threats to Protestants was the yeast of American exceptionalism. While Anglo-American Protestants in the form of Whig political thought had long connected Christian teachings about liberty of conscience and worship with the principles of civil liberty, Northern Protestants after the Civil War begged many questions about the place of the Union in divine providence.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Europe where various forms of tyranny still existed, America embodied the best hope for true religion because of the nation's democratic and republican foundations. For this reason the eradication of slavery during the Civil War loomed especially large in the minds the Evangelical Alliance's American supporters. The United States' witness to orthodoxy and liberty had obviously been compromised by the evil institution. But with its demise, according to General Assembly of New School Presbyterians, "not only has our American Christianity been vindicated, our faith and order maintained intact, and our Christian benevolence enhanced," but the Union's victory proved to the world the truths of evangelicalism and American politics.<sup>18</sup> Even the Scotsman, James McCosh, newly inaugurated as President of the College of New Jersey, read postbellum America and its

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16. See Jordan, "Evangelical Alliance," 311; Jordan, *The Evangelical Alliance for the United States of America, 1847-1900: Ecumenism, Identity and the Religion of the Republic* (New York, NY: Mellen Press, 1982), ch. 4; Cavert, *The American Churches*, ch. 1.

17. On the connections between Whig politics and American Protestantism, see Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), ch. 4.

18. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New School)*, 1866, 263, quoted in Jordan, "Evangelical Alliance," 324.

place in the world order in eschatological terms. The United States was “the land of the future” because evangelical principles were thoroughly incorporated in the life and spirit of the country. America for McCosh embodied precisely what the Evangelical Alliance was trying to accomplish, namely, a pervasive unity of evangelical spirit. For that reason McCosh urged his fellow Presbyterians to join the Alliance to “combine the scattered energies of Christendom all over the world.”<sup>19</sup>

The leaders of the Evangelical Alliance in America included many prominent Presbyterians. In fact, the reunion of the Old and New Schools greatly facilitated support for the Alliance because many of the impulses behind Presbyterian union were also at work in evangelical cooperation. As the committee on the reunion of the Old and New Schools put it, “the welfare of the whole country, and the kingdom of our Lord in all the earth” required merger of the two denominations as well as cooperation between Protestants.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Henry Boynton Smith, professor at Union Seminary (NY), and James McCosh of the College of New Jersey, both supporters of Presbyterian reunion also marshaled intellectual resources on behalf of evangelical cooperation. But Presbyterians did more than provide reasons for Protestant collaboration. They also provided administrative muscle. William E. Dodge Sr., an active New School Presbyterian elder, presided over the

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19. McCosh, “The Religious and Social Conditions of the United States . . .,” *Proceedings of the Evangelical Alliance* (1866), 17, 23, quoted in J. David Hoeveler Jr. “Evangelical Ecumenism: James McCosh and the Intellectual Origins of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 55 (1977): 45, 47.

20. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School)*, 1868, 5, quoted in Jordan, “Evangelical Alliance,” 315.

American Evangelical Alliance, and Samuel Irenaeus Prime, an Old School minister and editor of the influential *New York Observer*, shaped the direction of the Alliance. Presbyterian involvement in these cooperative endeavors prompted one contemporary to conclude that Presbyterians were “leaders in the matter from the first.”<sup>21</sup>

Desires for evangelical cooperation spilled over on to relations between different Presbyterian denominations. Soon after the formation of the American branch of the Evangelical Alliance many of the same Presbyterians began to work for a Presbyterian Alliance which would do many of the same things done by the Evangelical Alliance but under explicitly Presbyterian auspices. Though apparently redundant, supporters of the Presbyterian Alliance had a method to their madness. They knew that some Presbyterian communions would not participate in the broader Evangelical Alliance for fear of compromising distinctively Presbyterian convictions. Thus, the Presbyterian Alliance was a way for bringing into the larger ecumenical fold those Presbyterians ambivalent about cooperating with Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists and Episcopalians. Rather than exhibiting a form of Reformed separatism, the Presbyterian Alliance would, like its evangelical counterpart, promote ecclesiastical cooperation for the sake of fighting atheism, infidelity, immorality, materialism and Roman Catholicism.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Presbyterian contributions to the Evangelical Alliance and plans for their own cooperation reflected the late nineteenth-century American Protestant attitudes toward

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21. Quotation from Jordan, 310. See also Jordan, “Evangelical Alliance”; and Hoeveler, “Evangelical Ecumenism.”

22. See Hoeveler, “Evangelical Ecumenism.”

church union (a point of view still alive and well a century later). For middle-class Protestants ecumenism became a type of civil religion where theological concerns or confessional traditions became secondary to the apparently more important task of maintaining and promoting Christian (read Protestant) civilization in the United States. This conclusion is well illustrated in the writings of Samuel McCrea Cavert on the ecumenical movement's history. With almost no embarrassment (he wrote before anti-Americanism became fashionable in mainline denominations), Cavert organized his narrative around the themes of Americanization and assimilation. For instance, *The American Churches in the Ecumenical Movement* (1968) began with the lament that the Protestant churches lacked the "solid political unity" of the nation. Cavert also compared (much like Promise Keepers) the competition between the denominations to the divisiveness of race, ethnicity, and class. "Instead of being a force for understanding and reconciliation" the churches "seemed to be adding one more fragmenting factor" to the life of the nation.<sup>23</sup>

Cavert inherited these views from nineteenth-century Northern Protestants. Consequently, in the face of a nation that appeared to be veering away from Christian control, Presbyterians began to put aside differences over soteriology, the sacraments, church order—the things that had traditionally distinguished denominations—and rallied to the nation-state as an area of common endeavor and sure means of preserving Protestant hegemony. In fact, one searches the histories and plans for Protestant cooperative campaigns in vain for systematic treatments of the doctrine of the church

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23. Cavert, *The American Churches*, 15, 32.

and unity in Christ. Instead, what emerges are general notions that all Christians should be one, linked with efforts to ease Protestant fears about the state of American society.<sup>24</sup>

Protestant ecumenism, then, was part of a social gospel. Of course, many Presbyterians continued to believe in the necessity of individual conversion and regeneration. But often the salvation of individuals was a means of shoring up public order. More importantly, the areas upon which Protestants agreed to cooperate overwhelmingly concerned matters of public morality. Observance of the Sabbath, consumption of alcohol, the plight of the working class, the dangers of infidelity, materialism, and Roman Catholicism were all issues that had a direct bearing on public life and became the criteria for judging whether or not the nation was Christian. In turn these concerns moved Presbyterians specifically and Protestants more generally (at least in the North) to conceive of the work of the church more as social than spiritual. Public morality and civic righteousness pushed aside word and sacrament. According to Richard W. Reifsnyder, “practical results tended to become the church’s measuring stick rather than preservation of precise doctrinal standard.”<sup>25</sup> The culmination of this outlook was the founding of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908, an agency that drew upon the various strands of late-nineteenth century Protestant cooperation, gave muscle to the Social Gospel with its eight-point plan for labor and capital, and again depended heavily on Presbyterian leadership.<sup>26</sup>

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24. See Cavert, *The American Churches*; *idem*, *Church Cooperation and Unity in America, 1900–1970* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1970); and Ernst Eldon Gilbert, “The Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1919–1920,” (PhD. diss., Yale University, 1968).

25. Reifsnyder, “Presbyterian Reunion,” 37.

26. See Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social*

While ecumenism and the social and political concerns that fueled it redirected the churches' energies, they also contributed to the bureaucratization and consolidation of the mainline Protestant denominations. A fundamental factor in cooperative efforts was the triumph of efficiency. As Samuel Haber wrote, the words "efficient and good came closer to meaning the same thing [in the progressive era] than in any other period of American history."<sup>27</sup> As denominational leaders and clergy put the church in the service of civil matters it became clearer that the Protestant denominations were duplicating their efforts. At one level this meant that a small town did not need five churches from five different denominations with five ministers and five salaries when one or two "union" or "community" congregations would work just as well. At another level the desire for an efficient allocation of resources meant that the apparatus of denominations would have to be made more productive. Between 1870 and 1936 what James H. Moorhead calls the "mystique of organizational efficiency" bedazzled Northern Presbyterians even while the church went from a lean administration to an organizational behemoth. This growth in bureaucracy, however, was not the result of consolidating and beefing up the existing work of the Presbyterian Church but rather sustained the newer social functions of the churches. Indeed, the bulk of Presbyterian agencies founded and expanded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries oversaw the social mission of the church. Even in

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*Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988).

27. Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era* (1964; repr. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1973), ix, quoted in Moorhead, "Presbyterians and the Mystique," 265.

the realm of missions, typically an activity governed by the proclamation of the word, mission boards took on added staff and spearheaded new programs to apply the gospel to all areas of life and improve the standard of living both in the United States and around the world. Thus, even while Presbyterians endeavored to cooperate with other Protestants in the work of building a Christian civilization, they, like other denominations, greatly expanded the agencies of their particular communion. Both ecumenism and bureaucratization stemmed from the fusing of religious and national ideals that characterized late nineteenth-century Northern Protestantism.<sup>28</sup>

### Presbyterian Confessionalism

Protestant cooperation and Presbyterian expansion were not, however, without their critics. As the period between the Civil War and World War I wore on these Presbyterian opponents of ecumenism looked more and more sectarian, and for good reason. They were objecting precisely to the apparent disregard of Presbyterian theology in ecumenical endeavors and to the social definition of the church's mission within the denominational bureaucracy. In other words, strict Presbyterians were sectarian—as sectarianism came to be defined as the flip side of American Protestantism's civil religion—because they thought the task of the church to be separate from the work of society, and because they were less sure about the goal of creating Christian civilization in the United States. A small, but nonetheless, forceful body of literature emerged among

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28. In addition to Moorhead, see Weeks, "The Incorporation of the Presbyterians;" Dykstra and Beumler, "The National Organizational Structures;" and Ben Primer, *Protestants and American Business Methods* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1979).

Presbyterians in response to the ecumenical and cooperative endeavors of mainline Protestantism. To gain some perspective on the polarization of Presbyterianism along ecumenical and sectarian lines some acquaintance with these Presbyterian critics is required.

Because Northern Presbyterians, even former Old Schoolers, overwhelmingly supported both the Evangelical Alliance and the Presbyterian Alliance, criticism of evangelical ecumenism emerged primarily among Southern Presbyterians. A significant reason for Southern Presbyterian hostility was that they were unwelcome at the early meetings of the Evangelical Alliance because of the PCUS's stance on slavery. As Robert Lewis Dabney asked, greatly embittered by the war experience, how could the Evangelical Alliance welcome the Reformed Church of France, a communion which flouted the central truths of the gospel and "spurn American churches . . . because they would not declare that relation of domestic servitude criminal in which all the patriarchs and prophets lived, and which Christ and his apostles authorized"?<sup>29</sup> The politics that lurked behind evangelical cooperation and provoked such criticisms as Dabney's showed Southern Presbyterians to be particularly sensitive to the civil religion that often fueled Protestant ecumenism. For instance, one Southern churchman took delight in noting that at one of the early meetings of the Presbyterian Alliance, which convened on July 4th, a Scottish ecclesiastic recognized in prayer the United States' independence, thus forcing "on British soil" an audience "largely British" to acknowledge before God "that the United States

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29. Dabney, "What is Christian Union," in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 2, (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 441.

were independent of Great Britain!”<sup>30</sup>

Of course, Americans had the capacity not only to offend British political sentiments but American ones as well. The same writer took issue with an address by three American ministers to Queen Victoria that expressed “unfeigned respect” for Her Majesty’s throne and government. Aside from the problem of asking Americans to honor a monarch who sat upon a throne against which they had rebelled, also at issue was the propriety of church representatives, not as individuals but as ecclesiastical officers, paying honor to a queen. “That may do,” the writer explained, “for Presbyterians connected with national establishments, but how can any free Church tolerate such profane obsequiousness to a mortal?”<sup>31</sup> Thus, Southern Presbyterians showed themselves to be especially astute in detecting the civil purposes of Protestant ecumenism.

Objections to evangelical cooperation involved not only political differences but also a divergent understanding of the church. Here again Southern Presbyterians, perhaps because they had become adept at making arguments for political separatism, took the lead in arguing for the importance, wisdom and, ultimately, the good of separate denominations. Important to the Presbyterian defense of ecclesiastical separatism was the distinction between Israel and the church inaugurated by the advent and ministry of Christ. Accordingly, while Judaism was a religion for “one little nation,” Christianity is a faith for “all continents and languages.” While Israel had prophets and kings who could enforce prophetic oracles, God

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30. John B. Adger, “The Late General Presbyterian Council at Edinburgh,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 28 (1877): 765.

31. Adger, “The Late General Presbyterian Council at Edinburgh,” 765–766.

left the church with only the Bible. Thus, the diversity of humankind as well as the fulfillment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king in Christ led irresistibly to principle of “diversity in unity” and that such diversity “must be tolerated.”<sup>32</sup> Toleration of diversity was accomplished easily enough by recognizing the difference between the visible and invisible church. While all believers were one spiritually in Christ and, therefore, members of the invisible church, they were not all members of the same visible body.<sup>33</sup> Not only was this physically impossible, despite the advances made by trans-Atlantic sea travel and telecommunications, but even in the early church diversity was the norm. “Differences of rite, usage, and belief, are here recognized and allowed by the apostles,” wrote one anonymous Southern Presbyterian, “which must have resulted in distinctions resembling those now called denominational.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, while Presbyterian critics of ecumenism offered their convictions as the most biblical within the Protestant fold, they also recognized the legitimacy of other non-Presbyterian communions, even if in error, a principle they believed taught by the Reformation. In fact, one of the charges often hurled against either the Evangelical or Presbyterian Alliance was that Protestants, in responding to the threat of Roman Catholicism, were merely creating their own pope. As Dabney wrote of the Presbyterian Alliance, “there is little difference between a pope in the singular and in the plural number. The essen-

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32. Dabney, “What is Christian Union?” 432, 433.

33. Dabney, “What is Christian Union?” 433–440.

34. Robert L. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 28 (1877): 252; See also 258.

tial doctrines of popery will appear.”<sup>35</sup> Those doctrines were the necessity of outward conformity, the “damning nature of outward schism (so-called),” and the confusion of the visible and invisible church. In other words, Protestant strength lay in ecclesiastical diversity, not fraternal unity. The material principle of the Reformation taught as much. The doctrine of the sole authority of the Bible in church matters was directed not only against the tyranny of the papacy but also designed for the protection of individual conscience. Consequently, Presbyterian opponents of ecumenism appealed to old-fashioned Reformation instincts to oppose church cooperation and fraternity, an appeal that was ironic since cooperation was designed to advance Protestantism against Catholicism.

But such opposition scored an important point, namely, that the inclusive spirit which so often motivated Protestant ecumenism usually carried with it intolerance of dissent, hence, the comparisons with the papacy. Indeed, Southern Presbyterian critics saw with unusual perceptiveness the trends which would characterize Protestant ecumenism in the next century. Dabney wrote, “the same argument which demands that Presbyterian churches must be unified in a visible centre, will necessarily be extended to all others recognized as true churches, though non-Presbyterian . . . . Thus will come about a still wider confederation, not Pan-Presbyterian, but Pan-Protestant; and the necessary condition of its existence will be precisely that combination of loose, unfaithful, *doctrinal* broad churchism, with tyrannical enforcement of outward

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35. Robert Lewis Dabney, “The Pan-Presbyterian Alliance,” in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 2, ed. C. R. Vaughan (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1891), 537.

union and uniformity, which now characterizes popery.”<sup>36</sup> For these Presbyterians, outward unity went hand in hand with organizational infallibility and the means to coerce or bind the conscience. For the only way to insure such unity was through a power, usually centralized, that would exclude differences and enforce harmony. As one critic wrote, “The suppression of the truth, and the binding of the conscience, are necessary consequences of every attempt to realise organic unity.”<sup>37</sup> Appeals to a broad doctrinal consensus were of little avail in persuading these Presbyterians of the benefits of union because such a form of agreement was so broad as to prevent “differences of opinion from existing” and “men from thinking.” Protestant unity would ultimately result in the abolition of parties in the church and the prohibition of their views.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Protestant ecumenism was, from these critics’ perspective, a direct betrayal of Protestant convictions about the authority of Scripture and freedom of conscience. Conversely, the Presbyterian defense of denominationalism stemmed not merely from Southern bitterness but from Protestant convictions about church power and the lordship of Christ.

Presbyterian opponents of ecumenism not only wanted to protect freedom of conscience, but also feared what cooperation would do to the confessions that they taught and defended, and that established the boundaries of ecclesiastical unity and identity. Again, Southern Presbyterians took the lead in criticizing what they believed were the same sentiments—that is, doctrinal indifferentism—animating both the Evangelical Alliance and the reunion of Old and New School Presbyterians

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36. Dabney, “The Pan-Presbyterian Alliance,” 538.

37. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” 259.

38. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” 259.

in the North. According to one writer, “the broader the basis of union, the more lax and imperfect becomes the system of discipline and of doctrine.”<sup>39</sup> So too, Dabney argued that the kind of union proposed by the Evangelical Alliance and similar ecumenical efforts would inevitably result in “the Sadducean indifference to truth.” With remarkable foresight, he also detected within the union movement what would become the substance of liberal Protestant theology, where under the guise of merely “adjusting” “old dogmas” to new philosophies, a minister subscribed to a Calvinistic creed all the while advancing “‘as explanation of it,’ a false philosophy, which every intelligent Pelagian and even Socinian hailed as his own.”<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly, Presbyterians were even more concerned about the doctrinal consensus proposed for an international alliance of their own kind. Early discussions within the Presbyterian Alliance pointed to the need for a doctrinal platform that would define the theological character of ecclesiastical fellowship. Philip Schaff headed up efforts to produce a short statement of the Reformed faith that could accommodate different confessional standards and the relative strictness of subscription in the different communions. But rather than prompting unity, the effort to establish a confession for confederation only produced division and the new Reformed creed never gained the approval of the Alliance.<sup>41</sup> For one Southerner this was just as well. He complained that many of the theological statements supporting the unity of the church

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39. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” 263.

40. Robert Lewis Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” in *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney*, vol. 2, 460–461.

41. See Philip D. Jordan, “Cooperation without Incorporation—America and the Presbyterian Alliance, 1870–1880,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 55 (1977): 13–35.

were so “worthless, vapid, stale,” and “flat” as to be thoroughly “unprofitable.” What good was “harmony,” he asked, if it could not “endure the strain of frank and manly discussion of the disagreements which really obstruct the actual and honest, the real and truthful harmony of the Reformed Churches?”<sup>42</sup> So too, Dabney argued that the high price of formal unity among Presbyterians was to abandon “doctrinal fidelity.”<sup>43</sup>

While Southerners had the luxury of criticizing the cooperative plans usually being hatched by Northerners, confessional Presbyterians above the Mason-Dixon throughout most of the late nineteenth century tried to adjust to life with the New School. But Northern confessionalists finally began to make the kinds of complaints about church union which Southerners had long voiced when desires for church union finally produced in 1903 a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith, a change designed at least in part to facilitate merger between the Northern and Cumberland Presbyterians. The merger between these two communions made Southern Presbyterian criticisms of church union look prescient. For a principle factor in the union of Northern and Cumberland Presbyterians was the admission in 1885 of the latter to the Presbyterian Alliance. And the kind of doctrinal indifferentism that Southern Presbyterians saw in the Presbyterian Alliance and that provided the theological basis for the Northern/Cumberland Presbyterian union provoked among Northern confessionalists, especially the faculty at Princeton Seminary, a similar set of criticisms against church cooperation. Thus, Benjamin Warfield, who

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42. Adger, “The Late General Presbyterian Council at Edinburgh,” 760.

43. Dabney, “The Pan-Presbyterian Alliance,” 538.

earlier questioned whether the so-called liberality of church union was actually a form of tyranny,<sup>44</sup> wrote of the proposed union with the Cumberland church that “differences as to the nature of the Gospel . . . constitute the primary ground of righteous separation.” If differences between the two were minimized—in this case the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism—these denominations would be committing “treason to the very life of the church of God.”<sup>45</sup> So too William Brenton Greene Jr. detected that the motive of “greater efficiency” in Protestant ecumenism, especially the merger with Cumberland Presbyterians, was slowly eating away the theological integrity of the Presbyterian Church. “Broad churchism” produced intellectual suicide, hostility to truth, and “indifference to God.”<sup>46</sup> It took Northern Presbyterians a while to respond but when they did they responded with a vengeance.

Underlying both Southern and Northern Presbyterian critiques of Protestant ecumenism was the idea that the church’s primary responsibility was to bear witness to Christ and the gospel, thus the importance of sound preaching, correct teaching, and high standards for ordination being near the top of the list of requirements for a faithful church. In an article on “Broad Churchism,” Dabney laid out the most detailed understanding of the church’s task as a body of proclamation. An individual minister, he argued, was bound to “declare ‘the whole counsel of God’ as he conscientiously understands it.”

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44. See Warfield, “The Presbyterian Churches and the Westminster Confession,” *Presbyterian Review* 10 (1889): 646–657.

45. “The Proposed Union with the Cumberland Presbyterians,” *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (1904): 301.

46. William Brenton Greene Jr. “Broad Churchism and the Christian Life,” *Princeton Theological Review* 4 (1906): 308, 310.

As such, a minister was a herald of Christ whose duty is “to convey precisely the message of his king without addition or diminution.” Raising the stakes considerably, he added that a minister could only “claim to be clear of the blood of all men” by doing what the apostles did, that is, proclaiming “the whole counsel of God.”<sup>47</sup>

If such a view of ordained ministry put up roadblocks to church union because it required freedom for ministers to proclaim in detail, not in generalities, what God had revealed in Scripture, Dabney’s understanding of the corporate witness of the church was no less an obstacle. Ministers individually were bound to declare the counsel of God according to their honest conviction. But because their commission to this task was through the visible church, individual ministers were obligated to uphold the confessional standards of their own communion. A minister stands in the pulpit not as an individual but as an ordained minister from a particular communion. “The public,” Dabney wrote, “hears [the minister’s] church in him.” Therefore, officers had a duty to keep those out of the ministry who did not consent to the church’s teaching. If they did not, if they lent any part of their “official weight or countenance to aid” in the proclamation of religious error, “contradicting in any point more or less essential that code of redeeming truth which Christ has committed” to them, they were guilty of being unfaithful to Christ.<sup>48</sup> This was a big part of the reason why Warfield balked at the prospect of receiving through the merger with Cumberland Presbyterians two thousand ministers of a decidedly Arminian persuasion.<sup>49</sup> It is also why these con-

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47. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” 450.

48. Dabney, “Broad Churchism,” 454.

49. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Proposed Union with the Cumberland

fessional Presbyterians were so reluctant to enter into fellowship with non-Presbyterians or even with other less rigorous Presbyterians. Doctrinal laxity would compromise the corporate witness of the church and, more importantly, render the church faithless.

Thus, two different understandings of the church were at work in deliberations about church unity and ecumenical relations. Advocates of Protestant ecumenism regarded the task of the church more in social than theological terms. The church was an agent of bringing Christian civilization not only to the United States but also throughout the world. And the church was to be a means of promoting social harmony, civil liberty, and economic well-being. For this reason the chief bogeymen of the ecumenists were infidelity, intemperance, materialism, and Catholicism, all of which threatened the social fabric of the United States and other Protestant lands. What is more, this understanding of the church made possible the cooperation of Protestants who had disparate views of the sacraments, sanctification, church government, ordination, and the decrees of God. Whether to baptize infants or adults made little difference when the mounting tensions between labor and capital threatened national unity.

Opponents of Protestant union, here called confessional Presbyterians, took a different view of the church. For them it was a spiritual institution. Its concerns went well beyond those of any particular nation, ethnic group, or class. The church's task was to proclaim the gospel, a piece of good news, that prepared souls not necessarily for this world but for the world to come. This stress upon the witness-bearing character of the

church and its ministry required church officers to be especially vigilant in their oversight of the church's messengers. For this reason the effort to find the lowest common theological denominator among Protestants or even Presbyterians diminished what was the God-given duty of the church. Rather than overlooking differences about baptism, for instance, in order to join with Baptists in civic reform, Presbyterian confessionals made infant baptism—a mark of the church—and its supporting theology a reason for opposing cooperative endeavors among evangelical Protestants.

### Ecumenism and the Presbyterian Controversy

Such divergent understandings of the church came to a head in 1920 with the proposed “Philadelphia Plan” for organic union of Protestant churches in the United States.<sup>50</sup> This initiative, the culmination of Protestant ecumenism between 1870 and World War I, was as much responsible for the controversy in the Presbyterian Church during the so-called fundamentalist-modernist controversy as were higher criticism, evolution, or the date of Christ's return.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the most forceful book of the Presbyterian controversy, and the best articulation of Presbyterian confessional views, J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, came directly out of strict Presbyterian opposition to the plan of union. Unlike fundamentalists who opposed liberal Protestantism on either creationist or dispensationalist grounds, both of which had a direct bearing on the preservation of Christian civilization in

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50. Cavert, *The American Churches*, 112–113.

51. See D. G. Hart, “Christianity and Liberalism in a Postliberal Age,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 329–44.

America,<sup>52</sup> Machen opposed liberalism because of its indifference to doctrine, its nonchalance about the witness-bearing character of the church, especially to that of the Presbyterian Church, and its rival conception of the church as an agent of social change. Machen's book culminated the small but still formidable strain of Presbyterian particularism that had surfaced at different times to protest Protestant ecumenism. Rather than regarding the work of Christians as that of building a better America so that differences between Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians melted away into the common purposes of Christian endeavor, Machen contended, as confessional Presbyterians had before him, that the work of the church was to proclaim the gospel in all its detail, thus making Protestant union of the sort practiced in late Victorian America not just impractical but also egregious.

One of the features of Machen's critique of liberalism which illustrates the significant differences between ecumenists—whether fundamentalists who wanted to arrest America's moral degeneracy, or liberals who desired a Christian corporate order—and Presbyterian confessionalists was his civil libertarianism. Machen began *Christianity and Liberalism* in what now seems a strange fashion. He spent about half the introduction lamenting the “materialistic paternalism” of the modern nation-state and its “reduction of all mankind to the proportions of the narrowest and least gifted of the citizens.”<sup>53</sup> What is odd about this attack upon the growth of centralized government and national unification is that it appears to be almost entirely unrelated to the affairs of the church. What,

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52. See this theme especially in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

53. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 14, 15.

after all, did Warren G. Harding or Calvin Coolidge have to do with Harry Emerson Fosdick? Or even more remote was any connection between American involvement in the United Nations and the doctrine of the vicarious atonement.

Yet such relationships were never that unfathomable in the mind of the Presbyterian confessionalists under review here. For the policies and goals of both the Republican and Democratic parties during the Progressive era were of a piece with the vision of Christian civilization that late nineteenth century evangelicals, whether liberal or conservative, brought to the table during negotiations about Protestant unity and cooperation.<sup>54</sup> As Martin E. Marty has argued, the culture wars of the 1920s can be understood well as an answer to Andre Siegfried's question in *America Comes of Age* (1927), namely, "will America remain Protestant and Anglo-Saxon?"<sup>55</sup> Not only were the social goals of Protestant ecumenists significant for defining the terms and purposes of American politics during the first three decades of the twentieth century. But

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54. For connections between American Protestantism and Progressivism, see Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: the Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1982); Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1959), 21–29, 115–116, 153–158; David B. Danbom, "The World of Hope", *Progressives and the Struggle for an Ethical Public Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987); John Higham, "Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History," *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 20–27; and Ferenc M. Szasz, "Protestantism and the Search for Stability: Liberal and Conservative Quests for a Christian America, 1875–1925," in *Building the Organizational Society*, ed. Jerry Israel (New York: Free Press, 1972), 88–102.

55. Andre Siegfried, trans. H. H. Hemming and Doris Hemming, *America Comes of Age: a French Analysis* (New York, 1927), quoted in Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 2: The Noise of Conflict, 1919–1941* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 63ff.

the means for accomplishing those goals were also important. Just as evangelical Protestants, again whether liberal or conservative, promoted the assimilation of the different theological traditions in Protestantism to pursue a common social vision, so middle-class Protestants generally supported the politics of cultural assimilation which forced not only immigrants but also regions into the melting pot of America's burgeoning corporatist state.

Machen's civil libertarianism was a forceful protest against such policies and an extension of the confessional Presbyterian argument, both against organizational unity and for denominational diversity. In the same way that he defended the rights of ethnic groups to practice their religion and preserve their language, so he argued for the necessity of Presbyterians sustaining their own beliefs and organization if the Reformed faith were to survive. Just as Machen castigated the policy of "Christian Americanization" that proceeded "against immigrants . . . with a Bible in one hand and a club in the other offering them the blessings of liberty,"<sup>56</sup> so he also thought very little of the theological inclusiveness and liberality that American Protestantism's ecumenical plans offered. The liberal Protestant conception of brotherhood, Machen argued, was one of the most intolerant that could be found because it ignored important differences between people, saying in effect that such differences did not matter. A similar intolerance was at work, he believed, in the talk about the unity of the church, whether within a particular denomination or across Protestantism more generally. Liberals (and interdenominational fundamentalists who practiced a similar logic) ended

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56. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 149.

up saying to conservatives, “Let us unite in the same congregation, since of course doctrinal differences are trifles.” But the heart of conservatism, Machen wrote, was that doctrinal differences were “matters of supreme moment.” To suppose that conservatives could ignore theology was in fact “the extreme of narrowness.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, in the same way that Machen advocated cultural pluralism in the American republic, so he, like Presbyterian confessionalists before, championed ecclesiastical pluralism not just to preserve Presbyterianism but also to protect freedom of conscience.

In the Presbyterian controversy, then, more was at work than simply a contest between competing theologies, one adapting to modern thought, the other resisting that adaptation through its own novelties. What was also playing itself out was a struggle between rival conceptions of the nature and work of the church, a struggle that had been shaped by the unification of the United States after the Civil War. In the same way that Republicans had supported union and national consolidation, so Protestant ecumenists favored church union and the consolidation of Protestant denominations. Organizational unity mattered more than the specifics of legal documents, whether the U. S. Constitution or the Westminster Confession. The bickering over theology and polity expressed in the writings of confessional Presbyterians was therefore disruptive and hindered the “positive” work of the church.

For conservatives like Dabney, Warfield, and Machen, however, the church militant would always display diversity and division. This was partly the result of the fall. But it was also the nature of the work of the church, which was to

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57. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 161.

proclaim the gospel in all its fullness and significance. Such proclamation required freedom for individual ministers and denominations to speak and associate on the basis of shared understandings of the Scriptures that captured the specificity found in the various Protestant confessions. On this basis the church's work was not one of promoting civic unity or building social harmony. Instead, the work of the church, understood denominationally, contributed to cultural diversity. What prevented such diversity from breaking out into bloodshed or war was the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, a teaching much maligned because of its associations with slavery, but which recognized the rights of minorities to a greater degree than did the Yankee and evangelical model of ecclesiastical or national unification.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the question of union, whether ecclesiastical or civil, contributed as much to the polarization of Presbyterians in the fundamentalist era as did the teachings of Darwin, the findings of higher critics, or the flannel graphs of dispensationalists.

## Presbyterianism and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism

What implications does the history of Presbyterianism have for the ongoing debates about the definition of evangelicalism?<sup>59</sup> This is not as irrelevant a question as it might seem ini-

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58. See D. G. Hart, "The Spirituality of the Church, the Westminster Standards, and Nineteenth-Century American Presbyterianism," in John Leith, ed., *The Westminster Confession in Current Thought*. Calvin Studies VII. (privately published, 1996), 106–118.

59. For the Marsden-Dayton debate itself, see George Marsden, "Demythologizing Evangelicalism: A Review of Donald W. Dayton's *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*" (with reply), *Christian Scholar's Review* 7 (1977): 203–211; Donald W. Dayton, "The Search for the Historical Evangelical-

tially. The debate between George M. Marsden and Donald W. Dayton about the character and history of the evangelical movement hinges to a great degree on the nature of Presbyterian conservatism. According to Dayton, Marsden is guilty of using a “Presbyterian paradigm” that forces the narrative of evangelicalism into the categories of Reformed theology. As such, the fundamentalist controversy looms large in twentieth-century evangelicalism since Presbyterian conservatives balkanized the Protestant world into liberal and conservative (i.e. evangelical) parties. What is more, Dayton argues that Marsden stresses the Presbyterian and Baptist phases of the fundamentalist controversy, and especially the Presbyterian struggles that led to the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary, as the baseline for subsequent evangelical developments (e.g., Marsden places Fuller Seminary and the origins of neo-evangelicalism in the context of Machen and Westminster). In contrast, Dayton understands evangelicalism from a Pentecostal paradigm. This means that evangelicalism is a branch of Christianity like the charismatic movement, one that “disrupts ‘traditional’ and ‘conservative’ churches” not on the basis of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, but rather as an expression of the religion of politically disenfranchised and

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ism’: George Marsden’s *History of Fuller Seminary as a Test Case*,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (1993): 12–33; and George M. Marsden, “Response to Don Dayton,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (1993): 34–40. For assessments of the debate, see Douglas A. Sweeney, “The Essential Evangelicalism Dialectic: the Historiography of the Early Neo-Evangelical Movement and the Observer-Participant Dilemma,” *Church History* 60 (1991): 70–84; Sweeney, “Historiographical Dialectics: On Marsden, Dayton, and the Inner Logic of Evangelical History,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (1993): 48–52; and Joel A. Carpenter, “The Scope of American Evangelicalism: Some Comments on the Dayton-Marsden Exchange,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (1993): 53–61.

economically marginal folk. Dayton regards this approach as truer to the spirit of evangelicalism and one that opens more ecumenical doors than Presbyterian narrowness.<sup>60</sup>

In this debate, a prescriptive understanding of contemporary evangelicalism is never far from view. For instance, the debate over the Presbyterian or Pentecostal paradigms for twentieth-century evangelicalism has led directly to the recent efforts of William V. Trollinger and Douglas Jacobsen, whose Lilly Endowment-funded “Reforming the Center” project attempts to construct a definition of evangelicalism that transcends the typical two-party paradigm of liberal versus conservative and provides a new consensus not just for evangelicalism but for all of American Protestantism.<sup>61</sup> The degree to which evangelicalism is Reformed (Presbyterian) or Wesleyan (Pentecostal) will determine whether evangelical Protestants will provide the center that professors Trollinger and Jacobsen desire. If evangelicalism is generally Presbyterian and doctrinal in character then the desired center will not hold since Calvinism hardly has the numbers that the charismatic movement does and because Presbyterians have a reputation for being divisive.<sup>62</sup> But if evangelicalism is essentially Wesleyan, and, therefore, more experiential, activist, and egalitarian,

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60. Dayton, “Search for the Historical Evangelicalism,” 14–18. Marsden’s response is not to argue for the “Presbyterian” paradigm but to argue against all paradigms that would fail to account for the various streams in twentieth-century evangelicalism. He admits that he uses Presbyterian and Baptist sources more than Dayton. But he calls for all historians of evangelicalism to recognize that “there are multidimensional and mutually porous evangelical movements.” See “Response to Don Dayton,” 40.

61. See Jacobsen and Trollinger Jr., “Historiography of American Protestantism.”

62. The history of Free Methodists and the Holiness movement would suggest that Wesleyanism suffers from a similar difficulty.

then evangelical Protestantism may unite the liberal and conservative wings of American Protestantism. In other words, if evangelicalism is less a reaction to theological liberalism, and more a radical, modern form of Christianity, as Dayton argues, then it may be useful for scholars and for the church, by providing an alternative to the conventions of twentieth-century American Protestant historiography, and by forging a basis for contemporary Protestant ecumenism.<sup>63</sup>

The history of Presbyterian involvement in and opposition to Protestant ecumenism surveyed above supports the conclusion of scholars who question a Presbyterian reading of American evangelicalism. Presbyterian confessionalists have been rather exclusive folk, have devoted much attention to doctrine, and have not generally suffered gladly believers who dissent from Calvinistic convictions. The Presbyterians treated here, such as Dabney, Warfield, and Machen, those who cared greatly about their Presbyterian identity, do not provide models for building an evangelical consensus, let alone for overcoming the differences between evangelicals and liberals. In other words, if evangelicalism is fundamentally Reformed then pollsters may have to revise their figures about the number of evangelicals in the United States because an evangelical convention where these Presbyterians were responsible for sending out invitations would be an intimate and exclusive affair. Presbyterian confessionalists did not desire to be part of an evangelical consensus. Nor were they interested in accommodating erroneous views of the church and her ministry for the sake of ecclesiastical peace and interdenominational cooperation. This was no mere aberration to be explained away

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63. Dayton, "Search for Historical Evangelicalism."

by Southern resentment over the “war of Yankee aggression.” Presbyterian opposition to Protestant ecumenism of the sort generated between 1870 and 1920 stemmed from significant theological convictions regarding the gospel and the nature and work of the church.

Despite the apparent futility of using the Presbyterian experience to understand evangelicalism, these examples of Presbyterian confessionalism do show the inadequacy of the two-party paradigm in the historiography of American Protestantism. This is not to say that the division between liberal and evangelical Protestants is invalid. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the National Council of Churches (NCC) do represent two different blocs within American Protestantism. But try as they might, they do not represent all Protestants. Consequently, an interpretation of twentieth-century American Protestantism that relies only on the communions in the NAE and the NCC leaves out Protestant churches who because of a different understanding of the nature and ministry of the church and of the American experiment remain separate from these Protestant ecumenical organizations. Rather than dividing the Protestant world neatly between liberals and evangelicals, the differences described here between advocates of church cooperation, whether liberal or evangelical, and Presbyterian opponents of ecumenical initiatives, demonstrates the need for a different approach to twentieth-century Protestant history.

Instead of dividing Protestants into liberal and evangelical camps, a more useful rubric is to contrast Protestant cosmopolitans and localists. To the former group belong both liberals and evangelicals who, though disagreeing, for instance, about the virgin birth and the necessity of conversion are

united in their understanding of the church's importance for the well-being of the American nation and its involvement in international affairs. Thus, the NAE and NCC pursue similar aims but by different means. Their common purpose is the cosmopolitan one of transcending denominational and theological differences in order to work toward the creation of a Christian world order. (Neither liberals nor evangelicals balk at the idea of producing *global* Christians.)

Protestant localists, however, consist of those confessionalists, whether Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anabaptist, or Episcopalian, who are uncertain about serving the American nation, not necessarily because of political ideology, but because of a high view of the ministry of word and sacrament. To be sure, individual members in confessional Protestant communions may vote for candidates who promise to return America to its moral and religious foundations. Still, their denominations have understood that the identity of the church transcends national boundaries and is rooted in the particular teachings and practices of a specific theological tradition. Thus, in contrast to Protestant cosmopolitans who often blur ecclesiastical and theological differences into abstract notions of Christian unity and social harmony, Protestant confessionalists are localists when it comes to the work of the church. They look to the local church and a specific denomination for identity, and see its work as prior to and more vital than that of building political order, social harmony and functional families.<sup>64</sup>

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64. An example of such ecclesiastical localism would be the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's decision to remain separate from the NAE. On that decision and its background, see D. G. Hart, "The Legacy of J. Gresham Machen and the Identity of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," *Westmin-*

This way of interpreting twentieth-century Protestantism has the virtue of recognizing a good deal more diversity among Protestants than the evangelical/liberal taxonomy allows. Rather than assuming that all localists are one, which has generally been the case in the literature on evangelicalism, thus forcing a Presbyterian or Wesleyan definition upon the movement, the framework proposed here underscores the real diversity that exists among confessionalists of different stripes. Missouri Synod Lutherans and Orthodox Presbyterians may agree to decline membership in the NAE and some of their reasons may look similar. But finally they arrive at their positions because of differences in polity, theology, and worship.

A further benefit of a localist-versus-cosmopolitan reading of twentieth-century Protestantism is that it encourages historians to pay attention to the message and ministry of the various communions. Rather than regarding theology, preaching or church government as smoke screens for the votes of church members in a national election or for a denomination's social agenda, a recognition of Protestant localism should make historians more willing to explore those beliefs and practices that make the church different from political parties, literary clubs, and humanitarian associations. In other words, a historian with the concerns of Protestant confessionalists in mind may see that what sets a Presbyterian apart from other Protestants may not be that his church's politics (e.g. opposition to abortion) but rather his ecclesiology (e.g. refusing to give to Focus on the Family).

At the same time, the approach to twentieth-century Protestantism advocated here also encourages greater aware-

ness of the relationship between churches and the politics of the modern nation-state. Though Protestant ecumenists in America appealed to Christ's prayer for the unity of his church, the postbellum correspondence between Protestant hopes for a united church and American desires for a unified nation is difficult to explain as merely coincidental. Presbyterian particularists had a point when they argued that plans for church cooperation were based more often on the verities of American civil religion than on clear scriptural imperatives. This is only to say that what Presbyterians thought about the purposes and history of the United States often determined the degree of their support for church union and cooperation. But academic historians have rarely remarked on the connection between Protestant ecumenism and national unification in part because of their own cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>65</sup> In other words, historians have been loathe to not acknowledge their own assumptions about the relationship between religion and the American nation. Consequently, they have used the liberal-versus-evangelical paradigm as a way to laud the broad-minded and public spirited churches and to keep tabs on sectarian believers, an interpretive posture that contradicts the acade-

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65. Peter Dobkin Hall, "'Noah Porter Writ Large': Reflections on the Modernization of American Education and its Critics, 1866-1916," *History of Higher Education Annual* 16 (1996): 39, writes the following about educational historians that may equally true of church or religious historians: "In portraying the transformation of American higher education after the Civil War as a conflict between tradition and modernity, between religious and secular forces, between localism and nationalism, between institutional authority and academic freedom, chroniclers have more or less unanimously aligned themselves with the emergent new order, and almost without exception, identified those who resisted it with the backward-looking sensibilities that had held back educational development while the new nation's economic and political institutions moved relentlessly forward."

my's presumed skepticism about privilege and self-professed sympathy for the marginal. In the end, recognizing the politics behind both Protestant ecumenical efforts and the way historians have construed them should undermine the sway which the narrative of United States has had upon the histories of America's Protestant denominations, and thereby restore the Christian narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation to its rightful place in interpretation of church history.

# CONFIDENCE IN OUR BRETHREN

*Creedal Subscription in the  
Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

JOHN R. MUETHER

**J**OHN O’SULLIVAN, THE editor of *National Review*, is fond of citing what he calls “O’Sullivan’s Law,” which states that any group that is not explicitly right-wing will become left-wing over time. O’Sullivan applies his law generally to political organizations: parties, action groups, think tanks,

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etc. Students of American church history may be tempted to apply O’Sullivan’s Law to ecclesiastical contexts as well, to assert that any church that is not explicitly conservative will become liberal over time. After all, American culture, with its religious pluralism, anti-intellectual populism, and advancing secularization is hardly friendly terrain for Christian orthodoxy. More specifically, conservative Presbyterians may want to frame the principle in this way: a Presbyterian church that is not explicitly Old School will become New School over time, or, alternatively, those who are not explicitly strict subscriptionist will eventually become loose subscriptionist. The burden of this essay is to survey the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with respect to its view of creedal subscription. Along the way we wish to test the reliability of an ecclesiastical version of O’Sullivan’s Law.

The OPC, throughout its nearly sixty-year history, has established a reputation for rigorous doctrinal orthodoxy. George Marsden, for example, located the OPC within what he calls the “doctrinalist” strand of American Reformed tradition: “Orthodox Presbyterians . . . meant by ‘Reformed’ strict adherence to Christian doctrine as contained in the infallible Scriptures and defined by the standards of the Westminster Assembly. Only Christians whose creeds were fully compatible with Westminster’s and who viewed subscription to them as paramount were fully within the pale.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Mark Noll noted, not very sympathetically, that the OPC “has prided itself more on confessional precisionism than on ecclesiastical

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2. George M. Marsden, “Reformed and American” in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 2. The other two strands in Marsden’s taxonomy are the “pietist” and the “culturalist.”

diplomacy.”<sup>3</sup>

As Marsden and Noll indicate, the popular impression is that the OPC has a high level of confessional integrity that results in little diversity of theological expression. What is curious about that image, however, is that for all its reputation for creedal integrity, the OPC is without a history of debate on the nature of creedal subscription. When compared to the public debates in the Presbyterian Church in America over subscription,<sup>4</sup> what is most remarkable about the OPC is its silence on the topic. The language of “strict” or “full” subscription on the one hand, and “loose” or “system” subscription on the other hand, is virtually absent in the OPC. The question raises itself: Why is this so? We will suggest the answer lies in unique elements in the story of the OPC. Events surrounding the origin of the OPC and events that took place in its early history established a definite creedal sensibility within the church. Yet, however strong that sensibility is, it is not the product of careful reflection on the part of the denomination, but rather the result of an unarticulated corporate culture.

### Subscription and the Founding of the OPC

A deep respect for the Westminster Confession pervades the writings of J. Gresham Machen, the New Testament scholar from Princeton who would found both Westminster Seminary and the OPC. He was reluctant to refer to the Confession as a “man-made creed” and referred to it instead as “the creed that

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3. Mark Noll, “The Spirit of Old Princeton and the Spirit of the OPC” in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986), 243.

4. For example, the Knight-Barker debate in *Presbyterion* 10 (1984) and the Barker-Smith debate at the 1992 General Assembly.

God has taught in his Word.”<sup>5</sup> As he became involved in the fundamentalist-modernist debates in the Presbyterian church in the 1920s and 1930s, his concern was in defending the Reformed faith as expressed in the Westminster Standards.<sup>6</sup> When over 1300 Presbyterian ministers signed the Auburn Affirmation in 1923, asserting that biblical infallibility, the virgin birth of Christ, his miracles, substitutionary atonement, and resurrection were merely theories that Presbyterians may or may not believe, Machen responded that the Affirmation’s skepticism challenged not only the authority of the Bible, but also the confessional character of the church.

In several works Machen lashed out against the brazen dishonesty of the modernists within the church, who were deceptively using traditional language to take control of the church, all the while denying the Confession and the infallibility of the Bible. Revival in the church will come only with the renewal of “just plain old fashioned honesty of speech,” he wrote.<sup>7</sup> In his most popular work, *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen reflected on the ordination vows in the Presbyterian Church: “if these ‘constitutional questions’ do not fix clearly the creedal basis of the Presbyterian Church, it is difficult to see how any human language could possibly do so. . . . [T]he ordination vow declaration is part of the constitution of the

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5. J. Gresham Machen, *What is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 229.

6. For a comprehensive study of Machen’s involvement in this struggle and his role in the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954) and D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Presbyterianism in Modern America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

7. J. Gresham Machen, “The Issue Before the Church” in *God Transcendent*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 44.

Church. If a man can stand on that platform he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church; if he cannot stand on it he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church.”<sup>8</sup>

In another essay, “The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance,” Machen lamented the anti-doctrinal spirit of his age. Modern “church-unionism” sought unity through a watering down of confessional commitments. The goal of ecumenical movements was to “make doctrine as meager and vague as possible,” in the name of religious progress. Machen countered that creeds are an expression of the truth, not an expression of the historically conditioned experience of faith. Creeds of the past were premised on the idea of truth, and ignoring them led not to doctrinal progress but to “doctrinal regression or decadence.” While he did countenance the possibility of doctrinal advance within the Presbyterian Church, he also believed that his was not a “creed-making age.”<sup>9</sup>

Machen’s confessionalism—coupled with his high ecclesiology—led him to champion the “corporate witness” of the church. The church as a *whole* was a witness to the truth through its constitutional documents. Ministers occupy pulpits in the church only with the endorsement of the church. “The preacher therefore speaks not only for himself but for the church.”<sup>10</sup> If he were to preach heresy it would be heresy for which the whole church would be responsible. The church must therefore be a doctrinally strict company through the

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8. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981 [1923]), 163–64.

9. J. Gresham Machen, “The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance” in *Scripture and Confession*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 149–57.

10. J. Gresham Machen, “The Parting of the Ways” *Presbyterian* 94 (Jan. 24, 1924), 8.

instruments of its doctrinal standards. Machen saw the corporate witness compromised not only by liberal preachers and the underhanded tactics of the modernist church bureaucracies, but also by the indifference of the “moderates,” who sought to stand aloof from the doctrinal controversies. The principle of corporate witness was to be held above institutional loyalty or prestige.

Thus, when the Old School identity of Princeton Seminary was compromised by its 1929 reorganization (the new Board included signers of the Auburn Affirmation), Machen founded Westminster Seminary, announcing at its opening convocation that “Princeton Seminary is not dead, the noble tradition of Princeton Seminary is alive.” Westminster would maintain that tradition, “not on the foundation of equivocation and compromise, but on an honest foundation of devotion to God’s Word, to maintain the same principles that old Princeton maintained . . . that the Christian religion, as set forth in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, is true.”<sup>11</sup>

Seven years later, when Machen was defrocked by the PCUSA for opposing modernism in the Foreign Missions Board, he and his sympathizers began what became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in order “to perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church . . . regardless of cost.”<sup>12</sup> Its charter proclaimed that the new church would maintain and defend the Bible “as the Word of God” and the Westminster Confession “as the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scriptures.” Thus the OPC was the “spiritual successor” to

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11. Machen, *What is Christianity?*, 232–33.

12. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 496.

the PCUSA in a way similar to Westminster Seminary's relationship with Princeton. Spiritual succession was understood in terms of fidelity to the theology of the Westminster Confession that had formerly characterized the Presbyterian Church and Princeton Seminary.

### Doctrinal Divisions in the OPC

Though he died six months after its founding, Machen had a monumental influence on the new church. The OPC inherited both Machen's confessionalism and his ecclesiology, and saw itself, like Machen, pitted against two opponents: the modernists who denied the truth, and the moderate indifferentists who refused to leave the church. As founders of the OPC put it: "Modernism and indifferentism have now so grievously silenced" the church's "clear and glorious testimony."<sup>13</sup>

Soon after its founding, the OPC was beset with doctrinal controversies.<sup>14</sup> In 1937, Carl McIntire and other fundamentalists left the young church to form the Bible Presbyterian Church. This split was the result of several issues, including the relation between the Church and its Confession. Among the early issues to resolve was the form of the Westminster Confession that the Church would adopt. McIntire argued that unless the Church adopted the 1903 revisions to the Confession, it could not legitimately claim to be the Presbyterian Church's "spiritual successor." The second General Assembly, however, voted to eliminate the 1903 revisions because they were Arminian

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13. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 495.

14. For a fuller explanation of these struggles, see D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC), 1995.

in character. Another issue was whether or not to amend the Confession to allow for a premillennial interpretation of the return of Christ. Although the Confession seemed to rule out premillennialism, Machen argued against revisions. A premillennial could still receive and adopt the Confession in good faith: “for the reasonable interpretation of the meaning of the ordination vow, so far as the return of Christ is concerned, we must have confidence in our brethren.”<sup>15</sup>

A decade later the church found itself embroiled in the “Clark controversy.” In part the debate was procedural: Did the Presbytery of Philadelphia license and ordain Gordon H. Clark properly? It also involved a theological dispute: Did his view of the incomprehensibility of God do justice to the majesty and mystery of God? There were other significant issues lurking in the background as well, having to do with the mission and character of the OPC: Would it be evangelical or conservative as defined by the emerging evangelical movement, or would it be distinctively Reformed as defined by the Westminster Standards? Clark’s supporters saw the OPC as an evangelical church opposed to modernism, while his opponents envisioned the church opposing modernism by defending and propagating the Westminster Standards. In the end Clark and his followers left the church, leaving the issues to be framed by the terms of his opponents.

The Clark case was almost immediately followed by the Peniel dispute. Some ministerial members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church became involved in the Peniel Bible Conference in upstate New York. The Conference began to

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15. “The Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America” *Presbyterian Guardian* 3:3 (November 14, 1936), 43.

take on peculiar teachings on new revelations of the Spirit that, according to critics, challenged the sufficiency of Scripture. Peniel's critics in the OPC were frustrated by the selective way in which the movement seemed to embrace the Reformed faith, and found a "serious lack of clarity and precision" in Peniel's formulations. Like Clark's supporters, Peniel's defenders critiqued the direction the OPC was heading. Clark called it a small circumscribed, obscure group. Peniel described it as cold, withdrawn, and inflexible. In both cases debate often focused on the tension between a strong Reformed identity and greater size and influence.

Thus, by its 30th anniversary, with the collective effects of the McIntire exodus and the Clark and Peniel controversies, the confessional identity of the church was fairly well established, though not explicit. The boundaries of Machen's movement, vaguely defined at first in the battles against modernism were clarified by these divisions in the direction of traditional Presbyterianism. While none of the debates saw the nature of credal subscription spelled out, each resulted in the exodus of those yearning for a broader vision of the church: McIntire left for the fundamentalist cause; the evangelicals departed in the Clark and Peniel disputes. The growth of the church was stymied, and the OPC remained relatively small and, to use Noll's term, firmly established in "confessional precisionism."

### Subsequent Reflection on Subscription

Later events provided opportunity for the Church to reflect on its Confession. The OPC followed closely events leading to the adoption of the Confession of 1967 in the UPCUSA.<sup>16</sup> In

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16. The *Presbyterian Guardian* devoted a series of articles to the new con-

adopting the Confession of 1967, mainline Presbyterians included the Westminster Confession within a book of ancient and contemporary confessions, and altered the ordination vows for church officers. No longer was there the requirement to “sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” Instead ministers were to “perform the duties of a minister of the gospel in obedience to Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance of the confessions of this church.” OPC commentators saw some positive benefit to the new confession: the new vow to submit to confessional “guidance,” along with doctrinal changes rendered by the Confession of 1967 introduced long-overdue honesty in the Presbyterian Church. The new confession “grants creedal tolerance to the unbelief of the Auburn Affirmation,” wrote Edmund Clowney.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, it thrust the remaining conservatives in the mainline church into a confessional crisis. These changes placed the Westminster Confession in a “creedal museum,”<sup>18</sup> keeping it only because it was historic, not because it was true. Indeed, the doctrine of confessional progress required the new Confession to prevail over the Westminster Confession. As the new Confession contradicted Westminster at several points, the new subscription formula required that officers in effect *deny* the Westminster Confession. Norman Shepherd summed up the OPC evaluation well when he wrote: “The tragedy of

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fession, and the faculty of Westminster Seminary produced an anthology, *Scripture and Confession* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

17. Edmund P. Clowney, *Another Foundation* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), 6.

18. Clowney, *Another Foundation*, 4.

the confessional crisis in the United Presbyterian Church is surpassed only by the glory of the opportunity now at hand to confess anew and unequivocally the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the fellowship of a church where the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are sincerely received and adopted.<sup>19</sup>

During roughly the same time, the church studied subscription from another perspective. In the late 1960s the church began to discuss merger with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod.<sup>20</sup> During these discussions, as well as later discussions with the Presbyterian Church in America in the 1980s, much of the debate focused on alleged differences in subscription between the uniting parties. Did these potential partners engage in credible subscriptions to the Westminster Standards? Many who opposed the merger questioned the creedal integrity of the RPCES and the PCA, often recounting anecdotal horror stories during the Assembly debate. Others responded with confidence in the integrity of these bodies. What emerged from the OPC reflection was ambiguity over its own understanding of subscription, with considerable confusion over what an officer of the church affirms when he accepts the doctrinal standards of the church.

On a practical level, the OPC engaged in a subscription discussion in the one area of the Confession that proves most vexing to contemporary Presbyterians, its teaching on the Sabbath.<sup>21</sup> In 1968, the Presbytery of Wisconsin, in the midst

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19. Norman Shepherd, "Subscription Crisis for Presbyterian Officers," *Presbyterian Guardian* 34 (November 1965) p. 145.

20. The discussion would climax with the vote at concurrent General Assemblies in 1975, where the OPC approved the union plan but the RPCES assembly rejected it.

21. Another area is in the teaching on creation. Does the Confession

of a discipline case over a minister's views of the Sabbath, overtured the General Assembly, requesting that the church "evaluate the teachings of the Westminster Standards concerning the Sabbath with the purpose of defining the nature of subscription to the Standards on this matter."<sup>22</sup> The Assembly's Committee on Overtures and Communications recommended that the Assembly take a strong Sabbatarian position: "the second ordination vows for office bearers . . . entails belief that, as to Sabbath observance, the prescriptions and prohibitions of the Fourth Commandment under the new covenant apply to the first day of the week, in distinction from the other six days." The Assembly itself determined, however, that it did "not deem it advisable, apart from appeal from a decision by the Presbytery, to render a decision."<sup>23</sup>

That appeal would come in the very next year, in the form of a complaint entered against the Presbytery of Wisconsin for failing to discipline the minister. Among the reasons in the complaint was "a failure to uphold the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures" and "in effect to declare that those secondary standards are themselves in error."<sup>24</sup> In response, the Assembly appointed a "Committee on Sabbath Matters."

Four years later, that committee presented a divided report, in 1973. The majority report essentially upheld the complaint

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require a six 24-hour day creation that eliminates an animal ancestry for Adam? Or does such a requirement direct the church toward an extra-confessional fundamentalism? It is likely that the OPC will debate these issues in the near future.

22. *Minutes to the 35th General Assembly*, 1968, 9.

23. *Minutes to the 35th General Assembly*, 1968, 119.

24. *Minutes to the 36th General Assembly*, 1969, 12.

against the Presbytery. It concluded: “So far as the teaching of our secondary standards regarding the Christian Sabbath or Lord’s Day is the teaching of Scripture, *its acceptance is required by the second ordination vow*” [emphasis added].<sup>25</sup> A Minority Report took strong exception to this conclusion. The offenses alleged in the trial before the Presbytery of Wisconsin were “not contrary, on any construction, to the Reformed system of doctrine.” The report went on to argue that the “core of the church’s faith” should not be a Reformed faith that requires what is “confessionally unique with the Westminster standards.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, a “continental” view of the Sabbath should not be beyond the bounds in the OPC. The majority report was adopted, but not without significant dissent. What is important in this debate for our purposes is that this represents the first case in the OPC when the Assembly focused specifically on the nature and extent of subscription. Both the strict-leaning majority report and the system-leaning minority report claimed that their understanding was in the spirit of the founding of the OPC.

On at least one occasion there was movement to resolve the apparent ambiguity in favor of more exact and binding forms of subscription. In 1993, the Presbytery of Northern California delivered an Overture to the General Assembly requesting that the church’s Form of Government be amended to establish a full subscription view of the confession. The proposed changes included the definition of “system of doctrine”:

The “system of doctrine” referred to in the subscription vows for licentiates and officers in the Church is the whole body

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25. *Minutes to the 40th General Assembly*, 1973, 106.

26. *Minutes to the 40th General Assembly*, 1973, 111–12.

of truth which the Holy Scriptures teach. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms are to be received by the licentiate and officer as a most satisfactory exposition of this truth in an integral and indivisible whole. By receiving and adopting the standards, he thereby affirms and agrees with nothing less than the complete set of assertions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than adopt the overture, the Assembly returned it to the Presbytery for proper grounds, and it has not reappeared.

### The OPC as a Community of Interpretation

From its origins under Machen's leadership the church affirmed the centrality of the Confession in its worship and life, yet it fell short of assuming a rigidly strict position. The church seemed able to profess forthrightly its confessional identity in general terms, yet hesitant to specify the nature of creedal subscription in internal debates. To be sure, the church understood that vague assent to the "system of doctrine" had opened the door to heresy in church history. Yet the OPC has resisted "overstrictness," not employing exacting subscription formulas to guard against decline.

This brings us back to O'Sullivan's Law. The OPC experience suggests that an ecclesiastical version of this principle needs some qualification. The OPC is a church that was never explicitly strict subscriptionist, and it has not, over the course of nearly 60 years, become loose subscriptionist. The church does not easily fit on either side of the strict or loose subscrip-

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27. *Minutes to the 60th General Assembly*, 1993, 82.

tion debate in contemporary Presbyterianism.<sup>28</sup>

How has the church avoided the tensions of strict and loose subscription? The history suggests that the church has established a community of interpretation that has enabled it to maintain both peace and orthodoxy without the polarizing effect of a rigorously enforced subscription. Providentially, the OPC has been, relative to other communions, clear about its theological identity. Both the doctrinal divisions that it has experienced, as painful as those were, and its failures at merger, as disappointing as they seemed, were helpful at least in this sense: they kept narrow the focus and identity of the OPC. If these episodes have kept the church numerically small, they have also kept it theologically cohesive.

Moreover, this corporate culture has developed in a way that has avoided the modern temptations of advanced bureaucratization and high levels of organizational efficiency. As a result, the OPC engages in very deliberate (and often painfully slow) debate on theological issues. The OPC has demonstrated the principle that theologian Richard Lints expresses in his book, *The Fabric of Theology*: “the construction of a theological framework and the appropriation of a theological vision are properly tasks of the Christian community and not of isolated individuals. . . . The communal character of interpretation serves to suppress the tendency of an ecclesiastical aristocracy or an academic elite to reign supreme in matters pertaining to the Bible.”<sup>29</sup>

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28. This point should not be lost on those in the PCA, on both sides of the debate, who have suggested that the PCA’s “strict subscriptionists” might seek re-affiliation with the OPC. Many of the strict subscriptionists in the PCA may be surprised at the lack of heightened sensitivity in the OPC toward subscription.

29. Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical*

The OPC believes that, “in the final analysis there simply is no *constitutional* device that will guarantee continued orthodoxy.”<sup>30</sup> Just as important is the necessity of a vibrant community of interpretation. As Machen put it in the premillennial debate, the OPC endeavors to interpret the Confession with “confidence in our brethren.” “Unless we have that mutual confidence,” Machen wrote in 1936 to a five-month-old church, “it would have been better that we should not have attempted to form a church at all.”<sup>31</sup>

The OPC has forged one model of being a confessional church in the modern world: seeing the Church as an *ethnos*, a community that operates within an interpretative consensus. That the Church could remain orthodox without an articulated position on subscription is a testimony to the power of that consensus. But the OPC model may not be easily appropriated. The OPC consensus is undoubtedly aided by its small size. This ought never to be a cause for boasting, but it may be a cause for reflection. Perhaps in an individualistic, narcissistic, and anti-creedal age, size is the necessary sacrifice of confessional integrity.

This sharpened identity by no means implies theological unanimity; doctrinal tensions continue to challenge the church. Recently, the “New Life” movement within the OPC could have threatened its consensus to the point of raising the issue of subscription, but the voluntary realignment of these churches into the PCA averted that debate. There are import-

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*Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 286.

30. D. Clair Davis, “Creedal Changes and Subscription to the System of Doctrine” *Presbyterian Guardian* 36 (March 1967): 46.

31. “The Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America” *Presbyterian Guardian*, no. 3 (November 14, 1936): 43–44.

ant doctrinal issues that still divide the OPC, such as theonomy and exclusive psalmody, with some arguing that these are confessional matters. Yet the OPC has achieved a certain peaceful coexistence on these issues, and no party has prosecuted its opponents for violations of subscription vows.

Finally, this analysis offers no opportunity for the OPC to be presumptuous about its confessional identity. The OPC's confessional precision and its shared consensus have been challenged in every decade of its life. It must be constantly vigilant in maintaining Machen's vision of a "hermeneutical circle," preserving both its heritage, the glorious Standards, and the community that accords "confidence in our brethren."

