

ALLIANCE
OF
THE REFORMED CHURCHES
HOLDING
THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM.

MINUTES AND PROCEEDINGS

OF

THE THIRD GENERAL COUNCIL,

BELFAST, 1884.

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home for carrying on the Mission and general management of all its temporal affairs, such as the fixing of salaries, the engaging of teachers, the purchasing of property, building, &c., &c., while the Presbytery, made up as it is of the Foreign Missionaries and the native ministers and elders, has only the oversight and management of the churches and the field in all spiritual matters. In carrying on the work in this way, neither has a Mission had any difficulty from its Presbytery, nor is there the slightest indication of any from any quarter.

In fine, the Presbytery abroad or on Foreign Mission grounds thus organized under the direction of the General Assembly, composed of ordained Foreign Missionaries and ordained natives, whether ministers or elders, and confining itself to spiritual and ecclesiastical things, is a Presbytery in the simplest and fullest sense. And all our experience testifies to the fact that thus, the system of Presbyterianism which was taught and practised by the Apostles, and under which the Gospel was formerly established "in all the world" before the close of the first century, is just as well adapted to the spreading and establishing of the Gospel in foreign and heathen lands in our own time.

The following Paper on

CO-OPERATION IN THE FOREIGN MISSION FIELD

Was prepared by the REV. J. LEIGHTON WILSON, D.D., Baltimore, and the REV. M. H. HOUSTON, D.D., Maryland.

At the Philadelphia Council, there was one point connected with "Co-operation in Missions among the heathen," which attracted special interest. It is a point which carries with it matters of deep practical concern, and which now presses for consideration in more than one Mission field. It is, the relations of the Missionary to the native Presbytery. Stated in the form of a question, the point is, Shall our Missionaries be combined with the native presbyters in forming a Presbytery; or, Shall the native presbyters alone form the Presbytery? It is apparent that if the Missionaries combine with the natives in the Presbytery, the Missionaries from various countries will co-operate inside of one ecclesiastical organization. It is equally plain that if the natives alone form the Presbytery, the Missionaries will retain their connection with their respective home Presbyteries. All the Presbyterian missionaries in a field would then co-operate by bringing the native converts and the native churches into one purely native Presbytery. Which of the two plans shall be preferred? It is this question we shall aim now to discuss.

Among all interested in this matter there is a universal agreement on two points.

First. All would make it their aim that there should be but one Presbyterian Church in each Mission field. No one would wish to extend to the native Churches the lines of separation which exist among Presbyterian bodies at home. For us all, the terminus *ad quem* is the same—one purely native Presbyterian Church, self-governing and self-supporting.

Second. All hold that it is a prime duty of the Missionary to train the native Churches to govern and support themselves, to stand and to walk alone. In doing this, it is plain that at some stage of the training, the leading strings must be thrown away. The Church must be allowed to guide itself. And here the question arises, At what stage of development should this be? Just at this point we find a divergence of views. On one side it is held, that as soon as a presbyterial organization is effected in a heathen land, the churches should be under the care and control of the native presbyters alone. On the other side it is held, that after the presbyterial organization has been made, the Missionaries should unite with the native presbyters in governing and caring for the native Churches. We ask again, which plan shall we prefer?

On a question so important as this, the Missionary work of the New Testament throws some light. The conduct of the first Missionaries in this matter is plain. So soon as a presbyterial organization was effected in the native Church, the Church was at once left to the care and control of the native presbyters alone. When the Missionaries "had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed," and "passed" on to other work. A Missionary in Crete, under the direction of the Apostle Paul, organizes the native Church, ordaining elders in every city, and then at once leaves the native presbyters to manage their own affairs, while he rejoins the Apostle at Nicopolis. To these first Missionaries it was well known that the young native Churches under native presbyters, would be exposed to great dangers. They saw that "grievous wolves" would enter in among them "not sparing the flock." They knew that among those very native presbyters, some would "arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." They found by experience that there were cases of the grossest immorality in which the native presbyters failed to exercise discipline. And yet, with all this before them, they committed to the native presbyters alone, the administration of the native Church. They commended these presbyters to God and to the Word of His Grace, assuring them that thus they might be built up, and the Missionaries turned to other work.

With this precedent before us, we can give but one answer to the question which we now consider. What was done at Ephesus and at Antioch should be done at Tokiyo and at Shanghai. We are of those who believe that it is always wise and safe to follow an inspired example, even though we may not see clearly the reasons by which the example is justified. But in this case, the reasons are not far to seek, and they have the same force now as in the days when the Missionaries of Christ first went forth to the Gentiles. Let us see what these reasons are.

It is plain, in the first place, that if the Missionaries unite with the natives in their presbyterial councils, the tendency will be for the natives to lean on the superior knowledge and intelligence of the Missionaries. This must have an enfeebling effect on the natives. To develop their strength, they must be made to look to God and to the Word of His Grace. To throw the native presbyters directly on their dependence on the Spirit and the Word of God, is the true way, as the Apostle expressed it to the Ephesian presbyters, to build them up. This does not mean that the Missionary is no longer to have any care for the native Church. Though the Apostle Paul had committed the government of the native Church to native presbyters, there was an important sense in which the care of all those Churches came on him daily. So it should be with the Missionary now. He should watch the development of the native church. From time to time he should visit them. He would find that the very weight of responsibility resting on the native presbyters would incline them to listen to his suggestions and counsels, and by his prayers and exhortations, by his warnings and rebukes, he might do much to confirm them in a true faith and a holy life.

And here we must notice what we conceive to be a fallacy, on the part of those who favor the union of the Missionaries and the natives in a Presbytery. It is said that the presence and the counsels of the Missionary in the Presbytery do good; that they make the management of Church affairs *safe*. There is a sense in which this is true. When a little child is beginning to walk with uncertain step, an over-anxious mother may stay by its side all the time, and hold it up wherever it goes. There is a sense in which this does good, and it is *safe*. But surely this is not the way to develop and improve the child? There was a time, not far back in the history of Missions, when the Foreign Missionary acted as pastor of the native church, though there was a native on the ground qualified to act as pastor. Undoubtedly the preaching of the foreign pastor did good. Unquestionably his administration of the Church was *safe*. And yet, it is

now recognised as an axiom in Missions, that the foreign pastor should step out and give place to the native pastor. It is conceded on all sides that only thus can the native Church become vigorous and self-reliant. And just so in presbyterial affairs. Admitting that the presence of the Missionaries in the Presbytery makes things safe, and their counsels do good, it yet hinders greatly, we think, progress towards the *terminus ad quem*. Let the Missionaries go out of the Presbytery. Let the native presbyters be left to God and to the Word of His Grace. Perplexities may arise in the Presbytery. Mistakes may be made. Scandals even may occur. So it was at Corinth, and so it was at Ephesus. But, through all these failures, the native presbyters and the native Christians under their care, will be built up, and the end will be reached—a strong, self-supporting, self-propagating native Church.

But, there are other considerations too important to be overlooked. A Presbytery purely native will exert a more wholesome influence among the native population, than a Presbytery in which foreigners are members. Among the native Christians there are matters in which they may mistrust the judgment and the counsel which emanate from the Foreign Missionary. They see that he is raised above the social difficulties which surround them. They know that he is not exposed to the temptations which they are called to meet. They doubt whether he appreciates fully the embarrassments and difficulties by which they are beset. And so in the various business and social relations of the natives, a judgment influenced by foreign presbyters must come with diminished weight. A judgment in these matters which comes to a people only from presbyters of their own race, men who move in the same social sphere as themselves, awakens no such mistrust, and if just, comes with a satisfying power.

And then in respect to the natives who are not Christians. In China, in Japan, in all the great Mission fields, there are high-class natives who hold aloof from Christianity on account of the foreign influence connected with it. But, let it be seen that in the government and care of the native Church, foreign influence no longer controls, that the administration is purely native, and a repelling force is at once removed. It is clear, too, that this withdrawal of foreigners from the Presbytery must tend to remove any jealousy or suspicion on the part of the civil government towards the Church. Take as an example the Mission in Mexico. An esteemed brother in that field, whose views we asked on that subject, writes: "The Romanists and some of the secular papers accuse us of having come here to prepare Mexico for annexation to the United States. If we organize the Church and decline to hold on to it ourselves, but turn it over entirely to native control, it will be one of the best refutations of these slanderous accusations." And in every Mission field, the tendency of this course will be in the same direction.

We have said that the Missionaries of the New Testament, as soon as a Presbytery was organized passed on to other work. It should be observed that the Missionaries of our day, by purchasing the same method, will make the most effective use of their strength. The native presbyter has an advantage over the foreigner in the administration of the native Church: but the Foreign Missionary has an advantage over the native in evangelizing the heathen. It is the foreigner who easily attracts an audience. In evangelizing the heathen masses, a Foreign Missionary will bring the Gospel to far more people than the native preacher or native colporteur can reach: and so he uses his strength to the best advantage when, with a few native helpers about him, whom he daily instructs and encourages, he goes forward to sow broadcast the good seed. In that one land where he is, he sees before him vast unevangelized districts. These are to him the "regions beyond." He reminds the native presbyters that he is ever willing to be a servant to them and to the native churches, so far as the great duties before him will allow, but his main work must be among the heathen. He cannot, therefore, be associated with them in their Presbytery. He must commend

them to God and to His Word, while he goes forward with those whom they designate to go with him, to tell the glad tidings to their countrymen beyond. We can hardly imagine anything better fitted than this, to put a right spirit into the native churches, and to hasten on the evangelization of the whole land.

Let the Presbyteries, then, be purely native, and plans of Co-operation become simple and easy. The Missionaries of the different Churches hold their original presbyterial connections unaffected. They may meet together annually in council, and discuss and arrange matters of common interest. In all their work they have a common end. There can be no rivalry as to which Mission shall attach to itself the greatest native following. Each Mission brings its native following, and contributes it to one native Church, governed by native presbyters. No question can be raised as to whether the Symbols of this or of that Presbyterian body shall be adopted, or whether both alike shall be made to bind. It is recognised by all that a purely native Church has need of Symbols different from either those of Westminster or those of Dort; and the native presbyters, aided and advised by able men chosen by the council from among its own members, frame Symbols suited to the native Church. The anomalies and complexities are all gone.

The hour of adjournment having arrived, the Council, on motion, adjourned to meet in this place, this evening at seven o'clock, the Session being closed with prayer.

ST. ENOCH'S CHURCH, BELFAST,

Thursday, June 26th, 7 o'clock p.m.

THE COUNCIL met according to adjournment, and was opened with devotional exercises, conducted by the Rev. Dr. Burns, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Chairman of the Session.

The Order of the day was taken up, when the Council was addressed, as follows, by the Rev. Dr. W. FLEMING STEVENSON,
on

THE MISSIONARY CONSECRATION OF THE WHOLE
CHURCH.

Whatever may be the judgment of history, it is probable that our present century will remain distinguished for its practical energy and the fruitfulness of the great Christian ideas that have possessed it. There can be no better illustration of that fruitfulness than the idea of the Christian Mission round which our discussion gathers to-day. Less than a hundred years ago a Mission of the Church was practically unrecognized. When it was brought forward it was scouted in our General Assemblies. Public men, who commanded the attention of the country, held it up to ridicule. It was regarded as "the dream of a dreamer who had dreamed that he was dreaming." When it passed into the region of fact, those who founded it held their meetings in small parlours and vestries, the missionaries that were employed could be counted on the fingers, and the annual sum given for planting the Gospel of Christ throughout the world did not exceed a few hundred pounds. Yet