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A MAN FOR THE HOUR

A LITTLE over two years ago the long conflict between Modernism and the Christian religion in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. entered into its final phase. Christian people were asked to support the Modernist propaganda of the Board of Foreign Missions. When they refused to do so, and when they in support of their refusal appealed to the Bible and to the constitution of the church, they were placed under the ban; and the doors of the ministry were closed to others who, like them, would not promise to put the word of man above the Word of God.

In this conflict, who would be raised up as a spokesman and defender of the gospel cause? Who would stand in hostile General Assemblies and say a good word for Christian liberty and for the lordship of Jesus Christ? Who would plead before biased judicial commissions in order that the record, at least, might show,

to all fair enough to examine it, the ruthlessness of the ecclesiastical machine in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the justice of the unpopular cause?

The answer to these questions could not very well be given in the editorial pages of this paper hitherto, since the modesty of the Editor prevented it; but no such inhibition rests upon us now, and so we can say very plainly that in our judgment the man whom God raised up to be pre-eminently the spokesman of the evangelical cause in the councils and courts of the church was the Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths, D.D., who has up to the last issue been the Editor of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN.

In 1934 it was he who stood on the floor of the General Assembly and opposed the indifferentist plan of union with the United Presbyterian Church and who also pled with the Assembly not to

dethrone Jesus Christ by adopting the "Mandate" requiring an implicit obedience to human councils. At

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

With the present issue "The Presbyterian Guardian" appears under the editorship of J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D., and Ned B. Stonehouse, Th.D., with Mr. Thomas R. Birch as Managing Editor.

This paper was begun in October, 1935, as the organ of the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union, which had been organized to bring about a reform of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. or, failing that, to continue the true spiritual succession of that church in a body distinct from the existing organization. Employment of an editor at full salary would not have been financially possible; but the paper was exceedingly fortunate in securing, at the start, the services of the Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths, D.D., who was also General Secretary of the Covenant Union.

On June 11, 1936, the Covenant Union was dissolved and The Presbyterian Church of America was constituted. Just before the dissolution of the Covenant Union, the assets, liabilities and good will of "The Presbyterian Guardian" were transferred to The Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Company, which is now publishing the paper.

Since our financial resources do not warrant the employment of an editor at full-time salary, we are obliged, to our great regret, to release Dr. Griffiths from his engagement with us, though we rejoice greatly in the assurance of his continued counsel and assistance.

We are happy to announce that the editorship will be undertaken by the Rev. Professor Ned B. Stonehouse, Th.D., of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Dr. Stonehouse is assuming full editorial supervision of the paper, except that the editorial pages, for the present, will be in charge of the senior editor, Dr. Machen. Mr. Birch, Managing Editor, will be in charge of the business affairs of the office and will continue to render important service in the matter of the make-up of the paper.

THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

Why Separation Was Necessary

By the REV. PROFESSOR R. B. KUIPER
of Westminster Theological Seminary

In this important article, which is reproduced slightly abridged from The Banner, organ of the Christian Reformed Church, Professor Kuiper justifies the formation of The Presbyterian Church of America and indicates certain conditions which he thinks must be fulfilled if the church is to have a future as a truly Reformed body.

THE ELEVENTH day of June in the year of our Lord 1936 will go down in history as the date of the organization of The Presbyterian Church of America. In the afternoon of that day a group of Christian men and women gathered at the New Century Club of Philadelphia, severed their connection with the corrupt organization known as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., resolved to carry on the true spiritual succession of that body, and to that end constituted themselves *The Presbyterian Church of America*.

Immediately thereupon the ministers and elders present convened in the First General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America.

Prof. Dr. J. Gresham Machen was unanimously elected Moderator of the Assembly. It was felt by all present that he was entitled to that honor because of his leadership in the fight of the last decade or more against Modernism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and because of the reproach which he suffered in that struggle. He proved an excellent Moderator. The proceedings of the Assembly were characterized at once by the freest sort of debate and the finest Christian courtesy. The humblest elder was treated with as much respect as the most influential minister. Machine tactics and steam-roller methods were conspicuously absent. Far from assuming dictatorial airs, as moderators often do, Dr. Machen was servant of all.

Not a New Church

Uninformed newspaper reporters told the public that a new church had come into being. One or two even wrote of a new sect. As a matter of fact, what really happened was that a new organization was formed which aims to be, and is firmly convinced that it is, the true spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The latter organization has become flagrantly disloyal to the faith

of the fathers. It not only tolerates, but even highly honors, ministers of the gospel so-called who deny the inerrancy of the Scriptures and do not hesitate to dub as unimportant such central truths of the Christian religion as the virgin birth of Jesus, His bodily resurrection, and His vicarious sacrifice for the expiation of sin by the satisfaction of divine justice. It has gone so far as to suspend from the ministry men whose only crime was that they militantly opposed such heresy. In so doing it has substituted the decrees of church councils for the law of Christ, thus dethroning Him as the Church's only Head and King. Surely, it is no exaggeration to say that such a church has rejected its spiritual heritage. And this very heritage The Presbyterian Church of America would preserve. Whatever the legal aspects of the case may be, The Presbyterian Church of America has entered upon that spiritual heritage which formerly belonged to the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., but was wilfully spurned by that organization. The Presbyterian Church of America is the spiritual continuation of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has become something else, but The Presbyterian Church of America is not new. In the most real sense it is the old church.

It is worthy of note that The Presbyterian Church of America said nothing at the time of its organization about its being the *legal* succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. If that contention had been made it could have been supported by strong arguments. However, this matter was passed over in silence. The implication is that, while individual congregations leaving the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. may insist, and in certain cases actually are insisting, that they are the rightful owners of church properties, The Presbyterian Church of America as a whole does not intend to place

primary stress on the matter of property rights. The emphasis is decidedly on the spiritual. It has even been said that, though material things are not to be scorned, the church will be purer if those stay out who would come in only if they could take certain buildings with them. In this connection it deserves mention that several ministers have joined the new organization at the cost of honorable pastorate, beautiful homes, and comfortable salaries. The men and women in The Presbyterian Church of America have actually left houses and lands and many other things for Christ and His gospel.

The Need of Separation

Just when a band of Christians may depart from a corrupt church in order to effect a new and purer organization is generally regarded a hard question to answer. The fact that many devout Christians remained, for instance, in the corrupt *Hervormde Kerk*¹ of the Netherlands at the time of *de Afscheiding*² and again of *de Doleantie*³ is evidence that considerable difference of opinion exists on this subject.

However, the question is not altogether as difficult as many suppose. Such men of God, to name but two, as John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper were compelled in their day to face this very issue. Painstaking study of Scripture led them to certain definite conclusions. They acted according to these conclusions and recorded them in their writings. Today we may profit by their precept and example.

Obviously it will not do to sever connections with a church because of any and every imperfection that may cleave to it. To do so would destroy all church organization for the simple reason that even the best church has several spots and more than a few wrinkles. It is just as clear that one does not need to continue in a church until it has become so thoroughly corrupted that no good whatever remains. If that were one's duty it would follow that the Protestant Reformation was one big blunder. The Roman Catholic Church at that time was not so utterly false that not a vestige of truth was retained. To quote Calvin: "I call them churches, inasmuch as the Lord there wondrously preserves some remains of His people—and inasmuch as some symbols of the church

¹The State Church of the Netherlands.

²The Separation of 1834.

³The Separation of 1886.

still remain.—But as, on the other hand, those marks to which we ought especially to have respect in this discussion are effaced, I say that the whole body, as well as every single assembly, want the form of a legitimate church.”

There are those in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. who lay claim to orthodoxy but take the position that one may remain in a corrupt church so long as its official standards are sound. More specifically they say that they intend to continue in the church so long as it does not actually rewrite its constitution so as to destroy its Presbyterian and Christian character. To call this position foolish is to put it mildly. It is perfectly safe to predict that those who speak thus will stay where they are, if not till doomsday, at least until the day of their death. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. does not take its constitution seriously enough to care to rewrite it. It is trampling its constitution into the mire. There is no more effective way of scrapping it.

Let us suppose that anti-Christian teachings and practices have become rampant in a church. The faithful protest vigorously. So long as the church manifests a willingness to give heed they must remain. But if the church fails to respond and actually even resists their reformatory efforts, then they must depart. In the words of Dr. Kuyper: “Verzet ze zich daartegen, dan moet met de valsche forma worden gebroken.”⁴ There can be no doubt about it that the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has for several years already bitterly opposed the demand that Modernism, which of course is anti-Christian, be banished from its midst.

To come down to brass tacks, as the popular saying has it, a group of Christians *may* leave a corrupt church organization in order to establish a purer organization only when they *must*. If they do it sooner they are schismatics. But if they fail to do it when they must, then they deny their Lord.

When Must Christians Withdraw?

But just when *must* they withdraw? The answer is twofold. In the first place, the old organization may cast them out. Then they have no choice in

⁴“If the church resists reform, it becomes necessary to break with the false forms.”

the matter. They find themselves locked out of the church and can only form a new organization. In the second place, it becomes their solemn duty to depart when the church demands of them that they sin and when, in consequence, to remain entails sin.

Precisely this twofold situation confronted the militantly orthodox group in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Faithful ministers of the gospel were suspended from office, deposed, or even debarred from the communion of the church. If they were to continue preaching the gospel, the task to which they were convinced God had called them, they would do so only outside the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The church had driven them out. And two successive General Assemblies solemnly decreed that the members of the church were as much in sacred duty bound to support the regular boards of the church as to celebrate the Holy Supper. But the work of several of these boards is indisputably shot through with Modernism. To support them is to support Modernism. And to support Modernism is sin. Besides, the church, instead of casting out heretics, demanded of its ministers that they recognize as brethren in the Lord deniers of the most central truths of the Christian religion and required of its members that they celebrate the Holy Supper with such as reject the very core of the precious doctrine of the atonement. In a word, the church insisted that Christ have concord with Belial, that the temple of God have agreement with idols.

To say that the men and women who constituted The Presbyterian Church of America had a right, even a perfect right, to do so is a serious understatement. They *had* to do it. *It was their solemn duty.*

There are those who would remain in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in order to reform it from within. Perhaps they mean well. It is not for men to judge each other's motives. But I do not hesitate to say that they are pussyfooting. Any member of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. who will resist Modernism as it ought to be resisted, who will fight it with might and main, relentlessly, refusing to give it quarter, will not be tolerated. The case of Dr. Machen proves it, and so does that of the Rev. J. J. DeWaard of Cedar Grove, Wis-

consin, who, by the way, is not a member of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Again I make bold to say that they who would now stay in the old organization in order to be in a better position to reform it are sinning. Whether consciously or unconsciously, I do not know; but sin they do. As Dr. Machen put it pointedly in a stirring sermon delivered in the closing session of the first General Assembly, they are yielding to the most subtle of Satan's temptations, the temptation to do evil in order that good may come.

The Reformed Faith

To the Christian Reformed Church belongs the honor of having been the first church to give official recognition to The Presbyterian Church of America. Synod sent a telegram wishing the new organization Godspeed and requesting it to appoint a fraternal delegate. The General Assembly received this missive with evident joy. In the face of strong and bitter opposition it thanked God and took courage.

One phrase in synod's well-worded message was especially appropriate. Mention was made of “the tie that binds us in the propagation and defense of our common Reformed faith.” These words express a most significant fact. The basis of The Presbyterian Church of America, like that of our Christian Reformed Church, is definitely Reformed.

It goes without saying that the General Assembly could not in a few days draw up a complete and detailed constitution for the new organization. That work was assigned to a committee which is to report to the second General Assembly in the autumn of this year. But the broad basis of the church was at once established. It is the Bible, the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, embodying the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture; and the principles of Presbyterian Church government.

The mandate of the committee just referred to is extremely meaningful. The committee was told that the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are to be the doctrinal standards of the church, and that it may recommend only certain very specific changes. Those changes concern a revision of the Westminster Confession made by the Presbyterian Church in

the U.S.A. in the year 1903. At that time certain so-called Cumberland Presbyterian churches were received into the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Now these churches were Arminian in doctrine, and so, in order to facilitate their acceptance of the strictly Calvinistic Westminster Confession, a few alterations and additions were made which obscure the testimony of the Confession to the Reformed faith. These amendments the committee is charged to scrutinize. It is evident that The Presbyterian Church of America does not intend to brook the dilution of the pure wine of Reformed doctrine by the addition of even a little Arminian water.

The General Assembly had the privilege of examining several graduates of Westminster Seminary for licensure and ordination. It would have warmed the cockles of the heart of any Christian Reformed minister to hear how closely they were questioned about the two errors which are so extremely prevalent among American fundamentalists, Arminianism and the Dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible. The Assembly wanted to make sure that these prospective ministers were not tainted with such anti-reformed heresies.

All of which goes to show that synod used no vain words when it spoke of "the tie that binds us in the propagation and defense of our common Reformed faith."

The Presbyterian Church of America is not just another fundamentalist church. Its basis is strictly Reformed.

Prospects for the Future

The membership of the first General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America consisted of forty-three ministers and twenty-two elders. Since that time many more ministers and elders have united with the organization or have signified the intention to do so in the immediate future. In a few cases local churches are coming into The Presbyterian Church of America almost in their entirety. Numerous groups of Christians throughout the land, formerly or perhaps still connected with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., are waiting to be organized as particular churches. Some of these groups are of considerable size, but most are small. Much emphasis will be placed on Home Missions and Church Extension.

Thus it seems likely that The Presbyterian Church of America will enjoy considerable growth in the near future. To what size it will grow eventually no human being, of course, can say with any degree of certainty.

However, when speaking of the future of the church, I have in mind soundness rather than size. The leaders of the church too are concerned much more about purity than about numbers.

A Few Warnings

A few things may be named which The Presbyterian Church of America must stress strongly if it is to have a worth-while future.

For many years past there has been precious little doctrinal preaching in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Even the reputedly great preachers of that church were almost all of them woefully negligent in the presentation of doctrine from the pulpit. Especially the so-called five points of Calvinism were ignored. No wonder that this church collapsed. It perished for want of knowledge. If The Presbyterian Church of America is to maintain its Presbyterian and, I dare say, its Christian character, it will have to see that its ministers preach Christian doctrine, including specifically Reformed doctrine, in season and out of season.

From time to time the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has permitted un-Presbyterian elements to creep into its *Form of Government*, *Book of Discipline*, and *Directory for the Worship of God*. A committee was appointed by the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America to make a careful study of these documents and to propose such changes as may seem necessary. A prerequisite for the precise performance of this work is a broad and deep knowledge of the principles of Presbyterian church government and liturgies. In view of the fact that for decades past there has prevailed in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. a deplorable ignorance of these principles, the committee's task may well be called colossal.

It is to be hoped that The Presbyterian Church of America will make the requisites for membership much stricter than they are in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The latter body requires only a creditable profession of faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ. Obviously the word *creditable* is rather stretchable. How it actually has been stretched! And the word *faith* has in many cases been evaporated into thin air. By and large doctrinal knowledge and doctrinal soundness have come to be ignored. But no church can ignore them in its members and continue Presbyterian or, for that matter, Christian.

Another evil in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. which led it inevitably to ruin was its gross neglect of church discipline. Just recently there has been a remarkable revival of disciplinary zeal, but it was directed against the church's best members. May The Presbyterian Church of America receive grace to be faithful in the exercise of this key.

Finally, it is a matter of prime necessity that the new organization stress strongly the doctrine of the covenant of grace, and, as Dr. Van Til recently pointed out forcibly to its members in an eloquent address, that it draw up and carry out a complete and consistent program of Christian education for the covenant youth. When one considers how indifferent many of our Christian Reformed people still are to Christian education, this task of our Presbyterian brethren appears tremendous.

In a word, in order to insure its future, The Presbyterian Church of America will have to avoid scrupulously the errors that occasioned the downfall of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and will have to insist on remaining true to its Reformed basis all along the line.

My acquaintance with the leadership of The Presbyterian Church of America gives me high hopes for its future.

The last hymn sung in the concluding session of the first General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America was Luther's *A Mighty Fortress*. How comforting is the second stanza when one contemplates the future of Christ's Church.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He,
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same;
And He must win the battle.