

Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of His Life

By Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.

When considering the life and ministry of Morton H. Smith, I am reminded of Psalm 71:17, 18: “O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; and I still declare Thy wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Thy strength to this generation, Thy power to all who are to come.” Dr. Morton H. Smith was a man raised up by God to declare His name for half a century, a man who perhaps more than any other, has been used by God to restore the Reformed Faith and Presbyterianism to the South and disseminate it throughout the nation.

The purpose of this biographical article is not to present a critical biography of the man. That task will be left to a subsequent generation. My privilege is to introduce you to the man and his work.¹

FAMILY AND EARLY YEARS: 1923–1941

Morton Smith was born in Roanoke, Virginia to James Brookes and Margaret Morton Smith, on December 11, 1923. He was the fourth of five sons. The family of this man who has been a bridge between the faith of Thornwell, Dabney, Girardeau, and Palmer and the present generation, is itself a genealogical bridge of Reformed covenantal heritage. His father’s family on the male side descended from New England Puritans who settled in Connecticut and eventually moved into Kentucky. His paternal grandmother came from Presbyterian stock that migrated from Virginia to Kentucky. Through this side of the family, he is related to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and to Drury Lacy.

His grandfather Howison on his mother’s side was of Scottish descent, from a family that emigrated from Edinburgh, Scotland to southern Maryland, and eventually settled in Dumfries, Virginia. His maternal grandmother was descended from the Huguenots Abraham and Susannah Micheaux, who settled on a

land grant in 1699 in Manakintown, on the south side of the James River.² Agnes Woodson, a granddaughter of Abraham and Susannah, married Joe Morton. They were converted under the preaching of Samuel Davies, and consequently Joe Morton was one of the founding elders of the old Briery church, near Keysville, Virginia. Somewhat later, a pastor of this church was one of Dr. Smith’s ancestors on his father’s side, Drury Lacy. William Henry Foote wrote about the Mortons: “The Morton families [Joe’s brother married another granddaughter of Abraham and Susannah Micheaux.] were prolific, and the children, carefully instructed in religion and led on by example, became, like their parents, professing members of the church. The influence is not yet lost on their descendants.”³

Dr. Smith’s parents met while his father was studying at the University of Virginia, on the occasion of Margaret Morton’s visit to the home of Dr. Frank Dunnington, a professor at the University. They were married August 16, 1910 in Braehead, the Mortons’ family home, just

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1. This article is a revision of “Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of his Life,” in Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn, *Confessing Our Hope: Essays in Honor of Morton Howison Smith on His Eightieth Birthday* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2004), pp. 1–30. Much of that material is taken from an autobiographical sketch Dr. Smith wrote for his family. I have been an eye-witness of many of the events since 1967. I also would like to thank Wayne Sparkman and his staff at the PCA Historical Center for providing me with documents. For those interested, the Center has a treasure trove of material on Dr. Smith.

2. My wife’s ancestors lived on the land adjacent to the Micheauxs.

3. William Henry Foote, *The Huguenots or Reformed French Church* (1870; reprint, Harrisonburg VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2002), p. 547.

outside of Fredericksburg. His father took a B.A. and M.A. in Mathematics at the University and taught at Hampden Sydney College in Virginia until World War I.

Their first two sons, Benjamin Warfield and Graham Howison, were born to the Smiths while they lived in Hampden Sydney. Graham died at the age of three and is buried in the Union Seminary Cemetery in Hampden Sydney beside his grandfather Samuel Lyle Graham, who taught at Union Theological Seminary.⁴ When the U.S. entered World War I in April of 1917, Dr. Smith's father volunteered and served as First Lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps in Washington D.C. Their third son, James Brookes, was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, two days before Armistice in 1918.

While working in the Quartermaster Corps, Smith's father became interested in actuarial science. After the war, rather than returning to teaching, he began working in the insurance industry as an actuary. His first position was with Jefferson Standard in Greensboro, North Carolina, and later he moved to Shenandoah Life Insurance Company in Roanoke, Virginia.

Morton Smith and his younger brother, Rockwell MacDonald, were born in the family home at 323 Wasena Avenue in Roanoke. The elder was born December 11, 1923, and his brother on August 26, 1925. Dr. Smith writes: "According to my older brother Brookes, he was told to go out and ride his wagon on the morning that I was born. He recalled it as a sunny day. After he had been out for an hour or two he was invited back into the house and told that another brother has been born."

While a young boy in Roanoke, he became conscious of his faith in Christ. The family were members at the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church where his father served as one of the first elders. Dr. Smith writes:

Church was a regular part of our family life. I remember inquiring of my Sunday school teacher at about the age of five whether if I believed that Jesus had died and risen from the dead, I would be saved. Her affirmative response was a great encouragement to me....

At about this same time I remember sitting out in front of the house under the supervision of a black maid (I assume it was Octavia) and I was talking about liking mountains. She expressed her fear of the Day of

Judgment, when she said that men would call for the mountains to fall on them to hide from God. I remember saying to her that if we believed in Jesus as Savior, we would not have to fear that day. As I recall it, she agreed with me.

Dr. Smith's love for the mountains comes from his father. From the house in Roanoke the mountains could be seen on every side. Early on, the family would take car trips up various mountains; later they would hike the mountain trails. As a youngster he also developed an interest in technology. His parents gave him an Atwater Kent radio, which he owned all his life. He particularly enjoyed listening to football games and the opera. He remembers the news broadcast on the burning of the Hindenburg and also Orson Wells' *War of the Worlds*.

During this time Dr. Smith also received from his father a love for the South and the Confederacy. He writes:

I remember driving at night across the plank road past Chancellorsville, where Stonewall Jackson won his greatest victory, and was wounded accidentally by his own men. I remember Dad saying that he could "see" Confederate soldiers marching there. Ever since that night as I drive across that part of Virginia I can "see" Confederate soldiers marching there. Dad instilled in us a love for the South and for the Confederacy with his own interest in the battles. He used to take us to the battlefields, and hunt for bullets in corn-fields where intense fighting had taken place. I still have bullets from the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Sharpsburg, and Gettysburg. Both Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson became personal heroes of mine.

Young Smith began school at Virginia Heights Elementary School, but transferred the next year to a new school, Wasena Heights, closer to his home. Because of his natural shyness, he did not particularly care about school. He much preferred to be alone or spend time with the family.

When he was about eight years old, the family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where James Brookes Smith went to work for Baltimore Life Insurance Company, eventually becoming its first vice-president. The family settled in the Mt. Washington area of Baltimore because there was a very conservative Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) in that neighborhood—Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church.⁵ God profoundly used the ministry of that church in young Smith's life. Toward

4. Union Theological Seminary began at Hampden Sydney, and though the seminary was moved to Richmond, the Seminary's Cemetery remained at Hampden Sydney, near Farmville, VA. R.L. Dabney and Thomas Peck are buried in the cemetery.

5. This congregation came into the PCA and is now named Valley Presbyterian Church.

the end of 1933 the church called James E. Moore, a recent graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, to serve as pastor. He was ordained by Potomac Presbytery on January 4, 1934, and Dr. J. Gresham Machen, founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, preached the ordination sermon. The Machen family at times worshipped with this congregation. Mr. Moore remained at Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church until 1951, when he accepted a call to an Orthodox Presbyterian Congregation in California. Dr. Smith's love for and gratitude to Pastor Moore is immeasurable. Again, in his own words:

Mr. Moore was to become a major influence in the lives of all the young people of the Mt. Washington Church. Out of this fairly small church of around 150 members, some 15 or 16 young people ended up in the ministry, or as missionaries. The impact was not so much from pressure being put on us by Mr. Moore to enter the ministry, but rather from his impressing us with the fact that Christianity really makes a difference in the lives of believers. It was my sad duty to moderate a congregational meeting of the Mt. Washington Church that accepted the resignation of Mr. Moore. He had accepted a call of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in California. It was a sad day for many of us to see him drive off in the big stake truck that carried all of his worldly goods.... I believe that Mr. Moore was probably the most influential person on my life outside of my parents.

At the age of eleven, young Morton Smith made his public profession of faith. He says, "I had not gone through the regular communicants' class, but came to Mr. Moore a few weeks after his class had made their profession of faith. I met with the Session and was answering the routine questions, when the oldest elder asked me 'What does Jesus mean to you?' I remember choking up and hardly being able to answer, then said that He meant everything to me, and that I was trusting Him as my Savior."

Smith finished elementary school at Public School 221 in Mt. Washington. He then attended Roland Park Junior High School and afterwards did his high school work at St. Paul's School for Boys. The school was small, so every boy was expected to play on one of the three athletic teams: football, basketball, or lacrosse. Though not athletically inclined, he played on the varsity football team. He won the "spirit award" his first year and played enough his second year to earn a letter. From this experience, he developed a life-long

interest in football. After graduating from St. Paul's in 1941 he enrolled at the University of Michigan.

In addition to family and church, another influence on Dr. Smith's life was Boy Scouts. His oldest brother Ben had been active in Scouts and earned his Eagle Scout badge. Young Smith joined the Scouts at the age of 12 and was most involved in the camping and hiking activities. Throughout high school he remained active in Scouts and attended Camp Powhatan, near Roanoke, each summer. After his freshman year at the university, at the age of 18, he served as hike master at this camp.

He gives an interesting anecdote about one hike:

Brookes and I were sleeping together in a pup tent. I remember being awakened by the howling of a dog or wolf. It is possible that there were a few remaining wolves in the mountains at that time, or it may have been a wild dog. The howling was what I had always imagined wolf howling to be. I waked Brookes up, and we got our flashlights, and tried to see what it was that had waked us. As I remember it we may have caught a glimpse of some shining eyes, but with our awaking, and some others of the scouts, the animal took off. It was apparently frustrated at not being able to get some food out of one of our containers. The next morning we discovered that it had eaten what bacon and bread we had for breakfast. The only thing left was one egg for each of us. We also dug some sassafras roots from which we made sassafras tea. Then we set out to hike seven miles on down the ridge to Patete Gap and back to Camp Powhatan. Brookes, who had a weak ankle from an automobile accident, sprained that ankle about half way down the mountain. There was no way for him to walk, and thus we had to cut some small trees and rig a stretcher, using blankets. We cut the trees long enough for two or three boys to be involved in carrying each end. We carried him down the mountain and back to Camp Powhatan.

THE UNIVERSITY AND WAR YEARS: 1941-1949

Because of his interest in nature, the young college student dreamed of becoming a forest ranger. His Uncle Wallace Stephens was the head ranger at the Shenandoah National Park and strongly recommended the program at the University of Michigan. So, our young southerner made his way north in the fall of 1941; it was an eventful year in his life.

He recalls little of his classes that year and less of his classmates. The student body was about 14,000 and

he made few personal contacts. He had a single room on the inside of the quadrangle. At the University his interest in football was nurtured: Michigan's was the largest college-owned stadium, seating some 87,000, where he vividly remembers attending games. He remained an avid University of Michigan football fan.

The Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor was a great disappointment. The Pastor, William Lemon, was a pulpit orator and preached to a packed house, but he was one of the signers of the Auburn Affirmation and did not believe the gospel. For a while Smith attended a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church but was uncomfortable with its low views of the Sabbath and its ritual. He then discovered the Intervarsity chapter in which he became involved. Through that group he was introduced to the Christian Reformed Chapel under the ministry of Leonard Verduin. Although the preaching was very good, he felt out of place among the mostly Dutch members.

In the spring he began attending Grace Bible Church, a choice that led to one of the most important events in his life. Here he met a young lady, Miss Lois Knopf. He describes his first impression:

One of the things that was new for me was the use of two pianos in the service. I remember being impressed with the young lady who played the lead piano. She had a very open and attractive face, with a beautiful smile. A couple of weeks after starting to attend Grace Bible Church, I was invited by one of the ladies of the Church to go home for dinner with her family. It would be the first home meal that I had had during the school year, except for the Christmas vacation, when I had gone home. After I had accepted the invitation, lo, and behold the attractive pianist came up and the lady introduced me to her as her daughter Lois. Then the father came along, and he indicated that he would have to drive some older ladies home, and I was asked if I would be willing to walk home with Lois. One of the things that Lois did was to have her dad take a picture of the two of us with her box camera. Neither of us had any idea that that first meeting was to lead to our marriage and over 50 years of life together.

The Knopfs were a typical mid-western German family. They had two children, Lois and her brother, who is seven years younger. By persuasion her parents were Baptists. Her maternal grandfather was a carpenter who served for while as a Baptist preacher. During her youth they were part of the fundamentalist movement and knew Dr. Dehaan, the founder of the Radio Bible

Class. Her paternal grandfather was of German descent, but lived in Poland. In his teen years he emigrated from Poland because he was subject to being drafted into the Russian army. He came to Detroit where he labored as a carpenter. Lois manifested an early interest in music, and her grandmother insisted she take piano lessons. Beginning at age five, she studied piano, finally majoring in piano at University of Michigan under a very fine professor who wanted to groom her to be a concert pianist. She also sang quite well and was taking a second major in voice.

Her father, though not academically educated, was highly competent in the field of engineering. As a young man he worked as a tool and die maker for the Ford Motor Company. During World War II, he worked for an Ann Arbor ball bearing plant, and later for Argus Camera Company. He finished his career at the University of Michigan College of Engineering, where, among other things, he worked on the nose cones of some of the early rockets that were fired at Redstone Arsenal (Huntsville, AL). He often would examine the blueprints for a proposed device and occasionally tell the professor whether it would work. Initially, those in charge dismissed his analyses and would tell him to proceed with the project. However, when the device failed, they would ask him how to make it function correctly, and eventually they learned to heed his advice. He was an active churchman with a genuine, practical Christianity, which he lived daily.

The young couple only had about a month to become acquainted before Smith returned home for the summer. Through correspondence, however, their relationship grew during that summer.

Meanwhile another life-changing event occurred. Young Smith was at the apartment of one of the faculty members on Sunday December 7, 1941, when he learned of the surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor. Four days later, on Smith's 18th birthday, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan and the Axis powers in Europe. During the spring semester, Smith enlisted in the Aviation Cadet program, and as a freshman was sworn into the Army Air Corps. However, thirteen months would lapse before he was called up to active duty.

After working that summer at Scout Camp Powhatan in Virginia, he returned to the University for the fall term. During this term, he lived in the experimental Michigan Christian Fellowship house. The living arrangement was spartan: "Ed Franks, who was English in background, and I shared a room together. Actually we had a small study and slept on an unheated but

enclosed porch, which was quite cold in the winter.” That term he did some physical training preparatory for military service and continued to develop his relationship with Lois.

He was called to active duty on April 11, 1943. The first week of May he began pre-flight training at Maxwell Field near Montgomery, Alabama. From there he traveled to Helena, Arkansas for primary flight training. After advanced twin-engine flight training at Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, he graduated, on January 14, 1944, as a Second Lieutenant. To his disappointment, he was not sent overseas, but received orders to serve as a flight instructor. He spent the remainder of the European war in Blytheville, Arkansas instructing pilot trainees in twin-engine planes. After V-E Day he was sent to Lockburn Airbase at Columbus, Ohio, where he was trained in B-17s. Having completed this program, he was awaiting orders to train in the B-29 when Japan surrendered.

Since providentially he was not stationed overseas, he and Lois Knopf married on June 30, 1944. She was able to be with him during the remainder of the war. Those who know Dr. Smith may be amused by an event in his courtship which I will let him tell in his own words:

At the end of our basic flying training we were given three-day passes and one hundred or two hundred mile distance. Several of us hired a car to drive us to St. Louis. I caught a Chicago and Southern flight to Chicago. (This airline later became part of Delta Airlines.) Then I hitched rides with truckers to Ann Arbor. As I remember that trip, I called Lois early in the morning from Niles, Michigan, and asked her to stay home for me that day. She agreed. The first thing I did after getting to her house was to check on the train schedules for returning to Walnut Ridge before the three-day pass was over. I think I had about twenty-four hours in Ann Arbor. When Dad heard about this trip, he said it reminded him of his hike from Charlottesville to Fredericksburg to see mother. This was a real risk, since I was beyond the limits of the three-day pass, but I was never checked by the MP’s and got back on time.

After his discharge in 1945, he and Lois enrolled at the University of North Carolina, but since the University did not accept all of his course work from Michigan, they returned to Ann Arbor to complete his studies at the University of Michigan. Initially they lived in an old farmhouse a number of miles outside town. Later they purchased a trailer home in which they lived during the remainder of their residence in Ann Arbor.

While a student he began to help with student registration, and after graduation was hired as office manager in the Registrar’s office. He worked there for about two years. Little did he think he would ever need experience in academic administration, but God was preparing him for his future ministry.

PREPARATION FOR THE GOSPEL MINISTRY: 1949–1952

During this time another significant change occurred. Having decided not to pursue forestry, he took a degree in Botany in the Literature, Science and Arts College. He also began to teach Sunday school and eventually supplied the pulpit at a chapel of Grace Bible Church. The Lord worked through these opportunities to call him to the gospel ministry.

After visiting a number of seminaries, he enrolled at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. The young couple rented a duplex that was within walking distance of the Seminary.

Though theologically weak, Columbia was the most conservative of the Southern Presbyterian seminaries. He matriculated at Columbia in the fall of 1949. The two professors that were most helpful to the conservative students were Dr. Manfred Gutzke, who, though not reformed, was a sincere evangelical, and Dr. William Childs Robinson. Dr. Roby, as he was affectionately known by the students, had a profound impact on the young seminary student:

I already had a book or two that he had written. Eventually Dr. Robinson hired Lois to type the manuscript of one or two of his new books. He had the privilege of preaching the last sermon that President Roosevelt heard at Warm Springs, GA. In fact, Dr. Robinson received a thank you note from the President dated the day before he died. Dr. Robinson was a genuine Calvinist. He knew the Southern Presbyterian history, and introduced me to much of their thought. A number of students were intimidated by him, but I always felt he was a defender of the faith and thus I wanted to be aligned with him.

During this time, he also became acquainted with Dr. John R. Richardson, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta and a leader in the conservative Presbyterian movement.

Because of the liberalism at Columbia Seminary, the Smiths decided in the fall of 1950 to transfer to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. However, before moving north, he served as student

pastor at the Collinsville Presbyterian Church of Collinsville, Alabama. Collinsville was a small town about 20 miles north of Gadsden, Alabama. That summer he delivered a series of sermons on the Apostle's Creed and did pastoral and evangelistic visitation. He writes regarding that experience: "We look back on that summer as a useful training period in our ministerial lives."

The year at Westminster Seminary greatly influenced the seminarian. At Westminster, the young couple lived on campus in one of the "Gate" houses. They had dinner in the student dining club on campus.

Smith profited from the entire faculty under which he studied, but particularly from Dr. Van Til and Professor Murray: "It was without doubt, the most intellectually stimulating year of my education. It was not so much that I was being taught a new doctrine, but rather I was gaining insights in the Biblical grounds for the faith, and also in how we can best defend the faith."

He was also exposed to a different approach to theological education, an approach that confirmed for him the need for students to have ministerial experience:

One of the sharp contrasts between the Columbia and the Westminster approach to the training of the ministry was seen in the attitude they had toward a student laboring in a church, while in Seminary. Columbia encouraged such relations, where Westminster strongly discouraged such. The goals of the two institutions seem to be different. The Southern seminaries are committed to the training of ministers and pastors, and thus the practice of ministry is part of that training. Westminster, on the other hand, was more interested in teaching at a scholarly and intellectual level.

By studying at the two schools, Smith became convinced that one of the greatest needs of the Southern Presbyterian Church was to have sound teachers at the College and Seminary levels. He believed that God was calling him to engage in such work. Therefore, on the counsel of Dr. Richardson, who told Smith that if he desired to teach in the Southern Presbyterian Church, he should graduate from one of the denominational seminaries, he returned to Columbia.

6. See C.N. Willborn, "Southern Presbyterianism: The Character of a Tradition" in *Confessing our Hope*, pp. 293–328 for a brief discussion of the error of this approach in a seminary that belongs to a denomination that subscribes to the Westminster Standards. For an extended discussion of Confessionalism and ecclesiastical education see chapter 5 of C. N. Willborn, "John L. Girardeau (1825–1898): Pastor to Slaves and Theologian of Causes" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003).

The summer after his year at Westminster, he served as student pastor at Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. Mrs. Smith found Savannah charming and developed a taste for seafood. God blessed the work that summer, and the elders invited Smith to serve the congregation during the school year. He drove down every weekend and exhorted at the morning and evening services until the Church called a full-time pastor.

That summer in Savannah he became acquainted with Albert H. Freundt Jr., the son of one of the elders in the church. They became friends and later colleagues when Mr. Freundt worked with Dr. Smith in the founding of Reformed Theological Seminary.

Also, that summer he met John C. Blackburn, the grandson of the great South Carolinian theologian, John L. Girardeau. Pastor Blackburn had one of the finest private collections of Southern Presbyterian books in the world. Smith would later use that library in doing research for his dissertation.

The next year at Columbia, Smith became involved in a serious theological controversy. A number of students were concerned about the presence on the faculty of Dr. Richard T. Gillespie. He openly espoused the higher critical views of Biblical criticism and taught his courses from that perspective. Smith and Jack Scott represented thirty-nine students who lodged a protest with the president, Dr. J. McDowell Richards. Smith and Scott and perhaps one other student were the only ones known by name. Dr. Richards accepted their testimony that thirty-nine students had signed the protest. The names of the others were not revealed to avoid any recriminations. These two young men, though, were willing to face the consequences of their action. A counter-petition was circulated, and after a couple of days of turmoil on campus Dr. Richards met with the student body. Smith writes,

He indicated that the different views being taught at the Seminary were views held by different elements of the Church, and that we had to learn to live with them. He said that it was the Seminary's position to be representative of what the Church held. We felt that the Seminary should be true to the Standards of the Church, and not merely the reflection of the views held by members of the Church.⁶

The Board of Trustees upheld Dr. Richards' decision. According to Dr. Smith, in this entire affair Dr. Richards treated them fairly, as a Christian gentleman. In a sense this protest planted the seeds of the PCA:

One of the things that grew out of it was a prayer meeting that some of us held down in the woods behind the Seminary. Expression was made there that we were willing to stand for the gospel, even if it cost us our standing in the Church. Harold Borchert has said that this was the beginning of the PCA. A good number of those involved in this action against Dr. Gillespie ended up in the PCA.

Toward the end of that year Smith began to minister to a group in Valdosta, Georgia. This group had withdrawn from the First Presbyterian Church over the conduct of the pastor and the Presbytery's poor handling of the situation. Some in the group were Dispensationalist in their theology, and he wanted to persuade the group of the truth of the Reformed Faith and historic Presbyterianism. Desiring to keep them from going into independency, he accepted, with the approval of Dr. Richards, an appointment to minister there for the summer. Commenting on the summer he spent ministering among them, he says, "I look back on this time as one of the high points in my personal ministry. We conducted a full program, including vacation Bible school. I preached twice on Sunday, and we had Wednesday prayer meetings."

Since not all the course work he took at Westminster transferred, he had one final semester of work to complete at Columbia. He returned to Columbia for the fall term and continued to minister to the group in Valdosta on the weekends. Upon completion of classes in December of 1952, the Smiths moved to Valdosta.

THE EARLY YEARS OF MINISTRY: 1953–1964

During the next few months of the new year, the group in Valdosta was prevented from staying in the Southern Presbyterian Church. After examining the various possibilities, it decided to go into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The young minister had to determine whether to go with them. With great sorrow, he refused the call to Valdosta. He struggled a great deal over this decision. He writes,

I had talked with Dr. Van Til about moving to the OPC, and his advice was that I should stay in my mother Church and leave my mark on her. During this time we had Dr. Will McIlwaine, a Southern Presbyterian missionary to Japan, with a brother missionary in the OPC, come to visit the congregation. As I drove him back to Atlanta, he urged me not to leave the Southern church yet. He said that each furlough things were

worse in the home Church, and that the only bright light that he saw was the group of us struggling for the purity of Columbia Seminary, and that he saw Jack Scott and myself as needed if there was ever to be a reform in the Southern Church. He 'Farelized' me to stay in the Southern Presbyterian Church, which I decided I must do.

After considering a number of possible places of service, including his home church, which wanted to call him, the Smiths accepted a call to a two-church field: Springfield-Roller outside Baltimore. Smith was ordained and installed by Potomac Presbytery (PCUS) in February of 1954. They lived in the manse in Sykesville where the Springfield congregation was located.

They thoroughly enjoyed the work among these people and living near Pastor Smith's parents. However, the Lord's ways are not ours, and about six months after his ordination, Pastor Smith received a call to be head of the Bible department at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. Even though he believed that God would have him teach at the college or seminary level, he did not think it proper to leave his people after only six months. The College issued a second call, which he also refused. When they issued a third call, he sought counsel, wondering if this was not of God. Eventually he accepted that call, and in August the Smiths moved to Jackson, Mississippi. Initially they lived in an apartment on campus provided by the College, and later purchased a house in Clinton, Mississippi.

Belhaven College was founded by the Synod of Mississippi in 1894 as a women's college. In the early 50's, under its new President, Dr. McFerran Crowe, it became co-educational. The purpose of the change was "to build a school in the finest Liberal Arts tradition with a bedrock foundation of Calvinistic theology"⁷ and to provide training for a conservative ministry in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Dr. Crowe had assembled a very good reformed faculty including Dr. Gregg Singer in history and Dr. Kingsley Elder in Physics. Already present was a fine classical faculty among whom were Miss Bess Caldwell, Dean of Women, Miss Margaret Shields, Professor of English, and Miss Virginia Hoogenakker, Professor of Music.⁸ When the Smiths arrived in 1954 there were only five male students, but the positive Reformed world and life view soon attracted many male students.

7. Quotation from Dr. Crowe in September 8, 1964, "The Southern Presbyterian Journal"

8. All these ladies were still active when I studied at Belhaven 1964–68.

Professor Smith's role was to build up the offerings of the Bible department. As he did so, a number of pre-ministerial students began to attend Belhaven. These men constituted a significant part of the ministers that came into the PCA at its founding.⁹

Dr. Palmer Robertson reflects on those early years:

Seven of us men lived on the second floor of a building at the far end of the Belhaven campus. Seven men in a two-bedroom apartment with one bath. Morton and Lois Smith were on the first floor, right below us. On one Saturday evening we were up late making too much racket, and Morton came up in his robe to remind us that "tomorrow is the Sabbath." We didn't make much late-night racket after that.

In addition to his teaching, Professor Smith preached across the state and served for six months as interim supply at the Central Presbyterian Church in Jackson. He also began to write Women's Bible Studies for the *Presbyterian Journal*. During this time Mrs. Smith finished her degree, majoring in English. In the summers Professor Smith did post-graduate work at the University of Michigan in Near Eastern Studies, Philosophy, and German. While at Belhaven, he also worked with Dr. John Reed Miller, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, to encourage conservative ministers to take pulpits in Mississippi. They were able to fill a number of pulpits in Central and South Mississippi, with the result that the majority of these churches would withdraw from the PCUS to become part of the Presbyterian Church in America. Charges of "infiltration" were brought against him at the Synod meeting in Memphis (June 1957). A committee was appointed to investigate, but no charges were brought against Professor Smith.

Another important phase of life began for the Smiths while in Jackson. Unable to have children, they decided to adopt. In 1958 they were able to adopt their son Samuel Warfield, and in 1962 their daughter Susanne Rochet. Though temporarily estranged from their parents, later they both developed a close relationship with their parents. Both live in the Asheville area where Susanne is a pharmacist and Sam a carpenter and builder. Sam has two children, Sarah and Benjamin Warfield.

In 1958 Professor Smith was given a two-year Sabbatical to pursue doctoral studies. Although accepted by Duke and Harvard, he went on a Fulbright

Fellowship to the Free University of Amsterdam to study under Professor G. C. Berkouwer. His dissertation topic was "Studies in Presbyterian Theology." George and Virginia Knight were at the Free University during this time and kindly assisted the Smiths in getting settled.

During this first year Professor Smith studied Dutch, took a couple of preliminary examinations, and had his dissertation topic approved. After one year in the Netherlands, the Smiths returned to the States. While the Smiths were in the Netherlands, Dr. Smith's father died. His mother lived until 1982.

The second year of his Sabbatical, he did research for his dissertation, living part of the year in Montreat, North Carolina so he could mine the archival riches of the Presbyterian Historical Foundation. Upon the suggestion of Dr. Thomas Spence, director of the Historical Foundation, Professor Smith contacted Mrs. John C. Blackburn about the use of her late husband's distinguished collection of Southern Presbyterian books. Providentially, he was granted permission by Mrs. Blackburn to use her husband's books. Professor Smith spent about two weeks in the Blackburn home in Cayce, South Carolina, where Mrs. Blackburn graciously delighted in hosting the young theologian.

The Smiths returned to Belhaven in 1959 to a great deal of turmoil. In his absence, there had been a controversy on the faculty concerning Dr. Crowe's apparent compromises with the liberals in the Church. In the Smiths' absence, several of the faculty had left. As a result, the school lost its distinctively reformed world and life view, although it remained a conservative Presbyterian college. Professor Smith began rebuilding the Bible department.

Smith finished his dissertation in 1962 and returned to Amsterdam to complete his preliminary examinations and take his major examination. By God's grace he accomplished all of this as well as the publication of his dissertation, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology*, in a record time. He graduated July 13, 1962 and returned to teach another year at Belhaven.

In the fall of 1963, Dr. Smith was invited to Westminster Theological Seminary as a guest lecturer in practical theology. Although this was not his field, the nature of the call and circumstances in the South were such that he thought it was of the Lord. He had, without success, encouraged conservative leaders in Mississippi to begin a seminary: they considered the project too costly. Therefore, with respect to going to Westminster, he reasoned, "if Westminster placed a Southern Presbyterian on the faculty they might attract more Southern Presbyterians to attend. Thus I accepted

9. Two of the early graduates were Dr. O Palmer Robertson and Dr. Wilson Benton.

the invitation.” The call was a one-year appointment, with the possibility of its being renewed, a common practice at Westminster that allowed both the school and the professor an opportunity to assess the situation.

THE YEARS OF BEGINNINGS—RTS AND THE PCA:
1964–1973

The Smiths’ tenure at Westminster was short-lived. At the beginning of 1964, he received visits from Leonard Van Horn and later Sam Patterson inviting him to return to Mississippi to investigate the possibility of starting a new seminary.

Sam Patterson, the President of French Camp Academy, was one of the most respected conservative Presbyterian ministers in Mississippi. Although at the time he did not have a particular interest in Reformed theology, he had, as a result of his inquiries, received letters from the presidents of the four Southern Presbyterian Seminaries confirming that they did not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. He consequently became convinced that a new seminary was needed.

Mr. Patterson expressed his conviction to a number of ruling elders in Jackson. As they began to pray, they developed a commitment to begin a seminary. This group of men invited Dr. Smith to meet with them in Jackson. The five elders meeting with him were Robert Kennington, H.S. Williford, Erskine Wells, Robert Cannada, and Frank Horton. Noting the caliber of the men behind the plan, Dr. Smith accepted their call to return to Mississippi.

In 1964 the Smiths moved to French Camp, Mississippi where they lived there in the manse. Dr. Smith taught classes under the name of the Reformed Theological Institute, in Jackson, Kosciusko, and Memphis. The travel was wearying, and God now used Dr. Smith’s military training to facilitate this work. He purchased a Cessna 150 with which he reduced his travel time by half. This purchase continued to serve him well when as Clerk of the PCA he flew all over the nation, once even from Atlanta to California. Over the years he owned four different planes, selling the last one in 1988.

Also during this first year, he was invited to teach a Bible class on a Jackson television station. He taught the Bible Survey course which he had previously taught at Belhaven. It aired every day of the week in the early morning for five years and then for three more years on a reduced schedule. This program reached the majority of the state, and so I still meet people who reflect on what they learned from this program.

After a year of testing the waters, the committee

decided to move forward with a seminary. Mr. Horace Hull of Memphis financed the purchase of a large home with some ten to fifteen acres on the west side of Jackson. The property had a large, white house in which the seminary began. In their second year back in Mississippi, the Smiths moved into the upstairs portion of the house, where they lived for a little over a year. In 1966 they built a home north of Clinton, Mississippi. Mrs. Smith’s parents moved to Clinton from Ann Arbor and enjoyed several years in the South. It was here that her father died.

Working with his friend from the Savannah days, Al Freundt, who was then pastor in Forest, Mississippi, Dr. Smith began the task of compiling a list of potential faculty. Jack Scott, who had served as a missionary to Korea and was an accomplished linguist, was invited to teach Hebrew and Old Testament. He completed his doctoral studies while teaching at the seminary. Freundt’s field was Church History and Dr. Smith’s Systematic Theology. They invited George Knight to teach New Testament, but he had already accepted a call to Covenant Seminary. He suggested James DeYoung, whom Knight and Smith had known at the Free University. He joined the faculty in Greek and New Testament. Pastor Richard Bodey from the Arch Street Church in Philadelphia was invited to teach Homiletics and Practical Theology. Dr. Palmer Robertson, a son of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, joined the faculty in Biblical Theology. Guest lecturers taught Christian Education, Evangelism, and Missions. This early faculty’s sacrifices were commendable. Because of the tight financial situation, they worked for below-average salaries and most preached every Sunday in order to make ends meet. Dr. Smith would later reflect that regular absence from his family on the Lord’s Day was not beneficial for his children.

Reformed Theological Seminary opened in the fall of 1966 with seventeen students (including three transfer students) for whom classes were held in the downstairs portion of the old house. Soon there were over one hundred men studying for the ministry. RTS contributed greatly to the reformation of the Southern Presbyterian Churches and the origin of the PCA. The seminary affected churches throughout the state of Mississippi, most of Alabama, and many congregations in Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Because of the ministries of the early graduates, many congregations that were formerly evangelical but not Reformed, are now committed to the Reformed faith. Moreover, early RTS graduates developed Reformed University Ministries and the Reformed Youth Movement.

The seminary also served the Church through its early dissemination of Reformed literature through its bookstore and by providing many guest lecturers and sponsoring the annual Winter Theological Institute. Some of these speakers had a lasting effect on students and faculty. Dr. Smith writes, “Of particular interest to my own thinking was the impact that some of these speakers had on my understanding of the Biblical view of evangelism.” This insight led Dr. Smith to begin teaching a more consistently Biblical form of evangelism and critiquing methods used by groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ. He published a pamphlet at this time on Reformed Evangelism.

The first president of the Seminary was Sam Patterson, although the executive committee of the Board of Trustees made most of the decisions. The Board had such a bias against ministers’ serving on the Board that the only ministerial Board member was Dr. Henry Dendy, editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*. The Board appointed a committee of Ministerial Advisors which met occasionally and gave advice to the Board. The board often looked upon its own decisions as divinely sanctioned, leaving the faculty little recourse when differences arose. For these reasons, tensions soon developed between the Board and the faculty.

Even though the faculty had been carefully chosen, disagreements soon began to develop over the regulative principle, the use of crosses in places of worship, and the manner in which a minister related to the session. Another significant point of contention was whether the conservatives should separate from the PCUS.

Because his ancestors had been associated with the Southern Presbyterian Church ever since the days of Samuel Davies, it was emotionally distressing for Dr. Smith to consider leaving the mother church. He participated in the majority of the early meetings to consider whether it was time to leave, but, because of his reservations, he was not placed on the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee nevertheless commissioned him to research the decline in the PCUS and write a book that would present the rationale for the separation. He spent much of 1973 working on this book, which he titled *How is the Gold Become Dim* (taken from Lamentations 4:1); it was published shortly before the first assembly of the Continuing Church met in December. His research convinced Dr. Smith of the necessity of forming the Continuing Presbyterian Church.¹⁰ The leadership of the Continuing Presbyterian

10. God used *How is the Gold Become Dim* among many like me to convince us that in leaving the PCUS we would not be acting schismatically.

Church was determined to act as Presbyterians, rather than individualists. Dr. Smith describes the procedure:

Thus, we had a Convocation of Sessions at which the decision was made that we would move towards separation. We then had a Convention that heard reports of the Committee proposing the way in which we planned to establish a new Church, and made various decisions as to what was desired by the body. This body then called for the first General Assembly.

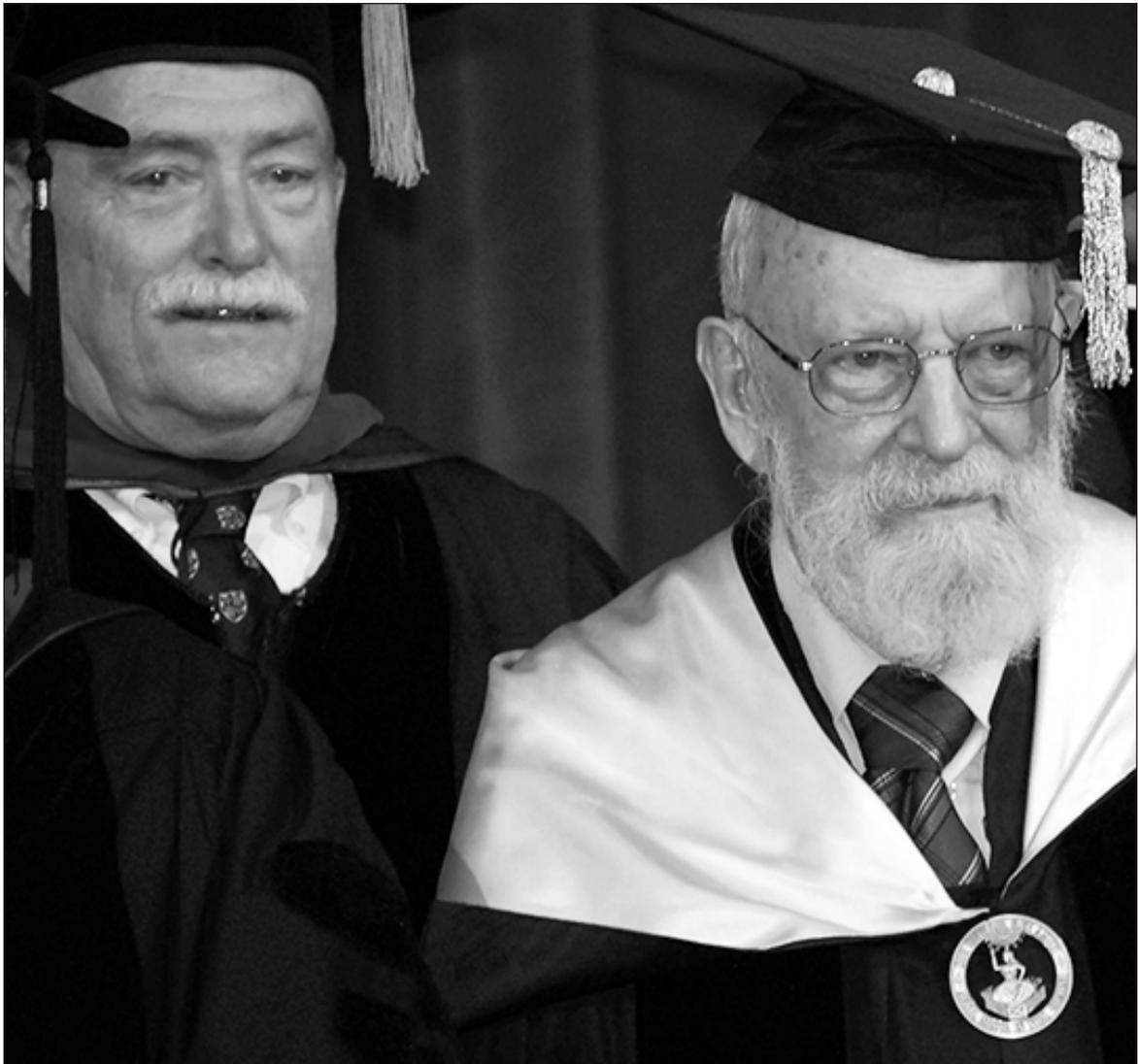
Dr. Smith was elected to serve as Clerk at the Convocation and at the First Assembly. For about ten years, Russ Johnson, a banker in Jackson, had sent Al Freundt and Dr. Smith to every PCUS Assembly so they could learn how an Assembly ought to operate. Since Mr. Freundt remained in the PCUS, Dr. Smith was the one man in the new denomination who best knew how to run a General Assembly. He states,

I guided the formation of the new Assembly very much after the pattern of the PCUS, since this was not the problem with our mother Church. One of the reporters at our first General Assembly said it looked like we had been doing this for years. It was because I sensed that there was no one else prepared to handle these ecclesiastical matters that I accepted the call to the office of Stated Clerk.

THE LATTER YEARS—1973 TO THE PRESENT: STATED CLERK AND GREENVILLE PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Dr. Smith served the PCA as Stated Clerk until 1988, first in a part-time capacity until 1978, doing the work of Stated Clerk in addition to all his work at the Seminary. Initially he managed the office from his kitchen, in order to keep it separate from the Seminary. Eventually he rented office space in downtown Clinton and hired Jackie Stuckey to work in the mornings as secretary; his wife worked in the afternoons. In 1978 the Seminary Board decided that a faculty member should not hold two jobs. He had to decide: to continue teaching at the Seminary or to continue serving as Clerk of the denomination. Believing that no one was yet prepared to do the work of Stated Clerk, he felt obligated “to answer the call of my Church and accept this position as a full-time position.”

He believed that the Board preferred that he leave RTS. “I think my strict views on the Reformed Faith, including my booklet on Reformed evangelism,” reflects



Dr. Morton H. Smith (right) with Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, GPTS Commencement, May 20, 2011. Courtesy of Tricia Stevenson.

Dr. Smith, “were also behind the move.” Dr. Smith desired “an Old School, strict subscription Seminary,” while the board intended the Seminary to become more broadly reformed. Even though the entire faculty asked him to reconsider his decision, not one board member expressed any regret over his departure.¹¹

The Smiths moved to Brevard, North Carolina in the winter of 1978, having chosen this area because of its proximity to Ridge Haven. As the General Assembly was developing the Ridge Haven Conference Center, plans were made to include a library and historical center. Dr. Smith reasoned that he could assist the denomination with these operations. He set up the Clerk’s office in the large downstairs area of his home. In 1983 he moved the Clerk’s office to Atlanta, Georgia, and again the Clerk’s

office was in their house because there was insufficient space in the PCA office. After a couple of years, the Clerk’s office moved to the offices of the Administrative Committee, where it has remained. When the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod joined the PCA in 1982, changes in favor of a broader, New School Presbyterianism soon became apparent, and some in the merged church were dissatisfied with Dr. Smith’s continuing to serve as Clerk. There was an attempt to entice him to resign by offering him two years’ salary if he would proffer his resignation. He rejected the offer and left the decision of his election to the fourteenth

11. Sadly, the published *Brief History of Reformed Theological Seminary* does not mention Dr. Smith’s role in the formation of the seminary.

Assembly meeting in Philadelphia. Again, the Assembly elected him as Clerk, but by this time a distinct minority was working against him. He was determined not to stand for re-election after the Sixteenth General Assembly, resigning in 1988.

As clerk, he had served his denomination faithfully for fifteen years, shaping the polity of the church by his role in the development of The Book of Church Order, the operation of the General Assembly, and the form of the Yearbook and Ministerial Directory. As clerk, his tenure was marked by an assiduous devotion to impartiality. There were times his friends felt betrayed, but he acted according to what he thought was correct.

During his last two years in the Clerk's office, he began working with a group of men in Greenville, South Carolina to establish an Old School Presbyterian Seminary. The desire for a theological seminary in the state of South Carolina had been evident since the founding of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1773. Some funds were committed to such an undertaking in 1976, and in 1981 a committee was formed by Calvary Presbytery to study the possibility of establishing a seminary in South Carolina. Neither of these early expressions of interest had their desired result. During the winter and spring of 1985–1986, interest in such a project was again raised. Ligon Duncan III and Duncan Rankin, students at Covenant Seminary, approached Dr. Smith about the need for a seminary that fully met "The Uniform Curriculum" adopted by the PCA. Pastor Paul Settle and ruling elder Ligon Duncan Jr., both at Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, concurred. A meeting was held at the Duncan home in Greenville on February 26, 1986 to consider the possibility of founding a seminary. In attendance at this meeting were Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, their three sons, Ligon, John, and Melton, Mr. and Mrs. Settle, Duncan Rankin, and Dr. Smith. Having considered the need for such a seminary and the advantages that the Greenville area offered, the group agreed to work toward the establishment of the Seminary.

A steering committee was formed consisting of Paul G. Settle, John C. Neville Jr., Morton H. Smith, J. Ligon Duncan Jr., and C. Stuart Patterson. They were asked to arrange for the actual organization of the school. In March 1986, Pastor Settle, acting on behalf of the steering committee, sent a letter to select elders announcing the establishment of the James Henley Thornwell Seminary, which was incorporated under

the laws of the state of South Carolina. Under pressure from the PCUSA, the steering committee changed the name to Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Dr. Smith was appointed the Dean of the Faculty and Administrator.¹²

In the fall of 1987, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary began training men for the gospel ministry. The Seminary met in the facilities of what was then Augusta Street Presbyterian Church, with Drs. Morton H. Smith, Gregg Singer, Henry Krabbendam, and others, teaching the first students. The Seminary's first commencement was on June 7, 1991; three men were graduated. Today the Seminary has more than 132 students enrolled in Greenville, Westminster Seminary, Newcastle (GB), and John Wycliffe Theological College in South Africa. Since its founding, the Seminary has been consistently and distinctively Confessional, Old School, and Presbyterian in its outlook and philosophy, and has placed a strong emphasis on the infallibility and sufficiency of the Word of God and obedience to the Great Commission as the one and only mission of the Church.

In 1988 the Smiths moved back to Brevard, again providing an apartment for Mrs. Knopf, who died on November 7, 1991. Dr. Smith continued to labor assiduously in the denomination and at the Seminary, until he retired in 2013. He has served on the Standing Judicial Commission and the Committee on Constitutional Business. In 2000 the 28th General Assembly elected him to serve as Moderator. He was an active member of Western Carolina Presbytery and with his wife were active in Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Brevard, where he taught the adult Sunday School for many years.

His worldwide ministry has also increased remarkably since 1988. In that year Dr. and Mrs. Smith traveled to South Africa, where he spoke at a conference in Durban on Christ in the Old Testament and preached at one of the South African Seminaries. In June of 1989 he flew to Korea to lecture on missions at a ministers' institute in Pusan. In 1994, 1995, and 1996 he lectured on Systematic Theology at the Theological Seminary of the Church of the Brethren in Prague, the Czech Republic. The first trip on which Mrs. Smith accompanied him was a celebration of the Smiths' fiftieth wedding anniversary. They were able to visit Vienna and Budapest as well as Prague, where they stayed with PCA missionary Sid Anderson. While in the Czech Republic in 1996, Dr. Smith went to Zlin, where he taught courses in theology to two students, Pavel Bartos, the founder of a Reformed church in Zlin, and Rene Draphne. He returned again

12. Dr. Smith continued in this capacity until I began my work as President on January 1, 1998.

to Zlin with Mrs. Smith in 1999 to provide further ministerial instruction to the same two Czech nationals.

In 1998 he traveled to Brazil to attend special services at the First Presbyterian Church in Recife, Brazil. His great uncle, John Rockwell Smith, had founded the church. In addition to preaching at First Presbyterian and a small mission church, he gave some lectures at the local Seminary. He returned to Brazil in 2002 to lecture on Ecclesiology under the auspices of the Puritan Project in Recife and San Salvador. In 2001 the Smiths and their daughter Susanne went to St. Petersburg, Russia, where Dr. Smith gave lectures at a small Reformed Seminary. In the fall of 2003, he traveled to New Zealand, where he spoke for the New Zealand Conference on Reformational Theology. Dr. Smith lectured at three sites (Christ Church, Wellington, and Auckland) on Ecclesiology and preached in two different churches in Wellington.

On August 15, 2013, the faculty at Dr. Smith's request approve a motion to be sent to the Board of Trustee accepting his retirement and being moved to emeritus status. The Board of Trustees granted him Emeritus status in May 2014. The Fall semester of 2013 he taught his last class, Introduction to Reformed Theology. This class perhaps more than any other he taught shaped students for forty-seven years. I know it did me.

Dr. Smith lived four years after retirement. He remained active, continuing to read widely and teaching an adult Sunday School class. I took some men to visit him the day before his stroke and he was mentally sharp. He suffered a stroke Thursday November 9, 2017, and died on Sunday, November 12. And is interred at Blue Ridge Gardens of Memory in Brevard. "Miss Lois" followed him into glory a few months later, January 28, 2018 and is buried beside him.

THE MAN

What does one say about a man like this? One is immediately impressed with his gentleness. Strangers as well as those who knew him will comment that he was a true Christian gentleman, always polite and unassuming. He was a quiet man, and by his own admission a shy man. Though he would prefer to remain in the background, because of his responsibilities he does not give place to his natural shyness.

He was a godly man. He had a burning love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a high regard for the Scriptures, and he inspired those around him with such love and regard. His was a simple faith, which has been tested and shaped in the refiner's fire. He had regular daily

worship with his wife, reading through books of the Bible in various translations. For private reading he prefers to focus his Bible reading on topics he desires to study in more detail, as well as the passages he will preach and teach on the Lord's Day. It was his custom to consult the original languages as part of his reading. For further edification he read in systematic theology and church history, as well as biographies.

It is not my intention to write a hagiography, for Dr. Smith was well aware that he was a sinner, saved by grace. The Gentle Shepherd has refined him in the furnace of trials, and those who knew him best have observed the increase in his patience and gentleness. Neither would he claim to have been without fault during the controversies of his life, even though his passionate desire had been the glory of God and the reform of His church.

He was a humble man. When in 1970 a guest lecturer at Reformed Seminary challenged the faculty and seminary body on Reformed evangelism, Dr. Smith owned that he had not thought through the issue, and he subsequently began to apply the Reformed faith more consistently to evangelism. Out of this experience, he penned his booklet on Reformed Evangelism. Later, as variant teachings on Creation became a subject of disagreement in the PCA, he publicly repented of having taught that the length and the order of the days were not important.¹³

With respect to his humility, I need to touch on the attacks on him the last years of his life. He had written that he had and could live both in integrated and segregated. When he penned those words, he was reflecting the condition of many places in the United States. Nevertheless, he was accused of racism. A number of African-American students have testified that the accusation is grossly false. Dr. Smith was loving and gracious to all his students. He also served alongside an African-American Board member, Dr. Cameron.

He was an innovator, constantly devising new ways to do things. In 1959, as he was doing research on his dissertation, he made an innovative use of photography to facilitate his research:

I had picked up a single lens reflex camera which I used for my research. I bought large rolls of microfilm, which I cut down to fit standard rolls. I then took the pictures, using a couple of gooseneck lamps. I had a changing

13. I have personally observed the humility of this man. He has warmly supported me in my work as President of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In a manner of speaking, it was his baby, and I had been his student, but he shows no concern for guarding his standing or resisting changes or new ideas.

bag, and a developing tank, which Dad had used in his hobby of photography. I developed the film each night to be sure that I had gotten good pictures. This process enabled me to do a lot of collecting of materials in a relatively short time.

As computer technology developed, he adapted to it. Although a number of older men have resisted the transition to computers, not only did he make the transition, but he used the technology to the fullest, doing research on the web and using a scanner to facilitate his research. Other earlier examples of his willingness to use available technology were his use of the airplane to expedite his travel; his use of television for teaching in the late 60's, and of the video camera in the late 90's. His innovative spirit was probably the result of his natural curiosity which prompted him constantly to observe and learn. For example, while we were traveling in New Zealand, he regularly questioned our host about various phenomena we were seeing or places we visited.

He remained active, until a few years before his death. He and his good friend, John Neville, hiked the mountain trails of North Carolina. For relaxation he read widely, often historical accounts, particularly of the War Between the States. He also enjoys historical novels, adventures, and mysteries.

THE SCHOLAR

Dr. Smith was a thorough-going Westminsterian, fully committed to all the doctrines of the Westminster Standards. He was also well acquainted with the Three Forms of Unity and their relation to the Westminster documents. He was well-versed not only in the writings of the Southern Presbyterian Theologians, but also the Church Fathers, Calvin and the Reformers, the Scottish and Puritan writers, the Princeton men, the Dutch theologians, and modern reformed writers. His own theology may be described as exegetical, Reformed, evangelical, and experiential.

It was exegetical. Although he admired the Westminster Standards, above all his commitment is to the Bible as the word of God. He believed that the Bible alone is to be our only rule of faith and practice.

It was Reformed. He delighted in teaching the great doctrines of the Reformed faith and found much solace in their truths. Unlike some modern Presbyterian theologians, he saw no tension between

14. Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Greenville: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 1:19, 20.

a commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice and subscription to every article of faith in the Westminster Standards. Rather, his commitment to the Westminster Standards was based on the conviction that the standards are a faithful exposition of the truth of Scripture.

It was evangelical. His was a simple faith in Christ. He loved the Savior and delighted in conversing about Him. As all roads in the ancient Roman Empire led to Rome, all doctrines for Dr. Smith lead to Christ. Often in teaching and preaching he pressed the claims of Christ on his hearers. He maintained an intense interest in home and foreign missions and instilled this commitment in his students and colleagues.

It was experiential. He loved God and pursued holiness, believing that truth should promote holiness in our lives and should have a profound impact on our experience. In his *Systematic Theology*, he quotes Warfield with approval: "Doctrine is in order to life and the study of doctrine must be prosecuted in a spirit which would see its end in the correction and edification of life."¹⁴

Dr. Smith's philosophy of teaching Systematic Theology also developed over the years. Following the pattern of Professor John Murray, Dr. Smith sought to teach systematic theology on an exegetical foundation. He preferred to begin with Scripture and summarize the doctrines from the Westminster Standards. Like Dabney's *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Smith's *Systematic Theology* is the fruit of his class lectures. When he began to teach Systematic Theology at RTS in 1967, he developed a three-volume syllabus which his students were to have read before class. He would then read and discuss the assigned section with them. Through the process of class discussion, the syllabus grew. Finally in 1994 he published the fruit of twenty-seven years of research and teaching in his two-volume *Systematic Theology*.

His later approach to teaching was an adaptation of Dabney's method, which was described by the students who printed his syllabus:

The system consists of recitations on lessons from text-books, chiefly the Confession of Faith and Turretin's (sic.) *Elencitic Theology*, oral instructions and explanations of the Professor, the preparation and reading of Theses by the students upon the topics under discussion, and finally, review recitations upon the whole. The design is to combine, as far as may be, the assistance of the living teacher with the cultivation of the powers of memory, comparison, judgment,

reasoning and expression, by the researches of the students themselves, and to fix the knowledge acquired by repeated views of it.¹⁵

Dr. Smith would assign students to read weekly or bi-weekly in different authors on the doctrine to be discussed. Each student then would write a brief paper and present it to the class. Dr. Smith would moderate a class discussion, after which he concluded the section with a summary of the topic, based on his textbook. He also assigned a research paper at the end of the term and gave oral examinations, which help equip the men to think on their feet.

His lecture style and preaching was like Hemingway's writing style. As he begins, one may wonder, "What is so remarkable about this?" But without realizing it, the listener is soon captivated. Dr. Smith's thought is well organized and clearly presented. In his preaching he used the method adopted by Calvin, *secundum ordinem textus* (according to the order of the text). His delivery was quiet but forceful.

Though he has taught every locus of theology often over the course of his careers, he maintained a fresh presentation with new reading and research. Toward the end of his teaching career, in discussing with me the covenant, he mentioned two newly published books he was in the process of reading. As mentioned, he also stays current with material found on various web sites relevant to his interests.

THE CHURCHMAN

Dr. Morton H. Smith arguably was one of the greatest living teachers of ecclesiology and polity. Following Thornwell, he maintained the accountability of the session to the presbytery, and of the presbytery to the General Assembly. He also firmly believed that Christ, the King of the Church, has given His church every gift and resource to fulfill her mission, which is spiritual: to preach the gospel, to nurture God's people, to worship God, and to minister to the needs of God's children through the diaconate. He held to a proper two-office view: one office of elder with two distinct functions (all elders rule and pastor; teaching elders have the additional responsibilities of preaching the word and administering the sacraments), and the office of deacon. He held a very high view of the office of ruling elder and deacon.

Dr. Smith, we should remember, was no ivory tower ecclesiastical ideologue. He was a churchman. One of the salient characteristics apparent in the story of his life is

that he never sought a path for himself out of ambition. Every major decision he made outside of his family was for the benefit of the church. Consider the following: his deciding to prepare for teaching because the Southern Church needed sound, conservative professors; his returning to Columbia because of the counsel that if he planned to teach in the Southern Church, he should graduate from a Southern Seminary; his giving up his pastoral charge to teach at Belhaven; his accepting the call to teach at Westminster; his exertions in founding Reformed Theological Seminary; his serving as the first Clerk of the PCA while still teaching at RTS; his decision to serve full-time as Clerk; and his joining the endeavor to found Greenville Seminary. In each of these decisions he believed he was heeding the call of Christ through the Church and for the sake of the Church.

His life's passion has been the reformation of the Southern Presbyterian Church, and, when forced to leave, it was for the preservation of the Reformed faith and practice in the Presbyterian Church in America. His decisions have often involved great sacrifice of time and financial well-being on his part, yet he served Christ in His Church faithfully for sixty years.

He has left his imprint on the PCA in *The Book of Church Order*, his *Commentary* on that book, and his work as Clerk. He led the General Assembly to set up Permanent Committees to oversee the work of the Church and Committees of Commissioners to oversee the work of the Permanent Committees. Although many of the advantages and reforms gained in the establishment of the PCA are being lost by default and usurpation of power by the Assembly Committees, no man has had a more profound impact on the early development of this denomination than he. He was broken-hearted when at the Thirty-first General Assembly, he witnessed the heirs of the Southern Presbyterian Church selling her rich legacy by adopting "System Subscription" and giving individual Presbyteries the authority to determine what comprises the "System."

As the Assembly of the PCA was considering a change in subscription that was being put forth by a group of men who were working in secret meetings to change the church, he wrote an open letter.¹⁶

15. R.L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), preface.

16. Wayne Sparkman at the Historical Center provided this letter. I have taken the liberty to divide the content into paragraphs that were not in the original.

An Open Letter To The Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership

Dear Brethren in Christ:

It is with a sense of deep sorrow that I feel called upon to address you in this way. First, I desire to express to you my genuine esteem and love for you as brethren in Christ.

A number of you hold high callings by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. For this, you deserve to be recognized and honored as servants of Christ and of his Church. Others of you hold distinguished pastorates, which is a high honor and great responsibility as servants of Christ. All of you as fellow Christians are to be held in love and respect as brethren in the Lord. I seek to write to you what I view to be the truth “in love” as a fellow Christian.

My concerns are several. First, as a group seeking to offer pastoral leadership in the PCA, it seems to me that on known controversial subjects, you should have acted more pastorally and invited some of those who differ with you to have consulted to see if a genuine consensus could be reached. In fact, such openness and collegiality might have helped avoid certain misstatements (See next paragraph). Your hasty pressing for legislative changes (and that as your initial offering to the church) before consultation with a broad cross-section of leaders—even if that means a greater diversity than you personally might desire—is, to say the least, less than what Christ would expect of us.

I plead with you brethren to lessen your efforts to impose your own political vision on the Church on such a major issue as subscription, until the broader church asks or commissions you, or some other group to do so. As a pastoral leadership group you should lead us by patient and humble persuasion instead of by political maneuvering. A pastoral approach—not an imposed legislative one—is what is needed.

Second, the citation of the statement, which I made at the last Assembly to the effect that I failed to press the issue of subscription at the First General Assembly, did not include the larger context of the statement and my life’s work. I ask you as pastors of honesty and integrity to correct or remove your mistaken references to my comments, with apology or quickly to publish a correction in some clear form as an excellent model of repentance and charity.

I indicated that the reason I had not pressed the question of nature of confessional subscription was based on the assumption that all conservative Presbyterians of the 20th century would have concurred with the conservatives of the 19th century that full subscription was our position. In other words, I presupposed that a Continuing Southern Presbyterian Church would be one that held to historic subscription as the Southern Presbyterian Church did in her early years.

To cite someone out of context is less than the best pastoral leadership you might have exhibited. You claim that you want “good faith” subscription. Yet, you have twisted the record of what I attempted to suggest and thus distorted my words to make me appear to say that the PCA did not hold to the received subscription position. I trust that it was done unwittingly, so I sincerely ask that you not harm the PCA with misinformation and that you bear true witness to my sentiments.

Please, in the interests of fairness to all and love to me, correct or publish this letter as a clarification from my own hand. The fact is that this is not my position, and never has been, and I certainly did not intend to leave the impression that the PCA did not adopt the historic subscription position of our forefathers.

Third, in the light of a call for “good faith,” have you shown good faith when you suggest in your overture that the PCA has always held to something less than clear subscription? Read the second vow. Professor John Murray, who was customarily precise in his interpretation of language, asserts, “It is not simply the system of doctrine contained in the Confession that is adopted, the Confession is adopted as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture.” This is all that we who hold to historic subscription desire, that our officers recognize that they are adopting the Confession and Catechisms as the confession of their faith.

That this was the position of the PCA is seen in the language of the first Assembly adopting the Confession and Catechisms as the bond of our unity. It is seen in the way that most judicial cases dealing with doctrines were handled earlier, although some recent decisions seem willing to depart from that standard. It is also seen in the answer to questions about the meaning of subscription adopted by the Tenth General Assembly.

Fourth, I ask, why you brethren are seeking to organize and chart a radically different direction for the PCA.

The “Address to All Churches” adopted and signed by the members of the first General Assembly sets forth a very different goal than that proposed by the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership group. This being the case, it seems to this writer that if you are not satisfied by the PCA’s goals and direction, then you should use pastoral persuasion to change the Constitution through our normal procedures—not by orchestrating the so called “ground swell” of a number of presbyteries adopting the same overtures, and then seeking to block any amendment to the overtures. You might even humbly submit to other brothers and a church that may not be as convinced of the need to adopt your positions.

One wonders why you men, who have affirmed in your ordination vows the Reformed Faith and conservative Presbyterianism in general, cannot learn from the history of American Presbyterianism regarding subscription to the Standards. During the period from 1801 to 1837 the broad, loose Presbyterianism of the New School group brought about a distinct decline in the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church. The result was the major division of 1837 in which the Old and New School groups went separate ways. The vast majority of the Southern Presbyterian Church came out of the Old School Church. It is an historical fact that they clearly identified themselves as Old School Presbyterians and the PCA, in its original formulations, overtly embraced the stance of the First Southern General Assembly.

The Northern Old and New School Churches merged in 1869 on the ground of allowing both views of subscription to the Standards. By 1910 subscription had been reduced from commitment to the Westminster Standards to the adoption of the five points of fundamentalism. In 1923, after the Assembly had reaffirmed the position of 1910, a group of some 1,300 ministers of the denomination signed the Auburn Affirmation, which declared these five points to be theories that Presbyterian ministers did not need to affirm. Nothing was done to them, and this view eventually prevailed in the mainline Church. The result was the separation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1936. It was a terrible day for American Presbyterianism to see a great denomination that had begun with clear adherence to the Standards to allow this requirement to slip from its grasp and to head toward the virtual apostasy of the mainline Presbyterian Church.

It has often been said that if one cannot learn from history, one will repeat the same errors of those who have gone before. Have we forgotten the Auburn Affirmation and its related decline? Is 1973 so far behind us that we have forgotten why we left liberalism? Surely you do not desire that PCA go down that same road. Why then should you espouse the very broadening steps that led the PCUSA into liberalism? You may not agree with my understanding of the early history and intent of the PCA, but many will conclude that the adoption of the loose position you espouse is, to say the least, a dangerous step, which cannot help but weaken the present and future testimony of the PCA. Knowing the propensity of sinful human nature, instead of loosening our Standards, should we not be striving to strengthen our commitment to our Standards?

Some of you seem to fear classic subscription, because it may bring on charges of heresy against those who fail to keep their ordination vows. Can you tell us when or how often that has actually happened in the entire history of the PCA? The design of healthy subscription is merely to aid candor and honesty, as much as to require that our officers maintain the ordination vows that they have taken, and to uphold the historic, Biblical Presbyterianism of the Westminster Standards.

Failure of the denomination to do this will result in the decline of the denomination’s orthodoxy. Jonathan Dickinson, who opposed the original Adopting Act, said that unless discipline is exercised orthodoxy would not be maintained. (Stated in a sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Philadelphia, September 19, 1722.)

Finally, having heard some very disturbing rumors about your group, I ask would you, in the spirit of an openness and pastoral candor, either publish all of your other political goals and mailings—including whether you: (a) have circularized a 10–point plan to stack certain key GA committees this year; (b) plan to employ parliamentary tactics to disallow verbal improvements to previously submitted overtures, as if they were un-amendable; or (c) hope to eliminate the historic office of deacons (Acts 6) so that women may serve equal to men in an un-ordained capacity—or else for the peace of the church, please unequivocally and publicly disavow that you or your political allies will use such carnal methods or seek such goals.

Dear brothers, my opinion in some areas may not be as far from yours as caricatured. May I challenge you, me, and all members of the PCA as follows: Indeed, I quite agree that we desperately NEED more of a pastoral, patient approach that humbly listens, embraces many, and that waits on God more in prayer than depends on raw political power or the tyranny of the majority. We NEED far less politics and much more openness, true consensus, research, reasoned-discussion, and true concern for flocks. We MUST NOT, even in respect for your impressive, collective accomplishments, follow the agenda that you presently promote so zealously. I do not believe that the perceived “crisis” is present, nor is the need so pressing, nor are the remedies proposed so sound. Brothers, may we not apply a little patience with one another, a little more honesty and charity to those who sincerely disagree, and not divide the church?? We have time . . . and God’s own promises; let’s listen more and politicize less.

Yours in Christ,
Morton H. Smith
First Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Note in this letter the heart of a humble churchman.

PERCEPTION OF HIS LEGACY: TOO RAGGED FOR OUR PARADE.

At the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the citizens of Charleston gave a victory parade for the low country militia. The great South Carolinian hero and patriot Francis Marion and his soldiers were not allowed to march in the parade because the elite of Charleston considered them too ragged. One leading citizen, Moultrie, objected to their decision, commenting sardonically, “Marion was not too ragged to fight, only too ragged to show.”

Sadly, this reprehensible episode has a parallel in the attitude of some in the PCA toward Morton H. Smith. He was “not too ragged” to fight our battles and labor for our denomination, but he is apparently deemed by some as “too ragged to show.” Though he is maligned and even disdained by some, he has indelibly left his mark on the Church in a way few men have. His legacy is beyond calculation.

He is our Lawrence Chadderton. Chadderton was the Patriarch of the Puritan movement in England. He

was born ca. 1537 and lived to be 103 years old. He taught the first generation of Puritans at Christ College, and then was the head of Emmanuel College, which was established in 1584 as a center of Puritan ministerial training. For fifty years he preached at St. Clements. When he resigned from St. Clements, some forty Puritan ministers petitioned him not to do so, because they owed their conversion to his preaching. He was appointed by King James I as one of the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible. He defined a movement.

Similarly, Dr. Smith has exercised a Chadderton-like role in the resurgence of the Reformed faith and the Southern Presbyterian tradition in the United States. He developed the Bible department at Belhaven for the training of men for the Southern Church (PCUS). He introduced us to the Southern Presbyterian Worthies. As Dr. Willborn avers later in the aforementioned festschrift: “With the publication of *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* in 1962, Morton Howison Smith turned the attention of a new generation to the riches of Southern Presbyterian history and theology.”¹⁷ He was a major participant in the founding of two Reformed seminaries. He was one of the primary architects of the government, structure, and operation of the Presbyterian Church in America. Probably no other professor of Systematic Theology in the twentieth century has taught as many men as he has in his professorial career: hundreds of men have learned the Reformed faith from him. Directly and indirectly through his students he has been used to bring an untold number of Churches to a clearer understanding of the Reformed faith. Even many who do not share his convictions on confessional subscription are more Reformed than they might otherwise have been because of his ministry. His students are ministers, missionaries, and professors. At least three of his former students have served as Presidents of Seminaries.

I am sure that I speak for many when I say I know of no man to whom I am as indebted as I am to Dr. Smith: not only did he teach me the Reformed Faith, but also he instilled in me a deep love for it, for the Church, and above all for the triune God.

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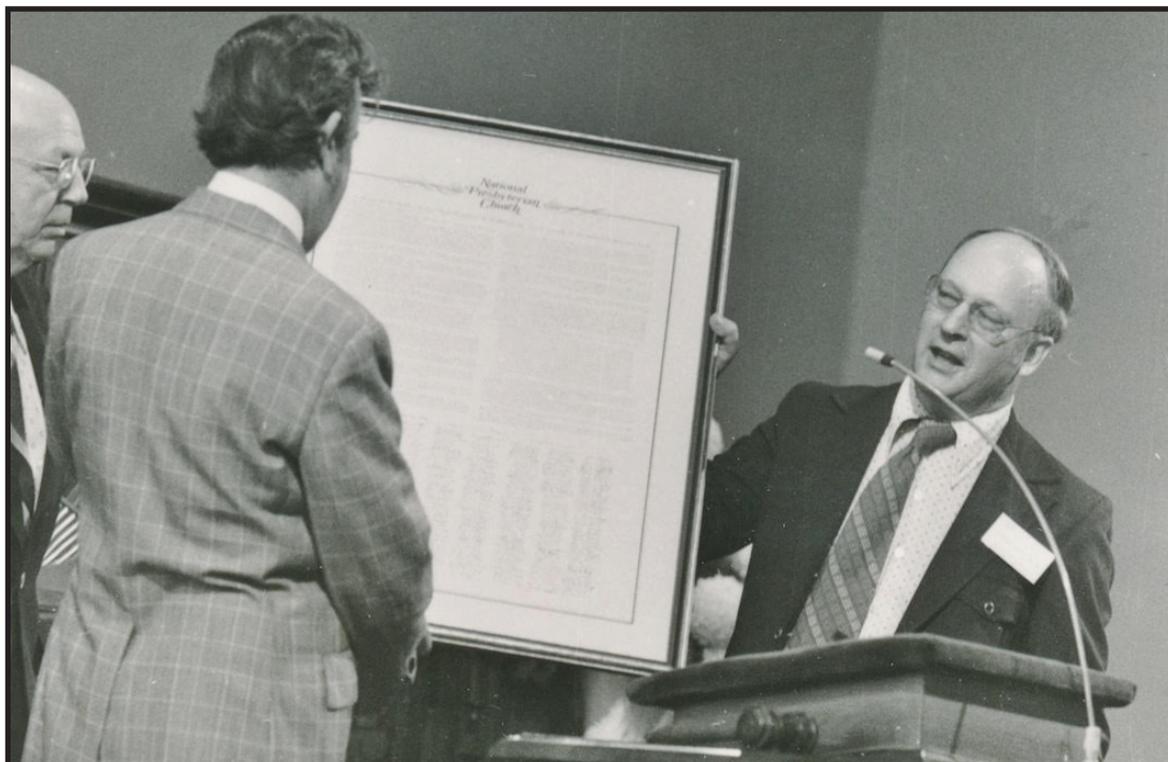
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Above: At the second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1974, Stated Clerk Morton H. Smith presented a framed copy of *A Message to All the Churches of Jesus Christ* to Jack Williamson (RE), who moderated the first General assembly. “The poster-size document includes the signatures of 296 of the over 330 attendees of the first assembly meeting of the new denomination. It is not an official document but a symbolic remembrance of the forming of the PCA that was distributed by the J. Ligon Duncan family of Greenville, South Carolina. The man at the left edge is Teaching Elder Erskine L. Jackson.” Barry Waugh, “A Lesson from Morton H. Smith, 1923-2017,” *Presbyterians of the Past*, <https://www.presbyteriansofthepast.com/2017/12/04/lesson-morton-h-smith-1923-2017/>. Courtesy of the PCA Historical Center. Lower photo: Dr. Smith speaking at the 2011 Spring Theology conference at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Courtesy of Tricia Stevenson.