

American Presbyterian Church History

Chapter 1 The Adopting Act & Subscriptionism

Presbyterian Beginnings in America:

First Presbyterian minister active in the United States in colonial history was Francis Mackemie. He engaged in an itinerant ministry to scattered groups of Presbyterians forming them into congregations and functioning as a circuit preacher. The lack of religious liberty in some of the states led to restrictions on his preaching, and to fines, and harassment, especially in Episcopal Virginia. He zealously contended for religious liberty and against the “establishment principle”. The first presbytery was formed with 7 members in 1705, when Mackemie returned from a voyage to England with two additional Presbyterian ministers and a licentiate, Mr. Boyd, who was the first man to receive Presbyterian ordination in America in 1706.

There was no subscription to any standards at that time. This was because they considered themselves an extension of the Church of Scotland and considered themselves bound by her constitution and saw no need to establish standards of their own.

In 1716 the first synod, the Synod of Philadelphia was formed consisting of 17 ministers and originally three presbyteries. Two ministers on Long Island, N.Y. were not allowed to form their own presbytery because they were insufficient in number. When they gained a third minister they formed the fourth presbytery.

Subscription Issues Overseas:

At the time of the Westminster Assembly there was a strong Presbyterian party in England. However they were never enabled to establish a strong Presbyterian Church due to the ascendancy of Cromwell and later the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688 they were too weakened to do so. They therefore entered into union with the Independents (Congregationalists) and Baptists through *the Heads of Agreement*. In this document they subscribed to receiving the scriptures as the Word of God and one of 5 doctrinal statements in currency at that time. This soon degenerated to only receiving the scriptures as the word of God. The results were that very soon they were overrun with error and heresy from Baxterism, Arminianism, and Pelagianism, through Arianism, and Socinianism. Entering into the Heads of Agreement and forsaking the Westminster standards permanently destroyed Presbyterianism in England. Lack of subscriptionism buried it in error.

In Ulster similar issues were ongoing. In 1698 the General Synod of Ulster required strict subscription to the Westminster COF for all candidates for the ministry. In 1705 The Belfast Society was formed of young, liberal ministers who opposed subscription. *"In reference to ecclesiastical discipline, the members of the society taught, among other things, that the church had no right to require candidates for the ministry to subscribe a confession of faith prepared by any man or body of men; and that such a required subscription was a violation of the right*

of private judgment, and inconsistent with Christian liberty and true Protestantism".¹ Due to continued agitation from the society in 1720 the "*Pacific Act*" was passed mandating that ministers be allowed to dissent from the Confession and state their doctrine in their own words as long as they were deemed, "*sound in the faith*".² This led to a six-year battle between subscriptionists and non-subscriptionists in the Ulster General Synod. The drift to heresy became such a threat that in 1726 the Synod voted to exclude all non-subscribing members. Those excluded soon drifted into Independency and Socinianism. The latter was the general fate of all non-subscriptionist Reformed churches. The Reformed Churches of both Switzerland and England succumbed to such a fate.

The Adopting Act:

These events had the effect in America of precipitating a drive for strict subscriptionism. In 1724 the Presbytery of New Castle required subscription to the WCOF for all ministerial candidates. In 1727 they petitioned the Synod for general subscription to the WCOF by all members of Synod. The fear was not that there was incipient heresy in the Synod. The fear was that there might be developing a lax attitude towards doctrinal discipline and a tendency to tolerate error. The strict subscription enjoined would allow no preaching of anything contrary to the standards without first reviewing the point at issue with the Presbytery or Synod, and to do so would require censure. The issue was received along ethnic lines, the Scotch and Irish ministers supporting it and the English and Welsh ministers opposing it. The opposition was not to the WCOF, which all approved of, but to the idea of being required to subscribe to any man made creed.

In 1729 the Synod passed the *Adopting Act* unanimously, which received the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as the doctrinal standards of the church to which all members had to conform. Later that same year the issue came up of the Directory of Worship, Form of Government etc.³ The Synod received these also as the standards of the church "*to be observed as near as circumstances will allow, and Christian prudence direct*". A stricter subscription in America was impossible, as the WFOG had been written to specifically apply to England.

Issues were immediately raised with respect to the *Adopting Act*. In the *Adopting Act* the Synod had disclaimed "*all legislative power in the church*". What did this mean when they had just legislated subscriptionism? They meant that the church has no authority to legislate in the area of faith (doctrine) and practice (morals). They did not consider this to inhibit them from legislating rules for the government of the church. Secondly the *Act* had stated that the WCOF & Catechisms, "*being, in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words*". What did that mean? Had they only subscribed to the essential doctrines and the necessary articles of the Confession and Catechisms?

The *Act* had also said that at the time of adopting the Confession any member or candidate could state his scruples and the Presbytery is still to admit him if the scruples relate to, "*articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government*". What did this mean? Was

1. Samuel J. Baird, *History of the New School*, Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, Philadelphia, PA, 1868, p. 57.

2. *Ibid.* p. 58.

3. See Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, PA, 1851, Part 1, pp. 136-156.

subscriptionism only a charade? The answer lies in the minutes of the Synod for 1726 and based on that the Synod explained itself at the session of 1730. After the Adopting Act was passed all ministers were allowed to state their scruples. The majority or all of the ministers scrupled at those sections of the WCOF that seemed to grant the civil state authority over the church. The ministers were received as such and the Confession and catechisms were received with the exclusion of the contested articles in chapters 20 and 23 of the Confession. With that exception the Confession and Catechisms were strictly subscribed to and all scruples, (i.e. definition of essential and necessary), were limited to those articles. All future members would have to similarly subscribe. They didn't amend the Confession because a significant portion of the members believed that it was not the intention of the Westminster assembly to grant such power to the state and that the Confession was being misunderstood. The Synod therefore stated its understanding and then enjoined strict subscription to that understanding. In essence they amended the Confession so it was their confession of faith and then subscribed to it. That was all they meant by the issue of "*necessary doctrines*" and "*scruples*". In 1736 when the confusion on this point still persisted, and people were concerned that the church was not actually a subscriptionist church, they issued a Declaration restating the above position and finally ended the confusion with respect to the issue of subscription.

Strict subscription remained an article of the church for 150 years until in the reunion of the Old School and New School after the War Between the States it was compromised. This swiftly led to doctrinal decline and set the stage for the Fundamentalist and Modernist controversy of the early twentieth century.

Chapter 2

The Great Awakening

The Great Awakening is the term for an extended "*revival*" of religion in the American colonies that occurred during the 1730's and 1740's. It commenced in 1730 in Freehold, N.J. in the congregation of Rev. John Tennant. The revival quickly spread and seemed attended by many genuine conversions and marked by many true spiritual blessings. Great numbers attended public worship, religion became a general topic of discussion, and many resorted to reading the Bible. It was termed a "*revival*" because all sides agreed that at the time the state of religion was considered low, at least by the standards of the day, and as compared to prior generations. There was however no evidence of doctrinal error, at least in the Presbyterian Church (although Arminianism was growing rapidly in New England), and both sides in the ensuing controversies were subscriptionists, and sound Calvinists. Rather religion was felt to be somewhat cold and formal and lacking in fervency, zeal, and other manifestations of experimental religion.

By the late 1730's had spread to other NJ towns such as Lawrence, Hopewell, Amwell, New Brunswick (Frelinghuysen of the Dutch Reformed Church), Elizabeth, and Newark. The revival spread south to Virginia and into the Carolinas and Georgia (Whitfield's ministry), and was already concurrent in New England. Whitfield, an Episcopal minister from England, was by then preaching in the colonies as well. He preached in NJ and then in Philadelphia for the better part of year (1739-40). He preached twice a day daily and 3-4 times on the Sabbath. At first the Episcopal clergy welcomed him but soon chilled to his evangelical fervor and closed their pulpits to him and he commenced outdoor preaching.

By this time many unusual occurrences and unnatural disturbances were routinely attendant upon the revival. People broke down and wept, they cried out, they fainted, they convulsed, they screamed, they claimed visions of hell swallowing them up, or of God, or of Christ. People fell senseless, or fell into a trance, sometimes for as long as 24 hours. Others who had made a profession at first now either openly backslid or became spiritually arrogant and so secure in their pretended faith they abandoned the means of grace. Many were filled with spiritual "*pride, a false and rash zeal and censoriousness*". It is interesting to note that the rise of the Methodists and the Wesleyan revivals in England, and revivals in Scotland were going on in the British Isles at the same time and were attended with many of the same disturbances as those on these shores.

Results of the Revival:

The earlier estimates were that tens of thousands of persons were genuinely converted to Christianity. Doubtless many thousands were. However it is the mature judgment of many that the majority of the conversions were ultimately determined to be spurious. Jonathan Edwards himself says, "*...that only a small portion proved to be genuine*".

Edwards own experience after the revival had burned itself out was not conducive to positive reflections. Although the revival had been the strongest in his area, and although he had been

one of the chief ministers advocating the revival, yet in the four years after it subsided, from 1744-1748 not a single new member was added to his church. When in 1749 he stated that persons should not be admitted to the Lord's supper unless they could give a credible profession of faith, the town went into an uproar, he was defamed and reviled, the church was scorned and mocked, and the members voted to cast him out of the church as their pastor, and to make sure that he left town they filed false criminal charges against him. This was the action of almost the entire church, a church that had figured so prominently in the revival.

After the revival subsided the state of religion rapidly declined so that the universal testimony of godly men was that it was far worse than that before the revival commenced. A coldness and deadness settled in from which the churches for the most part never recovered. After the revivals doctrinal errors came in like a flood. Edwards complains of daily propagation of "*Arminianism, Arianism, and even Socinianism, to the detriment of the doctrines of grace*". He also complains elsewhere that Arminianism and Pelagianism have made great progress in New England, that the Church of England there had tripled in size, and that the state of the churches is one of turmoil, dissension, schism, and confusion. Other godly divines particularly in New England complained of the host of errors of the New Divinity propagated by the converts and the ministers generated by the revival. Hodge notes that where the revival was most extensive was exactly those places where religion afterward most declined and where error was most prevalent and aggravated.

Hodge's Analysis:

Hodge maintained that the extraordinary manifestations of the revival were the work of man and not of the Holy Spirit. He attributes them to the excessive oratory of the overzealous revivalists preaching the terrors of the law and the judgments of God in a manner that was without precedent, and so working on the emotions of the people that they were precipitated into fits of weeping, crying out, convulsions etc. When these were encouraged there was a systematic nervous propagation of these manifestations throughout the assembled masses so that scores of persons were overcome. He notes that similar effects had been obtained by fanatic orators of both Roman Catholic and Moslem persuasion, where the truth of God was not proclaimed, and God's Spirit was not presumed to have been present. He notes that when these symptoms were attributed to the work of God they caused many, including the persons themselves, to come under the delusion that they had actually been objects of divine grace, when they had only been objects of the orator's art. He also noted that where they were discouraged and viewed as marring the work of God they disappeared and where they were encouraged they proliferated.

He notes that tested by its fruits the revival was seriously found wanting. He explains the schism that it caused in the churches due to the fact that the defenders of the revival concentrated only the good aspects of what was transpiring and in their enthusiasm were blinded to the problems that were accompanying their ministries. He noted that the opponents of the revival were not ungodly men resisting the work of God but merely those men, who aware of the serious disorders accompanying the work and their disastrous effects on the churches, were attempting to protect the churches from these ill effects.

Conclusion:

The Great Awakening started off as a genuine revival occasioned by a remarkable response to sound preaching by Calvinistic ministers. It degenerated into wild outbreaks of neo-

Pentecostal, charismatic disorders. The fallacy of attributing these disorders to the operation of the Holy Spirit led to their encouragement, to hosts of spurious conversions, and to anarchy, confusion, schism, and error in the churches. When these wild outbreaks finally burned out the people were immune to the attractions of the ordinary means of grace and the churches settled down to a coldness and decline that persisted for many decades.

Chapter 3

The Schism of 1741

The apparent benefits and the obvious problems of the "revival" had divided the Presbyterian Church into two opposing camps. The supporters of the revival with all its extravagances were known as "New Lights" and have come down to us as the "New Side". Similarly those who opposed not necessarily the "revival" itself but opposed the revivalists and their disorderly measures were called "Old Lights" or the "Old Side". The "New Lights", though they were subscriptionists and generally sound in doctrine, started to behave as "Charismatics". They believed that they were under the direct illumination and guidance of the "Spirit". As such they believed that they were free from the constraints of the regular rules of church order. They also believed that they could discern the spirits. In the exercise of this alleged gift they boldly denounced their opponents as being unconverted.

They entered the bounds of other churches and presbyteries and held competing meetings. They denounced the local ministers as unfit, spiritually dead, unconverted or worse. The results of these tactics was to greatly unsettle the churches, split congregations, have ministers expelled by their churches on the basis of their charges without any due process, and cause the people in general to become dissatisfied with their local church, its minister, and its services. Due to the above disorders in 1737 the Synod passed an Act to prevent ministers from one presbytery intruding into the bounds of another without its permission. The New Side ministers simply ignored the Act and persisted in their disorderly and schismatic tactics.

The Old Side also became concerned about ministerial qualifications. Heretofore all their ministers had generally come from overseas and had a thorough education in a British college. The New Side was generating ministerial candidates in the Tennant's "Log College" and there were concerns about the quality of their preparations for the ministry. So in 1738 the Synod passed an act requiring all ministerial candidates who had not received a regular college education to be examined by a committee of the Synod as to their educational qualifications. This was intended to interfere in the slightest with the presbyteries' historic right to examine candidates for the ministry but simply to provide an alternative means of meeting the requirement for a college degree. The New Side protested and then simply ignored the act.

The Old Side then charged the New Side with ignoring acts of Synod, with denying the authority of church courts, and in departing from the historic Calvinism of the Westminster standards. This was because they taught that a man was unconverted unless he could relate an account of a dramatic conversion experience, where he had experienced the terrors of the law etc, and unless he could give the date and the time of his conversion.

The conflict came to a crisis in 1741 at the meeting of the Synod. There some Old Side presbyters entered a protest that all those who would not strictly subscribe to the standards and who would not adhere to the rules of church order had no right to sit in the synod. When the New Side noted that the signers of this protest were in the minority they agreed that there should be a separation, but demanded that the protesting minority withdraw. The Synod then broke down into disorder, but when the New Side discovered that many ministers who had not signed the protest were in sympathy with the Old Side and that they were the ones in the minority, they withdrew and immediately formed their own presbytery, the Presbytery of New

Brunswick. The new presbytery had 10 members, mostly from the Tennants and their adherents and two from New England. They immediately announced their full subscription to the church's standards.

There were a number of ministers in the Synod, mostly from New York who were very dissatisfied with these proceedings. Their sympathies were with the Old Side and the majority in Synod. However they were of the opinion that the Old Side was wrong procedurally in seeking to remove the New Side ministers by means of a protest, without proper due process. They wanted to heal the breach and felt the best way was for they themselves also to secede from the Synod. They asked for permission to withdraw and form their own Synod. The Synod stated they thought they were wrong to withdraw but if they were determined to leave that would part amicably as brethren. In 1745 they formed the Synod of New York in union with the excluded New Side ministers. However the Synod required strict subscription to the standards and repudiated all the disorders of which the Old Side had complained. The main purpose of these actions was to reunite with the New Side and then bring them back into the church. The New York brethren thought this the most practical way of healing the breach.

The New York Synod sought union with the Synod of Philadelphia based on a proposal that they passed in 1749, the chief points of which were...

1. All to resubscribe to the standards according to the original formula.
2. All to agree to submit to all acts of Synod or if cannot in good conscience do so to peaceably withdraw.
3. To treat as a great evil to accuse anyone of being in error doctrinally or as being immoral without first resorting to private reproof and then resorting to the courts of the church in an orderly fashion.

Based on this overture committees of both synods met but negotiations broke down because the New York Synod insisted that the Protest of 1741 had to be withdrawn before negotiations could proceed.

In 1758 the Synods finally reunited. The basis of union was very similar to that originally proposed by the New York Synod, and included the provision that all candidates for the ministry be strictly examined for the competence of their education, in experimental religion, and strictly subscribe to the standards, and vow to submit to Presbyterian Church order. That this settlement was in substance similar to the proposal of 1749 but was not mutually agreed to until 1758 shows the deepness of the strife and the emotional nature of the wounds inflicted by all the schism and disorder in the churches wrought by the new measures.

Chapter 4

The New Divinity

Up to this time doctrinal heresy was not an issue in the PCUSA. Both sides in the schism of 1741 were basically sound in doctrine and supported strict subscriptionism. However, now things begin to change in the Reformed churches of America. A "New Divinity" raises its head in opposition to the historic Calvinist faith of the Reformation and of the English Puritans. The fountainhead of this apostasy was none other than Jonathan Edwards, a good and godly man whose doctrinal errors and philosophical speculations became the basis for the "New Divinity". Doctrinal decline follows a general pattern of several steps.

-Orthodoxy, where scriptural doctrines are believed and expounded from the word.

-Traditionalism-where the traditional doctrines of orthodoxy are still believed but are separated from the active exposition of the word and based on tradition, logical systems of doctrine, and defended by reason and philosophy.

-Heresy-this generally starts with Arminianism and winds up with Unitarianism.

Jonathan Edwards was the person responsible for the transition from orthodoxy to traditionalism. His speculations defended and explained the Calvinist system he inherited by means of logic and philosophy apart from the scriptures. The results were disastrous.

Edwards:

We have already noted Edwards' charismatic tendencies particularly in relation to his wife's visions of and revelations directly from God. We have already noted some of his strange opinions such as his belief that the North American Indians were the lost tribes of Israel. But these were harmless compared to his speculations whereby he sought to establish a philosophical defense of strict Calvinism. His theological conclusions remained orthodox but their foundation was being removed from the word of God. Edwards adopted the Cartesian philosophy of Rene Descartes, the French Christian and mathematician of "*cognito ergo sum*" fame. Particularly he adopted his theory of being, based on the proposition that God is the efficient cause of every effect. This was identical with the Islamic theory of being with the same fatalistic tendencies. And it thoroughly destroys Reformed covenant theology and subverts the entire idea of a substitutionary atonement.

Secondly Edwards redefined sin and holiness. The former was defined as selfishness and the latter as disinterested benevolence. The concepts were torn away from their roots in God's word and particularly God's law to the eventual destruction of the concept of divine justice.

Thirdly, Edwards postulated that as God was holy and therefore committed to disinterested benevolence God was required as a holy being to do all things in order to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number, to maximize happiness in his creation. This placed God himself under law, a law defined by mere human philosophical speculations!

Fourthly, man's depravity and fallen condition was redefined by the distinction between natural ability and moral ability, man being viewed as possessing the former but lacking only the latter. Man's total depravity was now subjected to philosophical mutations. Man is able to do good, but simply unwilling to do so.

The above are only a few of the chief points of the Edwardean system by which he sought to defend Calvinism, but which became the basis for the destruction of Puritan theology in New England and eventually in the PCUSA.

Hopkinsianism:

Hopkins, was a student of, and a close associate of Edwards, and was his official biographer and the executor of his papers. He knew Edwards better than any minister and was most imbued with Edwards' thought and philosophy. He started the process of taking Edwards' speculations to their logical conclusions. In 1793 he published his "System of Doctrines" containing the following salient points. Their derivation from Edwards' thought is obvious.

1. All sin consists of selfishness.
2. All holiness and virtue consists of disinterested benevolence. Since God is required to be benevolent there is no such thing as personal penal justice. God's attributes of justice and righteousness are swallowed up by the dominant attribute of benevolence. The very character of God is changed.
3. All holiness and sin consists of voluntary actions (Finney's perfectionism in embryo).
4. Adam's sin is not imputed to the human race but God has ordained that all his progeny should be sinners but not by virtue of any connection with him.
5. Man's total depravity is total only of the will and does not affect the understanding and the conscience.
6. Men have natural ability to do the holy will of God.
7. Christ's atonement is not substitutionary but general and is mainly a public exhibition of general divine justice and displeasure with sin. God can save whom he pleases without any connection to Christ and Christ's death does not actually save anyone.
8. True faith requires total submission to God including willingness to be damned.
9. God is required to do that which is best for the greater number of his creatures and therefore the present world is the best possible including the fact of the presence of sin.
10. Sin is not evil per se but a necessary ingredient in God's plan to work out the greater good (Hopkins was vague on the issue of the origin of sin but others including Emmons boldly asserted that God was the origin and source of all sin).

Edwards's son also followed his father's philosophy and used his father's speculations to redefine the gospel. He preached that substitutionary atonement that pays for sin cannot constitute forgiveness and cannot be gracious, since all the legal requirements of justice are being met. Therefore there is no substitutionary atonement and God's justice is simply a general administration of divine benevolence.

These doctrines were spread through New England in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth.

Taylorism and the New Haven Theology:

Nathaniel Taylor was a professor of theology at Yale in New Haven. He reacted to some of the logical conclusions of Edwards' thought as developed by Hopkins and his followers, and developed a new divinity that sought to correct some of the problems of Hopkinsianism.

He reacted against the fatalism inherent in Edwards' theory of being. He reacted against the notion that God is the author of sin. He stated that all sin is the result of the free will of the creature. This was developed to full blown Pelagianism. He stated that men are created without any moral character good or bad and that sin is the result of circumstances beyond the control of God. For Taylor regeneration is the result of moral suasion and not an act of irresistible divine power and grace.

Edwards had denied our common nature with Adam. Hopkins had denied any real connection of the human race with Adam. They had postulated a circumstantial connection only as ordered in God's providence. Taylor repudiated this fiction and denied any covenant link whether through a covenant of works or a covenant of grace. He stated that all men are created exactly the same way that Adam was. He stated that all men sin and fall exactly as Adam did by an act of their own volition. He stated that Christ died not as substitutionary sacrifice but only as act of divine benevolence towards sinners and as a display of divine displeasure with sin. This came to be known as the governmental theory of the atonement, that later became such an issue in the PCUSA. In Taylor's view the sinner is graciously pardoned but not justified. In his view the sinner is forgiven but his sin is not atoned for or blotted out. In his view divine justice is waived and not satisfied in the salvation of sinners.

Taylor represented the third step from orthodoxy, as Edwards represented the first. The final step was Unitarianism, logically developed from the preceding steps. The younger Edwards had to leave his pastorate in New Haven, where he had labored for 26 years because his congregation turned Unitarian. It was but the logical result of the extended years of preaching the philosophy of Edwards and Hopkins.

Chapter 5

The New Divinity & the PCUSA

Update on PCUASA History:

During the schism of 1741-1758 the New Side had grown numerically superior to the Old Side. They had grown faster as a result of the revival and the graduates of the "Log College" and the presbytery of New Castle in Delaware had also joined the New Side. The "Log College" had ceased to exist because Rev. William Tennent, Sr. had retired in 1742 and died in 1746. Both sides now proceeded to establish their own schools. The Old Side established a school in Newark, Delaware totally supported and controlled by the Synod. The New Side established the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) which was not ecclesiastically controlled but which was dominated by New Side men. The school in Newark decreased in importance when its Master was called to the President of a college in Philadelphia and eventually became an Episcopalian institution. After the reunion of the two synods the College of New Jersey became the predominant college for preparing the ministers of the PCUSA. For the above reasons and others the New Side came to dominate the reunited church so that by the time the struggles between the New School and the Old School developed the Old School was essentially the New Side of the prior century.

For the remainder of the eighteenth century the PCUSA remained doctrinally sound and suffered no serious problems or disorders. The most significant issues that came up were issues with respect to the doctrine of marriage (The church decided several issues such as a continuing prohibition on a man marrying his deceased wife's sister) and psalmody (The church retained exclusive psalmody but reluctantly tolerated Watt's "*The Psalms of David Imitated*"). It was in the nineteenth and the twentieth century that the church was faced with a series of crucial doctrinal battles that ultimately destroyed the PCUSA as a viable branch of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Plan Of Union:

Westward expansion was creating many new communities on the frontier in what is now Western New York State and Ohio.

These were settled chiefly by Congregationalists from New England.

There were many small struggling churches and a great shortage of ministers.

Since it was not practical to attempt to have both a Congregational and a Presbyterian church in each locale, each requiring a minister, a practical form of cooperation was proposed.

This was the Plan of Union of 1801.

It was made with the Congregational Churches of Connecticut (The State of Connecticut's Western Reserve comprised much of the frontier area where the plan was implemented) partly because these churches under the Saybrook Platform were more Presbyterian than those of Massachusetts and they were also more conservative theologically.

The rules allowed churches, only in the area where it was to be implemented, to call either a Presbyterian or a Congregational minister and to conduct their church polity according to either the Presbyterian or the Congregational scheme of church polity. Ministers if charged with wrongdoing, can be tried by either the Presbytery to which they belong, the Association to which they belong, or by a local tribunal composed of Presbyterians and Congregationalists. As such the scheme of church discipline was even weaker than the Saybrook Platform. This

actually allowed churches conducting congregational polity to send voting delegates to the courts of the Presbyterian Church without even being subject to the discipline of that church! Since in 1801 the churches of Connecticut were deemed sound in the faith this may not have been of great concern. However as the inroads of the New Divinity corrupted the churches of Connecticut the effect was soon felt in the churches involved in the Plan of Union. And through them the New Divinity entered the PCUSA and precipitated the Old School-New School conflict. This turned out disastrously for the Presbyterian Church. As during the Great Awakening, the motive for these disorderly arrangements was evangelism, particularly home missions on the Western frontier. The New Side majority in the PCUSA thus perpetuated to a degree the errors of the Great Awakening. This is similar to the effect of the Billy Graham Crusade in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the twentieth century.

The New Divinity in New England:

Resistance to the "New Divinity" was only nominal in New England and never very effective. In 1832 Dr. Hawes on Hartford, Conn. publicly challenged Dr. Taylor's orthodoxy in an article in the "Connecticut Observer". Dr. Taylor answered him in statements that were couched in the language of orthodoxy and gave the impression that he was very close to being orthodox. However in explanatory notes as to what he meant by these statements it was made very clear that he interpreted these statements in a way radically different than the orthodox did. By such deviousness attacks on the New Divinity were blunted.

Lyman Beecher, a highly respected Connecticut minister, who was deemed orthodox, felt obliged to question Taylor's orthodoxy. However as Taylor had long been a protégé of his and his efforts amounted more to an attempt to gloss over Taylor's errors and to seek to harmonize them with orthodoxy.

In 1833 conservative ministers in Connecticut formed the Pastoral Union and established a rival seminary, the East Windsor Theological Institute, to counter the influence of the New Haven theology. However as this school did not require subscription to either the Westminster or the Savoy, but only to a simple doctrinal creed of its own manufacture. This was sufficiently weak that the institution provided no effective resistance to the New Divinity.

A few months later one of the trustees of Yale College officially raised the issue of the orthodoxy of Dr. Taylor with the College. He was answered that since its inception in 1722 all officers and teachers had subscribed to the Savoy. That in 1753 this had been interpreted as requiring assent to all the sentiments of the confession and not just to "the substance of doctrine" contained therein. Then in 1753 this had been objected to, as too strict, by Dr. Styles, the President of the College. At his inauguration as professor of theology, Dr. Taylor had assented to the Savoy in substance and had given a statement of his own creed which was deemed to contain the substance of the doctrine of the confession. This shows the futility of doctrinal discipline when subscription is reduced to no more than assent to the substance of the confession.

(Note: This was a problem in the Bible Presbyterian Church as well).

In Massachusetts Andover Theological Seminary had been founded to counter the doctrinal drift at Harvard to Arminianism and later Unitarianism. However its leadership was basically Hopkinsian and from that basis they sought to oppose Taylor's New Haven Divinity. That was a hopeless task. Generally in New England the Orthodox and the Hopkinsians united to counter the more radical departures of Dr. Taylor. With no truly orthodox leadership or seminary the struggle was inevitably lost.

The New Divinity in the PCUSA:

The first minister to apply the radical doctrines of Taylor in the PCUSA was Charles Finney. He conducted Pelagian revivals where he preached sermons entitled, "Sinners Bound To Change Their Own Hearts" and "How to Change Your Heart". He taught that if sin is merely selfishness and we have no corrupt nature inherited from Adam and there is no such thing as original sin we do not need divine regeneration. All that is needed is a change of heart which the sinner can readily accomplish himself by ceasing his selfishness and deciding to put Christ first. He taught that there could be no moral obligation without moral ability. If we are required to believe and repent we must be able to do so in our own power. He said, "*Suppose God should command a man to fly; would the command impose him any obligation, until he is furnished with wings? Certainly not.*" Since evangelism under such a Pelagian scheme is simply a matter of affecting man's "free will", he introduced a series of "new measures", revivalistic gimmicks, designed to shock, scare, badger, persuade etc. the hearers into a change of will. Finney's new measures and his theological defense of them, became an ongoing issue in the PCUSA.

Other ministers in the PCUSA, from Congregational backgrounds, less radical than Finney, but thoroughly Hopkinsian in their sentiments, were being accepted throughout the church and not just in the area under the Plan of Union (Finney operated in Western New York). These could not pass muster per strict subscription to the standards but were accepted under the "substance of doctrine" plea, as it was felt that in light of the Plan of Union they could not be rejected. So at the very time of the greatest doctrinal challenges to the church's faith, her guard was relaxed as never before.

The inevitable concerns that this posed to those with Old Side sentiments were brought into focus by the publication by Rev. Ezra Stiles Ely, of "Ely's Contrast". This publication set side by side in parallel columns the teachings of Calvin and those of Hopkins. The Hopkinsians were incensed and brought charges against Ely for slander but were compelled to drop them because they had no case and were fortunate that they in turn were not similarly charged. They then published a series of anonymous (designed to avoid church discipline?) pamphlets ridiculing the orthodox doctrines of original sin, inability, and the atonement, and pleading for doctrinal toleration and free inquiry.

In 1816 the Synod of Philadelphia (dominated by the Old Side) put out a pastoral letter warning about "*Arian, Socinian, Arminian, and Hopkinsian heresies*", and admonishing all presbyteries to strictly examine all candidates for the ministry.

At the same time in the Synod of New York & New Jersey a congregation called a Hopkinsian minister, Rev. William Gray. The presbytery refused to place the call in his hands because of his sentiments. The congregation appealed to the Synod and the Presbytery's decision was reversed. Against this some ministers (i.e. Professor Archibald Alexander of Princeton) protested and the Presbytery appealed to the General Assembly. In the Assembly of 1817 the Presbytery was sustained, but the Synod of Philadelphia was censured, for disturbing the peace and unity of the church by its Pastoral Letter. This movement for censure, was led by Dr. Miller, of Princeton Seminary. This was the position of the Moderate party who for some time were dominant in the church. Protests were entered against the censure and the ecclesiastical battles that were to culminate in the New School-Old School schism had begun.

Chapter 6

The Schism of 1837

There were many issues that contributed to the schism of 1837, but the heart of all these issues was doctrinal. The crisis that precipitated the breach was the acquittal of Albert Barnes at his second trial. He have already studied the doctrinal issues that were dividing the PCUSA. We have seen how through the Plan of Union the New England Theology was being piped into the Presbyterian Church.

Starting in 1831 this led to annual conflicts between the two parties, the Old School and the New School at the church's General Assembly. The New School enjoyed numerical superiority and generally prevailed at the General Assembly when these issues came up. In 1834 the Old School protested in vain against the prevalence of unsoundness in doctrine and laxity in discipline. In 1835 the Old School organized to muster all its strength and came to the General Assembly in the majority. They used this majority to strengthen the denominational machinery of discipline, to increase the authority of the church courts, and to decrease cooperation with Congregationalists and the independent agencies of the Evangelical United Front. In 1836 they again mustered a majority and proceeded to strengthen their reforms. Then a steamboat with New School commissioners arrived and reversed the balance of power and all the gains of the previous year were annulled by the New School majority.

But the real issue in 1836 was Alfred Barnes. Barnes had been convicted of heresy the previous year by the Synod of Philadelphia had had appealed to the General Assembly. For the past year he had been suspended from the ministry. At his trial before the Assembly his appeal was sustained and he was acquitted from all the charges. Barnes acquittal precipitated a genuine crisis in the PCUSA. The Old School openly stated that this could not stand and that if it did there would have to be a parting of the ways. So at the Assembly of 1837 the main issue would be who would leave and who would stay: Who would control the PCUSA and who would have to form a new church. Before the Assembly the Old School men met and adopted a "Testimony and Memorial". This was an indictment of New School errors and called for the dissolution of non-Presbyterian churches, presbyteries, and synods in the PCUSA.

At the actual General Assembly of 1837 this was implemented by the Old School majority. The Plan of Union was abrogated by a vote of 143-110. Division of the church was now certain. A joint committee of Old School and New School commissioners met to work out an amicable plan of separation. However they could not agree on anything. The Old School then proceeded with its purposes and retroactively annulled the Plan of Union. By this action they expelled from the church 4 synods (all in Ohio and Western New York, that had all been formed under the Plan of Union and were hybrid Presbyterian-Congregational churches), 28 presbyteries, 509 ministers, and about 60,000 communicants. The rest of the New School men felt they had no choice but to secede and join their excluded brethren.

At their 1837 General Assembly the New School branch of the Presbyterian Church declared the division of 1837 to be unconstitutional and therefore null and void. They determined to send commissioners to the General Assembly of the PCUSA in 1838 to present their claims and contest their rights. They then issued the Auburn Declaration (not to be confused with the

Auburn Affirmation of 1923 in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy). This was a statement of and an explanation of their doctrines. This was a relatively orthodox statement and rejected the New England theology, especially the New Haven theology of Nathaniel Taylor. The New School men were determined to demonstrate that that were good, sound Presbyterians. They would defend Barnes and Finney while not necessarily holding their views. The majority of the New School men were moderates. They did not personally subscribe to the radical views and practices of a Barnes or a Finney. However, they didn't like church discipline and thought that the church should be broad enough to contain such men.

In 1838 the New School men appeared at the General Assembly of the PCUSA and attempted to be seated and participate etc. The Assembly broke down into pandemonium, confusion, and disorder. The New School men finally gave up these tactics and retreated to their own meetings. Two General Assemblies were now meeting in Philadelphia both claiming to represent the true and ongoing PCUSA. The division was now final and complete. The church had been split. What were the reasons for the schism of 1837?

The Causes of the Schism of 1837:

1. Subscriptionism: The Old School wanted strict subscription to the church's standards and wanted to enforce it with discipline. The New School were moderates who did not believe in enforcing church discipline and were willing to tolerate a broad range of errors if they were not deemed serious or thought to be of little practical consequence. Especially the New School men didn't want doctrinal issues to hinder evangelistic work or to prevent broad cooperation with the United Evangelical Front.

2. Presbyterian Polity: The Old School men to enforce presbyterian principles of church government on the church. They wanted the church to be governed by scriptural church courts. They were appalled at the results of the Plan of Union where Congregationalists, who had never subscribed to the standards, could join the church and even hold office, and vote in its courts, and yet were not subject to the church's courts and could set up their own courts to rule themselves apart from the duly appointed courts of the church. The New School men were committed to this kind of church union and to the cooperation of all evangelicals, and saw the salvation of the country in the power of the broad evangelical united front agencies.

3. The Evangelical United Front: The Old School men wanted the church to be governed scripturally by its courts. They were concerned that the church was losing control over its destiny. They saw that both their home missions and their foreign missions were being controlled by agencies such as the American Home Missionary Society. Their Sunday Schools and its literature was controlled by the American Sunday School Union etc., and even the training of its ministers was in the hands of independent seminaries. They were determined to change this and bring it all under presbyterian control. The New School men believed in the Evangelical United Front and were committed to defending and maintaining it all cost, including schism in the church and tolerating error etc.

4. Revivalism: The Old School men were concerned that men were being deluded by a false gospel, and that souls were being imperiled by false teaching. The New School men were concerned that issues of doctrinal precision would hinder the spread of the gospel and the

salvation of souls. They were prepared to accept a certain amount of error as long as souls were being saved and the church was being built. Finney's radical new measures had greatly alarmed the Old School. The New School had reservations about Finney but hesitated to interfere because they didn't want to hinder evangelism and prevent the salvation of souls.

5. Theology: The Old School remained terribly concerned about the doctrinal errors in the church particularly Hopkinsianism and Taylorism. The New School didn't take Hopkinsianism very seriously regarding it as an acceptable way of understanding the scriptures and even the standards. They were generally opposed to Taylorism but didn't perceive it as a threat. They were concerned that this would derail the United Front that they saw as the salvation of the country and as the mighty engine of evangelism and revival that would usher in the Postmillennial dream of the kingdom of God. Barnes and Finney were vocal representatives of the new theology making this not merely a hypothetical issue but a concrete problem in the church. Barnes explicit teaching of the “governmental theory” of the atonement, denying Christ’s atonement on the cross as the basis of our redemption, was unacceptable heresy to the Old School men.

6. Slavery: This was not as yet one of the main issues. However the disputes over slavery had already begun in the PCUSA and the New School men in general took a more radical and abolitionist approach than the Old School men did. We will deal more with this when we discuss the schism of 1861 in the PCUSA between the North and the South.

Chapter 7

The North-South Schism of 1861

The Issue of Slavery:

Presbyterians had historically opposed slavery. In 1787 the Synod of New York and Philadelphia made a resolution in favor of "*universal liberty*" and supported efforts to "*promote the abolition of slavery*". In 1793 the General Assembly confirmed its support for the abolition of slavery but stated this only as "advice". In 1795 it refused to consider discipline of slaveholders in the church and advised all members of different views on the subject to "*live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and the practice of the Apostles*".

In 1818 dominated by the New School it made its strongest statement to date on the subject of slavery. The statement said that slavery ...

- was a sin
- was utterly inconsistent with the laws of God
- was a gross violation of the sacred rights of nature
- was totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel
- that it was the duty of all Christians...to obtain the complete abolition of slavery

This statement was actually a compromise. A radical abolitionist in Virginia had been denouncing his fellow ministers for being slaveholders. The presbytery of Lexington, Va. had disciplined him for his contentiousness. The General Assembly upheld the presbytery when he appealed, but made the above statement as a compromise to the abolitionists to balance its position. The assembly also advised against harsh censures and uncharitable statements on the subject and again rejected the discipline of slaveholders in the church.

In contrast to this, radical abolitionism was popular among Unitarians and among the more radical wing of the New School. It was also popular in the reform minded, activist, empire of the United Evangelical Front. Finney personally was a radical abolitionist and the area where he had labored in Western New York was a hotbed of abolitionism. Albert Barnes was also a strong abolitionist. They all rejected the moderate abolitionism of the PCUSA with its gradualism and support for colonization of the slaves in Africa.

Slavery became an issue in the General Assembly of 1836 and threatened to split the church but moderate abolitionists prevailed over the radicals. A committee, appointed in 1835, reported to that Assembly and stated that "*slavery was recognized in the Bible and that to demand abolition was unwarranted interference in state laws.*" A recommendation to postpone further discussion of slavery was passed by the same majority that acquitted Barnes the day before.

The Old School was concerned that on this issue the New School's theology was being influenced by rationalistic theories of human rights. As Thornwell put it, "*...the New School theological heresies had grown out of the same humanistic doctrines of human liberty that had inspired the Declaration of Independence*". The minority report of the committee on slavery that had reported to the 1836 Assembly actually quoted the Declaration of Independence for

authority rather than scripture. A Southern delegate complained, "*...they were introducing a new gospel...a new system of moral relations...new grounds of moral obligation... a new scale (i.e. standard) of human rights.*"

At the Assembly of 1837 the Old School delegates from both the North and the South agreed not to make the issue slavery. Rather they wanted the issues to be doctrine and presbyterian church order. The Southern vote gave the Old School the majority to prevail over the New School and led to the abrogation of the Plan of Union and the schism of 1837.

The Old School refused to go beyond scripture as its only rule of faith and practice and against the Westminster Confession of Faith that declared that "*God alone is Lord of the conscience...*". As Hodge put it, "*The scriptures do not condemn slaveholding as a sin...the church should not pretend to make laws to bind the conscience*"

Slavery was not the issue in 1836 and 1837. In the schism of 1837 a very small minority of Southerners joined the New School. Their presence was enough to keep the New School Assemblies from taking a radical abolitionist position until late in the 1850's. Both the New School and the Old School communions basically maintained the 1818 position until the War Between the States. Barnes was forced to admit that the scriptures did not exclude slaveholders from the church, but he continued to maintain that although the scriptures did not condemn slavery per se it laid down principles that if followed would utterly overthrow it.

Ultimately the Old School and the New School had a totally different view of the nation. The Old School maintained the primacy of scripture and was willing to criticize the nation and the federal government. The New School furlled the cross in the flag and exhibited a radical blind patriotism that almost worshipped the federal union etc. The following statements from Chapter 10 , "The Flag and the Cross", in George Marsden's book, *The Evangelical mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience*", are examples of the New School's type of thinking.

"In theological terms the New School's response to the war may be described as an identification of the doctrine's of the church's mission to prepare the world for the millennium and to call the nation to its covenantal obligations with the patriotic dogmas that the Union must be preserved and slavery abolished".

"From the outset of the war New School Presbyterians were united in maintaining that it was the duty of Christians to help preserve the federal government. Albert Barnes, for instance looked upon the Constitution as a gift from God".

Nathan Beman went further, saying that the principles of equality of men and their inalienable rights embodied in the Declaration of Independence , could be traced as much to the Apostle Paul as to Thomas Jefferson".

"Not only were the principles of the Constitution identified with the cause of the Kingdom of God, but enlisting in the Union Army was marked as an evidence of discipleship to Christ".

"The Assembly explicitly declared the federal government to be an agency for the salvation of the world: 'We deem the government of these United States the most benign that has ever

blessed our imperfect world...we revere and love it, as one of the great sources of hope, under God, for a lost world."

"Rebellion against such a government as ours...can find no parallel, except in the first two great rebellions - that which assailed the throne of heaven directly, and that which peopled our world with miserable apostates."

"Prentiss considered the Confederate rebellion against the federal government a rebellion against God himself because it violated the sovereign union that God had ordained...He equated the rebellion with religious heresy...it is like atheism, and subverts the first principles of our political worship, as a free, order-loving, and covenant-keeping people".

The extreme position on slavery and this religious veneration of the United States government made union with Southern Presbyterians literally impossible. *Can two walk together except they be agreed?* In 1861 as the nation separated into two nations, the United States of America and the Confederate States of America so did the Presbyterian Church. Both The Old School and the New School communions split into Northern and Southern churches. The New School had already split over slavery in 1857. When the Old School split in 1861 there were now four Presbyterian denominations where back in 1837 there had been just one. As we have noted there were but few New School men in the South so the main split was in the Old School, the official PCUSA. At the Assembly of 1861 there were few commissioners from the South. Several states had already seceded and others were on the verge of secession. Many Southern delegates felt that they would not be received and others feared for their safety. With weak Southern representation the Assembly voted to make loyalty to the Federal Government a term of communion in the church. This sealed the fate of the church and ensured a separation. This act became the cause for Southern Presbyteries and Synods to secede from the PCUSA.

The action was vigorously protested by Charles Hodge who protested that the church had no right to make a political issue a term of communion: He maintained that although the scriptures required Christians to be loyal to their governments, and to obey the powers that be, the Assembly had no authority to decide which government had the right to that loyalty. He stated that thousands of good Presbyterians believed that their scriptural subjection and loyalty belonged to their State government and not to the Federal government. This was a political issue and the Assembly had no authority to make it a term of communion. The Assembly responded with a radical statement denouncing secessionists as traitors worthy of being hung and the die was cast. Separation was inevitable.

The South's Defense:

Southern theologians defended both slavery and secession from the scriptures. They argued the right of secession from the analogy of the Hebrew Republic even as Southern statesmen defended it from the Constitution itself. They defended slavery from the scriptures and considered radical abolitionists infidels. The most thorough defense of the South was provided by Robert Lewis Dabney, in his book, "A Defense of Virginia, and Through Her of the South". His arguments included the following...

-Abraham was a slaveholder

-When Abraham came into covenant with God he was commanded not to free his slaves but to circumcise them.

-The Laws of Moses did not abolish slavery but rather regulated it.

- Christ commended slaveholders and received them as believers.
- Paul in his letters admonished Christian slaves to obey their masters.
- Paul exhorted Christian slaves to be content in their lot and not to seek to change their situation.
- In both cases of runaway slaves in the scriptures, Hagar in the Old Testament, and Onesimus in the New, they are commanded to return and submit to their masters.

Dabney distinguished between slavery per se as scripturally allowed and the slave trade. He denounced the slave trade as an unscriptural exercise in men stealing. He documented that the slave trade had been opposed by Virginia since colonial days and that the Northerners, who were now attacking them, were the ones who had operated and grown rich from the slave trade. He also called for reform of Southern slavery to remove abuses that were inconsistent with the institution of slavery as scripturally defined.

Chapter 8

The Old School-New School Reunion of 1869

The New School Status:

During the period of the schism the New School was becoming more conservative. They were now a denomination and on their own. They realized that they could melt away to the Congregationalists and to the United Evangelical Front. They were determined to persevere and forge their own identity, and show the world that they were Presbyterians and that the Old School had been wrong to exclude them. They downplayed the slavery issue until 1855 to keep the Southern New School churches from seceding. By 1855 they had their own mission boards and had ended the years of cooperation with The American Home Missionary Society. Relations with the Congregationalists had also considerably cooled. Very few ministerial candidates from New England seminaries were entering the New School churches. In 1852 the New York Congregationalist Association broke off the Plan of Union. The New School church was now organizationally on its own.

The New School developed its own denominational identity. They were now separate not only from the Old School but also from the Congregationalists and from the Evangelical United Front.

In 1852 they ended their dependence on the American Tract Society and adopted its own denominational theological journal called the Presbyterian Quarterly Review. They wrote their own tracts, doctrinal papers, and debated issues in the Presbyterian press with the Old School. Like a teenager who has left home and is on his own they matured, developed, and did what was necessary to survive as a denomination.

In the debates with the Old School all the Old School accusations of doctrinal error and laxity were based on incidents, and opinions expressed before the split. If the New School still tolerated error they were at least smart enough not to advertise it. Even Barnes, while never recanting his errors, was on his best behaviour. All these developments tended to minimize the Old School-New School differences and to remove at least some of the causes of the division.

- The Plan of Union was dead.
- The New England theology was becoming extinct even in the New School.
- The Evangelical United Front had lost its grip on the New School.
- The issue of slavery had been settled by the war and the schism of 1861.

The two schools were closer together than ever, at least so it appeared. However new threats that were boding ill for the church were on the horizon.

Science:

The New School in general was caving into the demands of new geological science. They accepted the proposition that the earth was not 6000 but actually millions of years old. They accepted the proposition that the six days of creation were not to be taken literally but that the process of creation had actually taken ages. They still believed in divine creation and rejected Darwin's, "Origin of the Species" when it was first published in 1859. But they were definitely stretching their theology to accommodate secular science. Barnes predictably promoted the new "pro-science" views.

Philosophy:

The New School began to show the first signs of acceptance of the new German higher-critical, rationalist philosophy. Though some New School men did denounce the new rationalist theology the New School as a body was willing to take a wait and see attitude and await developments. They refused to condemn it until it could be demonstrated that it was a serious problem and had no benefits to offer.

After exchanging fraternal delegates for three years the two general assemblies in 1866 appointed a committee to propose terms of reunion. In the 1867 Old School General Assembly the terms were rejected because a vocal minority protested the form of subscription proposed for the united church. The New School agreed to amend the form of subscription to satisfy the Old School and in the 1868 Old School assembly these terms were accepted. A total of 52 Old School commissioners protested, including Hodge, Baird, and Breckenridge. The Old School majority countered that all three New School seminaries were free of the New England Theology and were teaching historic Calvinism and that the minority's concerns of doctrinal laxity were unfounded. The proposal was sent to the presbyteries of both communions and overwhelmingly approved. All the New School presbyteries approved it. In the Old School 126 of 129 presbyteries approved it. In 1869 the church was reunited. The schism of 1837 was over.

In the South the New School was very small. In 1861 many of the New School presbyteries, churches, and ministers had already joined the Presbyterian Church in the CSA. The Old school in the south decided to work for general reunion not only with the Southern New School (The United Synod of the Presbyterian Church), but also with the Associated Reformed Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church etc. The reunion with the United Synod was also based on practical considerations supported even by stalwart conservatives such as Dabney. He reasoned that if the Southern New School was absorbed it was so small it would be swallowed up and would disappear. Most of its members and ministers were sound and many had left in 1837 over procedural issues. Only three ministers were thought to actually hold New School errors such as the New England theology. However if it remained independent it would set up its own seminaries and journals etc. and begin to influence and corrupt Presbyterianism in the South. So also in the South the Old School-New School split was healed.

Conclusions:

What were the results of these mergers and reunions? What is the verdict of providence and church history on these actions? In the South it worked out for good. The New School party became extinct in the South. The Southern Presbyterian Church, renamed the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., remained sound for many decades, well into the next century. It finally surrendered its heritage and showed its doctrinal decline and moral corruption when it joined with the apostate PCUSA in 1983. Even then it resisted the PCUSA's demands to submit to their requirements in adopting feminism (female ministers etc.) and gay rights. Much of the church refused to go along with these trends and in 1973 they formed the PCA.

In the North the story is unfortunately much different. The issues of 1837 seemed to have gone away. The New School was indeed more sound and reunion seemed quite plausible. But although the New School Church was not considered heretical its willingness to be soft on

heresy and to tolerate error remained its Achille's heel. The conservatives in the Old School may have overstated their case in trying to prove actual heresy in the New School, but they were absolutely correct in their statements that they were lax in discipline. And without abundant current proof of actual heresy the merger was approved. However, when the full onslaught of the evils of evolutionary science and German rationalism, then just lurking on the horizon, hit the church, it was not prepared to deal with these deadly heresies.

Ultimately the PCUSA did not die of New School errors or of the New England theology. It died due to the New School attitude of toleration and laxity when faced with newer and more deadly errors. It succumbed to theological liberalism. And this set the stage for the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the early 20th century.

Chapter 9

The New Heresies & the PCUSA

Revision Attempted:

The issues of 1837 were essentially dead and this had enabled the church to reunite in both the North and the South. However new and more deadly heresies were waiting in the wings to take center stage in the decades ahead. One of the issues that faced the PCUSA towards the end of the nineteenth century was pressure for revision of her Confession of Faith. The General Assembly (GA) of 1889 approved sending questions out to all the presbyteries whether they favored revision of the COF and if so in what particulars. The GA of 1890 received the responses. Most of the requests for revision were related to a softening of the Confession's strict Calvinist soteriology, and involved proposed revisions of Chapter 3, "Of God's Eternal Decree" and Chapter 10, "Of Effectual Calling". There were also objections to the statement in Chapter 25 calling the Pope the Anti-Christ.

Revision failed because although a significant portion of the church favored it, when the proposed changes were submitted to the presbyteries in 1893 no single proposed change could muster the two-thirds majority required to pass. It also failed because one of the chief advocates for revision, Dr. Charles Briggs, of Union Theological Seminary in New York, was being tried for heresy at that time.

The Briggs Trial:

Briggs was the most vociferous advocate of extreme higher critical views in the church. Initially he had cautiously advanced his views under the cover of orthodoxy, but progressively he had become more rash and extreme in his statements. He advocated radical re-translation of the English Bible and considered the recent Revised Version far too timid.

Union Seminary promoted him to the newly established chair of Biblical Theology. In his inaugural address he spoke on, "The Authority of Holy Scripture" identifying three sources of divine authority: the church, reason, and scripture. He gave three examples of men who had come to God by these three means...

- Newman the Roman Catholic (by the church)
- Martineau the Unitarian (by reason)
- Spurgeon the Protestant (by scripture)

He then listed six barriers that prevented men from coming to the truth, some of which were...

- The superstition of Bibliolatry (i.e. literal belief in the Bible as the word of God)
- The doctrine of verbal inspiration
- The doctrine of inerrancy
- Belief in supernatural miracles
- The concept of prophecy as history foretold

He stated his belief in the progressive sanctification of men after death and that almost all men would be saved. He stated that the Old Testament patriarchs etc. were at a very low state of

morality and that men such as Noah, Abraham, Moses etc. through David and Solomon would probably be considered criminals today and be put into prison.

There was a strong reaction throughout the PCUSA against Briggs' speech. As part of the reunion arrangements of 1869, in 1870 the General Assembly had been granted the power to veto the election of any professor in any seminary associated with the church. The GA of 1891 overwhelmingly voted (449-60) to veto Brigg's appointment to the chair of Biblical Theology at Union. The board and trustees of Union Seminary rallied behind Dr. Briggs and the Seminary after protesting left the PCUSA to avoid its control.

In October of 1891 charges were presented against Briggs in the Presbytery of New York. The Presbytery overwhelmingly dismissed the charges as unsubstantiated by a vote of 94-39. The moderate position prevailed, the Presbytery not defending Briggs' views but stating its belief in a broad, inclusive church. The minority appealed to the GA and the GA of 1892 overwhelmingly supported the minority and ordered the Presbytery of New York to put Dr. Briggs on trial. The Presbytery did so and in January of 1893 voted to acquit Briggs of all charges. Much pressure was brought to bear on the minority to accept the results and get on with the "important work of the church". "A Plea for Work and Unity" was signed by 235 ministers calling for an end to this divisiveness and for all to unite and get on with the work of the church. Nonetheless the minority party appealed to the GA of 1893 which voted 410-145 to sustain the appeal and to try Dr. Briggs. At this trial he was convicted and suspended from the ministry of the church. A protest was filed by 62 commissioners (many from New York) and in 1898 Briggs joined the Protestant Episcopal (Anglican) Church as a minister.

The Smith Trial:

The next significant ecclesiastical trial was of Henry P. Smith, another theological professor at another New School Seminary, Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. Smith had been one of the chief architects of the reunion of 1869 on the New School side. His mediating influence and his leadership in getting the New School to accept strict subscriptionist language had made the reunion possible. Smith supported Briggs and came to his defense when the GA vetoed his appointment to the new chair of Biblical Theology at Union. In March of 1891 he read a paper at The Cincinnati Presbyterian Ministerial Association in which he condemned the doctrine of verbal inspiration and supported Briggs' views. In 1892 he published two articles in a theological periodical. In one he maintained the view that ordination vows applied only to the views that the candidate held at the time and not to any subsequent views. In the second article he stressed the great sin of schism taking the position that the guilt of this sin was always on the excising party, the party carrying out the separation, and by implication never on the party bringing novel and heretical teachings into the church.

Several presbyteries disturbed by these views petitioned the GA of 1892 to resolve these issues and the GA affirmed the doctrine of the church to be verbal inspiration of the scriptures and that one's ordination vows were binding during one entire tenure as a church officer.

In September of 1892 the Presbytery of Cincinnati put Smith on trial and in January of 1893 Smith resigned his position with Lane Seminary after being convicted and suspended from the ministry. However the Seminary refused to accept his resignation and proceeded to abolish the chair of Dr. Roberts, the Seminary's leading advocate of the verbal inspiration of scripture. The

GA of 1893 rebuked the Seminary for these actions, which then accepted Dr. Smith's resignation. The rest of the faculty then resigned as well. The new President of the Seminary was a conservative who had been one of Smith's prosecutors. The Seminary was reorganized, dropped its liberal progressive views, and became more conservative.

Dr. Smith appealed first to the Synod of Ohio and then to the General Assembly but lost both appeals. In 1899 he joined the Congregationalist Church.

Conclusions:

Both Old School and New School men favored higher criticism and theological liberalism. Both Old School and New School men opposed higher criticism. The difference was that Old School men favored heresy trials and the prosecution of false teachers in the church. The New School men who opposed the new views were content with pronouncements and resolutions against the new views. Both Old School men such as Briggs and New School men such as Smith could become infected with the current errors. But only New School seminaries harbored such false teachers and gave them a platform from which to expound their heresies.

Both the Synod of New York and the Presbytery of New York were very large, powerful and influential. They were also very liberal in their views and discipline of heretics was impossible in these courts.

Union Theological Seminary, although no longer officially connected with the PCUSA, continued to have a significant influence on the church especially in the above mentioned courts.

However conservatives had followed the path of scriptural church discipline and had brought both Briggs and Smith to trial. They had been successful in this, and unlike the case of Barnes, both men were tried, convicted, and suspended from the ministry of the church.

Two of the three New School seminaries had been dealt significant blows. One had been removed from the church and another had been reorganized under more conservative influences.

Up until now, that is up until the end of the nineteenth century, the church had waged a seemingly reasonably successful fight in defense of its theological heritage. Revision of her standards had been defeated and the church had in its General Assembly overwhelmingly rejected the new heresies and repudiated its prophets.

Unfortunately for the cause of God's church and His truth this would not last. The twentieth century would see a dramatic change in this situation and a tragic reversal of the church's stand on these issues. Only the overt champions of heresy had been driven from the church but there was no real separation from the infected portions of the church as had occurred in 1837.

Chapter 10

The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversies

The McGiffert Case:

The PCUSA's successful prosecutions of the Briggs and Smith cases didn't either end the controversy or settle the issues that were dividing the church. Large portions of the church were still committed to theological change especially as advocated by Briggs et al. Dr. McGiffert was a former professor from Lane Seminary, where he had been a strong supporter of Dr. Smith, and had gone to Union Seminary after the disruption at Lane. There he published a book in 1897 in which he denied the doctrine of inspiration and questioned the genuineness of half the books in the New Testament.

In 1898 an overture from the Pittsburgh Presbytery requested the General Assembly (GA) to investigate the matter. The GA was reluctant to proceed with a heresy trial, which were becoming very unpopular in the church. They dealt with the matter by politely asking Dr. McGiffert to reconsider his views and if he could not conform to the standards of the church to peaceably withdraw. Dr. McGiffert's response to the counsel of the GA was to publish in 1899 an article in which he denied any church's right to define or enforce orthodoxy. He called all denominations "sects", and demanded that orthodoxy be defined in a brief statement of universal Christian beliefs.

In 1899 ten presbyteries submitted overtures requesting the GA to deal with Dr. McGiffert. The GA again declined to prosecute but passed a resolution declaring four specific doctrines questioned by Dr. McGiffert, including the inerrancy of the scriptures and justification by faith alone, to be fundamental doctrines of the church and urged all the church's sessions and presbyteries to defend these doctrines.

This action of the GA compelled the New York Presbytery to deal with the matter. They called Dr. McGiffert to appear before a committee of the presbytery and questioned him on his views. The Presbytery also declined to prosecute and simply passed a resolution condemning some of Dr. McGiffert's opinions and stating that heresy trials would damage and disrupt the church. Dr. Birch of the New York Presbytery then filed specific charges against Dr. McGiffert and when the Presbytery refused to act appealed to the GA of 1900. Dr. McGiffert then resigned from the Presbytery to escape the jurisdiction of the church. This ended the matter.

Revision Accomplished:

The GA of 1900 received overtures from close to 40 presbyteries requesting revision of the church's confession of faith (COF). Some in the church advocated a much shorter, simpler creed. The GA appointed a committee to examine the matter. The committee put a series of questions to all the church's presbyteries. The results reviewed at the GA of 1901 indicated that 63 presbyteries favored revising the COF and 63 favored adding a supplemental statement. The result was that a Declaratory statement was added stating "...the belief that God loved all mankind" and that the COF was not to be interpreted as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. The text was modified to delete statements that the "good deeds" of unregenerate men were sinful and instead said they fell short, the statement that it was sinful to refuse a legal oath was deleted as was the statement calling the Pope the Anti-Christ. They also added two

chapters to the COF entitled, "*Of the Holy Spirit*" and "*Of the Love of God and Missions*". These changes to the COF of faith were overwhelmingly approved by the presbyteries by votes well in excess of the required 2/3 majority. One result of this revision was that reunion with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church now possible. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church had long objected to the Calvinism of the church's COF terming it fatalism and unacceptable. With the revision they felt the church was distancing itself from its historic Calvinist soteriology and they could unite with her on that basis. Conservatives were chagrined that these revisions were interpreted as making union with a church considered to be Arminian acceptable.

The Presbyterian Ministry:

As rationalism, pragmatism (William James), and neo-orthodoxy (Barth) continued to erode the theological landscape of American Christianity the church's seminaries were absolutely critical. They would play key roles in both the defense of the faith and in its subversion. The issue of Union Theological Seminary, a fountainhead of apostasy, had never been settled. The church was short of ministerial candidates and the status of students from seminaries like Union had never been dealt with. In 1910 the GA received a complaint against New York Presbytery for ordaining three candidates who had refused to affirm their belief in Christ's virgin birth. The GA, true to its recent aversion to dealing with such issues judicially, responded by passing a resolution stating that the following doctrines were "essential and necessary" to the faith.

1. The inspiration and inerrancy of scripture.
2. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ.
3. The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.
4. The bodily resurrection of Christ.
5. The reality of Christ's miracles.

Although this seemed like a victory for orthodox Christianity and the conservatives in the church it was actually a crippling defeat. The church's faith had been reduced to a few fundamental doctrines that were essential and necessary. Historic Presbyterianism with strict subscription to a full and systematic expression of the Christian faith had become little more than Fundamentalism. The GA reenacted this statement again in both 1916 and 1923. However it was an exercise in futility in attempting to stem the doctrinal erosion of the PCUSA by mere resolutions.

The GA of 1913 appointed a committee to look into the church's relationship with its seminaries in general which included the ongoing knotty problem of its relationship or lack thereof with Union. This committee reported back in 1915 that the compact with Union gave the GA the right of veto over professorial appointments was legally unenforceable. This continued the status of Union Seminary in a kind of limbo with respect to the PCUSA. The issue lay dormant until it surfaced again in 1925 on the same issue, the licensure of candidates for the ministry who again refused to affirm their faith in the doctrines deemed essential and necessary, particularly the virgin birth of Christ. A minority in the New York Presbytery filed a protest and the majority a memorial request⁹ng the GA to establish the precise constitutional rights of presbyteries in the licensing and ordination of ministerial candidates and defending the right of the presbyteries to be the sole judge of these matters. The GA appointed a Special Commission. The Commission reported back to the GA in 1915, 1926, and 1927. The initial report of 1925 sustained the GA right to review the actions of a presbytery and compel compliance to the laws of the church. This seemed like a conservative victory bit it was not to

be. In 1926 the Commission reported on the constitutional authority of the GA. The GA can make resolutions etc. but they are subject to change at any time by a future GA. It can institute judicial process but its decisions although binding set no precedents and future cases can be decided differently. Finally it can amend the constitution but only with the approval of the presbyteries. The inference was that resolutions to be binding as the law of the church need to be part of the constitution and need the approval of 2/3 of the presbyteries. This was a blow to the resolutions deeming certain beliefs essential and necessary as being binding on the presbyteries. In the report of 1927 the Commission continued in this vein, stating that the GA had no authority to declare certain doctrines essential and necessary, that the GA can only act in specific judicial cases brought before it and cannot make general decisions binding on all the church. Finally it stated that the GA can only enforce the precise wording of the constitution and not any necessary inferences or logical deductions from it. Church discipline was now impossible. Liberals can define the constitution to mean whatever they want and as long as they maintain the "form of the words" they cannot be disciplined. Instead of strict subscription not even the fundamentals of the faith are enforceable.

The Auburn Affirmation:

In 1924 "An Affirmation", signed by 1274 ministers of the PCUSA, rejected the General Assemblies resolutions declaring five specific doctrines to be "*essential and necessary*" to the Christian faith. While "affirming" their faith in inspiration, the atonement, the virgin birth etc. they rejected the attempts to define this in a specific way. The Affirmation insisted on the right to define these doctrines in other ways and insisted that the GA had no constitutional right to impose its definition of these doctrines on the church. It did not reject orthodoxy. It did not seek to establish liberalism. What it sought to do was to broaden the church, to make it more inclusive, to create a safe haven for liberalism within the church. It was in essence a plea for toleration of heresy. The conservatives greatly miscalculated its significance and chose to ignore it. At the GA of 1924 they elected their candidate as moderator but decided not to pursue any action in response to the Affirmation. It essentially went unchallenged until the Special Commission of 1925 would up making its constitutional argument the official position of the church.

Church Union:

In 1918 35 presbyteries overtured the GA to propose to other "*ecclesiastical bodies a union of all Evangelical Churches in the United States*". Presbyterians had been involved in the prior founding of the Federal Council of Churches, a radical organization, dominated by liberals, that had evolved out of the old Methodist League for Social Action. A Committee was formed and meetings with delegates from 17 and 18 denominations were held in 1918 and 1920 and a Plan of Union was submitted for the church's approval. It failed overwhelmingly because there was no unity on how to achieve unity. Liberals wanted actual organic union instead of a federation of denominations. Moderates and some conservatives who supported union wanted any union restricted to evangelical churches only etc. so the plan went down to a crushing defeat when submitted to the presbyteries.

Presbyterian Missions:

The doctrinal fidelity of the church's foreign missionaries, especially in China, became an issue in 1921. It became apparent that modernism was making significant inroads even on the mission field. Again conservatives sought to protest and to raise the church's concern over such

matters without resorting to the unpopular means of judicial process which was considered by the majority of the church to be divisive and disruptive. However without judicial process these attacks on missionaries were considered slanderous by many and with the church's boards solidly defending their missionaries, and moderates in position of denominational leadership, nothing was accomplished.

The Fosdick Case:

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick was a liberal, modernist Baptist minister who was called to be the Associate Pastor at New York's First Presbyterian Church in 1918. In light of the church's discussions on church union Dr. Fosdick didn't transfer his membership to the PCUSA. IN 1922 he preached a ringing sermon entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win" in which he defended liberalism and demanded toleration in the church for theological liberals etc. The Philadelphia Presbytery overtured the GA that the First Presbyterian Church of New York had allowed preaching attacking doctrines deemed by the GA to be essential and necessary, and requesting the GA to see that the pulpit of that church conform to the church's system of doctrine as taught in the Confession of Faith. The overture succeeded because the elders voted strongly for it even though the church's ministers voted against it. A protest opposing the overture and declaring it unconstitutional was signed by 85 delegates.

Conclusion:

The doctrinally orthodox and conservative element of the church had clearly lost the battle. G. Gresham Machen had written a book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, taking the position that liberals were not Christians and that there were two competing religions within the PCUSA. Liberals of course disagreed and claimed that there were merely two different expressions of Christianity in the church. The moderates held the balance of power and they were committed to a peace and unity agenda that gave scant support to the conservative agenda of maintaining the purity of the church. The special commission of 1925, dominated by moderates, had ensured that the denominational machinery could not be used to enforce doctrinal discipline that would be divisive and disruptive to the church. In the final analysis the conservatives went down without much of a fight. They went out "*not with a bang but a whimper*" in the words of T. S. Eliot's famous poem. In light of the moderates repugnance of the judicial process they adopted a strategy of conducting a publicity campaign that would so expose and discredit the liberals, that they would be rejected by the laity, and compelled to leave the church. It was an unbiblical and unconstitutional strategy, which left them open to charges of disruption and slander and never won over the crucial support of the moderates. In the final analysis the New School aversion to subscription, strict doctrinal accountability, and tolerance of error ensured the church's decline and helplessness in the face of a culture and nation rapidly rejecting historic Christianity.

Chapter 11

The Schism of 1936

Westminster Seminary: In the PCUSA the seminaries were always directly or indirectly under the church's control. They were to represent the church and teach her theology. Whenever a seminary was out of harmony with the church it was a matter for serious concern. Such had been the situation with respect to Union Theological Seminary in New York for much of the late 19th century. Then the church had been dominated by conservatives, with a few liberals, and a substantial minority of moderates. Now the moderates dominated the church with minorities of liberals and conservatives. In this situation Princeton, clinging to its historic position, was out of harmony with the church as a whole. This made the issue of Princeton Seminary increasingly a concern for the church. The Seminary was in somewhat of a dilemma for it had always held the Old School position of strict presbyterian control of all church agencies and boards. This was now placing it under the control of an increasingly liberal church.

In 1902 the Seminary was reorganized by the GA to have a strong Presidency, appointed by the GA, to give the church more effective control of the institution. In 1913 it appointed Dr. Ross Stevenson, a moderate, with strong affinities for church union, as President. He was opposed by the majority of the faculty. In 1925 he requested that the Board of Directors of the Seminary appoint a committee to investigate problems at the Seminary. The GA of 1926 was requested by group of Trustees and Directors of Princeton to appoint a committee to investigate problems at the Seminary, which it did. Earlier in that year Dr. Machen had been appointed to the chair of apologetics and ethics at the Seminary. The GA postponed approving his election until the committee had done its work. The issue at stake was whether the Seminary should continue its course of following Machen's position outlined in his book, "Christianity and Liberalism" or whether the Seminary should follow Stevenson's position and tolerate and represent all the divergent viewpoints in the church.

The committee reported back to the GA of 1927 recommending that both the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees of Princeton be abolished and replaced with a single expanded Board of Trustees appointed and approved by the GA. The GA of 1928 postponed action on this report but the GA of 1929 implemented it and carried out the reorganization. As a result the majority of the faculty resigned and formed Westminster Seminary that same year. The new seminary was quite successful, with adequate support, a good-sized student body, and placed many of its graduates into the ministry of the church.

The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions:

In 1933 the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions was organized. This was in response to the ongoing concerns about the orthodoxy of some of the church's missionaries. Two incidents in particular precipitated this action. In 1930 lay representatives of 7 denominations commissioned The Institute of Social and Religious Research to make a report on the nation's missionary programs. This report entitled Re-Thinking Missions, questioned historic missionary efforts and the superiority of Christianity over other religions and advocated cooperation with rather than conversion of non-Christian religions. The other issue was the

ongoing writings of Pearl S. Buck, Presbyterian missionary to China. Although the PCUSA's denominational missionary board strongly denounced Re-Thinking Missions Machen used it to continue his attacks on the church's foreign mission board. When the GA of 1933 reaffirmed its confidence in the denominational board the Independent Board was formed. The wisdom of this course of action can be questioned in light of the following facts.

1. It split the already dwindling ranks of conservatives in the PCUSA between those who supported and opposed this action.
2. The denominational board's strong repudiation of Re-Thinking Missions made this action controversial and seemingly extreme.
3. The church had had a continuing history of using seminaries that were independently founded and indirectly controlled by the church but not of independent agencies such as mission boards whose limited use had contributed to the Old School splitting the church in 1837.
4. Independent agencies went against historic Presbyterianism and the Old School's position of strict denominational control, church discipline, and judicial review.

The GA of 1934 ordered the Independent Board to disband and those ministers and elders of the PCUSA officially connected to it to resign immediately, and ordered the presbyteries to try all those who remained connected with it. The immediate result was the trial of its President, Dr. Machen, which resulted in his conviction and suspension from the ministry. The GA of 1935 restated its support of the denominational board and this resulted in further trials of those still affiliated with the Independent Board. The Philadelphia Presbytery, being Old School and believing in church discipline and judicial process convicted five members. The New York Presbytery, being liberal and moderate and rejecting the use of judicial processes refused to prosecute a member still on the Independent Board.

The Presbyterian Church of America:

The ongoing controversy in the church with respect to the Independent Board led to a split in Westminster Seminary between the proponents (all of the faculty save one) and opponents of the Board (all of the trustees save one). The faculty threatened to resign en masse and to keep the school from liquidation the trustees resigned and allowed the proponents of the Board to take over the Seminary. The GA of 1936 received appeals from four cases involving members of the Independent Board. In all four cases the GA sustained the convictions by the lower courts. Nine days later Dr. Machen and some of those allied with him formed the Presbyterian Church of America.

The Bible Presbyterian Church:

Within one year the Presbyterian Church of America split again. There had from the beginning been two factions. There was the historic Old School Presbyterian faction and a group that was somewhat more fundamental than Reformed. This latter group was to at least some degree tainted with Arminianism and dispensationalism. The group more closely representing historic Presbyterianism was led by Dr. Machen and became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1939. The other group was led by Dr. Carl McIntire. Machen was such a dominating leader that he wielded almost prelatic authority in the new church. This greatly concerned the more fundamentalist faction. And Carl McIntire himself was quite authoritarian and unwilling to compromise and cooperate. This clash of visions and of personalities led to an unfortunate

separation over issues that could have been worked out if they had not been exaggerated and inflamed.

Conclusions: The final resolution of the lengthy struggles for the heart and soul of the PCUSA was a disappointing failure for historic Presbyterians. Ultimately they made their moves way too late. They had adopted an unscriptural strategy of seeking to prevail by stirring up lay opinions rather than by judicial review and discipline. When they finally acted they did so in a way inconsistent with their own principles and gave the moderates in the PCUSA a sound constitutional means of removing them from the church. This led to three splits within the conservative camp itself.

1. The split between those who supported and those who opposed the founding of the Independent Board.
2. This led to a subsequent split of Westminster Seminary.
3. This contributed to the split in the Presbyterian Church of America. (The Orthodox Presbyterians opting for strict denominational control through church boards and the Bible Presbyterians for Independent Agencies.)

In retrospect it would have been far better if the conservative Presbyterians in the PCUSA had acted more forcefully much earlier to form a new and ongoing Presbyterian Church. This is what Abraham Kuyper did in the Gereformeerde Kerk in 1886 and launched a rival church that essentially equaled the church it separated from and was established in every town and village of the nation. By the time they separated from the PCUSA the conservatives had dwindled to an insignificant minority. A little leaven had already leavened almost the whole lump.

Chapter 12

The Separatist Movement

Introduction:

The conservatives in the PCUSA had stayed in until they were forced out of the church. This strategy had proven to be a disaster. They had dwindled to an insignificant minority and even that minority was divided. The longer the Lord's people stay in an apostate denomination the more baggage they take with them. The longer they stay in the more they are influenced by their ecclesiastical connections and compromise their original convictions. The more apostate a denomination becomes the more likely the residual Christians will ally themselves with other believers and compromise their historic beliefs. This is what happened in the PCUSA. The Presbyterian Church of America soon split again between those who held more to Old School Presbyterianism and those who had allied themselves with fundamentalism in the battle against the liberals. The lesson was clear. The longer you stay in the more manifold the problems.

Separation from Apostasy:

As a result of these historic occurrences a separatist position was developed. This was based on a number of scriptures that taught that there was a duty of the Lord's people to separate from apostasy and not remain in fellowship with unbelievers and deniers of the faith. Some of the scriptures used to justify this position were as follows...

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.
2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. Romans 16:17

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8-9

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Ephesians 5:11

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject. Titus 3:10

It was felt that this was the path of obedience and the only one that the Lord would bless. The sacrifices to obey these commands were enormous. People left their former congregations and lost friends, neighbors, and relatives, and were scorned and ridiculed. Congregations left their denomination and generally lost their property, church buildings, endowments etc. They left it all behind and started from scratch to build new churches and denominations. And the Lord in his faithfulness blessed. In Scotland (The Free Church of Scotland and the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland), in the Netherlands (The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk and the Gereformeerde Kerk), and in the United States (The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Bible Presbyterian Church and many others from non-Presbyterian denominations such as the Free Methodists etc.), new denominations, faithful to the word of God and to the historic Christian faith, were being formed at great effort and expense. The battle lines for the faith had been drawn, the issues were clear, and the Lord was prospering his faithful remnant. Satan, that master of confusion and deception, could not allow this to go on for long.

The New Evangelicalism:

The attempts to deal with heresy in the church by judicial action through the courts of the church had been a failure. The reason was the moderates. These were the ministers and ruling elders in the church who, although they personally remained reasonably sound in the faith, refused to support church discipline. The moderates believed in tolerating a wide diversity of theological opinion and they ran interference for the liberals and the heretics. As they came to dominate the PCUSA they frustrated the attempts to purge the church and allowed liberalism the time to gradually corrupt the entire church.

A similar strategy was employed to frustrate the separatist movement. A new class of moderates emerged called the “New Evangelicals”. The Old Evangelicals had stood for the defense of the faith. They had contended for the truth and separated from error and rebuked it. The New Evangelicals had another and less scriptural strategy. They believed not in separation but in infiltration. Their strategy was you remain in fellowship with liberals and try to influence them in the right direction. Their shibboleth was, you can’t change them if you break off fellowship with them. They had a conscious policy of only “proclaiming the truth” but not saying anything in condemnation of error or of those who were promoting error and heresy. In other words error and apostasy went unchallenged and false prophets had a free pass. They justified their disobedience to the scriptural commands to separate from unbelief by saying that they were staying here so they could preach the gospel to them. However in practice, when you stay in fellowship with unbelievers and accept them as Christians, you have no basis from which to call them to repentance and you have no influence over them at all.

The father of the New Evangelicalism is Harold Ockenga, the first President of Fuller theological Seminary, Pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, and the founder of the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals). Its chief spokesman is Rev. Billy Graham, and its main organ is Christianity Today. Their influence has been to stem the tide of separation and to redirect professing Christians troubled by the apostasy and unbelief in their churches to

continue to fellowship with and support their liberal churches. All these unscriptural practices, and this embracing of unbelief and this accepting of those who deny the deity of Christ and deny the authority of the scriptures, is justified by a program of evangelism. It is as if preaching the gospel (if they actually did it) justifies disobedience in all other areas of the Christian's walk. The results of this movement is that there has never been an effective large-scale separation of Christians from unbelief. Those Christians who remain in such churches grow weaker and lose their convictions as they are fed by false pastors and gradually corrupted away from their original beliefs. The next generation has no conception of what true Christianity is. And liberalism marches on unimpeded. Such is the bitter fruit of this movement.

The Billy Graham Crusades are a good case in point. The bait is evangelism and the program is ecumenism. It is a "sine quo non" for the Billy Graham Crusade organization that every crusade must include liberal and even Roman Catholic sponsors. A weak Arminian "gospel" is preached without any clear convictions with respect to sin and repentance. The offense of the gospel is avoided. The "converts" are counseled by representatives of evangelical, liberal, and Roman Catholic churches. The "convert" is allowed to choose whether he will join a evangelical church, a liberal Christ denying church, or even a Roman Catholic Church. No warnings about error and soul destroying heresies are given or allowed. All is peace and union as the lambs are led to the slaughter. Christ denying liberal clergymen are on the podium and in places of honor and respect. The only ones excluded are those who refuse to countenance such compromise. It is as if Elijah and the prophets of Baal had joined together to bring revival to Israel!!!

Church History:

The separatist movement that was so strong and principled in the first half of this century has been severely crippled by the tactics of the New Evangelicals. It is rare to hear of further separations from unbelief and when it does occur it is generally on a small scale. It is more common for those who once separated from unbelief under Biblical conviction to be seduced by the New Evangelicals to return to their vomit and sell out their principles. Billy Graham's ministry has been the great catalyst for promoting church fellowship with unbelief. Like the conservatives in the old PCUSA, the separatist movement has continued to dwindle until it has become an insignificant minority among professed Christendom. Under the New Evangelicalism, Christianity has lost its salt and its ability to influence the nation. Christianity seems impotent to stem the tide of corruption in our nation. The neutralizing tendencies of these compromises have assured that.

Secondary Separation:

The disastrous results in American Christianity resulting from the New Evangelicalism has led to a further development and refinement of the doctrine of separation. This has been to note that separation from unbelief is not enough. It is also necessary to separate from those who profess orthodoxy but remain in fellowship with unbelief. In no other way could there be a clear and consistent stand for the truth and an effective demarcation between truth and error. The following, as well as many of the above noted scriptures, were used to justify this position...

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 2 Thessalonians 3:6

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

Church Councils:

As a result of these three positions there have sprung up three different national and international church councils. For openly liberal denominations there is the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. These contain most of the mainline denominations, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and the official state churches of most nations including the communist bloc. Then there is the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Fellowship representing the New Evangelicals. Finally there is (or was) the American Council of Christian Churches and the International Council of Christian churches representing the separatist, fundamentalist movements. These represented respectively the liberal, moderate, and conservative expressions of “Christianity”. They represented the cold, the lukewarm, and the hot church .

Carl McIntire:

One of the defining figures in the history of the separatist movement in the twentieth century has been Carl McIntire. He has the distinction of being both its greatest champion as well as its nemesis. As a young pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Collingswood, NJ, he led his congregation out of the PCUSA and was one of the founding pastors of the Presbyterian Church of America. He became the foremost spokesman for and champion of the separatist movement. He founded both the American Council of Christian Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches. He went everywhere, world wide, to confront liberals with their unbelief and apostasy, and to call the Lord’s people to come out of association and fellowship with them. No one in this century has worked as hard as he has to expose the unfruitful works of darkness especially in the ecclesiastical world. Without McIntire there probably never have been much of an organized separatist movement.

McIntire’s ministry unfortunately has also had a down side. This can be summed up as his “rule or ruin:” philosophy. Having spent much of his career battling liberals and contending for the faith he has come to judge all opposition to himself as being incipient liberalism and to identify his own person with the movement he represents. He tended to rule the entire separatist movement, including the ACC, the ICC, International Christian Relief, The Bible Presbyterian Church and its independent agencies, such as Faith Theological Seminary, Shelton College, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Missions (both Home and Foreign Boards), etc. as a personal fiefdom.

McIntire was basically New School, suspicious of denominational control, and an ardent believer in independent church agencies. He set these up and controlled them through interlocking boards composed of his closest and most trusted associates, with himself as President of all these organizations. Opposition to this type of control was ruthlessly suppressed by all means, fair or sometimes even foul. Not just those who wanted to slightly

liberalize the position, but also true Presbyterians, chafed under this type of rule and periodically this would lead to dissensions and splits within the movement. If McIntire was in the majority the dissenters would be excluded from the movement. If he was in the minority he would lead his followers out and maintain an organization where he remained in total control. This periodic fragmenting of the movement was very destructive and eventually it was the demise of the movement. Today McIntire is a lonely old man whose latest splits have reduced him to being a pastor of a small rump group of his congregation meeting in his own home.

The PCA:

The Presbyterian Church in America is probably the largest exception to the fact that there has been no significant separations from apostate denominations in the latter half of this century. They split off from the PCUS (Southern Presbyterians) in 1973 as the National Presbyterian Church. One issue was the talks of an incipient merger between the PCUS and the PCUSA. However, although they were more numerous than in other denominations, being in a church that was considerably more conservative than the Northern church, they also stayed in too long. The people that came out were a mixed multitude. They ranged from Old School conservative Presbyterians in the tradition of Thornwell and Dabney, on the right, to charismatics on the left. The issue had long superseded issues of maintaining Presbyterian distinctives. The major issues were the inerrancy of the scriptures, funding (especially equalization) of radical causes promoting revolution, the Black Manifesto, immorality, drugs etc., radical ecumenism and union presbyteries and synods (organized similar to the 1801 Plan of Union with the Congregationalists), unconstitutional actions by the General Assembly, a total contempt for the traditional polity and theology of the church, and a rejection of its tradition of “the spirituality of the church” in favor of all manner of political and economic causes, usually advocating a Marxist position. (When the PCUS finally did join with the PCUSA in 1983 the issues were that the PCUSA was demanding that the PCUS accept feminism and gay rights as a condition of the merger and involve these groups, particularly the former, in the eldership of the church on a quota basis.) The church has a distinct fundamentalist flavor and strict Presbyterians are a minority in the church.

The CRC:

The only other significant separation from apostasy in the latter half of this century has been the ongoing hemorrhaging of conservative congregations from the Christian Reformed Church. The CRC had long ago already departed from its founding distinctives such as exclusive psalmody and no unscriptural holydays. It had already liberalized significantly on social issues and revised its historic position on the inerrancy and inspiration of the scriptures in 1969. However its ongoing battle to implement feminism in the church led to the practical conflicts that compelled many congregations to leave. It was the issue of “women in office” that disturbed the church for decades and provided most of the impetus for separation. However there was no organized mass movement out of the CRC. Rather it was individual congregations sporadically making the painful decision to leave and making the sacrifices necessary to rebuild on a better foundation.

Many of these congregations chafed for many tears under the misrule of liberals who had seized the denominational machinery of control. This had made them leery of all denominational control. Many of these separated churches therefore remained independent. They threw out the baby with the bath water and rejected Presbyterian church government and

control. Many of them set up loose federations (such as the OCRC and the URC) based more on congregational polity than on the Presbyterian order of the old CRC.

Conclusion:

The twentieth century has been the century of the separatist movement. However the end of the century finds that movement fragmented, discouraged, and in decline. The sacrifices, courage, and convictions of the leaders of this movement have been largely forgotten by the present generation. Church history is an important subject. Those who will not learn its lessons will likely be condemned to repeat them at more cost and sacrifice. It is to correct these deficiencies that this series of lessons on church history has been offered. May the Lord bless that the sacrifices of those who have gone before may not have been in vain for this generation.

The Old Testament prophets battled false prophets and apostate kings. Christ battled the Saducees and the Pharisees. He warned that he came not to bring peace but a sword, to divide men on the basis of his person and his word. The Apostles battled the Judaizers. The early church battled Gnostics and Arians. It remains to be seen if this generation will battle for the truth and contend for the faith or if they will succumb to the siren song of peace and unity and brotherhood at the expense of fidelity to Christ.

Chapter 13

American Presbyterianism

Introduction:

Due to all the separations and splits that has fragmented Presbyterians over the last few centuries keeping track of all the various Presbyterian bodies can be a confusing chore. The attached chart of the various denominations representing American Presbyterianism (taken from George Hutchinson's, *The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod*) is very helpful. I have updated it and added a brief statement about the various denominations listed on it to assist the reader in understanding the origin, distinctives, and nature of all these groups.

Reformed Presbytery:

These were the first Covenanters to come to America from Scotland and Northern Ireland. They were Reformed Presbyterians. These people had suffered greatly during the "killing times" under James II, in defense of Presbyterianism. They held to the continuing obligations of both the Scottish National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. They had refused to accept the "revolution settlement" in 1690 that established Presbyterianism in Scotland after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. They felt that this settlement established Presbyterianism not on a scriptural but on an Erastian basis and that the covenants had been ignored.

Associate Presbytery:

These were Scotch Presbyterians who had aligned themselves with the secession of 1733. The Seceders from the established church in 1733 were led by Ebenezer Erskine. They seceded for the following reasons. They opposed the continuing practice of lay patronage in the established church. They were concerned by theological error in the church particularly rationalism and neonomianism. And they were strongly aligned with the "Marrow men" in that controversy and opposed all weakening of Calvinist soteriology.

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church:

In 1782 the above two groups united in America to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. In doing so they gave up the distinct testimony of the Covenanters for the abiding obligation of the Scotch national covenants and the resulting opposition to any involvement with the American government.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America:

A small pastorless group of Reformed Presbyterians refused to go along with the merger of 1782. They remained unorganized until 1798 when they had sufficient ministers (2) to form another Reformed Presbytery. This became the RPCNA. They continued the strict Covenanter heritage and refused all association with the United States Government. Members could not take an oath of allegiance to the United States, or vote in elections, serve on juries, serve in any capacity in the government, or take part in the military forces of the United States. This was based not only on the absence of a National covenant, covenanting to make Jesus Christ the

true head of the civil commonwealth, but also on the fact that the United States Constitution was seen as an infidel document because it failed to recognize God as the Declaration of Independence had.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, General Synod:

In 1833 the RPCNA split. The issue was the church's attitude towards the American government. Many of the Scotch and Scotch-Irish immigrants could not become citizens because they could not take the oath of citizenship. This was therefore somewhat relaxed in 1812 due to the exigencies of the War of 1812 with Britain. Similarly the prohibition against jury service was relaxed. A more favorable view of the American government was becoming popular. The General Synod with about two thirds of the church took the more relaxed position. The strict Covenanters continued as the RPCNA.

Associate Presbyterian Synod of North America:

This was a rump group of the Associate Presbytery that also refused to go along with the merger of 1782. They continued the historic Seceder tradition.

United Presbyterian Church:

This church was formed by the union of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Associate Presbyterian Synod of North America. Having lost the distinctive Covenanter witness it became progressively assimilated into American Presbyterianism. It merged with the PCUSA in 1958.

The Associate Presbyterian Synod:

This was the part of the Associate Synod of North America that refused to join in the merger that formed the UPC. In 1969 they joined with the RPCNA and were completely assimilated into that body.

Presbyterian Church of America:

We have noted in a previous lesson the formation of this church. It was formed by the remaining conservatives in the PCUSA, some of whom had already been put out of the church because of their association with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

As previously noted this church came out of the Presbyterian Church of America. This was the more Presbyterian side of the split led by Machen, Murray, and Kuiper etc. They more closely identified with Old School Presbyterianism.

Bible Presbyterian Church:

This was the other side in the split in the Presbyterian Church of America and was led by Carl McIntire. This was the faction that identified more with the New School tradition and with American Fundamentalism.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church:

This church came out of the split in the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1956. The reasons were manifold. There were objections to McIntire's person rule dominating the church. There was

also a desire for a more regular Presbyterian polity. And there was a desire to soften McIntire's strong separatist stand and to disassociate with his strong emphasis on political issues.

Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod:

This church was formed by the union of the RPCNA, General Synod and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The former having shed their Covenanter distinctives were now simply another conservative American Presbyterian church and therefore similar to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This denomination later joined the Presbyterian Church in America. Covenant College and Covenant Seminary and Francis Shaeffer's ministry were all part of this church.

American Presbyterian Church:

This church came out of the Bible Presbyterian Church. They were a group that was more Reformed and wanted to influence the church more in the direction of its professed standards (a modified version of the Westminster standards) and away from the Arminianism and dispensationalism of American Fundamentalism. For its testimony a number of its ministers were cast out of the church for founding a rival Seminary called Reformation Seminary. After their expulsion in 1976 they formed an Old School type Presbyterian church, holding to the regulative principle of worship, exclusive psalmody, no unscriptural holydays etc. They continued the Bible Presbyterian heritage of confessing premillennialism and temperance as the faith of the church

Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States:

These was a small group that left the PCA to form a more conservative and Presbyterian body. Some of their pastors such as Morecroft have strong Theonomist leanings. They have since split into several smaller bodies including the RPCUS, Hanover Presbytery led by Edwin Eliot.

Cumberland Presbyterian Church:

This was a church that was formed as a result of the "revivals" in Kentucky and Tennessee in the early part of the nineteenth century. They had a pronounced Arminian streak and a dislike for strict Presbyterian polity and for an educated ministry. In 1906, on the occasion of the revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith by the PCUSA, this group for the most part joined with that body except for the typical rump group that maintained the historic position.

Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church:

This church was formed in 1869 by the separation from the main body of its colored (Negro) membership to form a separate church. The abolition of Negro slavery and the resultant segregation policies gave the impetus for this reorganization of the church.

PCUSA:

In previous lessons we have already covered the history of the PCUSA and the Old Side-New Side, Old School-New School, North-South splits in that body.

Conclusions:

The confusing disarray of various Presbyterian denominations can be discouraging to a student of church history. It may be obvious to many that a greater degree of unity could have and should have been achieved and maintained. It should also be obvious that many of these

separations were necessary for the defense and preservation of the historic Christian faith. The undeniable fact is that without any schisms there would be only two Presbyterian bodies in existence, the Church of Scotland and the PCUSA. Both are thoroughly apostate. By God's grace separation has maintained a remnant.

Chapter 14

The Church of Scotland

Introduction:

American Presbyterianism has its roots in Scotch Presbyterianism. Presbyterianism never really flourished in England. The Church of England dominated the ecclesiastical landscape in that nation. The Puritan party in that church, with strong Presbyterian convictions, never had the opportunity to establish itself in England. They were suppressed by the Stuart Kings, James I and Charles I. During the interregnum because of their opposition to religious liberty and their determination to force an established Presbyterian Church on the nation they were suppressed by Cromwell and the Independents. After the restoration they were again suppressed by the Stuarts, and they dwindled into a small minority. Those who fled persecution to New England merged with the Pilgrim Separatists and became Congregationalists. It is thus the Scotch who fathered all the Presbyterian denominations across the globe. The roots of all Presbyterians lead back to the Church of Scotland.

The Church of Scotland:

The origin of all Presbyterian and Reformed churches can be traced back to Calvin's Geneva. It was there that John Knox, a former Catholic priest, and the founder of the Church of Scotland, was instructed in "the most perfect school of Christ since the Apostles" as he himself put it. Returning to Scotland in 1555, and continuing in the tradition of those who had gone before such as Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart (both martyred for their attempts at reformation), he launched the reformation of that land delivering it from Popery and superstition and establishing scriptural Christianity. In 1560 after a brief civil war the Church of Scotland was officially established and the Scotch parliament adopted a Reformed confession of faith written by Knox and forbade the mass. The reformation was still incomplete at his death and was continued by his successor, Andrew Melville, who built a real Presbyterian Church on the foundations laid by Knox. Melville established the educational institutions required for a trained ministry and to lift the population out of ignorance and superstition. He authored the Second Book of Discipline (1577) that established Presbyterian Church order in Scotland eliminating the temporary expedients that Knox had been compelled to resort to because of the lack of qualified ministers. Later at the time of the "Second Reformation" as it was called the Church of Scotland came to maturity adopting the Westminster standards that her commissioners to that assembly had assisted in developing.

Unfortunately, like most churches, her history is somewhat defined by the history of those who separated from her ranks over the years for various causes. There have been about three significant schisms from her communion over the last few centuries. We will examine all three.

The Covenanters:

The Scotch Presbyterians developed a unique habit of making National Covenants with God. As a New Testament Israel they wanted to be in covenant with God as a nation. The first covenant was made with Knox and the Lords of the Congregation to support the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. Over the years almost thirty covenants were transacted by Scotch Presbyterians. The First National Covenant was when the nation subscribed to the Second

Scots Confession of 1580. The two most significant ones for church history were the Second National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. The National Covenant of 1638 recommitted the nation to the Reformation and the Presbyterianism that it established and to oppose all innovations in religion since the First National Covenant of 1580. It was signed by over 300,000 Scots and passed by the General Assembly the same year. The Solemn League and Covenant was a Covenant that committed the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland (Then ruled by England) to establish Presbyterianism as the true religion. It was entered into to induce the Scots to assist England in their war against Charles I. The Westminster Assembly, already working to revise the 39 Articles of the Church of England was redirected to develop the doctrinal standards for the implementation of this covenant in the three nations.

The latter covenant was never implemented as the Long Parliament, dominated by Presbyterians, was dismissed by Oliver Cromwell, who was backed by the army controlled by the Independents. They wanted religious liberty and opposed an establishment of Presbyterianism and the suppression of all others as required by the Covenant. After the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1661 the Church of England was reestablished in England and Presbyterianism was persecuted in Scotland. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when the Stuarts were driven from the throne for the second time due to their civil and religious tyranny, Presbyterianism was only restored in Scotland and on a somewhat Erastian basis.

The Covenanters considered this settlement of religious affairs after the Revolution to be dissatisfactory and as a breach of both covenants. They separated from those who accepted these compromises and called themselves Reformed Presbyterians. They had suffered terribly during the persecutions leading up to the Revolution and had led in the resistance against the Stuarts. They were not prepared to accept these compromises now that victory had seemingly been won. This was the first significant secession from the Church of Scotland and their heirs continue in their tradition to this day. Even their descendents in North America continue to hold to abiding obligations of both these covenants to Presbyterians of Scotch descent and their adherents in North America.

The Seceders:

In 1733 a number of ministers and churches seceded from the established Church of Scotland. The issues were manifold and we will review some of the leading causes that impelled the Seceders to this act.

One issue was the presence of rationalism and heresy in the church. One form of this was Neonomianism. This involved errors with respect to the relationship of faith and works in the life of the believer. Neonomianism is basically a reaction against Antinomianism, against those who deny that the believers are under the moral law and are called to bear good works. The Neonomians, such as Richard Baxter the famous English Presbyterian divine, taught that men were saved by works and that the exercise of faith was particularly that good work by which men were saved. However in thus seeking to guard against Antinomianism they had compromised the gospel of salvation by the free grace of God. The Biblical doctrine of faith and works had been ably defended against the Baxterians decades earlier in a book entitled "The Marrow of Modern Divinity". It taught that salvation is by faith but that good works, which are the fruit rather than the cause of our salvation, always accompanies saving faith. The

“Marrow men” as they were called were involved in the Secession while the General Assembly of the Church condemned the book.

Another issue was lay patronage, which allowed the local lord of the parish to appoint the minister in the parish church without respect to the wishes of the congregation. Issues such as lay patronage, royal prerogatives, and other governmental interference in the life of the church has always been the Achilles heel of the establishment principle. The whole idea is hopelessly impractical and naïve. The church expects that the state will sustain her, maintain her, and defend her to the exclusion of all others. The state is to endow her institutions, subsidize the salary of her ministers, suppress all dissidents from her, and yet grant her complete independence. The church decides her doctrines, educates her own ministers, calls her pastors, and governs herself through her church courts with the general assembly being the final arbiter of the church. The state has no control but only supplies the financial and political support to maintain the church as the exclusive ecclesiastical body of the realm. This has never worked out in practice. Every established church has sooner or later had to deal with the problems of Erastianism, the control of the church by the state. The old adage that “He who pays the piper calls the tune” inevitably applies. The position that he who is empowered to suppress heresy has no say in defining what heresy is has never worked out in practice. In 1761 another secession from the established church took place over the same issue of lay patronage. It was led by Thomas Gillespie and called the Relief body.

The Seceders led by the brothers Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine formed the Associate Presbytery. We have noted the history of the followers in America in a previous lesson.

The Free Church of Scotland:

The creation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843 was similar to the conflicts between Christianity and liberalism that took place later on in the Netherlands and in the United States resulting in the creation of the GKN and the Presbyterian Church of America. The broader issue that impelled this separation was the obvious rationalism and modernism in the established church. The specific issue that precipitated the crisis was again the old issue of lay patronage. There had been a measure of revival in the Church of Scotland and there was strong evangelical faction strongly opposed to any subservience of the church to the state. In 1820 they pushed through the General Assembly an act refusing to recognize the authority of the Privy Council in demanding that the church say prayers for the King. In 1834 they passed the Veto Act which stated that no pastor shall be forced on any congregation contrary to its will. A test case soon arose and was carried all the way to the British House of Lords, which predictably ruled in favor of the right of lay patronage. Several other cases arose where the presbytery either refused to ordain the patron’s candidate or did so against the will of the congregation and in violation of the Veto Act. In 1842 the House of Lords passed an act requiring all presbyteries to ordain the candidate appointed by the patron and setting civil fines for disobedience. The church appealed to the House of Commons and when they lost that appeal the separation occurred. A full third of the ministers of the Church of Scotland walked out and formed the Free Church in 1843. It was a heroic action and they lost their endowments, church properties, foreign missions; everything. They sacrificially rebuilt and maintained their vision of a scriptural Presbyterian Church.

In 1893 the Free Church itself was split again and the seceders formed the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The issue was doctrinal laxity and lack of effective church discipline. The Free Church and the Free Presbyterians disagree to this day over the split. The Free Presbyterians acknowledge that there were some problems in the church, but contend that the church was overwhelmingly sound, and that the split was caused by a few extremists. The Free Presbyterians take the “few problems” much more seriously and see their actions as a crusade to preserve true Presbyterianism.

In 1847 the Secession Church (Associate Presbytery) and the Relief body joined and formed the United Presbyterian Church. In 1900 the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church joined to form the United Free Church of Scotland. A minority, called the Wee Frees, refused to go along. They continue until the present under the Free Church name and their North American branch is called the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Canada. In 1874 Parliament abolished lay patronage removing the original cause of many of these separations. The United Free Church and the Church of Scotland grew closer together over the years and they finally reunited in 1929.

Chapter 15

The Christian Reformed Church

Introduction:

The Dutch Reformed constitute the main branch of continental Presbyterianism also known as the Reformed. Historically they have had a significant influence on Presbyterians in this country. There were Dutch Reformed men, such as VanTil and Kuiper, in alliance with Machen on the faculty of Westminster. The main Dutch reformed denomination in America, and the one of most concern for our study, is the Christian Reformed Church.

The Hervormde Kerk:

The Hervormde Kerk (The Reformed Church) is the old mainline Dutch state church. It was formed in the middle of the sixteenth century during the Great Protestant Reformation. It was thoroughly Reformed and Calvinistic, and Presbyterian in its church polity. It was similar to the Church of Scotland except it used continental creeds instead of the Westminster standards. It subscribed to the three Forms of Unity; the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. These are all Reformed creeds but constitute a less detailed, less theologically precise, less mature expression of that faith than the later Westminster standards.

This church was born amidst great suffering and persecution. Like the Presbyterians of Scotland they had to resort to armed meetings in the fields to be able to worship and express their faith. The Netherlands were ruled by Spain at the time. The Spanish king, Philip II, was a bigoted Catholic determined to exterminate the Netherlanders rather than tolerate heresy. He sent the Duke of Alva into the country with an army to suppress the Protestants and institute the Inquisition. Tens of thousands of Dutch Christians were brutally martyred for their faith. This reign of blood and terror finally provoked the revolt of the United Netherlands and the Eighty Years War for Dutch independence. The revolt was led by William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, and a retainer of the Emperor Charles V, the father of Philip II. He was assassinated by an agent of Philip II and the revolt continued under his son Prince Maurits. It took forty years of war (1568-1608) to achieve their defacto independence, followed by a ten year truce and then thirty more years of fighting in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) that involved most of Europe. During this time the Hervormde Church grew and was established solidly as the Dutch state church.

The Belgic Confession:

This confession was authored by Guido deBres, a Dutch Reformed minister in 1561. It is called the Belgic confession because he wrote it in Belgium (then part of the United Netherlands) while hiding in an attic from the Spanish Inquisition. It was partly based on the Confession of Faith of the Reformed Churches of France authored by John Calvin and published in 1559. It is a beautiful and sound expression of the Reformed faith, but, as the product of one man under duress, it cannot be compared to the later Westminster Confession of Faith. The latter was the product of the best Reformed minds of several nations deliberating over a period of years a century later, when the Reformed faith was more developed. The Belgic Confession was adopted by the Hervormde Kerk as its confession of faith at the great Synod of Dortrecht.

The Heidelberg Catechism:

This catechism was authored by two men, Ursinius and Olevianus in 1563. It was authored in Heidelberg, the capitol of the Palatinate, one of the German States comprising the Holy Roman Empire. This state was unusual in that although it was Protestant it adhered to the Calvinistic branch of the Reformation rather than the Lutheran, as did most other German Protestant states. The Elector, Frederick III, commissioned it for use in his realm. It is not known for its theological precision, but is valued as a more subjective, devotional, and heartfelt expression of the Reformed faith.

The Canons of Dort:

The Hervormde Kerk held a great synod in the Dutch city of Dortrecht from 1618-1619. At this synod the church adopted all three Forms of Unity. The canons of the Synod of Dort were its official pronouncements with respect to the issue of Arminianism. A Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius, had in recent years been challenging the Calvinist orthodoxy, and propounding an alternative soteriology, that has come to be identified with him as Arminianism. The Synod strongly condemned his teachings and set forth the historic doctrine in these canons.

Although theologically the Synod was a great success, politically it was more controversial. The confederation of the United Netherlands was based upon religious liberty, at least at the federal level. Each province could therefore decide religious matters for itself. For the federal government to call a synod to adopt and develop doctrinal standards to be imposed on the nation was seen as unconstitutional. Jan van Ouden-Barneveldt, a leading statesman in the province of Holland opposed the synod on political grounds. He was later judicially murdered by Maurits on trumped up charges of treason.

De Afscheiding (The Separation):

In 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars and the liberation of the Netherlands from French control there were significant changes. The Hervormde Kerk had already become more rationalistic and legalistic based upon the prevailing Enlightenment philosophy. Now the restored monarchy reorganized the Hervormde Kerk giving it a decidedly Erastian character. The growing reaction to these developments led to a secession of a few ministers and their flocks in 1834. This secession was called the “afscheiding”. The crisis that precipitated the schism was over the use of uninspired hymns. The Hervormde Kerk was now requiring all its ministers to use these hymns in their services. The ministers of the afscheiding to a man refused to obey this requirement. Many were disciplined and suspended from the ministry. It was no longer possible for them to stay in the Hervormde Kerk. For their stand they were persecuted by church, state, and society. They became known as the “Kerk under het kruis” (The church under the cross) because of their suffering. They were denied the right to meet, their ministers were arrested, jailed, and fined, and their members reviled and ostracized by society in general. They paid a high price for their fidelity to the Reformed faith and the word of God.

The Gereformeerde Kerk:

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the Hervormde Kerk was overwhelmingly liberal, rationalistic, and modernistic. A young minister, named Abraham Kuyper, educated in a liberal

seminary, took his first pastorate. There, by the witness of a godly lady in his flock, he was converted to true faith in Christ. Kuyper became a zealous apostle for reform in the church and eventually led a massive exodus from the state church in 1886. The issue was much the same as it had been with Machen in the PCUSA a few decades later, Christianity versus liberalism. Kuyper was a gifted theologian, writer, editor, and organizer. His accomplishments were prodigious. He founded a Reformed newspaper and magazine of which he was the editor. He founded a church (the GKN), a new Christian University (the Free University of Amsterdam), and a political party (the Anti-Revolutionary Party) opposed to Enlightenment philosophy, the proponents of the French Revolution, and their Marxist heirs. He became Prime Minister of the Netherlands shortly after the turn of the century. Unlike the churches of the *afscheiding*, which were led by those committed to the original Reformation doctrines, the GKN came out of a battle with modernism and never fully restored the doctrines of the Great Protestant Reformation.

The Christian Reformed Church:

The men of the *afscheiding* were greatly persecuted. Although they appealed to the authorities for their rights under the constitution, which guaranteed religious liberty, their requests were denied. Their ministers were frequently arrested and imprisoned and fined. Their members were ostracized and lost their jobs etc. Like the English Puritans two centuries earlier, it was finally decided that emigration to America to escape the persecution be considered. Under two of their ministers, VanRaalte and Scholte, they led their people to form Dutch settlements in Holland, Michigan and Pella, Iowa respectively. They struggled on what was then the frontier to build settlements in the wilderness, and grew and established their churches in America.

There already existed a Dutch Reformed church in America, the Reformed Church of America. This church existed mainly in New York State and was composed of the descendents of the original Dutch settlers in the New Netherlands and New Amsterdam (New York City). However this church was more like the *Hervormde Kerk* and didn't maintain all the distinctives that the men of the *afscheiding* had suffered to maintain. Nonetheless the lure of church union, additional fellowship, a source of ministerial candidates, and the support of the prosperous churches in the East for the struggling settlers induced them to join with the RCA in 1850. The fact that the RCA was more conservative than the mother church in the Netherlands and not so infected with liberalism and rationalism made the union more palatable.

Although the ministers overwhelmingly supported the union a number of the laity objected. They were concerned that the RCA was not truly Reformed. The issues ranged from the regulative principle of worship (They objected to the use of uninspired hymns and choirs versus congregational singing), to the tolerance of membership in the Masonic Lodge, private baptisms, and neglect of catechetical instruction and regular preaching through the Heidelberg Catechism, a Dutch Reformed tradition. They were also disturbed by the practical neglect of the doctrines of election and predestination. By 1857 the dissatisfaction over these concerns reached the point where it precipitated another "*afscheiding*". This separation formed the "*Ware Hollandsch Gereformeerde Kerk*" (The True Dutch Reformed Church). In 1890 the church changed its name to the Christian Reformed Church. Although there was no ecclesiastical connection with the original secession church in the Netherlands, the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, the name was an exact translation. The CRC was in that sense clearly displaying its roots.

Over the years however this identification with the afscheiding faded away. This especially changed with the secession of 1886 and the founding of the Gereformeerde Kerk. The CRC identified more and more with that church. In the first half of the twentieth century as successive waves of Dutch immigrants came to North America they mostly joined the CRC. Most of these were from the Gereformeerde Kerk. The CRC was basically becoming the North American sister church of the GKN. As the twentieth century went on the GKN progressively succumbed to liberalism and modernism. The Free University of Amsterdam became infected with unscriptural philosophies. These became conduits for infecting the CRC with the same errors. In the second half of the this century, the CRC, although lagging significantly behind the radical unbelief and heresy in the GKN, has slowly drifted more and more in the same direction. This has sparked some limited separations from the CRC, such as the OCRC (The Orthodox Christian Reformed Church) and the URC (A federation of former CRC churches called the United Reformed Churches). The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands is now represented in North America by the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.