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AND DR. FOSDICK.

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*and*

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# The First Presbyterian Church of New York and Dr. Fosdick

The ministry of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in the First Presbyterian Church, New York, has aroused widespread interest throughout the country. In view of that interest, the First Church wishes to present in orderly fashion the salient facts of Dr. Fosdick's ministry and his present relation to the Church. These facts are presented largely in the form of correspondence between the Presbytery of New York, the First Church, and Dr. Fosdick with only such comment as is desirable to introduce the documents themselves.

It is hoped that by this presentation there will be removed any erroneous impressions which may have been formed in the minds of those not personally familiar with the actual conditions. If as the result of more complete knowledge a better understanding is engendered, the purpose of this pamphlet will have been more than accomplished.

## THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW YORK

In May 1918 three downtown churches combined to form what is now the First Presbyterian Church

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in the City of New York. In accordance with the terms of the merger agreement the pastors of each of the three churches tendered their resignations. Their pastoral relation was dissolved by Presbytery in November 1918. In January 1919 Dr. George Alexander was installed as pastor, and at the same time with approval of Presbytery Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist, was invited by the Church to become associate minister and to act as stated preacher. In February 1920 Thomas Guthrie Speers was called as associate pastor.

#### DR. FOSDICK'S MINISTRY

The results of Dr. Fosdick's ministry may be briefly summarized as follows:

- (a) Three congregations having different traditions, with individual members holding widely divergent theological views, have been welded together into a compact, working unit, with a present active membership of 1,883.
- (b) Every sitting in the Church is taken, with a long waiting list, and at the morning service the Church is crowded to far beyond its comfortable capacity.
- (c) In addition to the work at the Church itself, the four mission outposts forming a line across the lower end of the city have not only been maintained, but greatly strengthened and vitalized.



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- (d) The combined contributions to benevolent objects of the three constituent churches in the year before the merger were \$47,895. The benevolent contributions of the First Church last year amounted to \$163,898.

### THE INVESTIGATION BY THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW YORK

Following an overture to the General Assembly of 1923 by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to the effect that the preaching in the First Church did not conform to Presbyterian standards, the Presbytery of New York, following the direction of the General Assembly, made a searching investigation through a committee appointed for that purpose. The report of that committee, adopted by the Presbytery, is as follows:

JANUARY 14, 1924

The Committee of the Presbytery of New York, to which matters relating to the First Church of this city were committed, begs leave to report.

This Committee was in existence for another purpose prior to the meeting of the General Assembly in Indianapolis last May. Following the action of the Assembly at that meeting, the Presbytery re-appointed the Committee, with instructions to take up the subject referred to in the action of the Assembly. The Presbytery stated in its action at the June meeting that it would consider the subject with great earnestness and that it would pay due deference to the wishes of the Assembly. In view

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of the importance of the subject, the Presbytery also stated that it would require time. This Committee now reports that it has been diligent throughout the intervening months. We have been solicitous that we might be guided of God in the whole matter. We have been busy with a large correspondence, with the reading of documents, and with numerous meetings, interviews and conferences. Believing that the Church is entitled to a full statement of the situation, so far as it can be set forth on paper, the Committee resolved that it would not offer to a disturbed church a hastily formed report. The Presbytery may be assured that there has been no unnecessary delay.

The action of the General Assembly conveying directions to the Presbytery of New York on the subject of the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church has been widely discussed. It is generally believed that the Assembly's action creates issues that are very important in their nature, concerning which Christian men of like integrity and faithfulness may rightly claim the privilege to differ. The scope of the action, and the actual ultimate intention of the Assembly in taking the action, have been open to just inquiry. Moreover, the form in which the action was issued, in the judgment of many men in many Presbyteries, raises questions of a constitutional order, which cannot easily be ignored.

The Committee is not capable of showing any disrespect to the supreme court of our church, nor does it intend any, when it states that questions of this character lie in the minds of many men of moderate views and uncontroversial temper, who have not the remotest thought of indifference or disobedience to constituted authority. There is unquestionably much anxiety in

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the Church over the purity and integrity of doctrine. On the other hand there is much concern that the liberties to which we have long been accustomed shall not be abridged. This Committee feels the delicacy and difficulty of reporting upon a subject that is close to many hearts. We beg our brethren to understand that we have striven in every way to give a frank and unprejudiced judgment.

This Committee, however, has not felt called upon to take up such questions of constitutional order and authority as have just been alluded to. Questions of this nature do not belong to us, important as they may be. The Committee believes that it would be wise in all the circumstances to seek the appointment of a commission to investigate the powers of the General Assembly in relation to doctrine, in the spirit of the requirement made in the Form of Government, Chapter XXIV, Section III. To a proposal of this kind we think that the Presbytery of New York would gladly lend its support.

The General Assembly in its action in May at Indianapolis directed "the Presbytery of New York to take such action (either through its present Committee or by the appointment of a Special Commission) as will require the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York to conform to the system of doctrines taught in the Confession of Faith, and that said Presbytery report its action in a full transcript of its records to the 136th General Assembly of 1924." This action of the Assembly is explicit. The Committee has never had any doubt on this subject. To this clear mandate of the General Assembly the Committee, representing the Presbytery of New York, has addressed itself from first to last.

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The Committee now reports to Presbytery upon the course it has pursued, and the steps it has taken, in the effort to carry out the directions of the General Assembly.

The Committee states that it has taken up the action of the General Assembly with the parties concerned and has explained the action and enforced the authority of the General Assembly to the best of its ability. It has conferred directly with the Session of the First Church and has obtained from the Session a statement which will be submitted to the Presbytery. It has also conferred directly with the Stated Preacher in the First Church, and has obtained from him a statement which will be submitted to Presbytery. The Committee has studied the situation in the First Church on its administrative side with the view of determining the effect of the plan adopted by this congregation for a plural ministry, including a minister of another denomination than our own. The Committee has also studied the preaching and teaching in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church, with the view of determining the ground of apprehension concerning its alleged lack of conformity to the Confession of Faith. The Committee has reached certain conclusions on these subjects and is prepared to offer counsel and recommendations to Presbytery pertaining to the whole matter.

Our conference and correspondence with the pastors and elders of the First Church have afforded us ample opportunity to know their mind on the subject under discussion. They have provided us with full information from their records and have co-operated with us to the fullest extent in the pursuit of our inquiry. While the pastors and elders of the First Church regret that the General Assembly did not see its way clear to make

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fraternal inquiry by methods of its own before taking open action on the subject, the Committee is happy to report that it found no bitterness among our brethren in the First Church. We are not mistaken in our judgment that the Session of the First Church harbors no disloyalty toward the General Assembly, and no indifference toward our doctrinal standards.

Following is the statement of the pastors and elders of the First Church, made to this Committee:

December 11, 1923.

To the Committee of the  
Presbytery of New York,  
Rev. Edgar Whitaker Work, D.D., Chairman.

Dear Dr. Work,

The Session of the First Presbyterian Church has heartily welcomed the Presbytery's inquiry into the condition and doings of the congregation which they represent.

It is deeply grieved that a Church, conservative in its traditions and temper, should have become, largely through misunderstanding, subject to suspicion regarding its loyalty and soundness in the faith.

It has already explained orally to your Committee that the plan by which a distinguished minister of another denomination was invited to associate himself with the pastor of the First Church was not of its devising. It was one which the congregation was led to adopt through force of circumstances, but in which the Session heartily concurred. It did so not thought-

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lessly or with any intention of creating disturbance in the household of faith to which it belongs.

Three historic churches had just become one in law, but not yet in fact. It had failed to secure as pastor the Presbyterian minister whom it sought, and was in danger of disintegration. The minds of the people then turned toward a preacher whose temporary service they had found helpful and inspiring. With hesitation and after earnest prayer for guidance it was decided to make the venture of a plural ministry, with the preaching function largely dissociated from the pastoral and administrative service. This method would not have been adopted had it not been an era of good feeling in the Presbyterian Church and of longing for Christian unity as evidenced in the General Assembly of that year when its members, by a unanimous and rising vote, declared their "profound conviction that the time had come for organic union of the evangelical churches of America."

The Session was fully aware of the fact that it would be very unusual to have as Stated Preacher a minister not subject to the jurisdiction of Presbytery. It therefore took pains to have the plan, which had been widely published, submitted in all its details to the Presbytery of New York before the relation was consummated.

When the Presbytery had given unanimous approval and its action when reviewed by Synod was unchallenged, the Session assumed that any irregularity in the proceedings had been cured. It is of the same opinion still.

The venture has been attended with signal tokens of Divine favor. Another Presbyterian minister was shortly called to be associate pastor. The three ministers, differing in temperament and in shades of theo-

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logical opinion, have labored together in absolute harmony. Three congregations different in customs and ecclesiastical traditions have been cemented together in a most gracious fellowship. The contributions of the Church to Presbyterian objects have increased until they are several times greater than those of the three former churches combined. The Gospel has been proclaimed with earnestness and with great power, and many educated youth alienated from the Church and from Christ have been transformed in spirit and in life.

The Session has been charged with disobedience to the General Assembly because it declined to transmit to the congregation the resignation presented by Dr. Fosdick in May last. It disclaims any such intention. It is true that the action of the General Assembly is so framed that it might be interpreted as a prejudgment of a matter with which it had directed the Presbytery of New York to deal. The Session, however, preferred to believe that the Assembly did not intend to pronounce a final judgment without at least giving a hearing to the accused. It therefore decided that it should endeavor to preserve the status quo until the Presbytery had acted in obedience to the Assembly's mandate. Its silence, meanwhile, under accusations of disloyalty should not be interpreted as defiance of authority, but as avoidance of strife.

To the specific question asked, among many others, by your Committee—"How were the Elders of the First Presbyterian Church impressed by the sermon entitled: 'Shall the Fundamentalists Win?'"—it is not easy to make definite answer. The members of Session are in the habit of doing their own thinking and their reactions to the sermon in question were not identical. We can only indicate their general consensus of opinion:

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(1) We applaud the motive which prompted this sermon and its purpose, which was, as indicated by the text, to inculcate the duty of mutual tolerance while waiting for God, in His providence, and by His Spirit to decide questions in dispute.

(2) It seemed to us, however, that the title of the sermon was ill-chosen and provocative. It sounded more like a challenge to battle than a plea for harmony and peace. Nevertheless, we made due allowance for the fact that the preacher had been aroused by a theological controversy then acute in another communion.

(3) The sermon itself seemed to us open to misunderstanding and criticism, for the reason that, while the preacher presented two extreme views on several points of Christian doctrine and did not clearly define his own position with regard to them, his hearers might not unreasonably infer that he was personally committed to all the advanced opinions for which he asked toleration.

(4) As a Session, and individually, we disclaim any responsibility for the wide circulation of the sermon in slightly altered form and with a challenging foreword inviting attention to the fact that such a sermon could be preached in the First Presbyterian Church. This was done without the knowledge of any of us and by a person to us unknown.

The members of Session deeply deplore the distress thus given to many devout souls who had to judge the preacher by the printed sermon instead of judging the sermon by what they knew of the preacher. To the Elders and congregation of the First Church it was not an isolated utterance, but a regrettable incident in the ministry of one whom they had learned to love and honor for his loyalty to Christ and his spiritual power.



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(5) In expressing as we do our sorrow that occasion has been given for unrest and conflict in the Church which is dear to us, we desire to emphasize the fact that the sermon in question was exceptional. The preaching in the First Church is ordinarily uncontroversial, but searching, inspiring, and full of the spirit of the Gospel. It is devoid of sensationalism and deals almost exclusively with the great themes of evangelical religion,—The Reality of God, the Deity of Christ, His Incarnation, Sinlessness and Vicarious Sacrifice, His Resurrection from the Dead, and His Indwelling in Believers; The Sinfulness of Sin, The Call to Repentance, The Necessity for a New Birth, and The Beauty of the New Life in the Spirit.

These subjects are presented with profound understanding of the workings of the modern mind and with evident desire to clothe ancient truth in the common language of today, in order to make it more winsome and convincing.

Permit the Session to say in conclusion that the more deeply your Committee may probe into the present situation in the First Church, the better it will be pleased. It hopes to convince you that it would not knowingly tolerate in its pulpit teachings unevangelical or subversive to the historic faith of the Presbyterian Church. If, in the judgment of Presbytery, it has been in any particular derelict it will accept admonition in the spirit which the Gospel requires.

Faithfully yours,

(Signed) HENRY N. TIFFT,  
Clerk of Session.

(Signed) GEORGE ALEXANDER,

(Signed) THOMAS GUTHRIE SPEERS,  
Pastors.

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In this letter the Session does several things that are important in the judgment of the Committee. The Session claims for the First Church loyalty and soundness in the faith, and expresses grief that suspicion and controversy have arisen concerning its affairs. It explains the plan of a multiple ministry which was adopted by the congregation, with the unanimous approval of Session, and later of Presbytery, admitting its anomalous character in Presbyterian practice and justifying it as a measure required to meet unusual conditions. It testifies that the plan has not worked any disaster, but rather, in their judgment, has safeguarded the consolidation of the three churches, and has tended to harmony, fellowship and increased efficiency and usefulness. It disavows any intention of disloyalty in the action concerning the resignation of the Stated Preacher following the action of the Assembly, and explains its attitude in this matter.

It answers specifically the question which was one among many asked by this Committee, concerning the sermon entitled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" applauding its motive, but questioning the use of a provocative title, and admitting also that the sermon was open to misunderstanding and criticism. For the circulation of this sermon the Session disclaims responsibility, and deeply deplores the distress occasioned in many directions.

The Session insists that this sermon was exceptional, and that the preaching and teaching in their pulpit is ordinarily uncontroversial, dealing with the claims of religion upon humanity and the doctrines of grace that center in our Lord and Savior. The Session affirms that it would not knowingly tolerate in its pulpit teachings unevangelical or subversive to the historic

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faith of the Presbyterian Church. And finally it states that it will accept admonition from the Presbytery if Presbytery deems that such admonition is needed. The Committee understands this to mean that it acknowledges the full responsibility belonging to Sessions of Presbyterian churches respecting the public proclamation of the gospel.

The Committee commends this frank, discriminating and loyal statement of the Session of the First Church to the Presbytery and to the church at large.

We come now directly to the question of the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church. On this subject the Committee is frankly desirous of helping to remove distrust. The further we have gone in our inquiries the more we have been convinced of the danger of injustice in this connection. It is part of the history of the church that it has often listened to charges that were not wholly justified. The zeal that good men feel for purity of doctrine often leads them to suspicions that are unwarranted. It is not to be doubted that one of the safest cures for controversy that tends to division, is the awakening of confidence, the setting free of men's spirits in mutual trust.

At a time some years ago when this Presbytery was undergoing trial, a beloved member of the Presbytery, widely reputed for his wisdom and fidelity in preaching the gospel, wrote a private letter in which he spoke of the dangers that may arise in time of earnest contention for the faith. Now that the presence of Dr. John H. Jowett is a gracious memory in the church militant, his wholesome words are worth recalling. "I yield to none," he wrote, "in zealous guardianship and proclamation of the central and fundamental doctrines of the evangelical faith, and I think there was never a time

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when there was greater need for those doctrines to be proclaimed. It is imperative that we be solidly united in sacred loyalty to all truth that is essential to the regeneration and sanctification of the soul and the creation of men and women in Christ Jesus. But it is possible to so contend, even for central things, as to lose the sense of relation and proportion; and by the manner of our controversy we may lose the clear sight of the supreme values. The first necessity of all vital and tenacious hold upon the evangelical verities, and of fruitful ministry in them, is the spirit of the Lord Jesus. It is this spirit and this alone that clarifies the atmosphere, removing the confusing, obscuring medium of suspicion, misunderstanding and unholy anger and resentment.”

With the sound of such wise counsel in our ears the Committee proceeds to state the grounds upon which we rest our appeal for the restoration of confidence.

After earnest conference and extended correspondence with our brother who is serving as Stated Preacher in the First Church, in which the Committee sought to make clear the bearing of the action of the Assembly upon his ministry in that church, we have received from him the following statement:

December 28, 1923.

To the Committee of the  
Presbytery of New York,  
Rev. Edgar Whitaker Work, D.D., Chairman.

Dear Dr. Work,

I welcome the opportunity which the appointment of your committee affords me to express my attitude

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toward the theological controversy in the Presbyterian Church which, in part at least, has centered in me.

For many months now I have been the object of attack and until this letter I have made no public reply. Nor do I write this in a controversial mood. Any gentleman dislikes to be a cause of disturbance in a neighbor's household, and as an ordained minister of another denomination preaching in a Presbyterian pulpit I am profoundly sorry that contention has arisen because of me. For this reason I already have resigned from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church once and now retain my position there only because of the unanimous desire of the Church's Session and their insistence that withdrawal would do more harm than good.

In spite of sharp differences of opinion between two prevalent schools of theological thought, and in spite of the unmistakable fact that I am committed to the side called "liberal," I confess that I have been surprised at the misinterpretation of my position which has been spread broadcast. If I did not regard myself as an evangelical Christian, I certainly should not be preaching in an evangelical pulpit. Nor was there ever a day when one in earnest about his faith would wish his unqualified Christian allegiance to be more manifest than now.

These are the days when the Christian faith is being resolutely assailed, when materialistic naturalism is presenting a perilous problem, when many are in doubt, when Christianity faces alike one of its supreme crises and supreme opportunities. These are days when every man who seriously and deeply believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ wants to be counted on that side and not on any other. . It goes hard with me, therefore, to find

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myself and whatever influence I may possess rated as against things I really am for and for things I really am against.

I am in the ministry of the evangelical churches because I belong there and nowhere else—reared in evangelical Christianity, converted in it, convinced of it, and ready to live and die for it. The liberty I claim to think through the Gospel in terms real and cogent in our own time is, I am sure, not a denial of the Gospel, but one of the most precious and sacred privileges and responsibilities which our evangelical forefathers claimed for themselves, fought for, and gloriously used.

Personally I have no patience with an emasculated Christianity that denudes the Gospel of its superhuman elements, its redeeming power and its eternal hopes. I believe in the personal God revealed in Christ, in his omnipresent activity and endless resources to achieve his purposes for us and all men; I believe in Christ, his deity, his sacrificial saviorhood, his resurrected and triumphant life, his rightful Lordship, and the indispensableness of his message to mankind. In the indwelling Spirit I believe, the forgiveness of sins, the redeemed and victorious life, the triumph of righteousness on earth, and the life everlasting. This faith I find in the Scriptures and the objective of my ministry is to lead men to the Scriptures as the standard and norm of religious experience—the progressive self-revelation of God in the history of a unique people, culminating in Christ. To the proclamation of the Gospel with such elements of abiding experience at the heart of it I am giving myself—trying to translate it into terms that will penetrate the intelligence and challenge the conscience of the oncoming generation.

I am not, therefore, an enemy of the Gospel of Christ,

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a denier of the profound experiences and convictions which in all ages have been the glory of the church, the substance of her creeds, and the source of her power. Nor, as I understand it, are those who, like me, are called liberals. We are men at the center of whose life is a profound faith in God revealed in Christ for man's salvation, and we are facing with passionate earnestness the needs of this disturbed, doubting, and often wistful generation, endeavoring as our fathers did in their days to interpret the everlasting Gospel to our own time in terms that our own time can understand.

The joy of my ministry is now, as it always has been, to lead men into vital relationship with Jesus Christ, to bring them under the spell of his Mastership, and to inspire them to make him and all that he stands for dominant in the life of the world. Never did this ministry seem so much worth while; never were its fruits more manifest; and all my days I hope to give myself to it in the freedom with which Christ set us free.

Very sincerely yours,  
(Signed) HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.

Referring to this letter, the Committee wishes to say that there is a certain solemnity and impressiveness about the confession of a man's faith in circumstances such as these that will not be overlooked by earnest men. The Committee confidently asks for a careful and prayerful consideration of this solemn affirmation of faith.

It is easy to foresee that objections may be made. Some may say that words are used in a different sense from that to which the church has been accustomed. Criticism of this nature almost invariably contains the seeds of a subtle injustice.

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Others may be inclined to draw inferences and make implications in the circumstances which may or may not be correct. Exactly a hundred years ago the General Assembly refused to sustain a charge of heresy against a minister who had been convicted by a lower court on the ground of inferences which he himself denied. The Assembly ruled that it is a principle "that no man can rightly be convicted of heresy by inference or implication." Caution is advised in charging "any man with an opinion which he disavows." (Minutes of the General Assembly for 1824, pp. 122—124.)

There may also be those who will feel that the "five points" announced by the General Assembly are not sufficiently covered in the statement. The Committee has already stated the belief that is held by many that the constitutional questions involved in this matter should be taken up in the manner provided by our Form of Government.

What is especially clear to the Committee is that the doctrines of grace are strongly affirmed in the statement. Further our study of the preaching and teaching in the First Church convinces us that the doctrines of grace are being proclaimed in the pulpit of that church. Not only so, we believe that they are being proclaimed with power and in a manner that is producing an unusual impression upon the part of many persons who have grown careless as to the claims of the Christian religion.

While we find abundant evidence of variant methods, of new approaches, even of original adaptations of spiritual teaching to the ways of men's minds in our time, we do not find that the grace of God in salvation through Jesus Christ is being obscured or hampered. Rather it is our conclusion that these doctrines of the



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grace of God through Christ are receiving new force and urgency for times like ours. The Session of the Church solemnly testifies that the preaching is evangelical in meaning and force. The pastors and the fourteen Elders of the Church are entitled to be heard on this subject. Many of the Elders are of long Presbyterian ancestry, and a number of them are conservative in temper and training.

This Committee is also deeply impressed by what we have learned of the effect of the public proclamation of the Word in the First Church. Few such challenging voices have ever been heard in this city in defense of religion. There is no hint of sensationalism in the sermons. They are serious, studied affirmations of religious truth, intended to convince men that they cannot live rightly in this world without God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. The fact of sin and the need of a Savior are proclaimed with conviction and power. The Savior is Jesus Christ, and there is none other name that the preacher knows. In our judgment there can be no mistake concerning the tremendous challenge of this voice in the pulpit to a generation that tends to play fast and loose with religion. The arrest of thought that has been produced on religious subjects in this great and careless city is a fact that cannot be gainsaid.

Admitting the variant points of view, conceding that there are divergences in mode and form, this Committee, composed of men of moderate views, cannot resist the judgment that the Christian religion is receiving in the preaching and teaching in the First Church an impressive advocacy. The preacher is the implacable foe of the principal enemies of Christianity in modern times. The full force of the preaching lends itself, as we believe, to the maintenance of the spiritual ideals of Christianity,

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and the teaching and spirit of Jesus in thinking and conduct.

No one who knows the facts intimately can deny that the force of this ministry is also restorative of faith. Scores and hundreds, of young people especially, including many students, are responding to the quickening effect of this ministry. The Committee has received many testimonies to the return of faith, and none to the loss of faith, under this ministry. The preacher is keenly aware of the drift of many in our time out into the sea of doubt and unbelief. One of the principal aims of his ministry is to call men back to faith—back to faith in Christ.

This Committee gives great weight to the solemn declaration made by the Session of the First Church, that the preaching and teaching in the First Church deals almost exclusively with the great themes of evangelical religion—the Reality of God, the Deity of Christ, His Incarnation, Sinlessness and Vicarious Sacrifice, His Resurrection from the Dead, and His Indwelling in Believers, the Sinfulness of Sin, the Call to Repentance, the Necessity for a New Birth, and the Beauty of the New Life in the Spirit. It is impossible for this Committee to believe that a body of experienced Presbyterians, ministers and elders, would unanimously subscribe to a statement such as this without a profound conviction of its truth.

Less than this the Committee cannot say in recognition of the immense influence being exerted in this community by our Baptist brother who came five years ago as an invited guest with the full approval of Presbytery to the pulpit of the First Church. If his voice should for any reason fall silent, the Committee believes that it would be an incalculable loss and calamity to the

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church of God in this city, where so many different seas of thought meet in conflict and storm.

The Committee regrets that there are any qualifying remarks that need to be made, and we make them with hesitation, yet with the same conviction which we have put into our testimony to the evangelical character of the preaching.

It is inevitable that mistakes of judgment and emphasis will occur in a ministry such as we have described. It is the belief of this Committee that mistakes have occurred. The preacher is engaged in a task that is beset with perils, the task of approaching modern ways of thinking with the message of the gospel. It is almost to be expected that zeal in this direction might carry him beyond guide-posts and moorings of the past. This is the danger of all men who mediate between the past and the present. They are committed in their own minds so largely to the destinies of the coming time that they may all too easily underestimate values and obligations that have come down to us out of the past.

Further, they are particularly open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The language that they use may have a new and unfamiliar sound, that seems to give ground for alarm. It is our judgment that one who takes upon himself the difficult task of the adaptation of the past to the present in matters of faith should exercise extraordinary care in dealing with subjects concerning which deep feeling exists, and about which the faith of men is much concerned.

This Committee therefore agrees with the Session of the First Church that the sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" while seeking a laudable end, was captioned by an objectionable and challenging title, that tended to contention and strife. We further agree with

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the Session that the sermon was open to misunderstanding, and, like the Session, we regret its wide circulation, and deplore the serious distress and disturbances to which it has given rise in many minds. We go further to say that while we are sure that the preaching and teaching in the First Church has never spoken any denial of the church's doctrine of the Virgin Birth of our Lord, it is our judgment that the manner in which this subject was dealt with in the sermon mentioned, is open to painful misconstruction and just objection.

It is well to remember in this connection that Dr. Fosdick allows no man to question his belief in the deity of Christ. To lose this cardinal fact of the gospel, he has frequently said, would result in the uprooting of his whole Christian experience. If such a spiritual calamity ever came to pass in his faith, he has solemnly affirmed that he would at once leave the evangelical pulpit.

We have already indicated our belief that there is strong ground for assurance as to the evangelical fruits of the preaching and teaching of this pulpit. At the same time we cannot but feel deeply concerned about the wide disturbance that has come into the church. Wise men will address themselves to the cure of this disturbance with earnest prayer and with a purpose to do justice to all concerned. They will also seek the wisest ways of bringing about a better understanding.

The Committee has endeavored in this report to present grounds for the restoration of confidence, and we are sure that the Presbytery of New York desires to do all that it can justly do to aid in this measure. It is our hope that the signed statements and the information herewith presented together with the conclusions given may contribute to a clearer understanding of the situation.

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The real *crux* of this situation, the Committee feels, lies in the fact that the Presbyterian Church is accustomed to a ministry that recognizes the obligation of ordination vows. This is the genius and method of our system of government, and it cannot safely be ignored. While we deprecate too narrow and binding an interpretation of such vows, we are certain that the failure to recognize such obligations would be destructive of the Presbyterian conception of church government, as relating especially to ministers and the teaching of doctrine. It is natural that a church, constituted as the Presbyterian Church is, should insist upon the recognition of this fact.

It is therefore the judgment of this Committee that this conception of an obligation to the denomination must be fairly met in the case of a member of another denomination who is invited to minister stately in one of our pulpits.

We do not doubt that this Presbytery understands that it has no direct jurisdiction over the Stated Preacher in the First Church. Nevertheless the Presbytery cannot be indifferent to the responsibility which is inherent in Presbyterian government. There is moreover an indirect jurisdiction of the Presbytery in such a case, based upon the conception of the duties of an invited guest. It is our belief that a minister from another denomination, occupying one of our pulpits, should voluntarily wear responsibilities and obligations, which, although not based upon the force of ordination vows, are nevertheless real and cogent in the circumstances. This Committee has no reason to doubt that Dr. Fosdick feels the force of these obligations, and that he will willingly accept counsel and direction from this Presbytery of which he is a corresponding member.

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We feel further that the statement of the Session of the First Church submitted in this report must awaken both gratitude and confidence. We particularly welcome the affirmation made by the Session that "it would not knowingly tolerate in its pulpit teachings unevangelical or subversive to the historic faith of the Presbyterian Church." It is clear that the Session accepts the responsibility that belongs to sessions in Presbyterian churches of safeguarding the preaching and teaching of the pulpit.

The present report of the Committee is not necessarily a final report. If the Presbytery shall think best, in all the circumstances, to continue this Committee in its work, the Committee will be prepared to report further to the Presbytery, as occasion may require.

The Committee now offers to the Presbytery the following recommendations:

*First.* The Presbytery states that it believes in the purpose and character of the preaching and teaching in the First Church of New York, and that it expresses its confident expectation that our brother of another denomination who enjoys the freedom of his pulpit will labor unceasingly and in all good conscience to promote the gospel and the spread of evangelical truth.

*Second.* The Presbytery expresses its confidence in the loyalty of the Session of the First Church, and particularly in the wisdom and devotion of our beloved brother, the Rev. George Alexander, D.D., the pastor of the First Church. The Presbytery further records its satisfaction with the statement of the Session as to its understanding of the duty of sessions in safeguarding the preaching and teaching of the pulpit, in accordance with the doctrinal standards of our church.

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*Third.* The Presbytery holds itself in readiness to receive further reports on this subject, and to take further steps in relation to it, as occasion may require.

*Fourth.* The Presbytery affirms its belief in the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and in all the doctrines of grace and salvation belonging to evangelical Christianity. The Presbytery further declares that it sorrows deeply over controversy and strife, and that it is its desire and intention to address itself to prayer and the ministry of the Word; to the building up of our churches, to the work of evangelism, soul-winning and social welfare in this great city, and to the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ at home and abroad.

Conscious that we have striven with loyalty and fairness to carry out the directions sent to this Presbytery by the General Assembly, and trusting that no man may be able to discover in this writing aught but a controlling purpose to promote the truth as it is in Christ, and to further his sacred cause in the world, the Committee unanimously and respectfully submits this Report to the Presbytery of New York, praying that it may have studious and prayerful attention from all who are concerned.

EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, *Chairman*  
CHARLES L. THOMPSON  
A. EDWIN KEIGWIN  
GEORGE B. AGNEW  
ALFRED E. MARLING

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## THE ACTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1924

Twenty-two ministers and elders of the New York Presbytery complained to the General Assembly of 1924 against the action of the Presbytery in adopting the report of its Special Committee on the First Church. This complaint was referred by the Assembly to the permanent Judicial Commission which tried the case and reported its preliminary judgment. This was adopted by the Assembly as its own judgment and is as follows:

The Judicial Commission of the Assembly as to the complaint of Rev. W. D. Buchanan et al., protesting as to the action of the Presbytery of New York in matters relating to the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, beg leave to report:

That the complainants and the respondents were heard by their counsel and their respective committees by the Commission on May 26, 1924. Upon consideration of the complaint itself, the Commission finds that in response to the mandate of the General Assembly of May, 1923, the Presbytery of New York by its committee made a careful investigation as to the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York to ascertain whether it conformed to the system of doctrine taught in the Confession of Faith.

The committee of the Presbytery took up the question first with the Session of the First Presbyterian Church and in a letter addressed to the committee the session of the Church indicated its purpose and intent to carry out the suggestions made by the General Assembly in its mandate and the Commission is persuaded that the



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Session of the Church desires that the system of doctrine taught in the Church should be in full accord with the Confession of Faith. The Commission also desires to say that in its judgment the action of the committee of Presbytery and the Presbytery itself was taken in all good faith.

The report of the committee shows that an extended correspondence was had with Dr. Fosdick on the subject of his preaching and teaching. There is set out in the report a letter from Dr. Fosdick in which he outlines to a certain extent his beliefs. Unfortunately his statement is not as clear and unequivocal as in the judgment of the Commission it should have been in view of the agitation which has resulted because of the preaching of the sermon entitled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" We are unable to determine just how far that sermon indicates Dr. Fosdick's personal belief as to the serious and important questions raised by his sermon. We regret that Dr. Fosdick did not in his communication say frankly whether or not he believes what is regarded as essential under our Confession of Faith.

In the mandate adopted in May, 1923, the General Assembly indicated its purpose to see to it that doctrines contrary to the standards of the Presbyterian Church should not be proclaimed in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in New York. The Commission desires to suggest in this connection that it believes that one of the difficulties involved in the situation is the fact that the relationship which Dr. Fosdick sustains to First Presbyterian Church of New York is wholly without precedent so far as recorded cases go and so far as the provisions of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline indicate. It is an anomaly. Dr. Fosdick is denominated a "guest" and he has continued to be a

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“guest” for a period of over five years. He, himself, says in his letter “any gentleman dislikes to be a cause of disturbance in a neighbor’s household.”

We agree that a very serious disturbance has arisen and this disturbance is largely the result of this existing anomalous situation. Dr. Fosdick, shortly after the action of the General Assembly, tendered his resignation to the Session of the First Presbyterian Church and in their reply to the Presbytery the Session recited this fact and said that, in view of all the circumstances, they deemed it best for the interests of the First Presbyterian Church to refuse to accept his resignation and, consequently, they did not transmit this resignation to the congregation of that church. It may well be that, considering only the interests of the First Presbyterian Church of New York, this decision of the Session was wise, but viewed from the standpoint of the Church at large we are not persuaded that it was wise; we are constrained to believe that the existing relations should not continue longer.

In saying so, we do not mean that the First Presbyterian Church of New York must of necessity be deprived of the services of Dr. Fosdick, which they so much desire. We do think, however, that if he desires to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit for an extended time he should enter our Church through the regular method and become subject to the jurisdiction and authority of the Church. If this is done, much of the cause of irritation would be removed. If he can accept the doctrinal standards of our Church, as contained in the Confession of Faith, there should be no difficulty in receiving him. If he cannot, he ought not to continue to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit.

The Presbytery in its action states that it holds itself

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in readiness to receive further report on this subject and to take further steps in relation to it as occasion may require. The Session also expresses its willingness to do what is necessary to allay the unrest and distress which exists in the Church at large.

We therefore recommend that the Presbytery of New York be instructed, through its committee or through the Session of the First Presbyterian Church, to take up with Dr. Fosdick this question to the end that he may determine whether it is his pleasure to enter the Presbyterian Church and thus be in a regular relationship with the First Presbyterian Church of New York as one of its pastors.

#### THE INVITATION OF THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW YORK TO DR. FOSDICK

In accordance with the judgment of the Judicial Commission adopted by the General Assembly, the Presbytery of New York through its Committee invited Dr. Fosdick to enter the Presbyterian Ministry. The Committee's letter to Dr. Fosdick follows:

Your absence in Europe, prolonged into the summer, and the subsequent vacation-time separations, have made difficult such intimate discussion as might have been desired on the subject that is uppermost in our minds. Nevertheless you have, I think, been fully advised of the action of the General Assembly, and there have not been lacking as you know correspondence and personal conference on the subject.

At this time, however, in view of the approaching

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meeting of New York Presbytery, I am laying the matter formally before you, in order that you may consider carefully the proposal of the Assembly, and give your formal answer to it. The action of the Assembly taken at Grand Rapids on May 28th of the present year instructed the Presbytery of New York, either "through the present Committee or through the Session of the First Presbyterian Church, to take up with Dr. Fosdick this question to the end that he may determine whether it is his pleasure to enter the Presbyterian Church, and thus be in a regular relationship with the First Presbyterian Church of New York as one of its pastors."

This instruction of the General Assembly being in due time transmitted to the Presbytery of New York, the Presbytery at its June meeting referred the matter to the Special Committee, of which I have the honor to be chairman. I am therefore writing officially, to represent the Presbytery of New York, which acts through this Committee in obedience to the instruction of the General Assembly.

In taking up with you the proposal made by the General Assembly, allow me to say that the Assembly's action represents a sincere and profound desire upon the part of the Presbyterian Church to find a way, agreeable to our rule and custom, out of a situation that has produced no little anxiety. It is specifically the desire of New York Presbytery to which this Committee is attached, that you give the proposal of the Assembly the full and careful consideration which we believe it deserves.

It is further our earnest hope that you may see the way clear to accede to the proposal. The Presbytery of New York sets a very high value upon your ministry in the First Presbyterian Church, and we would be

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loath to see any interruption of it. We are also concerned for the welfare of the First Church, and of the large number of adherents and attendants who have been attracted by your preaching. The General Assembly itself makes plain that it does not seek the discontinuance of your ministry in the First Church.

The proposal now submitted to you is constructive in its effect, tending to produce both confidence and peace. It is to be interpreted as a friendly overture seeking the best interests of all concerned. An unusual honor in fact has been paid you, albeit the acceptance of the honor has explicit conditions attached to it. Presbyterian annals, so far as we are aware, contain no record of any previous action of this character. The Assembly could not have gone further in the direction of according you a welcome. At the same time the Assembly could not have done less toward maintaining the order and procedure of our church.

In brief, your attention is directed to the judgment of the Assembly concerning the relationship existing between you and the First Presbyterian Church of New York City. The Assembly does not in its action pronounce an opinion upon your preaching and teaching in that pulpit. While it comments briefly upon the nature of your statement made to this Committee, it utters no condemnation whatsoever. Neither does the Assembly pronounce the relationship illegal, there being no rule of our Constitution either for or against it. It recognizes frankly however that a state of disturbance exists in the church, and it expresses the opinion that this disturbance is largely the result of an anomalous situation, which is without precedent in our history, and which moreover is out of line with our Form of Government and Book of Discipline.

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To the cure of this anomaly with the serious unrest arising from it the Assembly addresses itself, and its conclusion is that the relation in its present form should not continue longer, but should be made regular and conformable to our government and usage. From being a guest in our Church, as you have been for the past five years, the Assembly suggests that you voluntarily transfer your connection as a minister to the Presbyterian Church, in the manner prescribed by our Constitution, and thus continue your ministry in the First Church as an installed Presbyterian pastor. In other words the Assembly holds that, in view of your prolonged service among us, and in view especially of disturbed conditions existing, it is better for all concerned that the Presbyterian Church should assume responsibility for your ministry, and that you in turn should assume responsibility for the Church. This can be done in one way only.

The language of the report of the Judicial Commission, which was made the permanent judgment of the Assembly, is as follows:

“We are constrained to believe that the existing relations should not continue longer. In saying so we do not mean that the First Church of New York must of necessity be deprived of the services of Dr. Fosdick, which they so much desire. We do think, however, that if he desires to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit for an extended time, he should enter our denomination through the regular method and become subject to the jurisdiction and authority of the church. If this is done, much of the cause of irritation would be removed. If he can accept the doctrinal standards of our church, as contained in the Confession of Faith, there should

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be no difficulty in receiving him. If he cannot, he ought not to continue to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit."

I have thus laid before you the action of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, calling as it does for explicit decision on your part. I am deeply sensible, as I send you this communication, of the importance of your ministry to the church and community which you serve, as well as of the issues involved in your own mind. There is no desire upon the part of any of your brethren to seek to warp your judgment, or to hinder in any manner the free operation of your own conscience. We can only ask that the proposal may receive free, full and anxious consideration, in the light of all the facts and circumstances. It is our earnest prayer that you may be guided by the Spirit of God to make a right decision. If it be your pleasure to enter the ministry of the Presbyterian Church, you may feel assured that the Presbytery of New York will pursue the matter with you at an early date, after the rule and custom of our Church. In the event that you decide otherwise, the Assembly's decision in the situation is clear.

Grateful for the fellowship we have had with you in the Master's work, and assuring you of our deep interest in your decision, I commend you and all of us for these trying hours to the grace and wisdom of God.

I am, with fraternal regard,

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) EDGAR WHITAKER WORK.

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## DR. FOSDICK'S REPLY

To the invitation of the Presbytery of New York to enter the Presbyterian Ministry, Dr. Fosdick made the following reply:

Rev. Edgar Whitaker Work, D.D.,  
Center Lovell, Maine.

My dear Dr. Work:

I have before me your letter of September 1st, informing me of the action of the General Assembly with reference to my relationship with the First Presbyterian Church of New York. I agree with you that this action is a sincere and kindly endeavor to find a solution for a trying situation and, from my first acquaintance with the Assembly's decision I have so understood it. It is with the more regret, therefore, that I must write you my declination of the proposal which you so courteously have transmitted to me.

My disinclination to become a Presbyterian minister is not at all due to denominational reasons. Were the transfer of my membership from one denomination to another the only question involved, I have no sectarian loyalties that would make the change difficult. But that is not the only question involved. The proposal of the General Assembly calls for a definite creedal subscription, a solemn assumption of theological vows in terms of the Westminster Confession.

In answer to this proposal I must in all honesty set my long standing and assured conviction that creedal subscription to ancient confessions of faith is a practice



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dangerous to the welfare of the church and to the integrity of the individual conscience.

There have been two historic attitudes toward creedal subscription among evangelical Christians. Some have welcomed it, have founded their churches upon acceptance of definite formulations of faith, and then with the passage of time and the coming of new ways of thinking have sought liberty from the literal meanings of their confessions by emendation and interpretation.

Others, equally evangelical, have felt that this practice is perilous to honesty and hampering to the free leadership of the Spirit. They have distrusted the ethics and feared the effect of subscription to ancient forms of statement, involving successive reinterpretations of the meaning attached to the words. They have refused to require this in their churches and, as individuals, they have not submitted to it. To this second way of thinking I unreservedly belong.

There are many creedal statements such as the Augsburg Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, which express in the mental formulas of the generations when they were written abiding Christian experiences and convictions. I honor all of them; they represent memorable achievements in the development of Christian thought. But for me to make a creedal subscription in terms of any one of them would be a violation of conscience.

Let me add also that this general and long-standing attitude toward creedal subscription is necessarily heightened by the particular situation in which I now find myself.

In theology I hold the opinions which hundreds of Presbyterian ministers hold. I am an evangelical Christian. So many men of my position have been

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cordially welcomed into the Presbyterian ministry, as holding the substance of doctrine for which the church stands, that I have no reason to suppose that the Presbytery of New York would fail to receive me. But, after two years of vehement personal attack from a powerful section of the Presbyterian Church, I face now an official proposal which calls on me either to make a theological subscription or else leave an influential pulpit. Any subscription made under such circumstances would be generally and, I think, truly interpreted as moral surrender. I am entirely willing that my theology should be questioned; I am entirely unwilling to give any occasion for the questioning of my ethics.

One further reason for my declination remains. I undertook my present relationship at the First Church with entire good faith. Knowing nothing about Presbyterian regulations with regard to the employment of ministers from other denominations, I refused to take responsibility for any decision in the matter. When, however, the Session of the Church, the Presbytery and the Synod had passed upon the proposed arrangement without a dissenting voice, I supposed that my relationship with the church was without taint of irregularity.

It was the interdenominational character of the arrangement which chiefly attracted me. Here was an object lesson in the new freedom with which Christians could disregard denominational lines and work together. The arrangement at the First Church has been so regarded in popular thought, and I have rejoiced in that aspect of the relationship.

The proposal of the General Assembly, however, would reverse all that. I recognize that the Assembly's decision concerns the particular relationship at the First Church and cannot fairly be interpreted as a general

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rule excluding the ministry of non-Presbyterians from Presbyterian pulpits. Nevertheless, the principle involved in the decision, if logically applied, would certainly tend to discourage the employment of any except Presbyterian clergymen as ministers in Presbyterian pulpits.

It may not enact a rule, but it suggests a precedent. It encourages a return to the principle of a denominationally "closed shop." It represents, so it seems to me, a retrograde sectarian movement. As a convinced interdenominationalist, therefore, who does not believe in an exclusive but in an inclusive church, I must not consent to the decision. To concur with it would be to agree with an attitude with which I radically disagree, to fall in with a denominational spirit which I regret and deplore.

As you see, my reasons for declining the courteous invitation which you have extended to me spring from my conscience. I must not do what for me would be a disingenuous and fictitious thing, under the guise of taking solemn vows. I am sure you would not have me do it.

Let me add a final expression of my cordial thanks for all the goodwill which I have met in my Presbyterian associations in New York. As associate minister at the First Church I have spent five of the most memorable and enjoyable years of my life. I sincerely regret that so much uproar has attended the latter part of my ministry, but I am grateful that it has been uproar from a distance and that among my brethren in the church and Presbytery I have had such unfailing friendship and such generous support. I leave these relationships now with a most lively sense of my indebtedness to you and to those whom you represent and

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with prayerful good wishes for the prosperity of the great church to which you belong.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Clerk of Session of the First Presbyterian Church together with my resignation as associate minister.

(Signed) HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.

### DR. FOSDICK'S RESIGNATION

The letter of resignation referred to in Dr. Fosdick's reply to Dr. Work's letter of invitation is as follows:

Mr. Henry N. Tiftt,  
Clerk of Session,  
First Presbyterian Church,  
New York.

My dear Mr. Tiftt:

I enclose a letter just sent to the Chairman of the New York Presbytery's committee, entrusted with the task of extending to me the proposal of the General Assembly adopted last May. As you will see, my decision in answer to this proposal necessarily involves my resignation as Stated Supply in the pulpit of the First Church.

In addition to the letter to Dr. Work I need say but little more, in writing to the Session of the Church. Once before, hoping to relieve you of the burdensome endurance which the violent attacks on me have forced you to share, I resigned my engagement with the church,

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and only upon your insistence that I remain, have I continued to preach to you during the last two years of controversy.

As now I surrender my responsibilities at the First Church, let me bear testimony to the unfailing friendship with which you have sustained my ministry! For five years we have worked together, and alike with my fellow ministers, with the office bearers and members of the Church, I have enjoyed a cordial, unbroken fellowship, which will always be one of the most satisfying memories of my life. No minister ever could hope to enjoy more unanimous and substantial backing from his own people, so that I look back upon the last five years as one of the happiest and most fruitful periods of my ministry.

I need hardly say that it has been a source of deep satisfaction that while some who were many miles away from my work were unhappy over it, you who have been working with me have so solidly and so generously supported my endeavor to set the Gospel in cogent and contemporary terms and make it a living force in the new generation.

I wish in parting from you, to do everything possible to conserve the great work on which we have been engaged together. It would be a deep grief to me if, by my going, I should at all unravel what I have helped to knit up. The far-flung line of service which the First Church is maintaining in New York has been my pride and joy. It is one of the most hopeful pieces of constructive work for the Kingdom that I know of in the city. I pray for the divine blessing on it and on all of you who will have the privilege of continuing in its active support.

My service as associate minister, while you are making

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other arrangements for your work, is at your disposal, but I am sure that it should not continue long enough to be a source of contention and discord in the Church at large.

Faithfully yours,

(Signed) HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.

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ACTION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON DR. FOSDICK'S RESIGNATION

A meeting of the congregation of the First Church was held on October 22, 1924, to receive a communication from the Presbytery of New York and to act upon the resignation of Dr. Fosdick. The communication from the Presbytery is as follows:

October 8, 1924.

Rev. George Alexander, D.D.,  
New York.

Dear Dr. Alexander:

The Presbytery of New York in session October 6th received a Report from the Committee on the First Church, through Dr. Work, chairman. In this Report were embodied letters from Dr. Work to Dr. Fosdick, and Dr. Fosdick's reply thereto, copies of which are enclosed in this letter. Dr. Work's Report then concluded as follows:

“With the submission of these letters to the Presby-

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tery, the Committee believes that it has carried out the instructions given to it.

“The resignation of Dr. Fosdick has been in the hands of the Session but a short time. The absence of many officers and members of the congregation from the city has thus far prevented the holding of such official conferences and meetings as are necessary in the case. It is the opinion of this Committee that it is due to the First Church that it should have time to consider this subject in the light of all the papers pertaining to it. Therefore we offer the following

RESOLUTION: That the documents submitted by this Committee be transmitted to the First Presbyterian Church for their careful consideration and action, and that the First Church be respectfully requested to report back to the Presbytery of New York at its next meeting on November 10, 1924, and further that such report be made either directly to the Presbytery or through this Committee, as the First Church may decide.

“Respectfully submitted,

“By the Special Committee,

“EDGAR WHITAKER WORK, *Chairman,*

“ALBERT EDWIN KEIGWIN,

“ANTHONY H. EVANS,

“GEORGE B. AGNEW,

“ALFRED E. MARLING.”

The Report was received and the resolution unani-  
mously adopted without discussion.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) H. G. MENDENHALL.

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Before consideration was given to Dr. Fosdick's resignation, the congregation adopted, unanimously, the following resolution:

THAT we the officers and members of this Church and Congregation express to Dr. Fosdick and make known to the Presbyterian Church at large and to our fellow churches of Christ in America, our unreserved confidence in him, our warm affection for him, our faith in his spiritual leadership and our belief in his teachings. We further wish to make unequivocal and emphatic expression of our desire that he should remain with this church in the relationship which has not only been so profitable and precious to us as individuals, but which has notably illustrated in practice that interdenominational spirit which is seeking an organic unity in the evangelical churches. His interpretation of the teachings of Christ has enriched our lives and has been a spiritual power in a time of dominant materialism. Especially are we grateful for the religious zeal with which his preaching, teaching and writing have inflamed the minds and hearts of our young people. We cannot contemplate, without respectful but urgent protest, the severance of the ties that have united us and the withdrawal from us of a ministry which has been a priceless possession.



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STATEMENT OF THE CONGREGATION ACCEPTING  
DR. FOSDICK'S RESIGNATION

The meeting of the congregation authorized the acceptance of Dr. Fosdick's resignation by the adoption of the following statement:

In response to the courteous request of the Presbytery of New York, the congregation makes the following declaration of its attitude and purpose:

(1) We affirm our loyalty to the Presbyterian Church, our accord with its faith and order, and our enthusiastic support of its world-wide work (as evidenced by the fact that we are giving far more to Presbyterian objects outside of our immediate field than we expend in the maintenance of our own Church). We respect the historic position of the First Presbyterian Church and would resist any attempt to wrench it from its ancient moorings.

(2) We are utterly opposed to sectarian narrowness and seek to illustrate and promote the spirit of union among all genuine Christians. We have in our fellowship members drawn from nearly every Christian communion, who have found it possible to work and worship together without friction and in perfect charity. We applaud every movement like that initiated by the General Assembly of 1918 designed to effect an organic union of all evangelical churches.

(3) After more than five years of experience under his ministry, we can testify that the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick has the unreserved confidence and affection of our people. We endorse the statement already made by the Session of our Church that in its judgment his

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teaching is not subversive of Presbyterian beliefs, but in agreement with the reformed or evangelical type of doctrine.

We do not know of any whose faith in the great verities of our religion has been unsettled by his method of presenting the Gospel; we do know of many whose faith has been reestablished and vitalized. We regard him as the foremost preacher in our time in his ability to meet the religious difficulties and aspirations of the new generation. Greater than our apprehension of loss to ourselves is our fear that among the educated youth of our day the Presbyterian Church may be discredited by inhospitality to such a spiritual teacher and leader.

(4) We are satisfied with the existing relation between Dr. Fosdick and our Church. He has worked in perfect harmony with the pastors of the Church and contributed immensely to its growth in grace, as well as in outward prosperity—a prosperity which has been achieved without diverting to itself the resources and energies of any other Church.

We recognize the action of the last General Assembly as a sincere attempt to allay the unrest in the Church at large without severing the connection between Dr. Fosdick and ourselves. Had Dr. Fosdick found it possible to accept that overture we should have invited him, with great cordiality, to enter into still closer ecclesiastical relations. Since he has declined under present conditions to become a Presbyterian minister, our concern is, not for ourselves alone, but for the cause of Christ in our city, to find some way not inconsistent with Presbyterian law and usage whereby his ministrations, which have been attended with such signal tokens of divine favor, may be continued.

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(5) Nevertheless, in view of the action of our General Assembly and under present conditions, we are constrained with great reluctance to authorize our chosen officers to accept the resignation of Dr. Fosdick as associate minister, to take effect at a date most agreeable to him and to the Session, and not inconsistent with any expressed desire of the Presbytery.

(6) We are encouraged by the evidence which Dr. Fosdick's letter of resignation affords that his heart is in our work and that he is solicitous for the integrity and spiritual efficiency of the Church which he has done so much to compact together in love. We hope and expect that a way may be found by which his ministry may be continued in the Presbyterian Church.

#### INVITATION TO DR. FOSDICK TO PREACH IN THE FIRST CHURCH

The congregation at the same meeting authorized the sending of the following letter to Dr. Fosdick:

Dear Dr. Fosdick:

October 22, 1924.

We have before us your letter of September 7th tendering your resignation as Associate Minister of the First Presbyterian Church. While we regret your inability to become a Presbyterian minister, we understand your reasons and from every quarter we hear expressions of approval of your forceful and dignified attitude.

In view of your decision and the opinion of the General Assembly that if you should decline to enter the Presbyterian Church the relation of associate minister

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should not continue, we have felt compelled, with great reluctance but with a desire to be loyal, to recommend acceptance of your resignation.

We invited you to enter into this relationship and you accepted our invitation in the spirit of Christian fellowship and with the desire to promote Christian union. This action was in harmony with the declared purpose of our denomination. It was our own General Assembly which made the following notable declaration:

“The Presbyterian Church holds Christian fellowship with all those who confess and obey Jesus Christ as their divine Savior and Lord, and acknowledges the duty of all churches that recognize Him as the Head of the Church Universal to work together in harmony and love for the extension of His Kingdom and the good of the world, and this Assembly earnestly desires to commend and promote this Christian cooperation.”

It was our Presbyterian General Assembly that six years ago, in 1918, by unanimous and rising vote, declared its profound conviction that the time had come for the organic union of all Evangelical churches and took measures accordingly.

We can understand that from a denominational standpoint there might be objection to appointing a Baptist an associate minister of a Presbyterian church, but we do not understand that there can be any valid objection to inviting a Baptist minister to preach in a Presbyterian church. Such an objection would be entirely at variance with the attitude and policy of our Church as declared by our General Assembly.

Therefore, after your resignation as Associate Minister takes effect, we invite you to make it your custom when not otherwise engaged to preach in our pulpit on

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Sunday mornings. We cannot believe that this is in opposition to the mind of the Presbyterian Church.

Our Church, as you know, occupies a peculiar position in the City of New York. It is the only downtown Presbyterian church that can carry through a large program of Christian service. It is in a district where one-time private residences have largely given place to small apartments; a district of many different nationalities and religious faiths; a district of changing population, where social classes are commingled. There are few rich, some poor, many young people of very modest means, largely without home ties to bind them. To attain its highest usefulness in such an environment our Church must seek to be a community church as far as it is possible for a Presbyterian church to be such.

Your preaching has attracted to the Church great numbers of this composite population who are being slowly welded into a gracious fellowship. We are deeply concerned for the effect upon their religious life of a severance of your relation to them. We are solicitous to hold them to the Church and to win for Christ many who have been attracted but are as yet undecided.

During the five years of companionship with you, there has grown to be a mutual, strong, personal affection. We believe in your teachings; we regard you as an outstanding figure in the Christian world today; we cannot bear the thought of separation. A great spiritual force has been built up in the Church as a result of your cooperation with us, and we have definite plans for further growth and influence in the years ahead. We will suffer an irreparable loss if you leave us entirely.

Moreover, the Presbyterian Church at large will suffer seriously. Thousands of young men and women, attracted by your preaching and writing, will drift away

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from any church association whatever. But the greatest loss will be to the cause of Christian fellowship and church unity to which you and we are committed.

Your withdrawal will be a blow to the high hopes which the General Assembly has expressed for the coming of the day of Christian unity.

We believe the welfare of our Church and the furtherance of the cause of Christ in the great metropolis of our country require us in no uncertain terms to extend to you this invitation, and require you in no less certain terms to accept it. We take upon ourselves the full responsibility of extending it. We have faith to believe that the next General Assembly, advised of our action and fully informed of all the facts, will be in sympathy with all that we have done. Great issues are involved in the present situation and we are called upon to stand up for them. With all our hearts we ask you to stand with us.

George Alexander  
Thomas Guthrie Speers  
Howard Duffield  
Charles H. Parkhurst  
Arthur Curtiss James

J. K. Andrews  
Robert W. Boyd  
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C. A. Comstock  
James Stewart Cushman  
Robert W. deForest  
Benjamin G. Demarest  
John H. Finley  
Lawrence C. Freer  
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Leeds Johnson  
Paul T. Jones  
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David McMunigle  
James B. Munn  
John P. Munn  
John E. Nicholson  
G. B. Overton  
Geo. A. Plimpton  
Wm. E. Stiger  
Henry N. Tiff  
D. Everett Waid  
Roger H. Williams  
John Wylie

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DR. FOSDICK'S REPLY TO THE INVITATION TO PREACH  
IN THE FIRST CHURCH

Mr. Henry N. Tift, Clerk of Session,  
First Presbyterian Church,  
New York, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Tift:

The letter sent me by vote of the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church is before me and in answer I must first of all express my affectionate gratitude for its personal goodwill to me and for the approval of my ministry which it contains. I should be very insensitive if I were not deeply moved by this cordial defense, coming, as it does, from those who for five years have intimately known me and shared my labors.

That you are seeking by lawful means within the Presbyterian denomination to solve the problem which confronts you and that therefore you accept my resignation as associate minister seems to me the only right and wise course to pursue. I should not have consented to be involved in any other method of procedure. Indeed, for this very reason I must qualify my acceptance of your new proposal which suggests that I should still make it my custom to occupy the pulpit of your church on Sunday mornings.

That you have the right to extend this new invitation I have no doubt. That I appreciate deeply the goodwill which prompts you to extend it goes without saying. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the General Assembly in its action last May intended that I either become a formally installed Presbyterian clergyman or else cease to occupy your pulpit. You say that when the next

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Assembly is advised of your action and fully informed of all the facts, you are sure that it will be in sympathy with what you have done. This venture of faith it is your right to make and any endeavor toward its realization is your privilege and your responsibility. But, until such time as your hope has been realized, we surely ought not to take for granted what has not yet come to pass.

In considering your new proposal, therefore, I must insist that a date be set when my relationships with the church, even as casual supply, shall come to an end. For the sake of definiteness, I name the end of March, 1925, the close of the present church year, as a date beyond which under present circumstances I must not consent to preach in your church. I name that date as the farthest possible extension of time to which I can consent, and I suggest that it may seem wise to your leaders to fix a date even nearer at hand.

This acceptance of your new invitation, with the qualification which I have named, I consent to because I cannot imagine any one except a man of ill-will who would demand the abrupt disarrangement of your work in the midst of the church year. I am too deeply indebted to you, too affectionately concerned for you, too heartily interested in the fortunes of your great organization not to wish to help you in every honorable and wise way that I can. Therefore I will occupy your pulpit, when I am able, on Sunday mornings after my resignation as associate minister takes effect, which should be very soon, but I must, however regretfully, terminate even this new arrangement on or before the close of the church year.

I shall have opportunity on other occasions than this letter affords to express my loyal interest in the church



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and my good wishes to you all. You have been my unfailing friends and never more manifestly so than in this present outspoken defense of my ministry and public adherence to the aims which we together have been endeavoring to serve.

Fraternally yours,

(Signed) HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.

### THE REPORT OF THE SESSION OF THE FIRST CHURCH TO THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW YORK

In accordance with the resolution of the Presbytery, the Session of the First Church at its meeting held November 9th adopted the following resolution:

November 9, 1924.

Acting under the authorization given by the Congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, New York, at a meeting held October 22, 1924, the Session hereby accepts the resignation of the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, DD., as associate minister, the resignation to take effect at a date to be fixed by Dr. Fosdick and Dr. Alexander, after consultation with the Presbytery of New York.

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ACTION OF THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW YORK ON THE  
REPORT OF THE SESSION

At the Meeting of the Presbytery of New York held  
November 17th the following report was adopted:

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE  
FIRST CHURCH TO THE PRESBYTERY  
OF NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 17, 1924

At its meeting on October 6, 1924, the Presbytery received and approved a Report from this Committee on matters pertaining to the First Church. The papers in the case then in hand were referred to the First Church, with a respectful request that the Church report back to the Presbytery on November 10, 1924, either directly or through this Committee. The papers consisted of a letter from the Chairman of the Committee, advising Dr. Fosdick of the proposal of the General Assembly, and a reply from Dr. Fosdick declining to accept the Assembly's proposal.

It is the desire of the Church to report through the Committee. A meeting of the congregation duly called was held on Wednesday evening, October 22, 1924, at which time the papers referred to the Church by the Presbytery were submitted to the congregation. There was also laid before the congregation a letter from Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick to the Session, dated September 7, 1924, tendering his resignation as associate minister. In concluding his letter of resignation Dr. Fosdick said:

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“My service as associate minister, while you are making other arrangements for your work, is at your disposal, but I am sure that it should not continue long enough to be a source of contention and discord in the church at large.” Therefore the congregation, in response to the request of the Presbytery, made a declaration of its attitude and purpose, which in substance is as follows:

The First Church affirms its loyalty to the Presbyterian Church, its accord with Presbyterian faith and order, and its enthusiastic support of the work of the denomination in the wide world. Any attempt to wrench the First Church from its ancient Presbyterian moorings would be resisted.

The Church declares further that it is committed to the ideal of union among Christians, as illustrated by the varied membership of the First Church. It especially applauds such movements toward organic union as that which was initiated by our General Assembly in 1918.

The Church emphatically renews its endorsement of the ministry of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, and expresses the unreserved confidence and affection of the people toward him. It supports the statement already made to the Presbytery by the Session that his teaching is not subversive of Presbyterian beliefs, and that it is in agreement with the reformed or evangelical type of doctrine. It affirms also its belief that his teaching has reestablished many in their faith, and expresses the fear that inhospitality toward such a leader and teacher may work harm among the educated youth of our day.

The Church affirms that it is satisfied with the present relation, and expresses profound regret that it cannot in the circumstances invite Dr. Fosdick to come

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into a closer relation with the Church. Having in mind the wide interests involved, the Church is concerned to find some way not inconsistent with Presbyterian law and usage, whereby his ministration to the Church may be continued.

Nevertheless, in view of the action of the General Assembly, and under present conditions, the Church is constrained, with great reluctance, to authorize its chosen officers to accept the resignation of Dr. Fosdick as associate minister, to take effect at a date most agreeable to him and to the Session, and not inconsistent with any expressed desire of the Presbytery.

The report of the Church closes with an expression of its satisfaction in the fact that Dr. Fosdick's attitude is so manifestly one of solicitude for the welfare of the Church and its work. On November 9, 1924, the Session of the Church met and took the following action:

“Acting under the authorization given by the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, New York, at a meeting held October 22, 1924, the Session hereby accepts the resignation of the Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, D.D., as associate minister, the resignation to take effect at a date to be fixed by Dr. Fosdick and Dr. Alexander after consultation with the Presbytery of New York.”

(ATTEST)

GEORGE ALEXANDER,  
*Moderator.*

(At this point the Committee interrupted its report and requested Presbytery to give Dr. Alexander an oppor-

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tunity to make any supplementary statement he may desire to make, and to answer questions from members of Presbytery.)

It appears from the report of the Church already submitted and from the supplementary statement made by the pastor, Dr. Alexander, that the desire of the General Assembly has been fully met by the acceptance in regular form of the resignation of the associate minister. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the main question is thus settled. There is not the slightest reason to harbor any doubt on this subject. The sole question remaining is the fixing of the date when the resignation shall take effect.

To this subject the Committee has given studious attention. In general it is our opinion that the Presbytery, charged with the care of its churches, is bound to consider the welfare of the First Church with sympathy and understanding. The main question being settled, it is competent for Presbytery to decide upon the wisest course to pursue in the matter of the date, having in mind the unusual circumstances that surround the whole matter. If the General Assembly were here on the ground, or at least the Judicial Commission, we have no doubt that careful attention would be given to the serious problem with which the First Church is confronted. The Presbytery can do no less than this.

The opinion of this Committee covers three points, and we so inform the Presbytery.

*First*, it is our conclusion that it is wise in the circumstances that there should be a reasonable interval before the resignation shall take effect, as in the case of any pastor who resigns his charge. In the particular case before us such a postponement appears to be imperative,

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in order that the Church may be saved from extraordinary confusion and loss. It is well for Presbytery to remember how difficult the transition to new conditions is likely to be. It is both reasonable and necessary to give the Church ample opportunity to adjust itself to another order, and to make safe and wise plans for the future. This is a counsel of prudence which we think ought to be observed.

*Second*, it is our opinion that any temporary continuance of the present relation which shall seem wise in the circumstances should be on a regular basis approved by Presbytery. The date when the resignation shall take effect should be definite, and there shall be no other date.

*Third*, it is our judgment that definite action of this character as to the date when the resignation shall take effect is not inconsistent with the solicitations and friendly spirit of the General Assembly's action. Moreover, it will safeguard the welfare of this great congregation, whose loyalty to the will of the General Assembly is not to be questioned.

Therefore the Committee makes the following recommendation :

*That the resignation of Dr. Fosdick as associate minister of the First Presbyterian Church take effect March 1, 1925, and that his connection with the Church terminate on that date.*

This Committee is actuated by no other motive than a desire to carry out the will of the General Assembly in a manner that is just, wise and fraternal and that will conserve as far as possible the important spiritual

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interests of the First Church. We trust that the measure proposed will be regarded by our brethren everywhere as an action of sound judgment and wise generosity, such as will tend to that gracious peace which we all greatly desire.

It is our ardent hope, therefore, that the Presbytery of New York, even men of variant opinions, may be able to unite heartily in this action.

Respectfully submitted  
by the Committee

EDGAR W. WORK, *Chairman*  
A. EDWIN KEIGWIN  
ANTHONY H. EVANS  
GEORGE B. AGNEW  
ALFRED E. MARLING

(ATTEST)

H. G. MENDENHALL,  
*Stated Clerk.*

(Signed) HENRY N. TIFFT,  
*Clerk of Session.*

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1. Fosdick, Harry Emerson, 1878-1969. 2.
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