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HISTORY

AND

DISTINCTIVE PRINCIPLES

OF THE

United Presbyterian Church

OF

NORTH AMERICA.

PITTSBURGH:
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United Presbyterian Church.

THE United Presbyterian Church of North America is not yet (1872) fifteen years old. It is reasonable therefore to suppose that its history, since the time of its organization is generally known to those who are now members and adherents of it. But, on the other hand, it is quite as reasonable to suppose that persons who depend on general church histories for their information, and those who have not come much into personal contact with the church, should be very ignorant as to its origin and history.

It was organized on the 26th of May, 1858, in Pittsburgh, Pa., by the union of the Associate and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches. The Associate Church was the older of the two, and was formed in 1733 by a secession from the church of Scotland, hence often called "the *Seceder* Church." It had only four ministers at first, viz.; Ebenezer Erskine, Wm. Wilson, Alex. Moncrieff and James Fisher. They were soon joined by others, so that

in eleven years they numbered twenty-six settled ministers. Three years after this, in 1747, a division took place about the Burgher oath.* This division continued till 1820, when they again united.

Soon after the organization of the Associate Church in Scotland, petitions were sent from persons living in America, for supplies. But, although there were many in this country asking for the bread of life, several years passed before any missionary could be induced to come. They seemed to fear the privations of a new country.

The first missionary that came to this country from the Associate Church was Alexander Gellatly. Andrew Arnot, a settled minister was sent along with him to remain one year. This was in 1753, just 120 years ago. These two brethren constituted themselves into a Presbytery under the name of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, subordinate to the Associate, Anti-burgher Synod (of Scotland), the first churches organized were in the Eastern counties of Pennsylvania, Lancaster, Chester and York.

These churches had their trials, but they made progress, receiving constant accessions from the "old country" both of ministers and people. Mr. Gellatly died in 1781, and the Presbytery had then two ministers left—James Proudfit of Pequa, and Mat-

*This oath, required in certain places, contained the clause "I profess and allow with my heart the true religion presently professed in this realm." Some refused this as contrary to their profession, others took it under the saving clause "the true religion." The latter were called Burghers and the former Anti-burghers.

thew Henderson of Oxford and Pencader. They were soon joined by John Mason, who was settled in New York city.

At the outbreak of our war of Independence in 1776, there were two Presbyteries, Pennsylvania with ten ministers, and New York with three.

The people soon caught the prevailing spirit of independence, and as communication with the mother country was much interrupted, the American church began to take measures for her own welfare without consulting the Synod of Edinburgh, to which it was subordinate—one of these was to effect a *union* with the *Reformed Presbyterians*. A Presbytery of this church had been constituted in 1774, and had three ministerial members.

The union was effected in 1782. Being a union between the Associate and the Reformed Presbyterians, they assumed the name of “Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.”

All went into the Union except two of the Associate ministers, Marshall and Clarkson. All the Reformed Presbyterian ministers went into the union, but some of the congregations did not. They sent to Scotland for supplies, and thus the Reformed Presbyterian Church in this country continues to this day.

The Associate Church was also continued, and the vacant congregations received pastors from Scotland. Thus the two churches, in their honest attempt to heal division and form one church, made three instead of one.

The Associate Church, though very much weakened by so many going into the union, continued to prosper. It still retained some connexion with the Synod of Edinburgh, but this was soon found inconvenient, and after the year 1786 subordination existed only in name. In 1794 measures were taken to secure a supply of ministers without going abroad for them, as had been the custom.

A Theological Seminary, the first in America was established in Beaver county, Pa., with Dr. John Anderson as Professor. In 1801 there were four Presbyteries. They then formed themselves into a *Synod*, which met in Philadelphia May, 1801. In 1820 it was agreed to establish two Theological Seminaries, one in Philadelphia, under Dr. Banks, and the other at Canonsburg, Pa., under Dr. Ramsey. In 1820 the Synod engaged in public social covenanting. The meeting was in Pittsburgh, and the covenant was signed by twenty-nine ministers, besides fifteen elders, five probationers and two students.

As many of the Eastern members were not present at the meeting of the Synod at Pittsburgh, there was an opportunity afforded them the next year at the meeting in Philadelphia, when ten additional ministers, ten elders, three probationers, and three students signed the same bond. Many of the older and larger congregations have also at various times observed the ordinance of covenanting in a public social way.

The Associate Church entered upon the work of foreign missions in 1842. The first missionaries

were sent to the Island of Trinidad. Missionaries were also sent to California and Oregon, then regarded as virtually a part of the foreign field. But the principal and most successful work was in Seal-kote, Hindoostan. This is yet in successful operation under the U. P. Church.

The progress of the Associate Church in this country, if not so rapid as some others, was gradual and permanent, always keeping pace with the country, as will be seen by looking at her numbers and position at the time of the union. There were at that time 21 Presbyteries, 198 ministers, 33 licentiates, 293 congregations, and 23,505 communicants.

THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED CHURCH.

The Associate Reformed Church was the result of an earnest desire to secure more unity among those, who held a very near ecclesiastical relation to each other, and thus afford an opportunity to vacant congregations to obtain pastors, who would be released from weak congregations.

From the earliest days of the church in this country the want of preachers was keenly felt, and it arose largely from the fact that often in the same place there were a few families organized as Seceders, and as a few Covenanters, and neither of them able to support a minister more than fourth, or half time; and as the ministers were thus employed, serving small congregations, many were unable to obtain preaching, except as the settled pastors could give them an occasional sermon. The feeling for union arose

partly out of the necessities of the time; and when it was at length consummated in 1782, the united church, viz.: the Associate Reformed, entered upon its new life with the most cheering prospects, and with marked vigor. Old and weak congregations were united and settled, and year after year, new organizations were rapidly formed, so that in twenty years the Associate Reformed Church had become influential, and bid fair to take the lead in many parts of the country. In that short time it increased to eight Presbyteries, four Synods and a General Synod.

But it was found impossible to secure the attendance of members from the Presbyteries very distant from the meeting of the General Synod, and as a consequence, there arose a suspicion of centralizing partiality. The General Synod having few representatives from the frontier Presbyteries, was looked upon with suspicion by those Presbyteries, and its acts were in some instances disapproved. Alienation increased, until in 1820, the whole Synod of Sciota withdrew, and the next year, the Synod of the Carolinas followed, thus leaving only the Synods of Pennsylvania and New York in the General Synod.

Then came efforts at union with *Reformed Dutch*, and soon after, in 1822, with the *General Assembly* of the Presbyterian Church. The General Synod met in Philadelphia, and, although it was manifest from the vote of the Presbyteries, that there could not be a harmonious union, yet by a mere majority, the Synod voted to go into the Union, (with the

General Assembly Presbyterians) and so declared the General Synod of the Associated Reformed Church dissolved. But notwithstanding this hasty action of a few persons met in General Synod, the vast majority of the ministers and congregations clung to the Associate Reformed Church and her principles.

• Independent Synods were organized, or rather in most instances *continued*. First in 1820 the Associate Reformed Synod of the West, next the Synod of the South. The Synod of New York in 1822, having never withdrawn from the General Synod claimed the *rights* of the General Synod, and so secured the valuable library of the Theological Seminary, which had been voted away to the General Assembly, and actually removed to Princeton. To this day, it, and all the property of the Seminary at Newburg, is held by the same Associate Reformed Synod of New York.

In 1840 the Second Associate Reformed Synod of the west was organized at Hamilton, Ohio, and in 1852 another was organized at Oquawka, Ill., called the Synod of Illinois. These Synods, though acting independently for a time, continued to hold the same views and the same standards, which were adopted at Greencastle, Pa., in 1799. The Synod of the South still remained independent, and differed only on the subject of slavery from the other Synods. All the other Synods were ever regarded as virtually the same church, and they came finally to act together as one church. The Western Synods were

first formed into a General Synod in 1841, and in 1855 the Synod of New York was added.

In these transactions there was no change of standards. All, except the Synod of the South, were brought together, forming a remarkably harmonious church notwithstanding these changes, the church as a whole, had prospered, so that at the time of the union in 1858, there were under the care of the General Synod, 4 Synods, 28 Presbyteries, 253 preachers, 367 congregations, and 31,284 communicants. There were three Theological Seminaries, and two flourishing foreign missions, one in Syria the other in Egypt.

THE UNION.

We have now traced the history of both the Associate and Associate Reformed Churches down to the year 1858, when they were united and formed into the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. As the churches had a common origin, they were always regarded, as substantially the same church, although their contentions were sometimes bitter.

The first attempt at union was made by the Associated Reformed Synod of the West in 1820. This looked hopeful for a time, but failed. Efforts were revived again in 1838 at the instance of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, N. S. A convention was called, and after several meetings, they agreed upon a basis of union in 1845. This basis did not prove satisfactory to the churches. In 1846 the Reformed Presbyterians withdrew, and their Synod

declined any further negotiations, but the Associate, and Associate Reformed Synods, although discouraged, did not give up their efforts. These efforts resulted in the presentation of a basis by the Associate Church, which after some amendment was finally adopted. The basis was adopted by the Associate Church in Philadelphia, and by the Associate Reformed General Synod in New York in the year 1857. Preparations were made for the union to take place the next year.

It was arranged that the Associate Synod should meet in the First Church, Pittsburgh, and the Associate Reformed in the First Church, Allegheny City, just across the river, the two churches being only about a mile apart.

There were anxious hearts in both churches during that year. Much was written on both sides in the papers. There was not entire harmony. There were suspicions on both sides, arising mainly, no doubt, from a want of better acquaintance, but the spring of 1858 arrived and, as many were trembling between hope and fear, a convention for prayer and conference was called at Xenia, Ohio. Here, brethren, long separated, met to pray, and talk, and together sing the same precious songs. The meeting was a grand success. There were more than a hundred ministers and elders present from the two churches, besides many from other churches, and from that time, every one seemed to breathe more freely. The impression went out that the favor of God was upon the proposed Union. The convention

maintained her position until the victory was secured, and the truth had triumphed.

PSALMODY.

One of the prominent, perhaps the prominent distinctive feature of the church is, that in her worship she is confined to an Inspired Psalmody, and that she excludes from her worship hymns or songs, which, though they may be sound in doctrine, and scriptural, are yet not a substantial translation of the word of God.

This church maintains that God has in his word provided songs for his church for all time—that the church, in all ages since they were given, has used them with his divine sanction; that he has never commissioned any one to make others to supersede them; and that, consequently, it would be presumptuous and dangerous to set them aside, either partially, or entirely, by introducing into the church any hymns or songs in their stead.

There are few bold enough to maintain, that the songs which God gave to his church, by men, who were moved by the Holy Ghost, are not suited to every emergency in the church, and to every phase of christian experience, and hence we may justly look with suspicion on any movement to produce a substitute. Such a movement must spring from a feeling, either of the incompleteness or insufficiency of what God has provided. But if there is no evidence that our *Saviour* introduced any other, and if the *Apostles*, wherever they went, continued to sing, and

urge the Christian church to sing (not compose) psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, then it would seem safe for us to conclude that the introduction of others is *not necessary* now. If it be claimed that our Saviour and his Apostles prepared, and used any other, then let them be produced or let any evidence be furnished that they ever did exist, and were used by them, and no church will sooner welcome them into her psalmody than United Presbyterians. If it be said, that this church excludes from her psalmody many beautiful songs contained in the word of God, and that she considers them improper to be introduced, I reply, that the church has never taken this position. Her standards simply say that "these songs should be employed to the exclusion of the devotional compositions of uninspired men." If the principle be admitted, that divine appointment is necessary, and what is divinely appointed should be as faithfully translated for use as possible, then there is not likely to arise any serious dispute about what shall be the psalmody of the church. Indeed, if the whole word of God were put into verse, and bound up to be used at pleasure, it is questionable, whether enlightened Christian experience, would not decide that in the delightful exercise of public praise, the book of Psalms is rich and varied enough to meet every want.

It is sometimes objected that the Psalms are not simple enough for children, and hence the cry for children's hymns, and that most absurd of all modern inventions, the monthly issue of Sabbath School

hymn-books set to music. Does it really make no difference what the children sing in the Sabbath School? If the children sing the Psalms, they will at least have nothing, in this respect, to unlearn when they are old. Besides we make a great mistake when we imagine that children cannot understand abstract truth. If it is proper and necessary for them to read the Psalms it is much more our duty to teach them to sing them. What is your experience? Did the Psalms you sang in your childhood, in the old home make an impression? Did the songs of the sanctuary ever reach your heart? Is there a thrill at their remembrance? Then give the children these same precious songs. Let them feel, when they are learning them, that they are learning them to be used in the public services of the church, and not to be laid aside in a few years and forgotten, as fit only for children. Then there will be less difficulty to get them to stay for church when the school is dismissed. Then it will not be so rare a thing in the *church* to hear the children sing.

SECRET SOCIETIES.

The U. P. Church takes very decided ground on the subject of Secret Societies. And this may be regarded as one of her distinctive principles: "That all associations whether for political or benevolent purposes, which impose upon their members an oath of secrecy, or to obey a code of unknown laws, are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of Christiani-

ty, and church members ought not to have fellowship with such associations." The very existence of such associations tends to excite suspicion. Let one be found in a family, and how is it possible for those, who are not initiated, to avoid suspicion? What more natural than for them to suppose that those who are in the secret, expect to get the advantage of those who are not? Confidence is diminished or destroyed in this way. Look at the facts. I assert it boldly. There are no persons in the community so suspicious of the evil intentions of secret societies as the members of the secret societies themselves. It is notorious, that little secret cliques in colleges are the first to charge rival cliques with using unfair means to accomplish their ends.

Let such an association be formed inside of a congregation, and let them, either by rules or by vote, exclude certain persons, or class, and what will be the result? Have not those who are excluded a right to suspect something wrong. I say they have, and they cannot help it. In the very nature of things, confidence among brethren is weakened, and it is weakened in proportion as the obligation to secrecy is made stronger and more binding.

Let it even be known that there is a private understanding that certain persons will work especially to each other's advantage, and the result will be a feeling of wrong on the part of other members of the congregation. But let there be an association binding its members by the most solemn and awful oath to stand by each other in preference to those

not initiated, and suspicion, and bad feeling, if not disruption will become inevitable. Hence such associations are inconsistent with the genius and spirit of christianity. The person who takes an oath "to ever conceal and never reveal" the secrets of a secret society does not duly "consider the weightiness of so solemn an act." He repeats over in some cases, sentence by sentence, and has not a moment to consider and weigh, as required by the word of God. The man sins against God by taking his name in vain, who binds himself under no less penalty than to have his throat cut across, his tongue torn out by the roots, and his body buried in the rough sands of the sea at low water mark, where the tide ebbs, and flows twice in twenty-four hours. No man or body of men dare inflict such a penalty, and hence to bring in God's name on such an occasion is to trifle with him. He sins, who administers such an oath, as well as he who receives it; and yet there are thousands of people in this country, who have rashly taken this oath. Such an oath is contrary both to the genius and spirit of christianity, and no man can be regarded as in good standing in the United Presbyterian Church who adheres to it.

COMMUNION.

I shall notice but one more distinctive principle. It has been already referred to in the history. The church does not invite all who belong to other evangelical churches to sit down to the Lord's table. Persons are admitted only through the session.

This excludes no one who will apply in the proper way. It is taken for granted that every one has all the privileges he desires in the church to which he belongs, but if he should desire the privilege of observing the Lord's supper in one of our churches, during a temporary absence from his own church, the session may, at their discretion, admit him to communion. But while this discretionary authority has always been conceded to sessions, both before and since the union, yet in no instance does this church sanction a general invitation to members of other churches to join in the celebration of the Lord's supper.

There is in this no ignoring of the spiritual unity of all those who are truly joined to Christ in whatever denomination. This church has never professed to be THE CHURCH to the exclusion of all who refuse to subscribe her creed. She has all through her history given practical illustration of her belief that there were true Christians in other churches, by coming together, laying aside differences and forming organic union with them. Let no one say that United Presbyterians are misnamed, but let them pray for and seek, not only unity among themselves, but union with all true Christians, only on the ground of the truth.

THE END.