

**AN OUTLINE OF CHRISTIANITY**

**THE STORY OF  
OUR CIVILIZATION**

*IN FIVE VOLUMES*

Illustrated in Color and in Black and White

**VOLUME THREE**

**THE RISE OF THE MODERN CHURCHES**



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*By William H. Weatherhead*

THE COVENANTERS

## CHAPTER XIX

### PRESBYTERIANISM IN AMERICA

*There are in the United States twelve denominations belonging to the Presbyterian group, and many of them have their roots in important episodes in the national history. With the democratic spirit breathed into it from the first by Calvin, Presbyterianism has always found itself in harmony with our American conditions.*

**T**HERE are twelve denominations in the United States belonging to the group of churches commonly known as Presbyterian or Reformed, and with but a single exception they all bear in their legal titles either or both of these descriptive terms. The family likeness among them all is very close, and the reasons for the continued separate existence of some of them are, to the outsider at least, hard to discover and harder to justify. Several of these churches are descended from the same ancestral stock; more than half of them arose from divisions in the main body of American Presbyterians; and a few of them represent reunions of intimately related groups. They all accept one or more of the historic confessions of the Reformed faith drawn up in Europe and Great Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and they all maintain, with minor modifications, the Presbyterian form of church government.

#### I

In outlining the history of American Christianity as represented by those churches, it will be most expedient to begin with a sketch of the largest and most influential of them all—the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The elements of early American Presbyterianism, like those



of the national life, were of most varied origins. England, France, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Holland made their contributions to its history. A considerable number of the Puritans who settled in Massachusetts were Presbyterians, and the churches of Connecticut were commonly spoken of as Presbyterian. The early New England churches have been aptly described as representing, in general, "a congregational Presbyterianism, or a presbyterianized Congregationalism". Later the congregational elements predominated in these regions, and in the main only those Puritans who drifted west and south of New England became a permanent part of the Presbyterian Church. Presbyterian ministers, chiefly from Great Britain and Ireland, such as Francis Doughty, Matthew Hill, William Trail, Joseph Lord, Archibald Stobe, labored in the Carolinas and especially in the middle colonies, in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The tap-root of American Presbyterianism is to be found in Maryland, the chief field of the truly apostolic labors of Francis Makemie, the virtual founder of the American Presbyterian Church.

Makemie was a man of marked energy and zeal, of excellent judgment, and apparently as worldly-wise as he was pious. Though his intellectual gifts and attainments were not exceptional, he was an eminently useful and successful minister. He was born in Ireland, educated in Scotland, ordained and commissioned by the Presbytery of Laggan in Ireland to be a missionary in the Barbadoes and the American colonies. He organized several churches in Maryland, including that at Snow Hill, which fairly claims to be the first-born of American Presbyterian churches. He itinerated from New York to the Carolinas, preaching as opportunity offered, establishing congregations, and making frequent appeals to New England and London for ministerial assistants. Crossing the ocean to plead his cause, he secured funds for the support of missionaries, persuaded two ministers, John Hampton and George McNish, to return with him, and by his example as well as by his counsels he encouraged that notable immigration of Presbyterians from Scotland and Ireland who, to escape the prelatie oppressions

under the Stuarts, had already begun to pour into the Barbadoes, Maryland, and Virginia, and were soon to make Presbyterianism the dominant religious force of New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and Delaware. In 1706 he was arrested in New York for the offence of preaching without a license, the Episcopal Church having been established in that colony by Governor Cornbury and his submissive legislature. But Makemie's chief title to fame rests on his success in securing the establishment in 1706 of the first presbytery, popularly known, from its customary place of meeting, as the Presbytery of Philadelphia. He was chosen to be its first moderator. Of the eight ministers composing this judicatory at the close of that year, all but one were foreign-born. The exceptional one was Jedediah Andrews, a native of Massachusetts and a graduate of Harvard College, who began his ministry in Philadelphia in 1698 and was ordained and installed as pastor of what is now the First Presbyterian Church of that city. All but two of the eight were ordained to the ministry in Scotland or Ireland. But neither the staunch Calvinism nor the genuine Presbyterianism that characterized all the ministers of the presbytery prevented their cherishing the most friendly relations with the churches of New England.

In 1716 the presbytery contained seventeen ministers; the number had more than doubled in a single decade. In view of the difficulties of travel and the wide territory represented—New York to Maryland—the presbytery in that year resolved to transform itself into a synod, with four presbyteries under its jurisdiction (Philadelphia, New Castle, Snow Hill, and Long Island). The first meeting of the synod was held September 17, 1717. In 1729 a more important change in the constitution of the Church took place. Up to that time no formal subscription to any standard of doctrine had been deemed necessary, but now, to safeguard the Church against the Arminianism and Socinianism that had become widely prevalent in Scotland, and Ireland—the very countries that were furnishing most of the ministers for the synod—the Adopting Act was passed, by which ministers and licentiates were required to subscribe to

the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, "as being in all essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine". Thus the Church gave formal and legal expression to the fact that it purposed to continue, as it had begun, a strictly confessional Church.

Shortly after the Adopting Act had been passed, the remarkable religious revival known as the Great Awakening arose, a movement that profoundly affected most of the Protestant churches, and especially the Presbyterian and Reformed group, stimulating their evangelistic, missionary, and educational enterprises, and proving itself a decisive factor even in the political sphere by breaking down some of the barriers of colonial reserve and sectarian isolation, and promoting the consciousness of the growing national unity. Its chief representatives were Jacob Frelinghuysen, of the Dutch Reformed Church at Raritan, New Jersey, Jonathan Edwards, a Congregationalist of New England, the Tennents of New Brunswick Presbytery, and George Whitefield, of England, who gathered his congregations by the thousands, now in churches and now in the open air, in the colonies from Massachusetts to Georgia.

But the treasure of the Gospel was borne in earthen vessels, and the indiscretions and the censoriousness of some of the evangelists led to the first division of the Presbyterian Church in 1741. This controversy between the Old and the New sides turned largely on the educational qualifications of candidates for the ministry. In 1741 the Presbytery of New Brunswick withdrew from the synod and in 1745 united with the Presbytery of New York to form the Synod of New York. The New Side was the more progressive and grew with great rapidity, founding Princeton College,—the heir and successor to the Log College of William Tennent, to whom "above all others", according to the historian Webster, were due "the prosperity and enlargement of the Presbyterian Church",—the Classical School at Faggs Manor, Pennsylvania, and the Academy at Pequon, Pennsylvania. In 1758 the two sides were reunited, the highest judiciary bearing the name of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. The union was followed by a notable expansion

of the missionary work of the Church—in Virginia under Samuel Davies, in the Carolinas under James Campbell, and especially in the middle colonies under various leaders. The celebrated Presbytery of Hanover, organized in 1755 by the Synod of New York, with Hanover County, Virginia, as its center, soon extended its bounds from western Pennsylvania to Georgia, becoming a veritable mother of presbyteries. And its service was in this respect only typical of the way in which this Church—and much the same might be said of the allied churches—carried the light of the Gospel and the blessings of a Christian civilization far out upon the prairies and into the primeval forests.

## II

This geographical advance of the Church was to be paralleled throughout its history by making the work of domestic missions keep pace with the growth and spread of the population into the further West, into the Mississippi Valley, and to the Pacific Coast. The heroism and self-denial of these home missionaries form one of the most stirring chapters in the marvellous making of America. Under what conditions they performed their arduous tasks may be inferred from the reports of some of them. James Hall, in the Mississippi Territory, received eighty-six dollars for his work of "seven months and thirteen days", and John Lindley, after laboring four months and "preaching ninety-six times", received twelve dollars and fifty cents. But the scant and uncertain financial support was a negligible factor compared with the "perils of rivers", "the perils of robbers", "the perils in wilderness", "the perils among false brethren", the hunger and thirst, the cold and nakedness, that had to be endured by the itinerant preacher and founder of churches on the hazardous frontier.

The devotion of the Presbyterians, especially the Scotch-Irish, to the cause of national independence was surpassed by no other denomination. No element of the colonial population was superior to them in intelligence, love of liberty, moral

firmness, and capacity for political achievement. Their republican institutions, based upon the idea of the sovereign right of the people to intrust the conduct of their affairs to representatives of their own choosing, helped to determine the forms of government adopted by the several states and by the nation. Their protests and resolutions in behalf of the freedom of the colonies, like the Abingdon Address and the Mecklenburg Declaration of 1775, were important precursors of the Declaration of Independence.

Many of the ministers served as chaplains in the Revolutionary War or themselves bore the musket into the thick of the battle. Joseph Clark and James F. Armstrong, later moderators of the General Assembly of the Church, were able and distinguished military officers. Particularly noteworthy were the services of John Witherspoon. By voice and pen he had made himself the leading spokesman for the freedom of the Kirk of Scotland from the evils of lay patronage, and when in 1768 he accepted the invitation to act as the president of the College of New Jersey, he became, and during the quarter of a century that he held this office till his death in 1794 remained, the most distinguished minister of the Gospel to be found in any of the denominations of his adopted land—"a man Scotch in accent and strength of conviction, but American at heart". To his eminent labors as teacher, author, college administrator, and ecclesiastical leader he added incomparable achievements in the realm of statesmanship. In 1774 he was appointed a delegate to the provincial convention at New Brunswick that adopted for submission to the Continental Congress a resolution unsurpassed up to that time for the boldness of its declaration of political principles: "We deliberately prefer war with all its horrors and even extermination itself to slavery riveted on us and our posterity." The next year he led in the raising of five companies of minute men called from his county. His fast-day sermons were clarion calls for resistance against the tyranny of the British Parliament. After serving for a time in the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, he became one of the five delegates to represent his State

in the Continental Congress, that only minister of any denomination who was a member of the body and placed his name on the Declaration of Independence. He was instrumental in shaping some of the most important State papers of that period, alike those that aimed at the strengthening of the Confederation and those that secured the final peace. On several occasions Washington thanked him in person or by letter for his efficient help in securing needed supplies for the army. His, too, was the commanding influence that led to the adoption of the national Constitution by the State of New Jersey. But in his devotion to the patriotic cause Witherspoon was exceptional among his fellow ministers only by reason of his superior abilities and his greater opportunities for service; it was with respect to them as a group that the rector of Trinity Church in New York voiced the complaint in 1776: "I do not know one Presbyterian minister, nor have I been able, after strict inquiry, to hear of any one who did not, by preaching and every effort in his power, promote all the measures of the Continental Congress, however extravagant." This celebrated testimony went, indeed, beyond the fact—but only by a hair's breadth; in New England two Presbyterian ministers joined the royal army; but of these one was deposed and the other suspended. So, too, the laity were loyal to the Revolution. Washington's army was largely composed of Presbyterians during the dark days of Valley Forge.

With the return of peace the Presbyterians shared in the general movement towards the organization of nation-wide churches. In 1788 the synod divided itself into four synods, with a body of representative delegates, ministers, and elders, known as the General Assembly, to serve as the highest court and the governing agency of the entire Church. The first general assembly met in Philadelphia in May, 1789. The synod adopted as its constitution the Westminster Confession of Faith, amended in Chapter XXIII, in regard to the relation of the civil magistrate to the Church, the Larger Catechism, with an amendment as to toleration, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory of Worship, with revisions making it almost a new work, the

Form of Government and the Book of Discipline, with many alterations.

In 1801 the Church entered into a plan of union with the General Association of Connecticut, the main purpose in view being that of securing the more rapid and efficient propagation of the Gospel, particularly in the new regions that had been opened for settlement west of the Alleghenies, after the treaty of peace between Great Britain and France had been concluded in 1763. By this plan all competition between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians was to be avoided. A pastor might serve a congregation of either denomination and yet retain his connection with his own Church. The scheme promoted aggressive evangelism, and during the following decades most of the theological seminaries of the Presbyterian Church were established to furnish ministers for the rapidly expanding work: Princeton (1812), Auburn (1819), Union, Virginia (1824), Allegheny (1827), Columbia, South Carolina (1828), Lane (1829), McCormick (1830), Union, New York (1836). But with this co-operation came various irregularities in polity, laxity in discipline, and most serious of all in the judgment of many conservatives at the time—the novelties by which the “New England theology” had sought to “improve” the historic Calvinism. There were differences also as to the administration of home and foreign missions; the Old School favored strictly denominational agencies, while the New School opposed this policy. After several years of controversy and trials for heresy, the Old School, finding itself in the majority in the Assembly of 1837, abrogated the Plan of Union, and eliminated the four synods in which the New School had its chief strength. The next year the New School party organized its own general assembly, retaining the same legal title as the other body.

The two branches of the Church, in spite of many deplorable results attending the division, made considerable progress in the organization of their benevolent work, but the slavery question and the Civil War led to a disruption of each of these bodies. Several Southern presbyteries withdrew from the New

School Assembly in 1857 and organized the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church; and in 1861 forty-seven presbyteries of the Old School Church renounced their general assembly and formed the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. In 1864 these two bodies united to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States, popularly called the Southern Presbyterian Church. And in 1869, after protracted negotiations, the Old and New schools in the North reunited on the basis of the Westminster standards, each recognizing the other as a sound and orthodox body, and retaining the name by which the Church had been known since 1788.

In 1902 the Church issued a Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith for the better understanding of its doctrinal beliefs, and the next year it made several amendments to the Westminster Confession, adopted a Declaratory Statement as to Chapters III and X, and added two new chapters, entitled *Of the Holy Spirit* and *Of the Love of God and Missions*. In 1906 the general assembly authorized for voluntary use a *Book of Common Worship*. In 1906 a union was effected between the Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which had arisen in Kentucky and Tennessee in connection with the revival of 1800.

In 1875 the Church entered into the Alliance of the Reformed Churches throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian System; in 1907, into the Council of Reformed Churches in the United States Holding the Presbyterian System; and in 1908, into the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. These developments are symbolical of the growing tendencies towards a more effective co-operation in interdenominational fellowship and Christian work, and where possible organic union of churches.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church in America, a lineal descendant of the Church of the same name in Wales—a Church committed to the Reformed faith and having a practically Presbyterian polity—established its first presbytery in the United States in 1828 and organized its general assembly



in 1870. In 1920 it entered into an organic union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

In recent years the increased activity of women in every phase of church work has become a marked phase of the Presbyterian as of other Protestant denominations. The aggressive foreign missionary policy of the Church has sent its lines out into every continent, and the stations in China, Korea, Japan, Siam, India, and Africa are among the most successful and influential centers of social service, education, and evangelization. The educational work of the Church, recently reorganized by the merging of several of the boards into a single main agency, preserves the high standard of historic Calvinism in the training of ministers, in the maintenance of Christian colleges, and in the publication of religious literature. The co-operation of the Church with the Christian forces at work in the State-supported universities has been greatly extended and richly blessed. A sense of obligation to social needs has led to the establishment of institutional churches and the strengthening of the rural churches as centers of community life. The contributions of the Church to scientific theology and all of its branches, and to devotional literature, and, though to a less extent, to hymnology and liturgies, have received merited recognition at home and abroad.

The extreme simplicity, not to say austerity, of early American Presbyterian worship is giving way in many places to the desire for a richer and more varied service. While in some respects the Church seems still to be in the colonial stage of its history, the individualism of the Puritan era and the Great Awakening is being combined with earnest endeavors to do fuller justice, both by denominational and by interdenominational effort, to the social application of the Gospel to the needs alike of the rural community and of the industrial metropolis. And by reason of its numbers, the intelligence, wealth, and culture of its constituency, the Presbyterian Church probably exerts as powerful an influence as any other upon the destinies of the republic and the life of the world.

Among the American Presbyterian churches are several

that owe their origin to the dissenting movements of the kirk of Scotland during the eighteenth century. Foremost among these are the United Presbyterian Church, the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Associated Reformed Synod of the South. Their internal history has been marked by many divisions, as well as by many attempts, often successful, to re-combine the separate groups into larger and more effective units. The work of the United Presbyterians in Egypt and among the Mohammedans is the most conspicuous achievement of these smaller bodies in the field of foreign missions. In general these denominations represent the extreme right wing of American Presbyterianism, and their influence has often served to put a wholesome check upon tendencies towards a too hasty or radical departure from Calvinistic standards of doctrine and discipline.

### III

Besides these churches, all of which bear the name of Presbyterian, there are in the United States three important denominations which are likewise Presbyterian in their polity and Calvinistic in their doctrine, but which have the word "Reformed" as the distinctive feature of their titles. Of the three, two had their antecedents in Holland: the Reformed Church in America (known until 1867 as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America and still often referred to as the Dutch Reformed Church), and the Christian Reformed Church. The third, the Reformed Church in the United States (popularly called the German Reformed Church) had its beginnings in Switzerland and Germany.

In his description of New Netherland for the year 1626 Wassenaar thus alludes to the beginning of religious services in that region: "The Honorable Peter Minuit is Director there at present; Jan Lempo is schout (sheriff); Sebastian Janez Crol and Jan Huyck are Comforters of the Sick. These, while awaiting a clergyman, read to the commonalty there on

Sunday texts of Scripture with the creeds. François Molemaecker is busy building a horse-mill over which shall be constructed a spacious room sufficient to accommodate a large congregation. Moreover a tower is to be erected, where the bells brought from Porto Rico will be hung." These "comforters for the sick", peculiar to the Dutch Church, were really trained pastoral assistants. Two years later the Reverend Jonas Michaelius came, and organized the first Dutch church in America—now the strong and wealthy Collegiate Church of New York City. For over fifty years the Dutch Church was the only one on Manhattan Island and along the Hudson, and it has therefore the honor of being the oldest Protestant organization representing the Presbyterian polity in the Western Hemisphere. During the government of the colony by the West Indian Company—up to the English conquest of Manhattan in 1664—thirteen churches were planted along the Hudson, on Long Island, and in New Jersey, under the fifteen ministers who served the Church during that period. The most noted of these pastors were Bogardus Mekelenburg—better known as Megapolensis, one of the earliest Protestant missionaries to the Indians—Drisius, Schasts, Selyns, and Luyck. Father Jogues, a Jesuit missionary, in his description of New Netherland in 1644 says: "On this island Manhate, and in its environs, there may well be four or five hundred men of different sects and nations. The Director-General told me that there were persons there of eighteen different languages. . . . No religion is publicly exercised but the Calvinist, and orders are to admit none but Calvinists. But this is not observed."

After the surrender of the colony to the English, there were for half a century almost continual struggles with the British governors, who attempted to establish the Church of England among a population which was overwhelmingly Dutch. In 1747 the Dutch churches, which from the first were under the jurisdiction of the Classis of Amsterdam, formed a "coetus" (assembly), and in 1755 this body, insisting on the exclusive right to ordain the colonial ministers, declared its independence of the foreign judicatory and assumed the full powers of a

synod. A dissenting minority, however, formed an opposing "conference". This division of the Church lasted till 1771, when the two parties came together on the basis of a reduced dependence on the Church of Holland. The leading peacemaker was the celebrated John H. Livingston. A graduate of Yale, he sailed in 1766 to Holland to complete his theological education and to receive ordination. Called in 1769 to become one of the co-pastors in New York City, he brought with him a plan provisionally sanctioned by the Classis of Amsterdam, which proved agreeable to both sides of the controversy, the colonial Church gaining its right to license and ordain its ministers. In 1784 Livingston was elected professor of theology—a fact upon which the Seminary at New Brunswick bases its claim to be the oldest theological seminary in the country, though the professor did not take up his residence in that city till 1810.

In 1792 an Americanized constitution of church government was adopted, with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism as the doctrinal standards.

From the very beginning the Reformed Church undertook missionary work among the Indians. In 1798 it took a prominent part in establishing "the monthly concert" for prayer for foreign missions. In 1842 it erected its own board of foreign missions, and received by transfer from the American board, with which it had been in co-operation, the Amoy mission in China and the Arcot mission in India. The most important of the other mission stations are in Japan and Arabia.

The Christian Reformed Church, closely related to the preceding denomination, and holding the same doctrinal standards and using the same liturgical forms, was organized in Michigan in 1846. Its early constituency was made up largely of immigrants from Holland, whose parents, or who themselves, had seceded from the State Church of Holland in 1835. In 1882 it received a group of immigrants from Holland who had withdrawn from the Reformed Church in America because the general synod refused to condemn freemasonry and to reject from fellowship those belonging to secret, oath-bound

societies. This Church is now one of the most conservative of all those holding the Presbyterian system and professing the Reformed faith.

The Reformed Church in the United States—it dropped the word “German” from its title in 1869—traces its origin chiefly to immigrants from the Palatinate and other parts of Germany, and from Switzerland. By invitation of William Penn, Pastorius in 1683 came with a colony of Mennonites to Pennsylvania and founded Germantown. He was soon followed by group after group of picturesque devotees,—the Dunkers, Schwenckfelders, and Amish,—many of whom established themselves in quasi-monastic communities, as at Ephrata, while others, as at Wissahickon, lived as genuine hermits. But the main tide of early German immigration was that of “the Palatines”, the victims of the barbarous wars of Louis XIV that laid waste the Rhenish Palatinate, though the name was also applied to other German and Swiss exiles who sought homes in the new world. The third tide is that which has continued to this day to flow in variable volume from Germany to the United States.

The Reverend Samuel Guldin has the honor of being the first German Reformed minister in Pennsylvania. He came to America in 1710. Making Rexboro and Philadelphia his home, he gathered congregations in various places and preached as opportunity offered, but organized no churches. The real founder of the denomination in this country was John Philip Boehm, a German schoolmaster who arrived in Philadelphia in 1720. He administered the Communion and organized churches at Falkner Swamp, Skippack, and White Marsh in 1725, the first being the oldest German Reformed congregation still in existence. His lack of full ministerial authority gave rise to considerable controversy, but the issue was satisfactorily adjusted when he accepted ordination at the hands of the Dutch ministers of New York with the assent of the Classis of Amsterdam.

In 1746 the synods of Holland sent Michael Schlatter to America to organize the scattered churches into a union. Born

at St. Gall in Switzerland, in 1716, he received a thorough education, spent some years as a teacher in Holland, and was ordained to the ministry. Richly endowed with gifts for leadership, he succeeded, the year after his arrival, in securing the co-operation of the ministers in and near Philadelphia for the formation of a coetus which, like that of the Dutch Church already established, had but limited powers, being similarly subordinate to the Classis of Amsterdam. He organized churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. In 1751 he returned to Europe. He brought back with him six young ministers and the pledge of the Dutch synods that they would devote to the support of the American churches the interest of the endowment-fund of twelve thousand pounds which they had raised for this purpose. In 1791 the coetus declared its purpose of assuming full synodical authority, and in 1793 the new synod adopted its constitution, making the Heidelberg Catechism its only doctrinal standard. This step towards complete independence paved the way for the enlargement and prosperity of the denomination.

Outside of the United States, Presbyterianism in America is represented chiefly by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Mexico, formed in 1901 by a union of four presbyteries belonging to the Northern and one to the Southern Presbyterian Church; by important mission-stations in South America; and by the Canadian Presbyterian Church, which, made up in 1875 of the union of four of the then existing independent Presbyterian bodies—all chiefly of Scotch antecedents was to unite with the Methodists and the Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada.