

A History
of the Covenanter Church
in Northern Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

"Old Puckety Society"
the Congregations of
Brookland, Manchester, and Parnassus

a paper presented for the licensure of Reid W. Stewart
before Pittsburgh Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church
May 20th 1958



— together with
A Sermon
by Dr. J. C. McFeeters
"Mission of Our Church" — Psalm 20:5
preached at Manchester
July 27, 1884

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THE MISSION OF OUR CHURCH

In the name of our God, we will set up our banners.

About two hundred and fifty years ago, Scotland witnessed a thrilling sight. On one of her noble hills, a Covenanter army had encamped. The regiments lay along the sloping sides. Forty pieces of artillery were bristling on the summit. And at the tent door of each captain, was planted a banner, waving defiantly on the winds, and flashing from golden letters, the motto, 'For Christ's Crown And Covenant'. Twenty-five thousand men were there, for the defence of the rights of Christ, and the liberties of the people. That daring army had caught the inspiration of the covenanted church, and had embroidered it on their ensigns. For Christ's crown and covenant, the Reformed Presbyterian Church was born, when ominous storms were raging; was baptised, with the Holy Ghost and with fire; was perpetuated, while churches and states were disintegrated and amalgamated; and now exists, firm, well-shaped, clearly defined, with her indisputable identity. From the beginning to the present, she has been inspired, with the motto of the banner, she has lifted up in the name of God, 'For Christ's Crown And Covenant'.

To-day we answer the question, Why does the Reformed Presbyterian Church exist?

1. Her existence. She does exist. The fact prevails. She is small, yet finds no difficulty in living. She is without aggrandizement, yet finds her simplicity no inconvenience. She is overshadowed by great churches all around her, yet is vigorous and healthy. Her statistics drop out of sight, amidst the round figures of sister organizations, yet is she fearless and determined.

She exists, not as the growth of yesterday, but as the rock, that has felt the warmth of the sun, and the beatings of the storm, for centuries; not as the off-shoot of Scotland's Reformation, but as the mother of that Reformation, who has outlived her own child; who carries its memory in her heart and its precious relics in her hand; who lives in the assurance of the resurrection of that Reformation, when the souls of them that were beheaded for Jesus, and the word of His testimony shall be seen, and their zeal, lofty aim, dauntless courage, decisive measures, and irrepressible controversy shall be felt.

She exists in the honorable discharge of all churchly duties. She proves herself to be a church, not by a few distinctive features,—that would not prove it,—but by possessing the functions, and performing the duties, and enjoying the privileges, belonging to the church of Christ. Her nature and work in general, are much in common with other churches. Are they of God? So is she. Are they joined to Christ? So is she. Are they guided by His Word?

So is she. Do they evangelize? So does she. Do they missionize among the heathen? So does she. Do they build up institutions of education? So does she. She has much in common with all true sisters.

2. The distinctive work of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. She performs a work, which other churches neglect. And if this work be of high importance, her perpetuation is justifiable. If not, let her go down. Let the waves thrown off from other churches overturn her little boat; and let her struggling passengers board some of the great steamers. A distinctive church, without a distinctive work, is rebellion in the kingdom of Christ. We charge upon any church, which occupies a separate position, without a great moral cause, the guilt of insurrection.

1. She demands of all her members fidelity to Christ. God has exalted Christ to the highest authority. He is Lord over all, and blessed forever. He claims homage from every soul; and enforces His claims. He is jealous of His glory, and will give it to none other.

Christ's people should honor Him with whole-hearted allegiance. They should serve Him with undivided affections, and with unspotted faithfulness. By profession, by promise, and by oath, they are bound to Him; their conscience is bound; their heart is bound; they themselves are bound, by bonds holy and solemn, as the in-citation of God can make them. And these bonds should never be desecrated, by any counteracting, or disannulling engagement. To place the soul under holy engagement to Christ, and under unholy engagement to any person else, is to dissemble, is to become treacherous; and finally to depart from Christ with loathing of heart, or to depart from deceit, with bitterness of soul.

Our church demands of all her members fidelity to Christ; and fidelity at whatsoever cost. She does not demand perfection. The final touches of beauty and grace, the soul receives not, till the hour of death. And up till that hour, she bears the burden of imperfection, in all her membership. And many grievous defects make her face flame with shame; and many sad slips make use for the rod of discipline. Her people have faults; they have failures; they inherit a perverted nature in common with all; they are beset by the snares of the world, and surrounded with the ambushments of the Devil; and often exhibit the weakness of their grace, and the power of sin. Our church does not demand perfection. She seeks to lift her people up to that point; but there she ushers them into the gates of glory; and henceforth they belong to that part of the City which is across the river.

But she does demand fidelity of her people in all their engagements. Their allegiance to Christ, is their supreme bond. And all other bonds that bind them, must be regulated by this, and in

harmony with it. She decides that any engagement contrary to this is null and void. And any who enter into any such engagement, are bringing confusion into their own morals, entangling their feet in snares, corrupting their conscience, alienating their affections, destroying their liberty, and steering toward the rocky reefs, where faith is ship-wrecked.

For this reason our people are not permitted to assume the obligations of secret societies. For in these fraternities, they bind themselves by oath or promise to they know not what; and they are bound, before they can tell whether to the Devil's cart, or Christ's chariot; whether to Satan's whipping post, or the Redeemer's throne.

For this reason, our people are not permitted to be bound to the present system of American government. That system of government is epitomized in the U. S. Constitution. An oath to that constitution, either in person, or by a representative, binds all that is constitutional. And that engagement is ensnaring and destructive to morals and fidelity. For much that is quite constitutional is very unscriptural. It is quite constitutional to collect the blood money of the liquor traffic, ninety millions; it is quite constitutional to run the mails through the land on Sabbath, and employ during that day, tens of thousands of men and other such things, and he who votes for a president, in the President's oath, binds himself, to do all this. Where is his oath of fidelity to Christ? Impaired, if not lost, in this oath of opposition to the laws and cause of Christ.

For the same reason, our people are not permitted to incorporate in any company, whose business desecrates the Lord's Day, or violates God's commands: are not permitted to make buy sell or use the intoxicant drink: are not permitted to invest their capital in any enterprise pernicious to morals or religion. Having given themselves to Christ, they are not at liberty to give themselves to any other except in the Lord. And the R. P. Church demands, upon pain of her severest discipline, that her members shall not form any alliance, or enter into any engagement, contrary to, or inconsistent with, their engagement to be the Lord's. This doubtless is the fine theory of all churches; but our church is left alone, to maintain the practice. And the burden they have thrown upon her to carry, is neither light nor pleasant. But it should be borne, and we live to bear it. And we have a mission, in setting forth before all eyes this principle of loyalty to Christ; loyalty undivided, and unintercepted.

2. Our church acknowledges the obligations assumed in other ages. Her promises to God of former centuries, are not mouldering in the dust, are not locked in dingy vaults, are neither forgotten, nor repudiated. They are remembered; they are honored with the signature of the present generation. The covenants that brought

high obligations upon the fathers, are gladly acknowledged by the covenanted church of to-day, with their weighty moral force. And she not only acknowledges them; but she meets them; she places herself under them; she admits them to be her own; she binds her conscience by them.

The fathers of the Scottish Reformation struggled hard in the defence of Christ's Church. At the risk of their lives, and at the cost of their blood, they contended for Christ's supremacy over the Church; and after passing through fire and water, they gained the battle: and on the field of victory, with hands lifted up to the Most High God, they swear, that they would preserve the Presbyterian form of church government. They bound themselves by this most sacred obligation, and they were no more at liberty to recede from their position. Neither danger nor difficulty, would justify them in going back; nor would the pains of death excuse them from holding the vantage ground gained. And we acknowledge that their oath binds us to hold the same fought field; and never abandon the position except we make the startling discovery, that it is wrong. Other Presbyterian churches, nobly defend the Presbyterian form of church government: but not one of them declares that the oaths sworn in Scotland's kirks, bind them to the high attainments. And therefore with easiness, their membership can abandon one form of church polity, and accept of another. We have been lifted up to that high stand, by our fathers as they passed through the fields of persecution; and we are under solemn covenant to remain where they placed us; and we can surrender their hard fought, blood bought victories, only by cowardice and perjury. The man who makes attainments in religion; and binds himself by an oath to stand in his attainments, is a man who cannot go back, but at greatest peril; his perfidy is blackened by perjury. We acknowledge we are Presbyterians by the oath sworn in 1643. We adopt Presbyterianism by choice; yet we can adopt no other form; till we have proven Presbyterianism wrong.

The fathers struggled hard for the purifying of the Church; and the remodling of her ordinances, according to gospel simplicity. And they purified her; and cast out images, and instruments, and hymnals, and whatsoever was not commanded. Dark were the days, dreadful were the struggles, and great were sufferings, through which they passed, in completing this work. Many of them lost their heads, in their efforts to bring the Church back to her primitive purity and simplicity. Yet they gained the battle. And on the field of victory, they promised and swear, by the Great Name of the Lord their God, that they would defend the true religion 'Reformed', from innovations that have no warrant of the Word of God. And resist all corruptions to the utmost of their power, God hath put in their hands, all the days of their life. They bound themselves by this most sacred obligation, and were no

more at liberty to recede from their high position. They occupied the heights, that drew the enemies fire. And on those heights they flung their banner to the breeze. And swear their allegiance anew to their king. And neither the pressure of foes, nor the difficulties of the position, nor anything else would justify them in going back. They promised to God, they would stand by the attainments he had granted them in their struggles, until death. And as the Church is one in all ages; the same person identified from age to age. They bound the Church to the end of time, to hold the victorious heights, and ascend higher, but never retreat. And we acknowledge those obligations. They are solemn; they are perpetual; their fulfilment brings Divine favor; their violation incurs His wrath. We resist the innovation of hymns, of instrumental music, of liturgies, because we are sworn to do so. The Oath of 1643 binds us to keep the worship of God free from whatsoever is not commanded. Our Church is sworn to her position on Psalmody, and all other parts of Divine worship; and cannot recede from it, except she make the startling discovery, that it is wrong. To disown those victories, won at most terrible cost, from the powers of Rome and of darkness, would be cowardice, treason, and perjury. Neither inconvenience, nor reproach, nor desire of aggrandisement, nor willingness to please the masses, can justify the Church, in such a miserable retreat. The law of church purity, is, whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden. Our fathers nobly defended the truth, with their estates and lives; and have handed it to us, in their oath. And our position is ours because they have placed us there; and bound us there by solemn covenant; and we cannot honorably depart, till we discover the position wrong. To go down, would be declension, backsliding, a disgraceful retreat, from the high places of victory. Other Presbyterian churches nobly stand for the purity of worship; but not one of them in spirit and practice declares that the oaths sworn in the Kirks of Scotland bind them to their high attainments. Nearly all the family of Presbyterian churches in America are the lineal descendants of the Covenanting Church of Scotland; were represented in her covenant oaths; and therein sworn to hold fast what she then possessed; and maintain the noble position then won; but what church among them acknowledges these obligations? Then the Reformed Presbyterian Church occupies the victorious fields of the past; which have been deserted in principle or practice by all our brethren around.

3. The Reformed Presbyterian Church teaches the duty of public covenanting. Covenanting is an ordinance, granted from the Lord, to churches and nations. And our Church, her aim, her name, her very existence, is a constant reminder among the churches; a memorial of the duty as performed in the days of old; and a prophecy of the privilege, as it shall yet lift the Church Universal

into higher and purer fidelity to Christ Jesus.

Her grand mission, however, is to disciple the nations; and lead them into covenant allegiance to the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. In 1581 she led the kingdom of Scotland into a covenant with Prince Messiah: in 1643 she again led the United Kingdom of Scotland, England, and Ireland in a Solemn League and Covenant binding the nation to the throne of the Most Blessed Potentate of heaven and earth. And she points the great American nation to the same high and honorable position. With diligent toil, and constant prayer, she prepares the highway. She labors to remove the rocks of prejudice; to fill up the marshes of indifference; to tunnel the flint mountains of infidelity; to bridge the broad currents of popular will; to light up the dense fogs of ignorance. She sacrifices her strength, and the praises of men, and the friendship of the world, in her purpose to lead the nation into covenant allegiance to the Almighty King. Her efforts seem to be in vain; she accomplishes but little; not many hear her voice; and far less heed her entreaties. The work which historic ages have assigned her, seems to be impractical the undertaking is so vast, as to appear almost hopeless. The world and her sister churches tell her, she might as well attempt to pontoon the Red Sea, and pike the desert.

But our Church knows that the work can be done, and should be done, and shall be done. The strength is not in herself, but in her God; reliance is not on her efforts, but on His Word. And though Red Seas of judgments and deserts of sinfulness, and rolling Jordans of opposition lie before us, yet the work shall succeed: for the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord; and holiness shall be written on the horses' bridles; and kings shall fall down before him; and nations shall serve Him. Our Church knows that the theory is practical; she has travelled the road to the summit; she has led nations into covenant with God before; and she can do so again.

She has learned of the honor, that belongs to her Lord and Redeemer. He is the one whom God the Father delighteth to honor. And as the Father asks, What shall be done unto Him, Whom the Most High delighteth to honor?, many and various are the responses. Some reply: 'We will build Him churches among the heathen'; others, 'We will pluck a thousand flowers of song from the gardens of human poetry;' others, 'We will endow His institutions with hundreds of thousands of money.' But it remaineth for the Reformed Presbyterian Church alone, to say, Let the royal apparel be brought; and let a crown royal be set upon His Head; let him be clothed with power over nations; and sway a scepter over rulers; let Him legislate among the legislators, and judge among the judges; let Him wear on His vesture and on His thigh,

a name written, 'King of Kings, and Lord of Lords'.

Our Church teaches the nation to bow before Jehovah. She points to the desolations of ancient kingdoms, and says, The hand of the Lord hath done; their sins are avenged in their death. She points to the calamities which lay fields and homes in ruins, and says, God is displeased; repent or suffer. She points to the appalling disasters that sinken the heart of the nation, and says, God's warfare is begun; return unto the Lord or perish.

And she looks forward, and sees the promised future of nations. There are they all exalted on the high elevation of Christianity. Their multitudes flow into the house of God. Knowledge is increased, and education glows in every face. The noise of battle has ceased, and peace reigns. Agriculture has inherited arsenals, and fortresses are turned into factories. The din of destruction is unheard, and the desert blossoms as the rose. Malice is gone and innocence carries the earth in her bosom; the wolf and the lamb lie down together. The earth yields her increase, and God blesses her fruits. All the kings of the earth praise the Lord; yea, they sing in the ways of the Lord; for great is the glory of the Lord. This is the future, which God has promised the nations of the earth. And this future they shall enjoy, when the Lord is theirs in covenant, and they in covenant are His people. And our Church alone, holds forth this royal highway, along which the nations can enter the spacious and matchless promise of national greatness and glory. She leads, she instructs, she exhorts and she warns; and in her solitude, fulfils her high mission. May God endow her with power and courage to finish the work He has given her to do.