

Church Hist. Bk.

HISTORY

OF ALL

THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

IN

THE UNITED STATES:

CONTAINING AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS OF THE

RISE AND PROGRESS, FAITH AND PRACTICE, LOCALITIES AND STATISTICS,

OF THE DIFFERENT PERSUASIONS:

WRITTEN EXPRESSLY FOR THE WORK,

BY FIFTY-THREE EMINENT AUTHORS, BELONGING TO THE RESPECTIVE DENOMINATIONS.

*J. S. Ebaugh
& Forsyth & others*

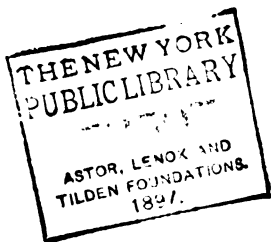
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contrary evils which may exist in the corrupt constitutions of either church or state.

6. An approbation of the doctrines contained in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, in defence of truth and opposition to error.

These, together with due subordination in the Lord to the authority of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and a regular life and conversation, form the bonds of our ecclesiastical union.

HISTORY

OF

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY THE REV. JOHN N. M'LEOD, D. D., NEW YORK.

THE Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, derives her origin from the old Reformation Church of Scotland. Her history, therefore, down to the period of her organization in this country, is necessarily involved in that of the parent church herself. It deserves remembrance to her honor, that Scotland was among the last of the nations to submit to the usurpation of the Church of Rome. Until the beginning of the eleventh century, she possessed a Christian church which maintained her spiritual independence, and refused to bow to the Papal supremacy. But Antichrist at length prevailed, and substituted his ruinous formalism for the ancient Christianity. From the beginning of the eleventh to that of the sixteenth century, "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people" of insular as well as continental Europe.

With the sixteenth century, however, commenced that glorious revival of evangelical religion, the Protestant Reformation. Scotland felt its influence, and awoke from her slumber. John Knox of famous memory, had lighted his torch at the candle of God's word, which had just been rescued from under the bushel where Antichrist had hidden it for ages. He carried

it through his native land, and her nobles, her people, and many even of the priests of Rome, were enlightened in the truths of the gospel. In the year 1560, Popery was abolished; the Bible was declared free to all; a Confession of Faith, containing an admirable summary of divine truth, was prepared; a book of discipline, declaring the government of the church to be presbyterial, was adopted; and all ranks of men in the nation bound themselves to each other and to God, in a solemn covenant engagement, to maintain and perpetuate the Reformation which had been established. This is what is usually denominated in Scottish history the "first reformation," or reformation from Popery. And thus arose the *Reformed Presbyterian Church*. For more than thirty years after this period, the church enjoyed great temporal and spiritual prosperity. But from the year 1592 to 1688, her history, with the exception of a twelve years' interval of rest and triumph, is one of warfare and suffering. Her most powerful enemies were unprincipled civilians. They sought to make her a mere engine of state policy, an instrument of their own despotism; and when she would not submit, they attempted to coerce her by the sword. During

the greater part of the reigns of James VI., and his son and grandson, the first and second Charles, the Reformed Presbyterian Church was struggling for existence against the power of the state, which assumed an antichristian supremacy over her, and proceeded to dictate to her the doctrine, worship, and order she should receive and observe under pain of imprisonment, banishment, and death.

Adversity tests the character of systems as well as of men; and never was the worth of the Reformed Presbyterian system more signally manifested, than during the period the church was in the furnace of affliction. Thousands maintained her principles in the face of the persecutor. The life and power of godliness was most remarkably displayed, and multitudes of holy martyrs sealed with their blood the testimony which they held.

Of the interval of relief to which reference has already been had, it is sufficient to say, that it was the period between 1638, and 1650: the era of the Solemn League and Covenant; of the Westminster Assembly of divines; of the revolution which dethroned the first Charles, and asserted those principles of civil and religious liberty, which all enlightened Christians and statesmen now regard as axiomatic and undeniable. This is the period of what is usually styled the "second reformation," and it was for a strict adherence to its principles that Cameron and Renwick, and their valiant coadjutors, were called to pour out their blood on the high places of the field. To these principles, as of universal importance and applicability, Reformed Presbyterians still avow their attachment.

In the year 1688, William of Nassau was called to the throne of the three kingdoms. He proceeded, among the first acts of his reign, to give a civil establishment to religion in his dominions. Episcopacy was established in England and Ireland, and Presbytery in Scotland, by the sole authority of the king and parliament, even before the assembly of the church was permitted to meet. And thus the old principle of the *royal supremacy* over the church was retained, and incorporated with the very vitals of the revolution settlement. The object of the civil rulers

was, as usual, to make the church a tool of the State. Into an establishment of this description the old consistent Covenanters could not go. They stood aloof and dissented from it as imperfect, Erastian, and immoral. The principal objections which they urged against incorporation with the revolution settlement, were: 1st. That the Solemn League and Covenant, which they considered the constitution of the empire, was entirely disregarded in its arrangements,—and 2d. That the civil rulers usurped an authority over the church, which virtually destroyed her spiritual independence, and was at variance with the sole headship of the Redeemer himself. The world has just witnessed the spectacle of the large majority of the Scottish establishment becoming "dissenters" on this very ground: a testimony that the old Reformed Presbyterians were right. For more than sixteen years they remained without a ministry; but they were not discouraged. Though a small minority, they organized themselves into praying societies, in which they stately met for religious worship. They exercised a watchful care over the moral and religious deportment of each other. They fostered the spirit of attachment to Reformation principles, and waited until God would send them pastors. And at length they were gratified. In the year 1706, the Rev. John McMillan acceded to them from the established church. In 1743, he was joined by the Rev. Mr. Nairne, from the Secession Church, which had been recently organized, and they with ruling elders constituted the "Reformed Presbytery." Through this, as the line of their connection with the ancient church, the Reformed Presbyterians in this country received their present ministry. They had, however, a ministry as well as a people in the North American colonies, before the Reformed Presbytery in Scotland was organized by the Rev. Mr. McMillan and his coadjutors.

In the same series of persecutions which drove the Huguenots of France and the Puritans of England to these shores, many of the Scottish and Irish Reformed Presbyterians, were banished from their native lands, and scattered among the American colonies. In crossing the ocean and chang-

ing their habitation, they had not changed their religious attachments. And when first visited by the ministers who came to their aid, they were found with their children collected into praying societies, and fostering with care the principles of civil and religious freedom, for which they and their ancestors had suffered. Though the name Covenanter, like that of Puritan, was given them by way of reproach, they did not refuse it. Esteeming it their honor to be in covenant with God and with one another, to do their whole duty, they accepted the designation, and even attempted in a public manner, to practise the thing which it indicates. In the year 1743, aided by the Rev. Mr. Craighead, who had acceded to them from a synod of Presbyterians organized a few years before, the Covenanters in the colony of Pennsylvania, proceeded to enter into a solemn public engagement to abide by and maintain their principles. This transaction served to promote union among themselves, and to keep them distinct from the other religious societies which were forming around them.

The Reformed Presbyterian has ever been a missionary church. The presbyteries of that name in Scotland and Ireland saw the promising field beyond the ocean, and hearkening to the Macedonian cry that came from their brethren there, they sent them the aid they desired. In 1752, the Rev. Mr. Cuthbertson arrived in America from the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland. He served the church alone for nearly twenty years, and was greatly instrumental both in promoting the piety of those among whom he labored, and fostering the spirit of opposition to British tyranny, which ultimately demanded and secured the independence of these United States. Being joined by Messrs. Linn and Dobbin, from the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland, in 1774, a presbytery was constituted, and the church took her stand as a distinct visible community in the North American colonies.

In the year 1776, the declaration of American independence took place. It was hailed with joy by Reformed Presbyterians. They were opponents of the British government from both principle and feeling, and in proportion to their numbers

they contributed largely to the success of the Revolution. They took an active part in the war. Some of them were members of the conventions which established the States' constitutions, and subsequently of their legislatures; and although they saw defects in the new government, they cordially recognised it as legitimate, and deserving of their conscientious support.

The visible unity of the Church of God is a fundamental principle of the Presbyterian system. The revolutionary and transition state of society for some time before the establishment of American independence, occasioned a neglect of this principle, and kept the church in a divided and inefficient condition. But on the settlement of a stable civil government by the American people, the minds of many in the different churches were turned to the subject of union. A union of the whole Presbyterian family on a basis of truth and order adapted to the age, country, and circumstances of the church in the American republic, was very extensively desired, and various attempts were made to secure it. The time, however, for this did not seem to have arrived. The results of the overtures for union in some instances were plans of correspondence and co-operation more or less extensive, and the nearest approach to the great object sought, was that union of formerly distinct bodies which gave origin to the Associate Reformed Church. This took place in the year 1782, between the presbyteries of the Associate and Reformed Churches. The united body took the names of its two constituent parts, and hence arose the "Associate Reformed Church in the United States."

A portion of the Associate Church, however, and one minister, with a large number of the people of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, did not approve of the union, or enter into it when consummated. And thus both these bodies, though diminished in numbers, retained their distinctive standings.

Within ten years after this event, four ministers emigrated from Europe, to aid in maintaining the Reformed Presbyterian cause. They were the Rev. James Reid, from Scotland, who returned to his own country when his missionary tour was

accomplished, and Messrs. McGarragh, King, and McKinney, the latter of whom arrived in the year 1793.

The Rev. Messrs. Martin, King, and McGarragh, regulated the affairs of the church as a committee of the Reformed Presbytery in Scotland. But this was a mere temporary expedient, and its object having been answered, Messrs. McKinney, King, and Gibson, who had recently emigrated from Ireland, proceeded to constitute a Presbyterial judicatory independent of all foreign control. Mr. King did not live to meet his brethren at the time appointed, and in 1798, the Rev. Messrs. McKinney and Gibson, with ruling elders, proceeded to constitute the "*Reformed Presbytery of the United States of North America.*" Thus the church took her stand on American ground. Her relations to the Reformed Presbyterians of the Old World, as then defined and since existing, are those of an independent sister church. And in proceeding to arrange her terms of communion, she at once declared that she adopted the Reformed Presbyterian system, only in so far as it presents common truth, and "binds to duties not peculiar to the church in the British Isles, but common in all lands." It was thus her determination to rear, not an exotic of foreign growth and culture, but a plant which would be at home on American soil, and furnish abundant fruit unto eternal life.

Soon after the organization of the presbytery, Rev. Drs. Wylie, Black, the late Dr. Alexander McLeod, and Rev. Mr. Donnelly, were licensed to preach the gospel. They became efficient missionaries through the United States; the cause prospered in their hands; and in the year 1808, a synod composed of three presbyteries, was constituted, under the name of the "Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States of North America." In the year 1825, the supreme judicatory received the form of a representative assembly, composed of delegates from presbyteries, and styled the "General Synod:" under this organization the church now exists.

Of the *principles* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, it may be sufficient to say generally, that as to *doctrine* they

are strictly *Calvinistic*; and as to *church government and order of worship, Presbyterian*. Her ecclesiastical standards subordinate to the word of God, are the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and her Declaration and Testimony, third edition, 1843. In declaring her approbation of the Westminster Confession of Faith, she makes the following disclaimer: "To prevent all misunderstanding of the matter of the second article of this formula, which embraces the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, it is declared in reference to the power of the civil magistrate in ecclesiastical things, that it is not now, and never was, any part of the faith of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, that the civil magistrate is authorized to interfere with the Church of God, in the assertion, settlement, or administration of her doctrine, worship, and order; or to assume any dominion over the rights of conscience. All that appertains to the magistratical power in reference to the church, is the protection of her members in the full possession, exercise and enjoyment of their rights. The magistratical office is civil and political, and consequently altogether exterior to the church."

Reformed Presbyterians have been regarded as entertaining certain *peculiar* opinions on the subjects of slavery, psalmody, communion, civil government, and covenanting. It is proper that these should be understood. With regard to *slavery*, the principle which they hold is, that the purchase, sale, or retention of unoffending men of any part of the human family as slaves, is a moral evil against which the Church of God should bear a pointed and active testimony. And in carrying this principle into practice, it was enacted by the highest judicatory of the church in the year 1800, and when a large proportion of her members resided in the South, that no slaveholder should be retained in the communion of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Upon this principle she still continues to act.

On the subject of *psalmody*, the sentiments of the church are thus expressed in the eighth article of her Testimony, under the head of "Christian Worship:—" "Singing God's praise is a part of public

social worship, in which the whole congregation should join; the book of Psalms, which are of divine inspiration, is well adapted to the state of the church, and of every member: in all ages and circumstances; and these Psalms, to the exclusion of all imitations and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship."

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has never insisted on the use of any particular version of the book of Psalms, any further than that such version was preferable to all others. Her principle is, that the matter of the church's praise should be exclusively songs of inspiration, in the best attainable translation.

On the subject of *sacramental communion* the principles of the church are, that such communion is the most solemn, intimate and perfect fellowship that Christians can enjoy with God and one another; that when Christians are associated together in a church state under a definite creed, communion in the sacraments involves an approbation of the principles of that creed; and that as the church is invested with authority, which she is bound to exercise, to keep the ordinances of God pure and entire: sacramental communion is not to be extended to those who do not approve the principles of the particular church or submit themselves to her authority. In maintaining these principles the Reformed Presbyterian Church does not design to unchurch any other religious denomination, or deny the Christianity of its members. She recognizes the validity of the ordinances of all Christian communities who hold the divine Head, and the plenary inspiration of his word. She rejoices to know that these contain many of the saints of God, who have fellowship with him and with one another at the table of the Lord, and she is willing to co-operate with them to the extent of her ability, in promoting the common Christianity. But she does not feel at liberty to allow every man to be the judge of his own qualification for sealing ordinances, to dispense these ordinances to such as do not assent to her religious principles, or whom she could not submit to her discipline were they found violating their Christian obligations.

On the subject of *civil government*, the Reformed Presbyterian Church expressly testifies against a sentiment that has sometimes been attributed to her, "that civil government is founded in grace." But she affirms, "that civil society, together with its order, has its foundation in the natural constitution of man, and his external relationships in life; that it was instituted by the Creator and Ruler of the world immediately for the good of man, and ultimately for the divine glory; and that the principles of God's moral law are the supreme standard according to which human society is obliged to regulate and conduct its affairs."

And again, "that though civil society and its governmental institutions are not founded in grace, yet it is the duty of Christians to endeavor to bring over civil states the influence of the grace of the gospel, and to persuade such states to put themselves in subordination to Immanuel, for the protection and furtherance of the interests of religion and liberty."

And again, in applying these principles to the constitution and government of the United States, she further declares, "that in a land where peculiar religious characteristics have never been extensively introduced into civil deeds of constitution; where there is no apostacy from established and sworn to reformation; where the constitutional evils complained of are simply omissions, not fundamental to the existence and essential operations of civil society; where no immoral engagement is required, and no pledge either demanded or given to approve of or perpetuate defects; where fundamental principles of the social state, moral in their nature, are adopted; where a testimony against defects is admitted, and the way left open, constitutionally, to employ all moral means to obtain a remedying of defects: the same obstacles stand not in the way of a Christian's entrance into civil communion, as do in a land where, such religious characteristics having been adopted, covenanted, and sworn to, but, having been departed from, upon the ruins of a reformed system, one of an opposite character has been introduced. And further, that under a testimony against defects, circumstanced as above stated, the Christian may con-

sistently enter into the civil fellowship of the country, where he resides, using his liberty on a moral basis to seek the improvement of the social state."

And again, the church has declared, "that the acts and legislation of this church have at all times authorized all connection with the civil society and institutions of the United States, which does not involve immorality."

The position, then, which the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States is understood to occupy towards the government of the country, is simply this, believing that a representative democracy is the ordinance of God, she approves of its republican form and character. She perceives no moral evil in its constitution. She finds it promoting the best interests of the citizen, and throwing the shield of its protection over the Church of Jesus Christ; and therefore she leaves her members at liberty to incorporate with it by becoming its citizens and assuming its offices, if they can do so in consistency with their own conscientious convictions. But she insists that no immoral man should be invested with office; that the Bible is the rule of official administration as well as private conduct; and that civil rulers, in common with all other characters, are responsible to Jesus Christ as the "Prince of the kings of the earth, and Governor among the nations."

Some Reformed Presbyterians have, from time to time, entertained the opinion that the constitution and government of the United States is essentially infidel and immoral, and that therefore they should be dissenters from both. And, principally on the ground of maintaining this opinion, in the year 1833, a number of ministers with adherents seceded from the General Synod of the church, and formed a separate organization. But the position of the church is as above stated. (See "Testimony," second and third editions, and "Proceedings of Synod," Pittsburg, August, 1835.)

On the subject of *covenanting*, from the prominence given to which in their systems, Reformed Presbyterians have often been called "Covenanters," the following requisition is made in the fourth article of their Terms of Communion:—"An

acknowledgment that public social covenanting, upon proper occasions, is an ordinance of God; and that such moral deeds as respects the future, whether ecclesiastical or civil, are of continued obligation, as well upon those who are represented in the taking of them, as upon those who actually covenant, until the ends of them be effected."

In common with other Christians, Reformed Presbyterians believe that every individual believer is in covenant with God for himself personally, and that the Church of God is a covenant society, whose members are solemnly engaged to God, and one another, to do their whole duty. But in addition to this, it is their sentiment that, on special occasions of commanding importance—such as a time of great and threatened danger to the interests of church and state, or of attempted extensive reformation in the church—men may and ought, both as individuals and by communities, to *combine* together, and mutually *pledge* themselves, under the *solemnity of an oath* to God and one another, to sustain the right and oppose the wrong, in both civil and religious things. When such solemn pledge respects the future, it is binding on the individual or community which gives it, until its whole object be accomplished. Passing by the many instances of public social covenanting which occur in the history of the Hebrews under the Old Testament, an exemplification of the principle is presented in the famous League of Smalkalde, formed by the Lutherans in 1530, when they pledged themselves to one another and to God to maintain and defend the Reformed religion against all its enemies. And there is another still more perfect and remarkable, in the Solemn League and Covenant, in which the friends of civil and religious liberty combined their energies to protect and secure the dearest interests of humanity against the civil despot and religious persecutor. Society, at the time it was formed, was in a revolutionary condition. In the state, absolute anarchy seemed about to take the place of the civil despotism, which had for some time prevailed; and the very existence of the Protestant religion in the British empire was threatened. In this emergency the friends of liberty

and truth had recourse to *God's ordinance of public social covenanting*, for relief and encouragement. They committed themselves to God, and to one another by the will of God. Under the shield of the Solemn League and Covenant, the Assembly of Divines at Westminster sat, and prepared the Confession of Faith and Catechisms for the world. It furnished the rallying point for the best friends of religion and liberty while England was in anarchy, and Scotland in the grasp of the persecutor; and in its spirit many of the English Puritans and Scottish and Irish Reformed Presbyterians emigrated to America, and gave their aid in making our country what it is. American Reformed Presbyterians approve of the great principle of *combination for good under the oath of God*, which this transaction illustrates, and hold themselves in readiness, when the exigencies of the time may demand, to exemplify it themselves as the age, country, and special circumstances of their condition require.

Reformed Presbyterians are scattered over the middle and Western States, and have a few congregations in the South. Their ministers possess much of the missionary spirit, and spend a considerable portion of their time in preaching the gospel to the destitute of all descriptions, beyond the bounds of their own immediate congregations. The practice of expository preaching prevails universally among them; they will be found "lecturing," as it is styled, over entire books of the Bible, as a stated part of the service of the Sabbath; and as errors and delusions arise, and are propagated in society, they are among the first to enter into an examina-

tion of them, and utter the warning against them. The ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church has always had among its members men eminent for talent, learning, and public spirit, who in proportion to their number, have had a large share of the literary labors, and honors of the country. Among the people, meetings for prayer and Christian conference, weekly and monthly, are steadily observed. Family worship, and attention to the moral and religious instruction of the youth, as well as a personal department becoming the gospel, are required of them as qualifications for sacramental privileges. They have but few endowments for religious or benevolent purposes, but are liberal in the support of the gospel, both at home and abroad. It is left to others to speak of the religious character, of both ministers and people. But it may be said in gratitude to the God of all grace, that he has not left them without a witness of his presence and approbation; but that from year to year he has given them the assurance, that he is employing their instrumentality as a distinct religious community, for the maintenance of his truth, the conversion of sinners to Jesus Christ, and the preparation of many saints for the celestial glory.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States, is under the direction of a General Synod composed of six presbyteries, one of which is established among the heathen in Northern India. And she numbers at present, thirty ordained ministers, eight licentiates, ten students of theology, fifty-one organized congregations, and about five thousand communicants.