

# The Reformed Presbyterian Church – A History

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## Introduction

The name “Reformed Presbyterian Church” outlines the history of our church. We are first of all the Church of Jesus Christ. We are second the Presbyterian Church of Jesus Christ. And we are third the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus founded our Church. “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:18) We are the household of God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (I Timothy 3:15) Neither enemies within nor enemies without nor death itself can defeat us because the living Christ dwells within his Church.

## The Church

In the first centuries of our Lord’s Reign, our fathers in the faith defeated the amorphous spirituality of the Gnostics. (Think New Age spiritualism.) They defeated Arius, who taught that Jesus is less than fully God. (Think Jehovah’s Witnesses.) And at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, they exhibited the true identity of our Savior. “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one Person forever.”

The Church endured persecution, even women, children, and old men suffering martyrdom. A disciple of John, Polycarp of Smyrna, answered the demand that he deny Christ: “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me....I am a Christian.” He was burnt. Our fathers in the faith took care of their widows. They took in abandoned infants. They were known, mocked even, for how they loved one another.

Eventually, the Roman Empire learned that it had to become Christian. “Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers,” Isaiah prophesied concerning the Church. (Isaiah 49:23) In 313 Constantine ended Rome’s persecution of the Church and proclaimed universal toleration of religion. He built churches, summoned the Ecumenical Council that taught the divinity of Christ against Arius, and began rewriting Rome’s laws in light of the Bible. Seventy-five years later, after a futile attempt by Julian to restore paganism, Theodosius I made the Empire officially Christian.

Would the Christian Church become a department of state in the newly Christian empire? Emperors, even Christian emperors, would have liked that. But the Church, though often corrupted, refused to become a mere tool of the government. When Theodosius I in a fit of bad temper ordered the slaughter of thousands in Thessalonica, Ambrose in Milan, exercised church discipline. He refused communion to the Emperor until he accepted public penance for his crime. (Think bishops refusing communion to all Catholic officeholders who support abortion. Will they?) In Constantinople, John Chrysostom sought to

reform the church, convert the Goths, and improve the behavior of the Court. He made enemies. When he began a sermon by likening the Empress to Herod's wife, who demanded head on platter of a preacher she didn't like, the Emperor banished Chrysostom from the City. (Think Billy Graham in a public sermon denouncing a president's adultery. Won't happen.) No, the Church did not become a mere part of the Roman Empire; instead, it often called its government to account.

In time, the Roman Empire collapsed in the west before Germanic invaders. A millennium later its last remnants fell in the east to the Turks. But the Church grew. Through Patrick, our Lord claimed Ireland for his own. From there missionaries roamed Europe converting pagan tribes. In ways lost to us, the Gospel arrived also in Caledonia, now Scotland. Wherever the Gospel spread, civil authorities tried to make it a governmental department, often by having the king appoint bishops.

As the centuries passed, the Church itself lost its way and needed reforming. In 1517, the Protestant Reformation began in Germany and spread quickly. Where the Reformers had state support, they succeeded. But even where the Reformation succeeded, the Church had to contend with a state that wanted to take it over. So it was in Scotland. There, the Church through its congregations and elders aimed to choose its preachers and determine its doctrine according to God's Word alone, acknowledging only one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Scotland's kings and queens, the Stuarts, were equally determined to control the Church themselves. They would do it through bishops. The battle lasted through six generations of royalty, until the last Stuart went into exile.

### **The Presbyterian Church**

Scotland in 1500 knew itself to be a Christian nation, but a mixture of superstition, confused doctrine, and worship in a foreign language left most Scots lost in error. Like all the churches in Europe, the Scottish Church recognized the primacy of the Pope. It was governed by bishops. In 1528 a noble, Patrick Hamilton, brought to Scotland the teachings of Martin Luther. He was burnt. People asked why he was burnt, and heard about justification through faith alone. In 1544 George Wishart, also of the nobility, preached to eager audiences. Cardinal Beaton arranged his arrest. Wishart was burnt. John Knox, a former priest and associate of Wishart's, hid in St. Andrews Castle with men who had murdered Beaton. French forces captured the castle and sentenced Knox to row in French ships. Freed, Knox preached in England, but fled to Geneva, republican and presbyterian Geneva, when the Roman Catholic Mary, known to generations as "bloody Mary" became Queen of England. In Geneva, Knox preached to an English congregation and promoted the Reformation in Scotland by pamphlets and visits.

Finally, in 1557, the nobles of Scotland demanded Reformation. They signed the First Covenant, pledging themselves to strive "even unto death" to support faithful ministers. They renounced "the congregation of Satan, with all the superstitions, abominations, and idolatry thereof," that is, the Roman Catholic Church. Two years later the French Mary of Guise, the widow of James V and Scotland's ruler, tried with French help to suppress the Protestants. The nobles took up arms and invited Knox back to lead them. With the timely death of Mary of Guise, they won. Parliament in 1560 passed a confession of faith drawn up mainly by Knox, and made Scotland a reformed Christian nation. The daughter of James V and

Mary of Guise, Mary “Queen of Scots” became ruler of Scotland and second in the line to the throne of England after Elisabeth.

Mary, widowed at eighteen, returned to Edinburgh in 1561. She was cultured, intelligent, beautiful, and Roman Catholic, and she clashed repeatedly with John Knox and the Protestants. She was also foolish. She married Lord Darnley, a Roman Catholic and lost much of her support among the nobles. They had one son, James VI, in 1566. Then Darnley was killed, and Mary married the man suspected of his murder. Outraged preachers aroused the nation, and a month later Mary abdicated in favor of her son, James VI, in 1567.

James VI was the third generation in the Stuart line to deal with the Reformation. The Protestant James Buchanan educated him, while a succession of nobles ruled Scotland. Buchanan in 1579 published, *The Rule of Law Among the Scots*, teaching that kings are put in office by the people, they are subject to human and divine law, and the Scots have the right to call wicked rulers to account, a book containing the essentials of the later teaching of the Covenanters Samuel Rutherford and Richard Cameron. James VI, though young, had the book burnt. Meanwhile, Andrew Melville, an associate of Calvin’s successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza, became leader of the Scottish Church. Would the Church be presbyterian and independent, or would it be ruled by the king through bishops? The battle seesawed. In 1584 the “Black Acts” forbade the general assembly to meet without royal permission. In 1592, they were repealed when Parliament adopted the *Second Book of Discipline*, largely Melville’s work, and made the Church presbyterian. James VI still wanted bishops. “No bishop, no king,” he said, meaning that a Church which he could not control would undermine his rule. And he believed in his divine right to rule! Melville put it differently.

There are two Kings, and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is Christ Jesus the King, and His kingdom the Kirk, whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose Kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. And those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over His Kirk, and govern His spiritual Kingdom, have sufficient power of Him, and authority so to do, both together and severally, the which no Christian King nor Prince should control or discharge, but fortify and assist, otherwise they are not faithful subjects nor members of Christ.

In 1603 Queen Elisabeth of England died, and James VI achieved the major goal of his life. He became James I, King of England. In 1610 he reintroduced bishops into Scotland. Presbyteries still functioned, but the bishops held power. In the short, sharp conflict over these changes, James won. Andrew Melville and twenty other ministers who opposed James were imprisoned or exiled. Next worship. The 1618 *Articles of Perth* introduced private communion, private baptism, kneeling to receive communion, and confirmation by the bishops into the Church of Scotland.

In 1625 James died. His son, Charles I, became king of both England and Scotland, the fourth Stuart to deal with a reforming Scottish Church. Where his father had dissimulated and connived, Charles, an earnest and stupid man, acted openly. He introduced a new prayer book into Scotland written by the

English Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Laud. There followed a riot in Edinburgh, the signing of the National Covenant by 300,000 Scottish nobles and commons to defend the reformed and presbyterian religion, Charles' attempt to enforce his will in Scotland by arms, his recall of the English Parliament to raise money for the war, a Civil War in England between king and a parliament dominated by Puritans, the calling of the Westminster Assembly in 1643 to unite the churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland in religion, the Solemn League and Covenant to establish and defend the true religion in all three kingdoms, the emergence of Oliver Cromwell as a military genius and victor in the English Civil War, the capture of Charles I by the Scots, his handing over to the English upon promise that his life be spared, and his beheading in 1649.

The Stuarts had lost. The Church of Scotland was now fully Presbyterian. Samuel Rutherford in *Lex Rex* (1644) and George Gillespie in *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (1646) summed up Presbyterian teaching Christ's Kingship over both Church and state. The General Assembly and Scotland's Parliament passed many reforms, including the abolition of lay patronage in a Second Reformation. The Church recognized Jesus Christ alone as its head. Scotland now had a Reformed Presbyterian Church. The Covenanters ruled Scotland. Then the Covenanters split into two factions. The issue was the Stuarts.

Charles I had a son, living in exile in France. The Covenanter majority, called Resolutioners, decided to make Charles II king upon condition that he swear to uphold the covenants. The minority, the Protestors, argued that Charles II would be insincere if he swore faithfulness to the covenants. He was a hypocrite as everyone knew, but he swore and was crowned king of Scotland in the last ever coronation ceremony in Edinburgh, on January 1, 1651. Scotland got another Stuart king, and Charles got an army with which to take the English crown. He lost to Cromwell and went back to exile. General Cromwell ruled Scotland with an occupation army of 7000 English soldiers. He mostly left the Church alone, which divided Resolutioner against Protestor. In Glasgow, for example, there were two presbyteries, a Protestor and a Resolutioner.

In 1658 Cromwell died, and England, tired from the instability of war and military rule made Charles II its king. Scotland rejoiced because the occupying English soldiers withdrew. But Scotland rejoiced too soon. Charles II hated presbyterianism. "Rebel for rebel," he wrote, "I had rather trust a Papist rebel than a Presbyterian." By the Act Rescissory the laws passed during the Second Reformation were repealed. The covenants were repudiated. Charles made an example of three men, executing them for pretended treason: the Marquis of Argyle, an ardent Presbyterian aristocrat, James Guthrie, a prominent Protestor preacher, and William Govan, a Protestor soldier. At his execution Argyle laid out the Covenanter view: "God hath laid engagements on Scotland, we are tyed by covenants to religion and reformation; those who were then unborn are engaged to it...and it passeth the power of all Magistrates under heaven to absolve a man from the oath of God...God must have his, as well as Caesar what is his, and those are the best subjects that are the best Christians." Guthrie was urged to duck a little in the face of the changing times. He answered, "there is no 'ducking' in the cause of Christ." And he and the soldier Govan followed Argyle in death.

For the next two decades, Charles tried to impose episcopal church government on Scotland, while wisely leaving their church services unchanged. To his surprise, about a third of the ministers gave up

their homes and incomes rather than submit to Charles' new bishops. Thousands of commoners refused to listen to their new preachers and went to the fields to hear their old ones. The battle raged on several levels. Covenanters were imprisoned, killed, and exiled by the thousands. Over time a variety of indulgences lured many ministers back to their homes. Three rebellions failed, one at Pentland Hills in 1666, one in the southwest in 1679 at the battle of Bothwell Bridge, and one in 1680 led by Richard Cameron. In the Sanquhar Declaration, He and his followers disowned the king and also his Catholic brother, James, the Duke of York. They were killed in a sharp engagement a few days later. By that time the only remaining Covenanter minister, the aged Donald Cargill, was left. He publicly excommunicated the king and his brother at Torwood before being captured in 1681. "God knows," he said as he climbed the scaffold steps, "I go up this ladder with less fear and perturbation of the mind than ever I entered a pulpit to preach."

The Covenanters, now without ministers, organized themselves into societies to maintain a private worship of God and to coordinate their efforts. Now known as the Society People, or as Cameronians, they bore the brunt of the government's determination to stamp out rebellion in what became known as the "killing times." The last Cameronian preacher, James Renwick was ordained in 1683 in the Netherlands. Upon his return to Scotland, he published the Apologetical Declaration, again stating the Covenanter reasons for rejecting the King's authority.

In 1685 Charles II died and his Catholic brother James II took the English throne. In February, 1688, James Renwick was executed at age twenty-six, the last of the Covenanter martyrs. Before the year was out, the English Parliament had deposed James II and called the Protestant William of Orange to take the throne of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Persecution ended, but the Revolution settlement, although it allowed the Church of Scotland to be Presbyterian, did not make it independent. The king was declared Head of the Church. What's more, the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant were ignored. Finally, lay patronage, the practice of having the local noble appoint the local preacher and pay his salary, was reinstated in the Church of Scotland. So, instead of kings appointing bishops, it was nobles appointing preachers.

The Society People, with no preachers, stayed out of the established Church, maintaining that they were the true and uncompromising Second Reformation Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They were Reformed Presbyterians. In 1707 John McMillan left the established Church to join them. In 1743 Mr. Nairn left the Associate Presbyterian Church, a body which had seceded in 1733 from the established Church of Scotland over its doctrinal compromises, spiritual lukewarmness, and the issue of lay patronage, and joined the Reformed Presbyterians. He and McMillan soon established a presbytery and were able to examine and ordain other men to the ministry. In Ireland and in the American colonies, Reformed Presbyterians also organized with regular congregations and ministers.

So who won? The Stuarts lost. Some Scots made a few pathetic efforts in the 1700's to restore the Stuart monarchy in Scotland. The English would not permit it. The Church of Scotland became Presbyterian, but not independent of the state or even of local aristocrats. Scotland, which turned its back on its National Covenant, lost its independence to England, submerged in a Great Britain where it had no real say. And the Reformed Presbyterians were granted peace, a remnant church too small to

bother with, but independent of the state. They recognized only Jesus Christ as head of the church and testified to Scotland that the nation had wrongly denied its covenants. They dissented from both the Church and State, living peaceably as members of society obeying the law and paying their taxes.

By the time the Reformed Presbyterians of Scotland had established their own presbytery, there were many Reformed Presbyterians in Ireland and the American colonies, still subjects of the English Empire. They continued to dissent from a government which repudiated the Solemn League and Covenant obligations which it had sworn to in the name of God. Then came American independence. A new nation was born in the New World.

### **The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the New World**

Immigrants to the American colonies brought memories of the old country. Some they wanted to leave behind, like religious warfare and political tyranny, or dependence on aristocratic landowners. Other things, like the “rights of Englishmen” and the Christian religion, they wanted to keep. Reformed Presbyterians brought the King James Bible, worship of emphasizing preaching and Psalm-singing, Societies for private social worship, and the Westminster Standards. They also brought loyalty to the covenants and to Christ, King in both Church and State. How would these immigrant Christians deal with the New World?

The first Scottish Presbyterians to America were sent by Oliver Cromwell to be sold as slaves. Others followed, fleeing or deported. Many came from the Ulster Plantation in Ireland, where James I had given land taken from Catholic owners to Presbyterians and Puritans. They had no ministers and asked the Scots to send them one. They commissioned John Cuthbertson in 1751 to go to America.

Cuthbertson settled in Lancaster County and spent his life ministering to the Society People of Pennsylvania, with side trips to Orange County, New York and even into the Connecticut Valley. He kept a diary which reveals the piety of a man who lived in prayer and lamented his sins. A friend of the revivalist George Whitefield, he insisted that religion must be personal, not merely formal. He catechized new members, oversaw church discipline, ordained elders, conducted the sacraments, and preached. First, a Psalm explanation. He went through the Psalms in order. Then a lecture on some passage of the Bible. And after lunch, a sermon on one of the central themes of the Gospel. Altogether, Cuthbertson estimated that he ministered to 5000 families.

Eventually the Irish Reformed Presbyterian church, organized in 1765, sent two men to help Cuthbertson, and in 1774 the three men formed a presbytery. Immediately the question arose whether the Scottish covenants bound America. The three ministers and the majority of the Society people concluded no, and in 1782 joined with the Associate Presbytery (the Seceders) to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, later part of the old UP Church formed in 1858 in a further union with the Associate Presbyterians (Seceders). But some Society People declined to join the new church.

The American Revolution, also a civil war, began. The third of Americans who truly supported the war included all of the Society People, all Seceders, indeed all Presbyterians. Americans of Scottish descent loved this war. An Episcopalian from Philadelphia said, “A Presbyterian loyalist was a thing unheard of.”

A representative of Lord Dartmouth wrote from New York in November 1776: "Presbyterianism is really at the bottom of this whole Conspiracy, has supplied it with Vigour, and will never rest, till something is decided upon it." A Hessian captain wrote in 1778, "Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion; it is nothing more or less than a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian rebellion." King George III himself was reported to have called the war a Presbyterian War.

With French help, the Americans won. A new nation emerged. Reformed Presbyterians no longer needed to dissent from an ecclesiastical and political establishment that denied the covenants. Then the states ratified a new constitution, written in secret in Philadelphia in 1787. The Covenanters were aghast at its secularism. Governments of Christian lands had acknowledged Christ's reign since Roman times. The Bible said, "Now therefore be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear...Kiss the Son...." (Psalm 2:10-11) In Scotland the main issue had been the independence of the Church. In America, the issue was the government's denial of Christ's authority.

James McKinney arrived in 1793 from Ireland to escape arrest as a suspected supporter of Irish independence. He articulated the Covenanters' reasons for dissent from the constitution. It did not recognize the mediatorial Ruler of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ. It allowed even atheists to hold office, granting equal protection to any and all religions. Finally, it protected slavery. Making no mention of the covenants or episcopacy, Samuel Wylie's 1803 *Two Sons of Oil* explained the Reformed Presbyterian dissent from the Constitution. An immigrant church had become an American church, dealing with American issues from the standpoint of the faith of Christendom. However, the practical applications of dissent were like those in the old country: no office holding, no voting in elections, no swearing an oath of allegiance to an ungodly constitution, no joining the army. Beyond that, Covenanters should live as peaceable members of society.

In 1797 William Gibson, McKinney's brother-in-law, fled Ireland for reasons similar to McKinney's. Congregations in New York City, Coldenham, and Philadelphia were organized in the winter of 1797-98. Then, in 1798 McKinney and Gibson established a presbytery, the direct ancestor of our Synod, and set to work. In 1806 they published *Reformation Principles Exhibited*, the RP Testimony drafted by Alexander McLeod, pastor in New York. In 1809 they formed a Synod with subordinate presbyteries. As Covenanters moved west, they organized new presbyteries, for example, in Illinois where the South Carolina Covenanters had migrated to escape slavery. In 1810 they founded a Seminary for training new ministers. It continues to the present. Ministers published and published: sermons, periodicals, tracts, and books. Books on basic Christian doctrine, infant baptism, slavery, and the secular American constitution.

The RP Church grew, from about 1000 in 1800 to about 5000 in 1833, the number of ministers from 2 to 36. There were about 60 congregations. Where did new members come from? The sessional records of Second Church, Philadelphia give a snapshot from the 1840's: one third from their children, one third from immigration, almost entirely from Ireland, one fifth from other denominations, and the rest from other American RP Churches.

By the 1820's, however, some Covenanters wearied of an unpopular stance separate from the American nation. They were intensely patriotic, proud of the new nation that had faced down Great Britain in the War of 1812, and they did not like dissenting from its government. In 1825 Synod authorized discussions with the main Presbyterian Church to bring about uniformity of doctrine, worship and order. Alexander McLeod headed the RP delegation. The discussions went nowhere, and between 1829 and 1833 five young ministers left to join the Presbyterian Church. Synod took up a discussion of political dissent, with the usual committees reporting. About half of Synod stressed the good aspects of the American constitution, the other half insisted that its flaws were fatal. In 1833 the Church split in half over the issue at a raucous Synod meeting in Philadelphia. Wylie and McLeod led the "new lights" while James R. Willson led the "old lights." After a period of polemics, the two churches with the same name went their separate ways. The "new lights" dwindled to about a 1000 members, who around 1950 joined with another body to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. It is now a part of the PCA.

The "old light" Church, their teaching on political dissent reaffirmed, resumed its growth. The Church moved west with its members, to Kansas and then to California. New immigrants arrived in the east. For the rest of the century the Church dealt with four issues raised by American society: slavery, revivalism, drunkenness, and war. It also dealt with seven internal issues: deacons, Psalm singing, finances, Sunday School, education, missions, and writing an American covenant. A paragraph on each matter. First, the external issues.

Slavery. From 1800 onward, when Alexander McLeod refused a call from the Coldenham Church until its members freed all of their slaves, the RP Church forbade its members to hold slaves. McLeod explained his position in an 1803 pamphlet, *Negro Slavery Unjustifiable*. American slavery is based on the capital crime of man stealing, it establishes racial lines that have no biblical basis, and it denies the clear implications of Christian baptism. From then until the Civil War, Covenanters were extremely active in antislavery activities, including the Underground Railroad. At least one freed Black slave and his family were members of the Coldenham Church from 1851 and for 32 years. In some antislavery societies, Covenanters cooperated with unbelievers. In protest against these associations, two ministers David Steele and Robert Luak left in 1840 to form their own Reformed Presbytery, the "Steelites." But the Church's enthusiasm for anti-slave agitation only increased.

Revivalism. Cuthbertson had been a friend of the Calvinist revivalist Whitefield, but RP's now rejected the Arminianism of the Second Great Awakening's revivals. Instead, they emphasized the periodic Communion seasons as times of fasting and repentance for the renewal of their Christian faith.

Drunkenness. Several Covenanter ministers in the 1700's were disciplined for drunkenness. The family of James R. Willson, the conservative leader in the 1833 split, even turned its wheat into whiskey to take down the Ohio River for sale. But as the Temperance Movement gained steam in the face of a massive social problem, the RP Church turned increasingly into a total abstinence church. Finally, in 1883 the Church amended its Testimony, Chapter 22, "Of Church Fellowship" to include the following: "Mutual help in a holy life and maintenance of the truth being one design of church fellowship, that individuals may be saved from the ruin wrought by intemperance, and that a testimony may be borne against this sin, and against the temptations thereto, the followers of Christ should totally abstain from the



manufacture, sale and use of intoxicants as a beverage.” A similar amendment to the Testimony had been made in 1861 against membership in secret societies.

War. War presented the greatest challenge to the Church’s teaching that Christians must dissent from an ungodly government by refraining from the voluntary aspects of citizenship: holding office, voting, and joining the army. In the War of 1812 Synod wrote a statement which young men could use to join the American forces without compromising their loyalty to Christ. Synod forbade its members to fight in the 1846 Mexican War on the grounds that it was being fought to secure more territory for slavery. Finally, the Civil War. Antislavery sentiments and political dissent ran head on into each other. Should Covenanter young men volunteer to fight for the Union in defense of an ungodly constitution? They did, in large numbers. World Wars I and II would present similar challenges to political dissent, with desire to fight in a righteous cause tending to overcome convictions about dissent.

Now for the seven internal issues.

Psalmody and singing. In the years before the Civil War, the American Presbyterian Church was replacing Psalms with hymns written by the Unitarian Isaac Watts and adding organs. One result was that some Irish and Scottish immigrants from churches which still used the Psalms joined the RP Church. By the Civil War, the Church abandoned the old practice of “lining out” the Psalms in favor of continuous singing, since almost everyone could now read. To improve singing, the first RP Psalter with music and words together was published in 1863.

Deacons. The office of deacon was generally absent in European Reformed churches, so trustees elected annually by congregations handled their property. But the Bible spoke of deacons. Synod discussed the office in 1838, but did not approve it. When the Philadelphia Church elected and ordained deacons, some resisted the innovation so strongly that they formed a second Philadelphia congregation. The pastor, James M. Willson, then published a pamphlet *The Deacon*. Counter blasts such as the nicely named *Anti-Deacon* were published. The argument continued for many years, affecting congregations, presbyteries and synod meetings. Eventually, the deacon side won out, but the price in hurt feelings, congregational division, and drawn out polemics was high. Only in the 1970’s did one of the Philadelphia churches finally elect deacons.

Sunday School. The Sunday School movement began in London to educate poor children. It soon spread to America as a means of evangelistic outreach. After several decades of local experimentation and some controversy -- It was argued that Sunday Schools would wrongly shift the religious education of children from parents to Sunday School teachers -- Synod in 1870 unanimously recommended Sunday Schools to its congregations.

Finances. Low salaries for preachers was a frequent problem. Synod tried exhortations to little effect. Sometimes a Presbytery would refuse to present a call because the promised support was too little. Many ministers supplemented their income by farming or by teaching or by marrying women with a good inheritance. Generally, money was raised by a pledge method or by pew rents or by special collections. Finally, in the 1860’s the Church began to emphasize the principle of regular giving based on a tenth of one’s income. This teaching did much to alleviate the worst financial problems.

Education. The Seminary begun in 1810 had a somewhat fitful existence at first, often moving to follow the Professor to his new congregation, sometimes not functioning at all. In 1856 the Church located the Seminary in Pittsburgh with two professors and began to collect an endowment. The Church began two colleges, Westminster College in Wilkesburg outside Pittsburgh, which lasted ten years, and Geneva Hall, first in Northwood, Ohio, and later in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The colleges had two purposes: a general higher education for its youth free from the dangerous influences of other schools, and the preparation of men for the ministry. For many years, the great majority of RP ministers were graduates of Geneva College. Parents of young children gave them their basic religious education. They memorized the Shorter Catechism and many Psalms. And most families read from Scots Worthies or The Cloud of Witnesses about martyrs in Scotland during the killing times. When the Presbyterian Church in the 1840's began establishing its own parochial schools because of the increasing secularization of the public schools, the RP Church explored the idea. But it was too small to support its own network of schools. Finally, of course, the Church educated its adult members in the weekly worship service, the Society meetings, and by monthly church periodicals. Two rival publications [over the deacon issue] merged in 1863 after the deacon issue had died down to become the Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter. It remained a lively magazine of theological dispute, comments on events of the day, and church news.

Missions. Though beginning before the Civil War, Reformed Presbyterian interest in missions flourished only after 1865 with foreign missions in Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, at the start of the twentieth century in China, and after World War II in Japan. Covenanters also began missions among freed slaves in Selma, Alabama, among immigrant Jews in Philadelphia, Chinese in San Francisco, Indians in Oklahoma, and for a short while in Kentucky.

Covenant of 1871. In 1802 the RP Presbytery had ordered the drafting of a covenant that would contain the spirit of the Solemn League and Covenant. It wasn't done. But drafts were prepared in 1823, 1848, and 1859. None were acceptable, the last because of the deacon controversy. Finally, in 1870 a covenant was unanimously adopted by Synod, sent down to the churches for their approval, and signed at a ceremony in 1871. The covenant made clear what had been the case since McKinney's time in the 1790's: that the Scottish covenants were not suitable for the New World. The covenant described the ideal of a church Reformed in doctrine, Presbyterian in government, and pure in worship and life. It also continued the Church's protest against errors and heresies in other churches and its dissent from an immoral government.

Thus, by 1871 the institutional form of the Reformed Presbyterian Church as it is today had been pretty well established: Synod, presbyteries and congregations; Church Seminary and College; a church paper; increasingly organized fundraising for missions and Seminary; Boards at the Synod level to oversee Synod activities; and despite itself the true uncompromising Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland turned into an American denomination responding to American issues with the heritage of Christendom.

The years after 1871 were optimistic ones for the RP Church, despite the failure of the millennium to arrive in 1866. Alexander McLeod in 1814 had published Lectures upon the Principal Prophecies of

Revelation, which was very influential in the American RP Church for decades. McLeod dated the rise of the beast to 606 when the emperor of Rome declared its bishop to be the universal head of the church. According to Revelation, the beast would rule for 42 months, that is, 1260 days. That made 1866 the year for the start of Christ's millennial rule on earth when the nations would recognize Christ, to be followed by his Coming after a thousand years and then the Judgment. The millennium did not begin in 1866, but the optimism engendered by the end of slavery and the survival of the Union infected the RP Church. It continued to grow numerically, reaching about 11,000 members by 1890. Its college and seminary grew. And through the National Reform Association it made a serious effort to amend the United States Constitution.

In order to secure wide Christian support for the amendment, the Church tacitly reduced its demands to two items: the abolition of slavery, accomplished by amendment after the Civil War's end, and the change of its Preamble to make the Constitution a Christian covenant rather than a secular one. The amended Preamble would read: "Humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Governor among the nations, and his revealed will as the supreme law of the land, in order to constitute a Christian government..." The NRA secured wide support, including from some governors, Senators, judges, and Representatives. At its height, it employed 20 men and got a hearing for its proposed amendment before a House Subcommittee. But by 1900 the push for such an amendment had lost steam. The NRA turned to issues such as gambling, Sabbath keeping, and temperance issues, and from being a Covenanter front organization, it became a mostly Covenanter affair until the 1990's. It still submits a report to our Synod every year.

Section 4 of the Covenant of 1871 reads in part as follows: "Believing the Church to be one, and that all saints have communion with God and with one another in the same Covenant believing, moreover, that schism and sectarianism are sinful in themselves; and inimical to true religion, and trusting that divisions shall cease, and the people of God become one Catholic church over all the earth, we will pray and labor for the visible oneness of the Church of God in our own land and throughout the world, on the basis of truth and Scriptural order." Pursuant to that aim a Committee on Union from the RP Church and the UP Church met in 1888. They agreed on the mediatorial reign of Jesus Christ over the nations, but could not agree on the religious nature of the American constitution. Union attempts failed. Negotiations were opened next with the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (the "New Lights" of 1833). The "New Lights" proposed a basis of union accepted by the RP committee. Neither church accepted it, but 17 members of the RP Synod dissented. A convoluted series of events followed, the upshot of which was a trial of 7 men in 1891 on the charge of following a divisive course. The trial lasted a week and centered attention mostly on issues of church order rather than the substance of the matter, which was the Church's teaching on political dissent. Only R.J. George, a Seminary professor, addressed the issue head on arguing that the church as church must dissent in a practical way politically. In the end, the men were convicted, but a major disruption followed. The Church lost about 2000 of its members as well as some of its ministers.

As the RP Church entered the Twentieth Century, it poured much of its energy into foreign missions, sending out over 100 missionaries by 1920, to Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, and China. In the United States and Canada, it began to suffer a slow but steady decline in membership. Its church paper became less lively.

Concerned about the loss of its young people, the Church in the 1920's appointed a Young People's Secretary and began to sponsor a series of Presbytery camps. But still the decline in membership and the loss of congregations continued. Quietly and not so quietly, leaders and members pointed to political dissent as the source of decline.

In 1928 two chapters in the Testimony were significantly rewritten: 29, "Of Civil Government", and 30, "Of the Right of Dissent from a Civil Constitution." The new chapter 30 dispensed with an outlook that used the "social compact" language of the Englishman John Locke and spoke of the relationship between government and people as being more "organic" in character. The result was a dark view of the American nation which essentially taught that a secular government truly reflected the secular sentiments of the nation. The Covenant of 1871 blamed national sins on the failings of the Constitution; the new chapter 30 of the Testimony blamed the failings of the Constitution on the irreligiosity of the American nation. By now, political dissent meant not voting or holding office, and Synod's attention became focused on how absolute the oath to the Constitution was. Could it be understood as allowing for a prior allegiance to Jesus Christ? In the end, Chapters 29 and 30 were rewritten in such a way that political dissent became a matter of private conscience. Covenanters became voters, then office holders and lawyers.

One active segment of the church were the Women's Missionary Societies, organized initially to provide financial support for single women missionaries. The national Women's Association, at the request of the Synod, also took on the task of providing a home for the Church's aged people. The Home today is still located in Pittsburgh, where it was begun a century ago, still run by the Women's Association. The renamed Women's Missionary Fellowships continue to meet in many congregations, with a hierarchical structure paralleling the presbyteries and Synod. They sponsor annual "Presbyterials," meetings of women at the presbyterial level, and a Synodical meeting of women.

Some segments of the Church in the years before and after World War I became frankly fundamentalist, while others were intrigued by essentially liberal scholarship regarding the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, the Church as a whole continued to hold to the Shorter Catechism's theology and never questioned the inspiration of the Scriptures. In the 1930's the Presbyterian Church in America suffered disruptions over the issue of Scriptural inerrancy, and a number of their people left to form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church among others. J.G. Vos, the son of the Princeton professor Gerhardus Vos, joined the RP Church, first as a missionary in Manchuria, then as Bible professor at Geneva College. Through the Blue Banner Faith and Life and his teaching Vos, along with others, led the RP Church to more closely identify itself with the Westminster Confession of Faith than with its distinctive Testimony. He also raised in Synod the issue of whether the Bible teaches total abstinence from alcohol. In the battle with liberalism, our ministers relied heavily on the scholarship of old Princeton Seminary and later Westminster Seminary. Both sources also sent the Church's attention more to Westminster than to the distinctive Covenanter Testimony.

The recentering of attention on the Westminster Standards came to fruition with the total rewriting of the Testimony by a committee headed by Jim Carson. It was appointed in 1969 and its work was fully approved in 1980. The new testimony did not stand by itself as had the old testimony. Instead, it was

written as a series of comments on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Some things were omitted, for example, the church no longer stated unequivocally that Christians should abstain from alcohol. Other things were added, for example, statements defending the Bible's truthfulness and parental responsibility in educating their children. The old refrain, "We therefore condemn the following errors and testify against all who maintain them," was amended to a more pallid "We reject." Finally, the status of the Covenant of 1871 was left ambiguous. It is printed in the section labeled "History" in our Constitution.

In the years after World War II, the Reformed Presbyterian Church made a second concerted effort to amend the American constitution, this time through the Christian Amendment Movement. It too secured wider support for a differently worded amendment and got a single hearing before a House subcommittee. But by the 1960's it was obvious to all that the Amendment was not practical politics, and Sam Boyle, then its director, tried to head it in a new direction as the Christian Government Movement. The organization died soon after he left it, however. Indeed, it looked more and more as if the revised Testimony chapter 30 had it right: the United States is not a Christian country burdened with a secular constitution which is the source of our sins; rather it is an essentially irreligious country that has the secular constitution which its people want. The legalization of abortion on demand in 1973, which had initial support even from the Southern Baptist Church, gave support to such a view.

If ours is, in fact, an essentially unconverted nation, then evangelism becomes a high priority for the church. Also after World War II a number of young seminarians became concerned with the paucity of evangelism in RP Churches. They turned to the Navigators for help, and from the 1950's through the 1970's Navigator influence was widespread. In the 1980's the emphasis on evangelism flowed into a new emphasis on church planting under the influence first of Roy Blackwood in Indiana and Ed Robson in New York and then of the Home Mission Board. Finally, after 1990 total church membership began to climb again after a century of declining.

Also after World War II, missions in China (1949) and Syria (1958) were closed when governments expelled all missionaries. To help the Chinese church, former missionaries to China such as Sam Boyle and others organized the Reformation Translation Fellowship. Its goal was to translate, publish, and distribute Reformed literature in Chinese. Its work continues to this day. The former RP congregation in Latakia, Syria, remains the largest Protestant congregation in that country. In Cyprus there was a concerted push to establish a local church after the island gained its independence in 1960. In the space of six years before 1970, the Church sent out over a dozen new missionaries to that island. In 1974 war with Turkey divided the island and the mission ended, but many contacts with believers continue. Missionaries from China headed by Sam Boyle began a new mission in Kobe, Japan. After four decades of work there, a Japanese Presbytery was formed and a seminary begun, Kobe Theological Hall. Finally, under the energetic leadership of Rich Ganz, RP work in Canada began to flourish. A hundred years ago the number of RP's in Canada may have been as high as half the number in the United States. But they never formed their own seminary, always depending on imports from Ireland or the United States, and in time all but two congregations faded away. Soon after arriving in Ottawa, Ganz began Ottawa Theological Hall to train Canadians for the ministry. The result is a growing presence in Canada and talk of a Canadian Presbytery.

A final new development after World War II was the involvement of RP's in the organization of the National Association of Evangelicals. Howard Elliott, then Bruce Stewart, and finally Jack White were all active and prominent in that organization. Somewhat later the RP Church helped to organize the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, to which it still belongs. In recent years, there has been a new interest in Reformed Presbyterian Churches worldwide with multiple contacts with churches in Ireland, Scotland, and Australia.

Several other developments of the last few decades are worthy of note. First, the RP Seminary became fully professionalized with accreditation by ATS. Second, presbyteries beginning in the 1970's began asserting their decision-making power as against the Synod. In other words, a measure of decentralization began. Third, a radically changed Psalter was introduced in 1973 and has become widely used beyond our denomination. Fourth, the traditional liturgy of the church which was never prescribed in our Directory for Worship began to vary by congregation. Fifth, new ministers after about 1975 began to come almost entirely from outside the ranks of those raised in the RP Church. At the same time, the flow of men from Geneva College to the Seminary dried up. Sixth, Geneva College under the leadership of Jack White gave substantial help to a new kind of educational undertaking, the Center for Urban Theological Studies in Philadelphia, continuing the Church's historic interest in the Black community. And the RP Seminary today has the largest percentage of Black students of any Reformed Seminary in the United States. Finally, a new interest in foreign missions has sent dozens of young RP's overseas on summer trips and in 2004 to a declared intent to begin denominational mission work in Yemen and the Sudan.

## **Conclusion**

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is part of the church of Jesus Christ. It does his work of teaching the nations, beginning at home and extending to the ends of the earth. It worships him in spirit and truth. It teaches the Word of God faithfully. It proclaims the Kingship of Christ over all nations, including the United States, Canada, and Japan. It continues the teachings of the universal Church through the ages and the attainments of the Reformation. It is the pillar and ground of the truth which awaits the Coming of its Lord Jesus Christ, God and man in two distinct natures and one Person forever, our Savior. Amen.