

The History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America from 1528 to 2004

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[Introduction](#)

[The Church](#)

[The Presbyterian Church](#)

[The First Reformation in Scotland](#)

[The Second Reformation in Scotland, Rise of the Covenanters](#)

[The Killing Times](#)

[The Society Period](#)

[The Reformed Presbyterian Church in the New World](#)

[The RPCNA Formed](#)

[New Light/Old Light Split](#)

[External Issues](#)

[Slavery.](#)

[Revivalism.](#)

[Drunkenness.](#)

[War.](#)

[Internal Issues](#)

[Psalmody and singing.](#)

[Deacons.](#)

[Sunday School.](#)

[Finances.](#)

[Education.](#)

[Missions.](#)

[Covenant of 1871.](#)

[Developments after 1871](#)

[East End Split and Decline.](#)

[Changes in Political Views.](#)

[Reforming our Theology.](#)

[Christian Amendment Movement.](#)

[Evangelism and Church Planting.](#)

[Missions.](#)

[Fraternal Relations.](#)

[Other Developments.](#)

[Conclusion](#)

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.) They defeated Nestorianism, that separated Jesus' divinity and humanity into two persons and denied that Mary bore the God-man in her womb. 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 and martyrdom. A disciple of John, Polycarp Presbyterian of Smyrna, answered the demand that he deny Christ and offer incense to Caesar: "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 burned in the stadium.

Eventually, the Roman Empire learned that it had to become Christian. "Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers," Isaiah had 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 are so tempted. 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, imposed 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 the head on a 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 an arm part of the Roman Empire; instead, it often called its government to account.

In time, the Western Roman Empire collapsed 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 the Church a governmental department. One method of control they sought was the authority to appoint bishops. Each bishop would then run his diocese according to government policy.

As the centuries passed, the Church lost its way and needed reforming. In 1517, the Protestant Reformation began in Germany. Where the Reformers had state protection, they succeeded, but the price was high in terms of the Church's independence. In Germany at the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, the rule was laid down: the religion of the Prince will be the religion of his state. But in Scotland, as in the Netherlands, the Calvinist reformed Church refused to submit to state control, no matter the cost in blood. The Church through its elders insisted on receiving its preachers and determining its doctrine according to God's Word alone. Scotland's kings and queens, the Stewarts, were equally determined to establish an absolute monarchy, including control of the Church. They would run the Church through bishops. The battle lasted through six generations of royalty and for over a hundred years, until James II went into exile in 1688.

The Presbyterian Church

The First Reformation in Scotland

Scotland in 1500 confessed 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, introduced the teachings of Martin Luther. Like Polycarp long before him, he was burned to death. People asked why he was executed, 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. A group of Protestants then assassinated Beaton and took refuge in St. Andrews Castle. One of their associates, John Knox, a former priest and body guard of Wishart's, joined them. French forces captured the castle, and Knox was sentenced to row in French galleys. When freed, Knox preached in England, but fled to 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, widow of James V and Scotland's regent for their young daughter Mary, 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 Christian nation with a reformed Church. 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 wicked and foolish. She married Lord Darnley, a Roman Catholic and lost much of her support among the nobles. They had one son, James VI, born in 1566. Then Darnley was murdered, and Mary married the man suspected of his murder. Outraged preachers aroused the nation, and a month later Mary abdicated in favor of her infant son, James VI.

James VI was the third generation in the Stewart line to deal with the Reformation. Although he was educated by the Protestant James Buchanan and guided by a succession of Protestant nobles ruling Scotland until he came of age, James had little liking for Presbyterian principles. 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 subjects have the right to call wicked rulers to account. His book containing the essentials of the later

teaching of the Covenanters Samuel Rutherford and Richard Cameron. Young James VI 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, the "Black Acts" were repealed when Parliament adopted the Second Book of Discipline, largely Melville's work, and made the Church presbyterian. James VI still wanted bishops, however. "No bishop, no king," he said, meaning that a Church which he could not control by appointing its bishops 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. Having gained a measure of control over the Scottish Church through appointing bishops to rule it, James next introduced worship innovations by the 1618 Articles of Perth: private baptism and communion, kneeling to receive communion, and confirmation by the bishops. Many Scots characterized these things as "Popish."

The Second Reformation in Scotland, Rise of the Covenanters

In 1625 James died. His son, Charles I, became king of both England and Scotland, the fourth Stewart 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. An attempt to use the prayer book produced a riot in Edinburgh, the signing of the National Covenant by 300,000 Scottish nobles and commons to defend the reformed and presbyterian religion -- the signatories henceforth called "Covenanters" -- Charles' attempt to enforce his will in Scotland by arms, and his recall of the English Parliament to raise money for the war. The end result in England was a Civil War 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 between the three kingdoms to establish and defend the true religion -- by which the Scots meant Presbyterianism -- 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 Stewarts had lost. The Church of Scotland was now fully Presbyterian and Reformed. 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. For a few heady years, the Covenanters ruled Scotland. Then the Covenanters split into two factions. The Scots, Presbyterian or not, were still loyal to the Stewart dynasty. The Stewarts hadn't lost yet, after all.

The executed 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 in Scotland's last ever coronation ceremony at Scone, on January 1, 1651. Scotland got another Stewart king, the fifth Stewart to deal with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and Charles got an army with which to retake the English crown. However, he lost to Cromwell and went back to exile. General Cromwell ruled Scotland with a hated occupation army of 7000 English soldiers. He mostly left the Church alone, which divided into Resolutioner and Protestor factions. In Glasgow, for example, there were two presbyteries, a Protestor and a Resolutioner.

In 1658 Cromwell died. England, seeing the incompetence of Cromwell's son and tired of 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, that the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant, sworn in God's name, have a "descending obligation" on the nations that signed them. He said, "God hath laid engagements on Scotland, we are tied 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.

The Killing Times

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 episcopal preachers and went to illegal field conventicles to hear their old presbyterian 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 left was the aged Donald Cargill. 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. 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. The true Presbyterian religion was not established throughout Great Britain. 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 Period

The Society People, with no preachers, stayed out of the established Church, maintaining that they were the true Second Reformation Presbyterian Church of Scotland. 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 immediately established the Scottish Reformed 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 Stewarts lost. The few pathetic efforts in the 1700's to restore the Stewart monarchy failed. Scotland lost its independence to England, submerged in a Great Britain in which it had no real say. The Church of Scotland became Presbyterian, but not independent of the state or even of local aristocrats; lay patronage resumed. The English Parliament won, defeating absolutist monarchy. Most significantly, the principles that the Church of Jesus Christ should be independent of state control and that the state should not coerce the conscience of its subjects became firmly fixed in English political thought. The First Amendment to the American Constitution, unthinkable through centuries of state efforts to control the Church, became possible: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

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, but refusing to vote or sit on juries or enlist in the army.

By the time the Reformed Presbyterians of Scotland had established their own the Reformed 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 worship of God with emphasis on preaching and Psalm-singing, their lay-led Societies, 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 in 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. Under the leadership of Alexander Craighead, the Society People in 1743 renewed their adherence to the National Covenant and to the Solemn League and Covenant at Middle Octarara, Pennsylvania. In 1751 the Scottish Reformed Presbytery sent John Cuthbertson 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. He insisted that religion must be personal, not merely formal. He catechized new members, oversaw church discipline, solemnized marriages, ordained elders, conducted the sacraments, and preached. He began with a Psalm explanation, going through them in order. Then followed a lecture on some passage of the Bible. After lunch, the day concluded with 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. (In 1858 they joined with Associate Presbyterians not involved in the first union to form the United Presbyterian Church.) A minority of the Society People in America declined to join the new church.

The American Revolution, which was also a civil war, began. The segment 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 against England. They remembered the years of oppression and persecution at English hands. 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, but the United States Constitution conspicuously omitted any reference to God or Christ. In Scotland the main issue had been the independence of the Christian Church from a professedly Christian King. In America, the issue was the government's wholesale denial of Christ's authority over the nations.

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 granted equal protection to any and all religions, allowing even atheists to hold office. It even protected the outrageously sinful institution of slavery! In 1803, Samuel Wylie published *Two Sons of Oil* explaining the Reformed Presbyterian dissent from the Constitution. He did not mention the covenants nor the issue of bishops. An immigrant church had become an American church, dealing with American issues from the standpoint of the faith of Christendom as known through the

experience of the Scottish Covenanters. 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 lived as peaceable members of society.

The RPCNA Formed

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 Reformed Presbyterian 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 South Carolina Covenanters had migrated to escape slavery. In 1810 they founded a Seminary. Ministers published and published: sermons, periodicals, tracts, and books -- books on basic Christian doctrine, infant baptism, slavery, and the secular American constitution.

The Reformed Presbyterian 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 Reformed Presbyterian Churches.

New Light/Old Light Split

By the 1820's, however, some Covenanters wearied of the unpopular criticism of the Constitution, which separated them from other Americans. 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 Reformed Presbyterian 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 joined and was received by the Presbyterian Church in America in 1982.)

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. First, the external issues:

External Issues

Slavery.

From 1800 onward, when Alexander McLeod refused a call from the Coldenham Church until its members freed their slaves, the Reformed Presbyterian 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. Such sinful laws have no rightful hold on the conscience, and the government that imposes them lacks legitimacy. 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 to 1883. 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 antislavery agitation only increased.

Revivalism.

Craighead had been a friend of the Calvinist revivalist Whitefield, but Reformed Presbyterians now rejected the Arminianism of the Second Great Awakening. Instead, they emphasized the periodic Communion seasons as times of fasting and repentance for the renewal of their Christian faith. Such seasons also helped to preserve ties to the Old World, since the Covenanters of Ireland and Scotland celebrated Communion in the same way.

Drunkennes.

Several Covenanter ministers in the 1700's were disciplined for drunkenness. The family of James R. Willson, the conservative leader in the 1833 split, had turned its wheat into whiskey to take down the Ohio River for sale. But as the Temperance Movement gained steam in the face of widespread drunkenness, the Reformed Presbyterian 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 an alternative loyalty oath to the official one, 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 came. 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 presented 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:

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 leaning Isaac Watts and adding organs. One result was that some Irish and Scottish immigrants from churches which still used the Psalms joined the Reformed Presbyterian 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 Reformed Presbyterian Psalter with music and

words together was published in 1863. Since other Presbyterian and Reformed churches were now abandoning Psalms, it became a new distinct mark of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

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 the Broomall Reformed Presbyterian Church 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 tithing 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 before the Civil War, 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, a large majority of Reformed Presbyterian ministers were graduates of Geneva College. When the Presbyterian Church in the 1840's began establishing its own parochial schools because of the increasing secularization of the public schools, the Reformed Presbyterian Church explored the idea. But it was too small to support its own network of schools. The Church educated its adult members in the weekly worship service, the Society meetings, and by monthly church periodicals. Two rival publications -- the deacon issue -- merged in 1863 after that 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. Finally, parents taught their children the Bible in daily family worship. 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.

Missions.

Though beginning before the Civil War, Reformed Presbyterian interest in missions flourished only after 1865 with foreign missions in Syria, Turkey, and Cyprus. Mission work began in China around 1900, and after World

War II in Japan. Covenanters also began missions among freed slaves in Selma, Alabama, among immigrant Jews in Philadelphia, Chinese laborers in San Francisco, Indians in Oklahoma, and for a short while in Kentucky.

Covenant of 1871.

In 1802 the Reformed Presbytery had ordered the drafting of a covenant that would contain the spirit of the Solemn League and Covenant. It wasn't done. 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: 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 sessions overseeing congregations in a system of graded courts; Church Seminary and College; a church paper; increasingly organized fundraising for missions and Seminary; and Boards at the Synod level to oversee national activities. One more organizational piece was the Women's Missionary Society. They met monthly in congregations and sponsored annual Presbyterials and a Synodical meeting. The Women's Association at Synod's request started a Home for the Aged in Pittsburgh. The true Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland had turned into an American denomination responding to American issues with the heritage of Christendom.

Developments after 1871

The years after 1871 were optimistic ones for the Reformed Presbyterian 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 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. The millennium did not begin in 1866, but the optimism engendered by the end of slavery and the survival of the Union infected the Reformed Presbyterian Church. It continued to grow numerically, reaching about 11,000 members by 1890. Its college and seminary grew. And through the National Reform Association the Reformed Presbyterian Church 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 idea of amending the Constitution was presented to a reportedly sympathetic Abraham Lincoln shortly before his death. The NRA secured wide support, including from some governors, Senators, judges, and Representatives. It began publishing the monthly Christian Statesman. At its height, it had 20 employees 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, only recently reviving its interest amending a secular Constitution. The NRA still submits a report to our Synod every year.

East End Split and Decline.

Optimism after the Civil War and the Covenant of 1871 encouraged the Reformed Presbyterian Church to make a second attempt at achieving union with another Presbyterian Church. The 1871 Covenant taught that the Church is one, and schism is sinful. It committed the Reformed Presbyterian Church to "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." Unfortunately, such talks in 1825 had helped to precipitate the New Light/Old Light schism of 1833. The result was similar in 1891. A Committee on Union from the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the United Presbyterian 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). Neither church accepted a proposed basis for union, but 17 members of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod dissented. The upshot was a trial of 7 men in 1891 on the charge of following a divisive course. The trial lasted a week. It dealt mostly with matters of church order, but the real issue was the practice of political dissent, most notably not voting in national elections. The men were convicted, and a major disruption followed. The Church lost about 2000 of its members and some of its ministers.

In the United States and Canada, the church 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 and a national convention. But still the decline in membership and the loss of congregations continued. Too many pulpits were empty. Quietly and not so quietly, leaders and members pointed to political dissent as the cause for decline.

Changes in Political Views.

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 the "social compact" language of the Englishman John Locke and spoke of the relationship between government and people as organic in character. The result was a dark view of the American nation: the people had the Constitution that they wanted and deserved. 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. On through the 1950's, Synod debated how absolute the oath to the Constitution was. Could it be understood as allowing a prior allegiance to Jesus Christ and so perhaps make room for voting in elections without compromising loyalty to Christ? By the early 1960's, Chapters 29 and 30 had been rewritten again. In 1964, Synod decided that political dissent would no longer be a matter of church discipline. Covenanters became voters, then lawyers, then office holders. This change also precipitated a union with the Associate Synod of North America in 1969.

Reforming our Theology.

Some segments of the Church in the years before and after World War I became frankly fundamentalist, with a pietistic emphasis on the evils of drinking, dancing, smoking, card playing, and the movies, along with a theological understanding that went little beyond the "fundamentals" and some Covenanter traditionalism. Others in the Church 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 faithful remnant Presbyterian Churches. J.G. Vos, the son of the Princeton professor Gerhardus Vos, joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church, first as a missionary in Manchuria, then a pastor in the Midwest, and finally as Bible professor at Geneva College. Through the Blue Banner Faith and Life and his teaching, Vos, along with others,

led the Reformed Presbyterian Church to identify itself more closely with the Westminster Confession of Faith. He also raised in Synod the issue of whether the Bible teaches total abstinence from alcohol. In the battle with liberalism, Reformed Presbyterian ministers relied heavily on the scholarship of old Princeton Seminary and later Westminster Seminary. Both sources also sent the Church's attention more to the Westminster Standards than it had been.

The refocusing 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 in parallel with the Westminster Confession of Faith. Some things were changed, 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, "We reject." Finally, the status of the Covenant of 1871 was left ambiguous. It is printed in the section under "History" in our Constitution.

Christian Amendment Movement.

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 secured support for a different amendment than the NRA had proposed and got a hearing before a House subcommittee. It published the Christian Patriot magazine. 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 returned to Japan as a missionary. Indeed, it looked more and more as if the revised 1928 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 whose secular constitution accurately reflects the will of the people. The legalization of abortion on demand in 1973, which had initial support even from the Southern Baptist Church, and the national legalization of gay marriage in 2015 gave support to such a view.

Evangelism and Church Planting.

If ours is, in fact, an essentially unconverted nation, then evangelism becomes a high priority for the church. After World War II, a number of young seminarians became concerned about the paucity of evangelism from Reformed Presbyterians. Some, like Ken Smith, turned to the Navigators for help, and from the 1950's through the 1970's Navigator influence was widespread. As secretary of the Board of Education, Ken influenced a whole generation of young people. 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, about 1990, total church membership began to climb again after a century of decline. The Synod made a goal of reaching 100 congregations by the year 2020.

Missions.

In the three decades after 1891, the Reformed Presbyterian Church poured much of its energy into foreign missions, sending out over 100 missionaries by 1920, to Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, and China. 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 led by Sam Boyle 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 Reformed Presbyterian 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, and over a hundred young people in six schools professed personal faith in Christ. In 1974, war with Turkey divided the island and the mission ended, but many contacts with believers continue through the two schools the mission once ran and the Trinity Christian Community Fellowship.

Missionaries from China headed by Sam Boyle began a new mission in Kobe, Japan. After four decades of work, a Japanese Presbytery was formed and a seminary begun, Kobe Theological Hall. Finally, under the energetic leadership of Rich Ganz, Reformed Presbyterian work in Canada began to flourish. A hundred years ago the number of Reformed Presbyterians 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, Rich began Ottawa Theological Hall to train Canadians for the ministry. The result is a growing presence in Canada and plans for a Canadian Presbytery.

Fraternal Relations.

A final new development after World War II was the involvement of Reformed Presbyterians 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 Reformed Presbyterian Church helped to organize the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC), 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, Japan, Cyprus, and Australia. Interest in Covenanter history, even Covenanter political theory, is reviving, in part through the efforts of Andrew Quigley in Scotland.

Other Developments.

Several other developments of the last few decades are worthy of note. First, the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary became a fully accredited institution. Second, presbyteries became more assertive in managing their own affairs, each developing its unique character. In other words, a measure of decentralization began. Third, a radically changed Psalter (The Book of Psalms for Singing) was introduced in 1973. In 2011, a followup iteration (The Book of Psalms for Worship) was published. Both have been widely used beyond our denomination. Fourth, the traditional liturgy of the church which was never prescribed in our Directory for Worship but was almost universally followed began to vary by congregation. An updated Directory for Public Worship was adopted in 2010 which gave suggested orders of service. Fifth, after 1975 new ministers began to come predominantly from outside the ranks of those raised in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. At the same time, the flow of men from Geneva College to the Seminary dried up. Sixth, the Church decided that the Bible establishes only two offices, deacon and elder, rather than three, deacon, elder, and minister. Seventh, 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. The Reformed Presbyterian 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 Reformed Presbyterians overseas on summer trips, and in 2004 Synod declared its intent to begin mission work in two new countries.

Conclusion

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is a part of the one church of Jesus Christ, maintaining the attainments of the ancient and the Reformation Church. It does Christ's work of teaching the nations, beginning at home and extending to the ends of the earth. It worships God in spirit and truth, teaching, the Word of God faithfully. It continues to believe that Christ is King over the nations and that they should officially recognize his reign. In other words, it rejects the ideal of a religiously neutral secular state as both an impossibility and an insult to Christ. It is the pillar and ground of the truth and awaits the Coming of its Lord Jesus Christ, God and man in two distinct natures and one Person forever, King over the nations, our Savior. Amen.