

## FOREWORD.

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OVER 100 years ago, the Rev. W. Melancthon Glasgow published his *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America*. In the intervening years, copies of this book have become rather rare; some have been destroyed by mischance, and many others have been ruined by the poor quality of paper and of binding. Furthermore, Glasgow's desire that "his imperfect work prove acceptable and interesting to those for whom it has been gathered" has truly been granted. Today, many people know of this *History* and would like to own their own copy—or at least want to read and to use one. To that end, this edition is published: although published only on the Internet, and not in book form, it is made available to nearly all who care about the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Since 1888, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has undergone many changes in its testimony to the nations. Primary among these is political dissent. The Preface states, "Reformed Presbyterians have never voted at any of the elections, nor held office under the government." Today, Reformed Presbyterians routinely vote, and at least one Reformed Presbyterian holds state office. Likewise, there is no longer a prohibition against citizenship oaths, service on juries, or related acts.

Other matters, as well, have changed. While Glasgow says, "[I]t will be seen that this is a temperance Church," and while abstinence from the use of alcohol is still encouraged, members and officers are no longer required to refrain from beverage alcohol. Similar restrictions—for example, ones on the use of tobacco—have also been revised or removed.

Of course, as the years have passed, new errors have arisen, and our *Testimony* has been updated to keep pace. The Church of 1888 did not make reference to willful abortion, as that was not an issue. Today, however, abortion is one of the most dynamic social controversies, and we should praise God that he has enabled this church to maintain a testimony against such murder.

In 1888, if a Covenanter minister were asked to name the most distinctive principle of his church, the response would surely deal with political dissent—an issue about which many members know little today. If a similar question were asked of an RP minister today, the response would surely deal with worship—a matter relatively little debated then. Many churches used only the unaccompanied Psalms, and would continue to do so for many years. How has the church changed in that issue? RP belief and practice have remained the same, except for the use of choirs in some congregations, but nearly every other denomination has abandoned exclusive Psalmody without instruments.

New debates have appeared during the twentieth century, and the twenty-first will surely be the same. The Synod of 1888, which Glasgow does not record, approved the ordination of women to the diaconate. With the changes in doctrines relating to alcohol, the elements of the Lord's Supper are not free from debate—some congregations and ministers yet stand for only unfermented juice, others endorse alcoholic wine, and some congregations even offer both. In recent years, these matters have been the source of much debate, and the Synod will surely continue to discuss them (and others) for years to come.

If a viewer, altogether ignorant of the history of our church, were to compare statistics of 1887 and 2003, he would surely consider the denomination to be in decline.

In 1887, the RP Church had 114 ministers, 11 licentiates, 20 students of theology, 121 congregations, 10,832 communicant members, annual contributions of \$24.04 per member, and 11 presbyteries.

In 2003, there were 148 ministers, 12 licentiates, 40 men under care of presbyteries (including 6 licensed to preach but not to receive a call), 77 congregations, 4,440 communicant members, annual contributions of \$1,878.28 per member, and 7 presbyteries.

Discounting contributions, the viewer would say that the denomination has a much better minister-to-congregation ratio, but that it were at serious risk of extinction. However, after looking at previous years, we indeed have reason to thank God for improving the situation. Since about 1980, he has given much growth; at one point in that period, there were fewer than 3,900 communicant members and only 66 congregations. A quick sketch of RP history since 1888 is in order.

Three years after Glasgow's book was published, the denomination suffered the "East End Controversy." A few ministers met at the East End RP Church in Pittsburgh to oppose political dissent, and their trial and conviction at Synod led to their departure and that of hundreds of members. Although the church recovered slightly and grew for a few more years, a long, slow decline began at the 1891 split. Liberalism fueled this decline; the Synod of 1939 even decided to ordain women to the eldership! At the same time, the preaching of "Covenanter Distinctives" grew at the expense of the gospel. One man, long an elder at the Belle Center congregation, was an RP his whole life, yet he declared that he never heard the gospel until he was an adult.

Graciously, God raised up others to oppose man-made ideas and to replace them with his truth. The RP Church has now seen over twenty years of almost constant growth in numbers and in purity. In the last twenty-five years, God has given it more than 1,200 more members—an increase of nearly 25%! He has also given a strong sense of church planting. New churches have been founded in many areas, among which are several new churches in New York, Ontario, and Indiana, the first churches in Maryland in 100 years, and the first congregation in the Carolinas since before the Civil War.

Some may be surprised to find that this edition was first started as a personal project. One day, I discovered my father's copy on a bookshelf and was so interested that I determined to buy a copy. However, advertising on the denominational e-mail network produced little advice, no offers to sell, and one request by someone else to buy a copy. With that, I decided that the only way to have a copy was to make one, so I set out to type the entire book into our home computer. Three months later, I finished the project with a very different purpose in mind.

For some time, I have been involved in the Boy Scouts. To advance to the highest rank, that of Eagle Scout, a boy must plan and lead a service project to benefit his church, community, or school. My father conceived the idea of republishing this book as my project; although I did not consider the notion useful at first, he soon persuaded me to pursue it. From January 2005 until now, making plans and arrangements with the Board of Education and Publication has occupied much of my time, as well as coordinating proofreading of the typescript. The volunteers who have done the work live throughout

America, from Kansas to Alabama to Pennsylvania. Many of them are not ministers (although some are), and they range from retirement age to that of fourteen years.

Careful readers of this edition, when comparing it to an original copy, may notice passages different from their original books. Except for my own errors, these modifications were uniformly made to improve upon the accuracy of the original volume. Various knowledgeable persons submitted these corrections; as Glasgow says on a somewhat different matter, “These were perseveringly brought to light from all parts of the Church, and used in furnishing material for this volume.” As this book is quite useful for historical research, an original error that is reproduced causes only further confusion. Since some errors doubtless exist in this online text, the E&P Board welcomes further corrections. All intentional changes are marked with a double dagger, like this‡ in the text, and all such changes are listed in the “List of Errors” appendix.

Although I have attempted to correct all inconsistencies, a few matters of spelling were left alone. This includes most town names with *h* on the end—for example, *Pittsburgh* or *Pittsburg*—along with some common words—such as *centre* or *center*. There are three main reasons for keeping this inconsistency. (1) Around this time, the Post Office began to standardize names of towns: *h* was dropped from *-burgh*, *Centre* was changed to *Center*, and other similar changes were made. (2) American spelling of some words, like *centre/center*, was still being standardized. (3) Such a large book takes a long time to write, and both Glasgow’s writing style and the style of writing in society in general changed during that time.

As we look to the future of Christ’s Church, we have cause to rejoice, whether we consider all of organized Christianity or just the RPCNA. We know that God will ultimately have the victory, be it tomorrow or thousands of years into the future, and for this let us praise him. “A seed shall rise to serve His will,/And to the age it shall be told/About our Lord; then they shall come/And shall His righteousness unfold/Unto a people yet unknown,/That this was done by Him alone.” (Psalm 22:30-31)

Amen! Hallelujah!

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