

Officer Training – Presbyterian Church History

Chapter 9: Glorious Reformation

What would have been some of the results if the Reformation had not occurred?

- Would the church have “caved in” and become largely “irrelevant” as Lucas suggests?
- How would Geneva have been different without Calvin’s presence?
- What type of leader would have united the European countries?
- Would not God, in His providence, preserved His church using other men and means?

Who was John Calvin (1509-1654)?

- He wrote a systematic theology of the Triune God and His Church in the “Institutes of the Christian Religion” beginning in 1536 and completing the final revision in 1559
- He placed great emphasis on man’s inability to save himself, God’s sovereign grace through the Holy Spirit in saving men, a high regard for the Church, the Sacraments, the importance of prayer, and expository preaching of the Word
- He wrote a catechism for his congregation in the vernacular (common) language
- He formed a “consistory” in Geneva made up of elders to handle discipline cases that demonstrated how church government and discipline could be organized and operated
- Calvin, Luther and the others were “reformers”, not “innovators” in the sense that they borrowed from the early church fathers such as Augustine reintroduced the teachings that had been abandoned by the Roman Church.

Who was John Knox (c1513-1572)?

- He was a student of George Wishart (and tutored Wishart’s children) in Scotland
- He preached until he was captured by the French and later escaped to Geneva
- He learned and embraced Calvin’s theology, church government and church discipline
- He took what he learned back to Scotland and became influential for the church there
- He wrote the Scots Confession (biblical historical plan of redemption) and other books

What legacy did the Westminster Assembly of Divines leave for us here in the 21st century?

- Various political and ecclesiastical disagreements between the Presbyterians in Scotland and Episcopalians in the Church of England eventually demanded an assembly to work out the differences
- It was formed by an act of the “Long Parliament” without the assent of King Charles I
- It first convened on July 1, 1643 at Westminster Abbey with 121 appointed ministers and 30 laity
- It met 1,163 times until 1649, although the majority of its work was completed by 1647
- It produced the “Westminster Confession of Faith”, a “Larger Catechism”, a “Shorter Catechism” and a “The Directory for the Publick Worship of God”

Chapter 10: Errand Into the Wilderness

When, where and by whom were the first Presbyterian churches in America formed?

- By the English in New England (Jamaica Presbyterian – Long Island, NY – 1672)
- By the Scots-Irish in the Mid-Atlantic (Philadelphia) and Northern Virginia – 1698

Who was Francis Makemie (1658-1708)?

- Gathered 7 ministers in MD, VA, DE and PA to create first presbytery in 1706
- Later moved to and preached in New York and Boston where he was mistreated and died

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What was the “subscription controversy”?

- Occurred during the 1720’s
- Supporters, led by John Thomson, argued that in order to control the church doctrine, it should be necessary for ministers to subscribe to the Westminster standards
- Opponents, led by Jonathan Dickinson, argued that “the Word alone” and the conscience were more important
- The synod (collection of presbyteries) adopted the Westminster standards in 1729

What was the “seminary controversy”?

- Occurred during the 1730’s
- John Thomson, and his supporters, felt that ministers should only be trained in England or at Yale or Harvard in America
- William Tennant, Sr., who had created the “Log College”, and his supporters, felt that ministers could be trained locally by qualified American teachers

What was the “Old Side” and “New Side” split?

- The split occurred in 1741 as a result of the
- The “Old Side”, led again by John Thomson and his supporters, felt that the “Great Awakening” was too disorderly, that the new schools led to spiritual unrest, and that the itinerant preachers were disruptive to congregations by pulling away members
- The “New Side”, led again by Jonathon Dickinson and by William Tennant, Sr.’s son Gilbert, believed that ministers needed a personal experience with Christ, that too much “order” led to missing the rebirth, took a looser view of subscription and were the allies of the Great Awakening preachers (Whitefield and the Wesleys) and the Dutch Reformed
- This all came to a head in 1740 when Gilbert Tennant preached a sermon “Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry” at Nottingham, PA in which he attacked the Old Side
- The New Side created the College of New Jersey in 1746 with Jonathon Dickinson, but he died after just a few months in office. Other presidents included Aaron Burr, Sr., Jonathon Edwards (who also died after just a few months) and John Witherspoon
- The Seven-Years War (French-Indian War) in 1757 brought the two sides back together in 1758

Who was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)?

- Started Yale in 1716 (at age 13) and graduated in 1720
- Served as pulpit supply in New York City in 1722-1723
- Tutored at Yale between 1724 and 1726
- Served in his grandfather’s (Solomon Stoddard) congregational church in Northampton, MA in 1727, took over when Solomon died just two years later, and led until 1749 when a dispute caused his dismissal
- Supported Old Side and New Side ministers but leaned toward New Side thought
- Served as a missionary to the Indians in Stockbridge, MA from 1750 to 1758
- Served as president of the College of New Jersey for only four weeks in 1758.
- He died from complications resulting from a smallpox vaccination

Who was John Witherspoon (1723-1794)?

- Introduced the so-called “Scottish Enlightenment” to the Presbyterian church
- President of the College of New Jersey from 1768 until his death in 1794
- Supported American liberty from the British
- Became a member of the Continental Congress
- Only clergy and college president to sign the Declaration of Independence

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- Helped to reorganize the Presbyterian Church into 16 presbyteries, 3 synods and general assembly due to problems with ministers being able to attend synod meetings
- Instrumental in creating the first Book of Church Order in 1788
- First General Assembly met in 1789

Chapter 11: The Golden Age

What is the importance of the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801?

- Communion celebration near Paris, KY
- An estimated 20,000 attendees and perhaps the first “camp meeting”
- Several denominations participated and at least three new denominations sprung out of the event: Christian Church/Church of Christ, Cumberland Presbyterians, and Shakers of Pleasant Hill, KY

Who was Charles Finney (1792-1875)?

- Described as an “electrifying” evangelical preacher
- Expressed and became a leader in the emerging “New School” thought

What was the “Old School” and “New School” split?

- The 1801 “Plan of Union” had created mixed Congregational/Presbyterian churches
- The “Old School” attendees at the 1837 general assembly abrogated this “Plan of Union”, and that vote was ratified in the 1838 general assembly after the moderator refused to recognize the “New School” attendees and effectively removed those churches from the denomination
- The New School produced the Auburn Declaration in 1837 (not to be confused with the later Auburn Affirmation of 1924)
- New School adherents believed:
 - Strict subscription to the Westminster standards were not necessary
 - Elder rule polity was not necessary (could be congregational)
 - Missions should be controlled by “societies” rather than the church
 - Certain “error” in doctrine was allowed to “save souls” and “spread churches”
 - Other errors, such as denying the atoning work of Christ, were supported by some
 - Abolition of slavery (after 1857)
- Key New School leaders included Albert Barnes and Charles Finney
- Key Old School leaders included Charles Hodge and James Henry Thornwell

Who was Charles Hodge (1797-1878)?

- Trained at Princeton Theological Seminary and at several schools in Europe
- Returned to teach at Princeton along with his mentor Archibald Alexander
- Represented “Northern” Presbyterian thought on government: there are three offices – minister, ruling elder and deacon, and the minister is superior to the ruling elder
- His lectures were published in 1873 as his Systematic Theology, which is still used

Who was James Henry Thornwell (1812-1862)?

- Trained at South Carolina College and Harvard
- Taught at South Carolina College and later at Columbia Theological Seminary
- Represented “Southern” Presbyterian thought on government: there are two offices – elder and deacon, and two kinds of elder – teaching and ruling, of equal authority
- Collected works were published by his colleagues in 1871-1873

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What changes did the Civil War bring to the Presbyterian Church?

- United Synod of the South split from the New School in 1857
- Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States split from the Old School in 1861
- The southern churches reunited in 1864 as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. under the leadership of Robert Lewis Dabney
- The northern churches reunited in 1869 as the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

What happened to the Presbyterian Church after the Civil War?

- Charles Darwin published *Origin of the Species* in 1859
- The northern and southern churches remained separate until 1983 (no, not 1893)
- A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield worked hard to preserve doctrinal standards at Princeton
- The northern church and Cumberland Presbyterian reunited in 1906
- The southern church lost many laymen and pastors (including Thornwell) during the war
- Dabney remained influential in the southern church into the 1880's
- The southern church remained pretty much undisturbed until the 1950's

Chapter 12: "A True Presbyterian Church"

What important events marked the northern church during the twentieth century?

- The northern church became more "progressive" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries mostly as a result of Darwinian teaching
- Opposed to "progressivism" was "fundamentalism" – led by men like D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Sam Jones and Bob Jones – marked by such things as revivalism, the holiness movement and dispensational premillennialism
- Fundamentalists (named for 12 pamphlets they produced called "The Fundamentals") also believed in the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of scripture and in a supernatural belief in Christ's miracles, the virgin birth and the resurrection
- One fundamentalist, J. Gresham Machen, stood against the growing liberalism of the northern church, published "Christianity and Liberalism" in 1923, and was eventually deposed (for founding the Independent Board of Presbyterian Missions in 1933 and in violation of his ordination vows) by the general assembly in 1936
- Machen, along with other men including Cornelius van Til and R.B. Kuiper, formed Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929
- Progressive liberals in the PCUSA produced the Auburn Affirmation in 1924 that, in summary, asserts:
 - The Bible is *not* inerrant
 - The General Assembly *cannot* dictate doctrine to Presbyteries
 - *None* of the five essential doctrines (scriptural inerrancy, virgin birth (and deity) of Christ, bodily resurrection of Christ, substitutionary atonement of Christ, and authenticity of Christ's miracles) should be used as a test of ordination and that alternatives to these doctrines are permissible
 - Liberty of thought and teaching (within bounds) is necessary
 - Division is deplorable – unity and freedom are commendable
- The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), led by Machen, split from the PCUSA in 1936
- The Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) split from the OPC in 1938 and eventually created Covenant College (now Lookout Mountain, GA) and Covenant Seminary (now St. Louis, MO) in 1955 under Robert Rayburn
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC – not the current EPC) eventually split from the BPC in 1956

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- The northern PCUSA and a smaller northern United Presbyterian Church of North America (of Scots-Irish heritage) joined together in 1958 to form the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA)
- The 1956 EPC and the “New Lights” General Synod Reformed church (also of northern Scots-Irish heritage) joined together in 1965 to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (RPCES)
- The northern UPCUSA church and the southern PCUS church joined together in 1983 to form the current Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – PCUSA

Chapter 13: “A Continuing Presbyterian Church”

What important events marked the southern church during the twentieth century?

- The southern church also started to become more progressive and liberal during the late 19th century, but it took longer for those forces to cause a split
- Conservatives tried to hold on in Union (VA) and Columbia (SC) Seminaries, but three progressive ideologies were creeping in by the 1920’s and 1930’s:
 - Social Gospel (E.T. Thompson and Walter L. Lingle, influenced by Walter Rauschenbusch of Germany)
 - Evolution
 - Neo-Orthodoxy (E.T. Thompson and John Newton Thomas, influenced by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner of Germany)
- Conservative forces began to organize in the 1940’s and 1950’s through men like Tom Glasgow, L. Nelson Bell and Billy Graham and through conservative journals such as the “Southern Presbyterian Journal” and later “Christianity Today” magazine
- Other conservative groups also sprang up later:
 - Presbyterian Evangelical Fellowship (PEF) – Bill Hill in 1964
 - Concerned Presbyterians – Kenneth Keyes in 1965
 - Presbyterian Churchmen United – John E. Richards in 1969
- The “Continuing Church” movement, a cooperation of several of these conservative movements for the purpose of reforming the PCUS, was started in 1968

What is the brief history of the Presbyterian Church in America?

- Continued planning and structuring, along with continued progressiveness in the PCUS during the early 1970’s led to the formation of the National Presbyterian Church in 1973
- First General Assembly was held at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL
 - W. Jack Williamson, a ruling elder, was elected the first Moderator
 - Morton Smith, an RTS professor, was elected the first Stated Clerk
- The National Presbyterian Church had to be renamed as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
- The RPCES was received into the PCA in 1982 (and Covenant College and Seminary along with it)
- During its brief 38 year history, there have been (and continue to be) struggles:
 - Differing emphases on the “Reformed Faith” or the “Great Commission”
 - Roles of charismatic gifts and continuing revelation in the church
 - “Theonomy” – the role of God’s Law in taking social and political action
 - Stands by ministers on the literal or symbolic view of a “six-day creation”
 - Degree of subscription required by ministers to the Westminster Standards