

PROPOSED PLAN OF UNION
of the
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, EVANGELICAL SYNOD
and the
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PART I

PREAMBLE: TESTIMONY
and
DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church come together committed to the supremacy and authority of the Scriptures, the inerrant Word of God, and confessing one Lord, one faith, one baptism. These churches* come together to unite as the _____ Church in one scriptural faith and order, in full fellowship in the service of Christ under the divine authority of the whole of Scripture for all of faith and life. We come to this union acknowledging both God's grace and our sins in days past, and trusting in the renewal of the Holy Spirit for days to come.

In this union we seek first the honor of our Saviour's name; we wish to be found pleasing in the sight of the Lord who prayed for the deepest unity of His people. In particular, we would praise God in His mighty grace for bringing us together after a sad experience of division in the history of our churches. Soon after the Presbyterian Church of America was established in 1936 to continue faithful witness to Christ of the Scriptures, a grievous division brought reproach upon this testimony. We recognize the genuine and deep concerns that influenced this division: on the one hand, a fear that indifference or hostility to characteristic features of the piety and hope of American Presbyterianism would doom the church to sectarian isolation; on the other hand, a fear that the reformation of the church would be crippled by adherence to requirements for life or faith that went beyond the teaching of Scripture.

We do not claim to have achieved unanimity of opinion on all the issues that led to that division, but in effecting this union we do confess that the unity of Christ's church should not have been broken as it was in 1937. Both those who left and those who suffered them to leave did so without pursuing with zeal all the Scriptural means for reconciliation. Each sinned in a measure, and even the least sin against the love of Christ brings reproach on His name.

In seeking the joy of restored fellowship, we would confess afresh our need of the heartsearching and healing work of God's Spirit to convict us of all sin and lead us into the obedience of Christ. We express, by this union, our obligation and determination to maintain, by God's grace, the unity of the church in the mutual faith, love and confidence which we profess.

* The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod was formed in 1965 by the union of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, originally called the Bible Presbyterian Church. The former was a church of Scottish descent. The first Reformed Presbyterian congregation in the United States existed as early as 1738 and the Reformed Presbytery was organized in 1774. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church began as part of the Presbyterian Church of America which was established in 1936 to continue the spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The Presbyterian Church of America in 1939 took the name The Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

THE TESTIMONY OF THESE CHURCHES

Humbled, but rejoicing in our renewed and extended fellowship, we would call on others to join with us in confessing the Lord Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures. To that end we would recall the testimony that has been raised in our communions by God's grace. In our united fellowship we pray that the Lord will receive our confession of His name and build His church.

1. A Testimony to the Christ of Scripture

Both churches come to this union rejoicing in one Sovereign Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. We confess Him as the Bible presents Him, not dividing a Christ of faith from a Jesus of history, but confessing one Jesus Christ, true God and true man, whose words and deeds were reported by those who were eyewitnesses of His majesty, and recorded for us in Scripture.

2. A Testimony to the Fundamental Doctrines of the Bible

Both churches believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Both churches therefore have sought to be obedient to Scripture in teaching and life, in order and worship. Because the inspiration and divine authority of Scripture have been questioned and denied within the professing church, the acknowledgement of the Bible to be the Word of God written is the more necessary for those who would stand today in the apostolic gospel: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

These two churches have a common background in our struggle to maintain the clear teachings of the Word of God that our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, worked mighty miracles, offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God, that on the third day He rose again from the dead with the same body with which He suffered, with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His father, until He shall come again bodily and visibly in power and great glory.

Modernism, old and new, in denying these doctrines and the infallibility of the Word that teaches them, denies the Lord of the Word and casts aside the scepter of His rule in His church. Since the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ must be grounded in the truth, the spread of apostasy brings division. Our churches exist because we have chosen to obey God rather than man in conflict with false teaching in the church.

3. A Testimony to the Whole Counsel of God

Yet in opposing such denials of doctrines essential to the Word of God and our secondary standards, these churches have not reduced the whole counsel of God to a few fundamentals of Christian faith. Rather, as we have separated from unbelief and renewed our commitment to obey the Word of God we have found fresh occasion for rejoicing in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Both churches have previously adopted the Confession of Faith in virtually identical form, a

form that precedes the major modifications made to the Confession by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1903. The two churches have one Confession, a Confession that expresses the glorious fullness of the Reformed Faith, declaring without equivocation that salvation is of the Lord. Soli deo gloria!

To set aside the Westminster Confession for a contemporary creed might be laudable if the new creed set forth more clearly the great doctrines of God's sovereignty in salvation, if it summarized more fully the riches of God's revealed Word, if it condemned more pointedly modern errors in the light of God's abiding truth. But when new and proposed creeds frame ambiguous statements to cloak error, when they labor to break down the doctrine of inspired Scripture expressed in the Westminster Confession, when they substitute a social gospel for the Biblical doctrine of salvation, then loyalty to the Westminster Confession is simply loyalty to the truth of God revealed in Scripture. To confront the sophisticated errors of our day, those who teach and rule in Christ's church need to hold fast to the whole counsel of God as He has revealed it. The high mysteries of salvation by grace alone, in particular unconditional election, definite atonement, and effectual calling including the need of regeneration for faith, as taught in the Westminster Confession may be distorted by those who set man's wisdom above God's Word, but no lesser confession is adequate for guiding the church of Christ today.

4. A Testimony to Holy Living

New obedience to the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ has kindled new desire for holy living. Both churches have manifested deep concern that Christians be not conformed to this world in an age of license, but rather be transformed into the image of Christ. These churches have honored the law of God, believing that contemporary immorality springs not only from the lusts of the flesh but also from hatred of the truth. The apostasy that casts off the authority of God's Word of commandment revealed in Scripture is at the last more destructive than guilty sensuality.

Because both churches teach obedience to the revealed commandments of Christ they have also sought to apply these specific commandments to modern life.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has called attention to the specific instruction of our subordinate standards, particularly the Larger Catechism, on the requirements of the Word of God for holy living. The Westminster Larger Catechism so applies the Ten Commandments, warning that each commandment implies the specific forbidding of all sins of that kind, "together with all the causes, means, occasions and appearances thereof and provocations thereunto" (Q 99). In the exercise of pastoral supervision ministers and assemblies of the church have similarly warned against specific breaches of God's law. The application of the teaching of Scripture to the question of abortion was a recent example of such warning.

The plan for the union of the Reformed Presbyterian Church with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, contained a declaration on the Christian life in which the united church emphasized the applicability of God's commandments to questions of conduct and practice that arise in the modern world.

The acknowledgement of Scripture as the infallible rule of faith and life has therefore borne fruit in both these churches in specific exposition and application of the Bible to learn what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. In life as in faith, the rule of the Word of God is both specific and inclusive. As the church is led into all truth by the Word, so is it led into all righteousness: whatever we do, individually in our hearts, together in our homes and communities, or corporately in the church of Christ, we are to do to the glory of God.

In uniting their witness, these churches would seek to grow in love and new obedience to Christ, finding in that obedience the remedy for both legalism and antinomianism. We dare not build a hedge around God's law, adding to it the burdensome traditions of men. Neither may we ever cease to hear in the law the voice of the living God, whose will and nature are revealed in His commandments. Yet respect for the liberty of the sons of God must not dampen our pastoral zeal to warn those in our charge against particular sins and against those practices in contemporary life that become frequent occasions of sin. When the mass media pander to unlawful sexual appetites, the Saviour's warning about the lustful look must be part of the church's instruction. When respect for human life is cheapened by revolutionary violence and socially sanctioned murder, the church must declare that man is made in the image of God, and apply the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" not only to the murdering hand but to the murderous heart. When the proper function of the body is impaired through the vain pursuit of pleasure and escape by the use of narcotics, stimulants, depressants, and hallucinogenic drugs, the church must teach that our bodies are for the Lord; it must warn not only the drunkard and the addict of his sin, but also caution all those who would begin in their desires to rebel against God's ordinances for sober and responsible human life; and it must charge all Christians to obey the law of love in every situation where the exercise of their own liberty under the gospel might offer an occasion to sin to another, or impede the service of Christ's church. When lusts and abuses of every kind are exploited for gain and power, the prophetic warnings against men who profit by pandering to vice must be heard in the preaching of God's Word. Apart from the courageous application of Scripture to individual and social sins in the context of modern life, the church cannot fulfill the whole ministry of the Word of God. As the occasion demands, such application must be made not only by pastors and sessions, but also by presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies according to the principles of Chapter 31 of the Confession of Faith ("Of Synods and Councils"), which are based upon the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). The forming of Christian consciences to prove the things that differ is most necessary so that the church shall not be conformed to the lawlessness of an unbelieving world.

5. A Testimony to the Mission of the Church

Nowhere does the direction of the Word of the Lord appear more clearly in the witness of these churches than in the work of missions and evangelism. Not only do the doctrines of grace require the seeking of the lost by those who are drawn by the Son of God to know the Father's heart of mercy; the express command of the arisen Saviour sends His disciples to the ends of the world and the end of the age. In obedience to Christ's Great Commission the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod have carried forward constantly

Presbyterial Differences in ministerial transfers.

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expanding missionary programs at home and abroad. Concern for the soundness of the missionary message in the former Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. led to the establishment of an independent board for Presbyterian foreign missionary work and to the division that was forced upon those who refused to surrender that testimony. In the work of World Presbyterian Missions, National Presbyterian Missions, and the Board of Home Missions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Committee on Foreign Missions and the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the cause of truly Presbyterian missions has prospered. Missionaries supported by these agencies now serve throughout the United States and Canada as well as in thirteen other countries. Evangelism is also served by the printed word through the labors of our committees on Christian education.

In contrast to the secularized evangelism that would substitute political and social action for the proclamation of Christ's kingdom, the Biblical evangelism to which these churches are committed recognizes that Christ must be obeyed in His program; that the gospel must be preached to all nations, and that until He comes only the sword of the Spirit may be wielded in His name. These churches have sought to manifest the compassion of Christ by deeds of mercy and to proclaim the gospel of Christ by words of power, but the power they claim is spiritual. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God..., casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God..." (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

In so speaking of the witness of our churches, we know that we have nothing that we have not received, and that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Yet in dependence upon the Sovereign God of grace and truth, we come together reaffirming our commitment to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, to His infallible Word, the Holy Bible, and to the pattern of sound words set forth in Scripture and summarized in the Westminster standards. We would now with lowliness, meekness, forbearance, and longsuffering give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To this end we of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church would remove every wall of partition that divides us, manifesting in one fellowship of order and service that unity under the Word of Christ that we profess as members of his body.

We do confess that all saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, have communion in each other's gifts and graces. As God now offers to us opportunity we would assume the obligation of our profession to extend and maintain toward one another a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, in performing such other spiritual services as tend to our mutual edification, and in relieving one another according to our several abilities and necessities.

And we pray that the ascended Lord will fill us with His Spirit, will give us grace to be faithful to our affirmations, and will bless this our work of ministering in His name till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and that to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, dominion and power, now and forever, world without end. Amen.

PART II

Resolved, that the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church be united on the following bases:

- A. The supreme standard shall be the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Word of God written, inerrant in the original writings, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
- B. The following subordinate doctrinal standards:
 1. The text of the Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster in 1646, except for those slight revisions adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
 2. The Westminster Larger Catechism with questions 86 - 89 amended to read as follows:

Q. 86. What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the return of Christ they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.

Q. 87. What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?

A. We are to believe, that at the last time there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust: when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed; and the self-same bodies of the dead which were laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls forever, shall be raised up by the power of Christ. The bodies of the just, by the Spirit of Christ, and by virtue of his resurrection as their head, shall be raised in power, spiritual, incorruptible, and made like to his glorious body; and the bodies of the wicked shall be raised up in dishonour by him, as an offended judge.

Q. 88. What shall follow after the resurrection?

A. After the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the just and the unjust shall follow the final judgment of angels and men. The day and the hour of the coming of the Lord no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray and be ready.

Q. 89. What shall be done to the wicked when they are judged?

A. When they are judged, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand, and, upon clear evidence, and full conviction of their own consciences, shall have the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them; and thereupon shall be cast out from the favourable presence of God, and the glorious fellowship with Christ, his saints, and all his holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever.

3. The Westminster Shorter Catechism.

C. Form of Government -

1. The congregations, sessions, and presbyteries of the united Church shall operate under one or the other of the present Forms of Government concerning all matters, according to their preferences.
2. The constitution and actions of the general assembly shall be regulated by the Form of Government in force in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
3. The Form of Government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, the present Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the proposed revisions to the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall be referred to a Committee on Form of Government in the united Church for further study and recommendations.

D. Book of Discipline -

1. The united Church shall operate under the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
2. This Book, the Book of Discipline of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the proposed revisions to the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall be referred to a Committee on the Book of Discipline of the united Church for further study and recommendations.

E. Directory for Worship -

1. The united Church shall operate under the Directory for Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
2. This Directory, the Directory for Worship of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the proposed revisions to the Directory for Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall be referred to a Committee on the Directory for Worship of the united Church for further study and recommendations.