

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, . . . is deeply convinced of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its relevance for our age. We are a Presbyterian Church, conservative in doctrine and contemporary in outlook, deeply committed to the extension of Christ's Church through our eleven presbyteries, covering almost every state, our national missions and youth outreach, college and theological seminary, radio, literature, chaplaincy and conference work, with foreign missions program in eleven countries. We are devoted to the preservation of historic Presbyterianism as it is presented in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

Synod of 1967
(Minutes, 1967, 131)

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The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod

THE declared purpose of this work is to trace the history behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. So far, in our attempt to accomplish this end, we have taken account of those two historical streams which combine to form the RPCES. First, we have traced the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America through many vicissitudes to the crisis facing the General Synod in the 1950's. Second, we have traced the history of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., through its various controversies and broadening perspectives to the appearance of the Presbyterian Separatist Movement in the 1930's. We have observed the U.S.A. Presbyterian Church overcome with modernism and indifferentism to the point of forcing historic Presbyterianism outside its organization. We have witnessed the formation of both the Presbyterian Church of America, later the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Bible Presbyterian Church for the purpose of continuing the spiritual succession of the old Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. We have witnessed the Bible Presbyterian Church divide into the Columbus and Collingswood Synods. Finally, we have seen the Columbus Synod develop as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

At last we are nearing our destination! The present chapter describes the merger of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod) with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to form the present RPCES. This involves an account, first, of a

new beginning in the RP Church; second, of a similar development in the EP Church; then, of the union itself; and finally, an account of the aftermath of union in the form of a description of the Evangelical Synod and Reformed Presbyterianism today.

A New Beginning

In 1945 the 122nd General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church gratefully accepted an historical repository from the patriarch of the Synod, Dr. R. W. Chesnut. This repository, collected over the years, contained many valuable documents in which the history of the denomination was enshrined. It was temporarily placed in the custody of the Duanesburg (New York) church until some further disposition could be made.¹ At each succeeding Synod Dr. Chesnut would rise to appeal for additional materials for the repository, maintaining for instance in 1951 that such would be 'in safekeeping for years to come.'² However, at the next Synod Dr. Chesnut, too weak to attend, had to report: 'We had hoped to make some important additions this year, but all we had done was destroyed by fire on the 16th of last December. . . . On our part we will make no effort to replace it. Age and infirmities make that impossible. Possibly someone else may try it and have better success.'³

When the Rev. Harry H. Meiners, Jr., went to tell Dr. Chesnut of the fire that had destroyed both the church and repository, the old man said: 'Mr. Meiners, don't worry, and tell the people not to worry. Our old Church has burned down; we will build a new one.'⁴

1. *Minutes*, 1945, 147 f.

2. *Minutes*, 1951, 28.

3. *Minutes*, 1952, 18. Others place the date of the fire on December 17th. Cf. the *Altamont Enterprise*, Dec. 21, 1951 (Num. 23), 'Fire Destroys Old Historic Church at Duanesburgh;' and M. L. Meiners, 'A Brief History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod in Duanesburg, New York' (Unpublished Paper, Covenant College), 1969.

4. Letter of H. H. Meiners, Jr., to Margaret Meiners, April 8, 1969.

Perhaps these events were symbolic of a new beginning for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of the mid-twentieth century. This new beginning involves three closely related developments in the life of the General Synod in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The first is the official abandonment of the distinctive testimony of the old Reformed Presbyterian Church. The second is the new blood brought into the Church with the reception of new ministers and churches. The third has to do with the carefully negotiated merger with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

The official abandonment of the Church's distinctive testimony took place with the dropping in 1959 of the historic subordinate standard *Reformation Principles Exhibited* (1807). The General Synod was willing to delete this work as a doctrinal standard of the Church and thereby cease to be Reformed Presbyterian in the traditional sense. It was made 'a document reflecting our great heritage rather than a subordinate standard.'⁵ It should be noted that Synod's action did not abruptly change the *de facto* testimony of the Church, but merely formalized a longstanding longing of many for a new beginning. It did not represent a radical change of attitude. For, as has been recently observed, 'the Reformed Presbyterian Church had long since ceased to be truly Reformed Presbyterian.'⁶ Some no doubt felt that it was time to give official recognition to this change with a view to a new beginning for a small, struggling denomination that certainly was not an exemplary testimony to the princi-

5. *Minutes*, 1959, 31; cf. 1956, 45.

6. N. E. Clark, *A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Butler University), 1966, 88. In the light of this change, discussed in more detail in Ch. 3, it is difficult to see how anyone in the General Synod could maintain the following which appeared in the *Reformed Presbyterian Advocate* (RPA) in 1960: 'The General Synod and the Synod of today (divided in 1833) can, without one link broken, claim that they stand upon the platform of the Reformed Church of Scotland in those palmy days of the second Reformation, 1638-1649'—RPA, 94:4 (April, 1960), 11. There is some semblance of organizational continuity, but is there really a doctrinal community in the sense that the RPC (General Synod) of 1959 stood for the distinctive principles of the Church of the Second Reformation?

pie enunciated in the historical part of *Reformation Principles Exhibited* itself, namely, that ‘life and growth distinguish the works of God.’⁷

The influx of new faces into the Church began in 1957 with Dr. Gordon H. Clark’s reception into the Western Presbytery. Dr. Clark had left the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., in 1936 on account of its modernism and had been instrumental in the formation of the Presbyterian Church of America, later to be renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In 1948 he left the OPC over disagreements regarding certain philosophical and practical matters and was received into the ministry of the United Presbyterian Church. Then, when the merger between the UP and U.S.A. Presbyterians became a certainty, he left the UP Church to escape being merged with that very modernism which he had left some twenty years before. He was now anxious to find a place of worship and work in the RP Church. The presbytery examined Dr. Clark on such issues as modernism, neo-orthodoxy, dispensationalism, the second coming of Christ, Christian liberty, and the distinctive testimony of the Church. He successfully sustained the examination and was unanimously received into the RP ministry. The Church considered herself fortunate and honored that such a firm defender of the faith would choose to enter her ranks. As Dr. Charles Pfeiffer remarked, ‘I hope that this will be the beginning of an infusion of new blood in the church.’⁸

Dr. Pfeiffer’s hope was not to be disappointed. The Synod of 1958 witnessed several interested visitors among whom were Richard W. Gray and Franklin S. Dyrness, whose ecclesiastical pilgrimage was similar to Dr. Clark’s except that they had remained independent after leaving the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Both Gray and Dyrness spoke to the Synod of their interest in the Reformed Presbyterian Church

7. *Reformation Principles Exhibited by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (RPE), 1892, 27.

8. RPA, 91:11 (Nov., 1957), 120, 122.

and of their hope that they would soon be members of the denomination. This was not long in coming. For the Philadelphia Presbytery could report to the Synod of 1959 that both ministers, along with their churches, had been received during the preceding year. It is significant that former Bible Presbyterian Wilbur Blakely was also received.⁹

It is also significant that the action of Synod regarding *Reformation Principles Exhibited* was taken as a means to facilitate church union, and that it was proposed to Synod by the Fraternal Relations Committee and applauded in the form of a resolution proposed by Dr. Gray, one of the recent newcomers to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹⁰ These newcomers were especially zealous for union with the Columbus Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church soon to be renamed the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. In fact they had joined the RP Church with a view to an eventual union with other Churches espousing historic Presbyterianism.

Now the matter of church union had come before the General Synod on various occasions in the preceding 30 years. The desire for union came up in 1931, and again in 1939, but nothing ever came of it. For instance, the appropriate committee reported to the Synod of 1940 that on first thought such a union seems very desirable when one considers the difficulties faced by so small a denomination in the meeting of its various obligations. ‘Our membership has declined until we find it difficult to function as a denomination and the size of our church is so inconsiderable that it is out of place to compare ourselves to other denominations of Religion.’ However, what are the possibilities for union? The three possible Churches with which to combine are: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the United Presbyterian

9. *Minutes*, 1948, 5, 38; 1959, 11.

10. *Minutes*, 1959, 22, 31. ‘It was moved, seconded and carried that General Synod be a committee of the whole to discuss the matter of union. It was moved, seconded, and carried that we proceed to discuss the matter starting with Reformation Principles’ (22).

Church, and the Old Light Reformed Presbyterian Synod. The latter is out of the question because those under care of the General Synod would not be willing to relinquish their American citizenship. As for the other two, union would mean, ‘to ask them to accept our Covenanting and Reformed principles, or for us to drop or ignore them ourselves.’ However, either of these alternatives is doubtful of acceptance, and to unite with either the OP’s or the UP’s would involve a loss of identity.¹¹

In 1946 R. W. Chesnut presented a resolution to erect a committee to pursue more friendly relations with the Orthodox Presbyterians, and to encourage them to persevere in ‘their efforts to maintain a scriptural testimony in behalf of the Reformation Principles.’ Further contact and cooperation were authorized by the Synod of 1947. In 1948 the committee suggested that the General Synod consider union in the form of an investigation of its possibilities. The corresponding committee of the OPC had proposed the consideration of union ‘upon the basis of the adoption of the name of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church standards as expressive of “Reformation Principles.”’ ‘However, again nothing came of the matter. The committee was thanked for work done, and that was that.¹²

One wonders why there was no consideration of union with the Bible Presbyterian Church during this period. The General Synod had historically much in common with the Bible Presbyterians. For instance, there was the tradition of maintaining a testifying church and of separation from apostasy and worldliness. There was also, with regard to the present, decided suspicion of, and opposition to, the modernistic Federal and World Council of Churches. Indeed, the Synod

11. *Minutes*, 1940, 168-171; 1939, 166; 1931, 144.

12. *Minutes*, 1946, 38 f.; 1947, 26 f.; 1948, 21 f. The OPC offer came by way of a letter from the Rev. C. K. Cummings. Cf. *RPA*, 91:6 and 7 (June-July, 1957), 64.

of 1954 invited Dr. Carl McIntire to address them on the purpose and organization of the International Council of Christian Churches. Dr. McIntire invited them to join the ICCC or, in lieu of this, to send an observer to the next international congress to meet in Philadelphia. However, General Synod did not join; elder David McIntyre was sent as an observer. Perhaps the reason for this action is expressed in Harry Meiners' earlier words to the same Synod concerning the signs of the times: 'We must not dabble in politics, we must not discontinue our preaching of the gospel to become news commentators; but we must speak with clarity and conviction where the Word of God bears upon current events.'¹³

In 1956 Jay Adams spoke to the General Synod as a fraternal delegate from the Bible Presbyterian Church. His remarks desiring friendly relations were heard with pleasure. In 1957 Bible Presbyterian leaders, R. Laird Harris and Thomas G. Cross, spoke to the Synod concerning friendly relations and of means to achieve a closer relationship between the two groups. Thereupon a committee was appointed by the General Synod to this end. This committee reported successfully to the Synod of 1958; whereupon it was reconstituted to form a larger fraternal relations committee to meet with a similar committee from the Bible Presbyterian Church (Columbus Synod) with a view to possible union.¹⁴

The Synod of 1959 authorized its Fraternal Relations Committee to formulate a detailed plan of union to be ratified by the two synods and the several presbyteries of the two Churches.¹⁵ It also passed a significant resolution regarding Reformed Presbyterian sentiment on union with the Bible Presbyterian Church. The first item of the resolution concerns the importance of the union. 'We believe that the teachings of Scripture on the unity of the church and the recent history of Presbyterianism in this country urge upon us that

13. *Minutes*, 1954, 23, 34, 50. Cf. *Minutes*, 1949, 18.

14. *Minutes*, 1956, 48; 1957, 35, 37; 1958, 38, 41 f. (cf. 1959, 7).

15. *Minutes*, 1959, 7, 26-28.

we do all in our power to consummate the proposed union, not allowing minor considerations to stand in the way.' The resolution also applauds the position of the Fraternal Relations Committee regarding the exclusion of *Reformation Principles Exhibited* from the proposed subordinate standards. Finally, the resolution regrets the reluctance of some Bible Presbyterians to accept the words 'Reformed Presbyterian' as the essence of the new name, and reacts 'with much opposition' to the suggested appendage 'Bible Synod.' The strong preference for holding to the name 'Reformed Presbyterian' has at least a threefold basis: First, it maintains the link with a long and honored history. Second, it clearly defines the united Church as Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in government. Third, 'it is free from the stigma that plagues other names because of controversies in the history of Presbyterianism since 1936.¹⁶

In January of 1960 a 'new' *Reformed Presbyterian Advocate* with a new format appeared under the editorship of Harry Meiners. The old *Advocate*, having completed 93 years of continuous publication, was now combined at the beginning of its 94th year with *The Witness*, an independent magazine for the family formerly edited by Dr. R. W. Gray. The new magazine with its new format symbolized the new face of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that many of its articles are from the pens of Bible Presbyterian ministers and also appear in the *Bible Presbyterian Reporter*. The new *Advocate* reflects the Church's desire for a new beginning in the direction of a larger and stronger Presbyterian Church.

For instance, in one of the early issues Samuel S. Ward, a member of the Fraternal Relations Committee, presents a

16. *Ibid.*, 31 f. The resolution concludes with a significant NOTE: 'At this time the Reformed Presbyterian Church has 18 congregations in this country, totaling approximately 2,000 members.' The Church had almost doubled in size since the gloomy signs of the times report to the Synod of 1953! See the end of Ch. 3.

17. *RPA*, 94:1 (Jan., 1960), 2.

timely discussion entitled ‘What About Union.’ He reviews the short history of merger negotiations with the Bible Presbyterian Church (Columbus Synod). When the Bible Presbyterians first approached the Reformed Presbyterians with the idea of union, it was ‘a very startling thing.’ The ensuing meetings of the joint fraternal relations committee exhibited a fine spirit and real fellowship among the brethren. The resultant plan of union calls for the dropping of *Reformation Principles Exhibited* as a subordinate standard on the RP side and the acceptance of the Westminster Confession as held by the U.S.A. Presbyterian Church prior to 1903 from the BP side. This form of the Confession without any of the twentieth century changes means that the united Church would drop the premillennial additions to the Confession adopted by the Bible Presbyterian Church when it was first organized back in 1938.

This plan of union was discussed by both Synods in the spring of 1959. When the joint committee met again in September, the Bible Presbyterians reported that there had been a ‘lively discussion’ of the millennial question in the BP Synod. Thereupon, a questionnaire was sent out to all BP and RP ministers to see whether the joint committee had the backing of the Churches in their attempt to proceed with union on the basis of eschatological freedom with regard to the millennial question.

When the replies were received, it was the unanimous opinion of the RP’s that their Church now allows full eschatological freedom within orthodox limits, and that the proposed united Church should take this position. On the other hand, there was much sentiment among the BP’s to retain the premillennialist amendments of 1938 and, consequently, to do away with the declaratory statement which promises eschatological freedom even though the Church is predominantly premillennial. This sentiment took the BP’s on the committee somewhat by surprise, and there was nothing left for them to do but to suggest that negotiations be postponed

until the matter of eschatological freedom was settled in the BP Church one way or the other.

Ward expresses his own views on union in the following terms:

The proposed union could be a great benefit to the Reformed Presbyterian Church (I am now speaking more to Reformed Presbyterians). It would make our organizations large enough to allow the mechanics of the church to function effectively. It would make it possible for missionaries to be in our congregations more often. It would give us a college and a seminary. It would give us advantages of Board Secretaries who can give their full time to the work of the boards. It would allow a minister to move without going outside the denomination, and would enable a church to call a pastor from their own denomination. It would supply some enthusiasm and vision that the church needs. But none of these advantages could outweigh the disadvantage of binding our church to a narrowing position which was never the historical stand of conservative Presbyterianism.¹⁸

It was no surprise, therefore, when Ward reported to the General Synod of 1960 that the Fraternal Relations Committee could not report ‘any considerable progress’ in negotiations toward union. The joint committee, however, recommended for consideration of both Synods, first, that the plan of union contain certain changes in the Larger Catechism which would render the Westminster Standards clearly neutral on the millennial question. Second, it was recommended that a declaratory statement, amendable only in the same way as the Confession, be adopted. This document would state that the large majority of the ministers and churches at the time of merger were premillennial. At the same time it would declare that, the official doctrinal standards of the Church do not favor one millennial position—premillennialism, postmillennialism, or amillennialism—over another.

In response to these recommendations, the Synod declared, first, that, while it was a very grave matter to change

18. *RPA*, 94:4 (April, 1960), 8 f.; cf. *RPA*, 94:6 (June-July, 1960), 13. This article was checked and approved by Dr. Harris, Chairman of the BP Fraternal Relations Committee. Ward’s last remark reveals the obvious discrepancy between the new proposed RP Church and the old RP tradition.

the Westminster Standards, Synod would be willing to consider the suggested amendments in the interest of union. The response to the second was: 'We hold that the Westminster Confession of Faith together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms in the original forms are clearly neutral on these questions of eschatology. However, we would be willing to go along with a consideration of this declaratory statement in the Proposed Plan of Union if expedient to consummate (*sic*) the union.'¹⁹

At this point another matter related to union was officially brought up in Synod for the first time. This has to do with the Bible Presbyterian position on the 'separated life.' Synod declares: 'After considering the question of Christian liberty in reference to the Harvey Cedars Resolutions, we feel that it is unwise for us to become involved in a deeper study of this document and of the controversy out of which it arose. We wish to declare that we adhere to a testimony of a separated Christian life as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.'²⁰ The new RP's apparently thought of themselves as mediators between the traditional Bible Presbyterian and Orthodox Presbyterian positions on 'Christian liberty.'

The April, 1961, issue of the *Advocate* contains an article by recently-ordained Wayne F. Brauning on why he chose to enter the ministry of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Brauning is 'exceedingly delighted' with his new-found ecclesiastical home. The Church has a unique and God-given position, opportunity, and responsibility in the soaring sixties of modern America. The reason for this is threefold. First, the RP Church, though small, is, unlike other old line denominations, united on the basis of the historic Christian faith as infallibly given in Scripture and reflected in the Westminster

19. *Minutes*, 1960, 30-32.

20. *Ibid.*, 32. The statement went on to cite the WSC QQ. 135 f, 138 f, 141 f, 144 f, and 147 f; it was adopted almost unanimously. For a resume of the General Synod of 1960, see *RPA*, 94:6 (June-July, 1960), 1 f.

Confession. The second reason why the Church is chosen of God to minister to this age is that ‘God has given to her an unusual combination of evangelistic zeal, a vision for expansion, a fervor for holiness, and a soundness in doctrine.’ This is not to encourage carelessness or to mushroom pride, but only to say that to whom much is given much is required. Third, the RP Church has an historical advantage in that it is not among the so-called ‘splinter groups.’ This is not to slander the OP’s or BP’s for God has given these brethren courage to stand for the truth, but simply to note that many people will more freely associate with an old line denomination than with one of the modern separatist Churches.²¹

The Fraternal Relations Committee reported to the General Synod of 1961 that little progress toward union had been made during the year since the BP’s continue to have in mind a united Church officially committed to a premillennialist position. The committee also presented to the Synod a preliminary statement considered to be a good expression of BP thinking on the issue of separation.²² The Synod did not officially adopt the committee’s statement, but did express their desire to unite with the Bible Presbyterian Church. ‘The Scriptural teaching on the unity of the church and the earnest desire of the 138th General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America impel us to seek to consummate a union with the Bible Presbyterian Synod, Inc., but we are hesitant to see any changes in the Westminster Confession as it was prior to 1903. . . . We would not close the door to further consideration of the matters under discussion, namely eschatology, a statement on the separated life, the name.’ These statements were substituted for an even more conciliatory original motion to the effect that the RP’s

21. *RPA*, 95:4 (April, 1961), 12. Brauning adds: ‘We must remember that the Reformed Presbyterian Church has not been without its difficulties and divisions in the past. But it can be safely stated that this church of today is essentially the same Reformed Presbyterian Church of the days of the Scottish Reformation.’ We may acknowledge the first proposition and wonder about the second.

22. *Minutes*, 1961, 27-29.

were not unalterably opposed to accepting premillennial amendments, a statement on the separated life, and even a change of name.²³

At the General Synod of 1962 the Fraternal Relations Committee reported that it had become apparent that RP men would not be favorable to union if the doctrinal standards of the united Church on the matter of eschatology were those presently held by the recently renamed Evangelical Presbyterian Church. They would, however, not object to merger if the united Church were to make some sort of statement on the ‘separated life.’ For the EP men, on the other hand, the only possibility of union lay in standards that were eschatologically neutral.

The committee, consequently, recommended 1) that it be authorized to continue negotiations; 2) that the doctrinal basis of union be the Confession in the early American form, the Shorter Catechism in the original form, and the Larger Catechism with certain specific changes to make it neutral on the millennial issue; and 3) that Synod adopt a previously prepared statement on the ‘separated life.’²⁴ The first two of these recommendations were summarily adopted by Synod. The third evoked much discussion and debate. For instance, the expression ‘separated life’ was changed to *Christian* life. After recommittal the committee recommended the following additions:

23. *Ibid.*, 31 f. For a resume of the General Synod of 1961, see *RPA*, 95:6 (June-July, 1961), 2, 11.

24. *Minutes*, 1961, 19-21. Since almost the whole of this statement is contained in the one finally adopted by both Churches, there is no need to reproduce it here. The statement on the Christian life in the final Plan of Union contains certain additional statements (Paragraphs Four and Seven). The following italicized words were *not* contained in the final statement: ‘Be it further resolved that we warn against the sin of gambling, including gambling to raise money for church and benevolent causes *and call for careful consideration of the temptations involved for ourselves and our Christian brethren before participating in games known to be commonly used in gambling.*’

At the same time we warn those who for reasons of conscience refrain from things not expressly forbidden in Scripture not to condemn those who do not refrain. No one is either better or worse for eating or not eating meat offered to idols. But it is a sin to erect objects of will-worship. The maxim, Touch not, taste not, handle not, is a commandment of men and is destructive of the liberty Christ has obtained for us. Wherefore we urge all Christians to strengthen their faith and to correct their consciences by God's revealed Word.

We acknowledge that we are speaking in the area of the application of Scriptural principles to Christian living. In such application we recognize that sincere Christians differ. These resolutions therefore are passed with the knowledge that they do not constitute an attempt to legislate.

A substitute motion was put forward to replace the recommended statement on the Christian life, which simply called attention to the Larger Catechism (QQ. 115-148) as a guide to living the Christian life among the temptations of this evil age. This motion was lost by a vote of 15 to 14, with moderator Charles Holliday breaking the tie. Thereupon an amendment was offered as a preamble to the recommended statement on the Christian life with the above additions: 'In view of the discussions with the Committee on Fraternal Relations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church on the Christian life, Synod adopts.' Thus the statement was carried.²⁵

In attempting to summarize Synod's action Harry Meiners commented:

Regarding the Christian life, our church is willing that there be a statement adopted stating that we caution our members to take care in their living, to avoid certain practices that tend to lower standards of morality and may mar a person's Christian witness, to endeavor to live in a manner that will set us apart from worldly practices. We do, however, caution those who do refrain from certain practices that are not specifically forbidden in Holy Scripture (examples are smoking, dancing, attending the movies, etc.) not to condemn those Christian brethren who do not refrain from these practices with a holier-than-thou attitude.²⁶

25. *Minutes*, 1962, 21 f., 32 f. The second of these additional paragraphs is included in the final Plan of Union; the first is not. One is left to draw his own conclusions concerning the implications of this very significant action.

26. *RPA*, 96:6 (June-July, 1962), 3 f.

The Fraternal Relations Committee had to report to the General Synod of 1963 that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church had as yet taken no action on the proposed Plan of Union. The Synod was somewhat impatient for union, and drew up a resolution both expressing this sentiment and encouraging the EP's to act. After all, had not the initial proposal for union come from the EP side? Also, what about the concessions from the RP side? 'Our committee, representing the views of at least a majority of our members, has made the following *concessions* to the Evangelical Presbyterian desires—to wit: 1) The relinquishing of Reformation Principles as a part of our doctrinal standards. 2) A series of alterations in the Larger Catechism. 3) A statement on certain details of Christian living.'²⁷

This same impatience was expressed by Dr. Gray to the EP Synod of 1963. However, he would not have long to wait! We must now turn to developments toward merger in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

A Fresh Start

The spirit of the Columbus Synod was, as we have seen, one of regret, repentance, repudiation, and resolve. One aspect of this spirit has to do with regret for the divisions of the past, repentance from whatever schismatic spirit may doubtlessly have been involved in them, repudiation of that extreme separatism which ignores the responsibility for a visible demonstration of love for the brethren, and resolve to seek closer relationships with other evangelical Churches, especially those espousing the historic Reformed position. There was desire for a fresh start in the matter of ecclesiastical relationships.

This attitude is well expressed in the Synod's directive to its Fraternal Relations Committee:

27. *Minutes*, 1963, 74 f.

It was moved that the Synod charge its Committee on Fraternal Relations with further efforts to cement friendly relations with other Bible-believing groups, especially the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Reformed Church, and that we go on record as regretting the severity and bitterness of the division of 1937 and urge our Committee further to explore avenues of mutual friendship and cooperation.²⁸

Overtures dealing with the matter of church union came before the Synod of 1957. One from the Mid-South Presbytery requests Synod to foster areas of cooperation with the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod) with a view to formulating a plan of union; to arrange for the publication of a new magazine under joint sponsorship; and to take steps to make a joint appeal to suitable elements in the United Presbyterian Church, which may be isolated in the event of union with the U.S.A. Presbyterian Church, ‘to join forces with our Churches in a unification for the advancement of our Common Testimony to the historic Christian faith.’²⁹ Synod referred these overtures to an enlarged Fraternal Relations Committee chaired by Dr. R. Laird Harris. Individual churches are encouraged to seek informal areas of fellowship with other Reformed churches for the purposes of establishing friendly relations. Dr. Harris reported on the cordial reception which he and Mr. Cross received upon their visit to the recent RP General Synod.³⁰

The Fraternal Relations Committee reported to the Synod of 1958 that the prospects for union with the Reformed Presbyterians were bright. Dr. Harris’ very interesting characterization of the RP’s and sober sentiments on union with them are as follows:

This group is small but has a worthy testimony, and we believe it is in basic agreement with us on all important points. . . . They are descendants of the Scotch Covenanters from whom they broke over some of

28. *Minutes . . . of the Twentieth General Synod* (Columbus), 54 (cf. 59).

29. *Minutes*, 1957, 4.

30. *Ibid.*, 21, 28 f. Cf. *Bible Presbyterian Reporter (BPR)*, 2:4 (June, 1957), 3 ff.; 4:2 (March, 1958—the issue numbers should be 3:3), 16, 8 ff.

the Covenanters' distinctives. These brethren are willing to vote, to sing other music than Psalms, and do not insist on closed communion. . . . The group is predominantly Premillennial, and we believe accepts our views of the separated life. They heard our Harvey Cedars statement without adverse comment and with apparent agreement. They wish to have the individual church protected in its use of its own property just as we have it. In our discussions, which were preliminary, we gathered that they would be much happier to have their own name perpetuated. We said that we knew of strong sentiment toward the changing of our own name. They would be much happier if we would not have the Westminster Standards modified to teach premillennialism explicitly, though they are quite satisfied to have premillennialism taught and to have full eschatological liberty. . . .

Your Committee feels that the benefits of union with these brethren would far outweigh the numbers to be added. We believe that it would allow us to be known before the world as a group that is willing to unite on good bases as well as requiring separation from modernist connections. We believe we are poised on the edge of large advance in our movement.

Dr. Harris goes on to mention that certain Presbyterians such as Dr. Richard W. Gray and dissident United Presbyterians and Southern Presbyterians are watching. The committee's recommended preliminary steps toward union, already unanimously approved by the RP's, need to be taken so that these watching brethren may be given proof that 'we are a church seeking cooperation and fellowship with Bible-believing Presbyterians.³¹

These preliminary steps involve continued negotiation with the RP's, the formulation of a plan of union, acceptance of an appropriate form of the Westminster Standards as a doctrinal basis, and the adoption of the name Reformed Presbyterian. After discussion, all of these steps are approved

31. *Minutes*, 1958, 10 f. Richard Gray, Frank Dyrness, and Robert Brown attended the BP-RP joint fraternal-relations meeting which drew up these preliminary steps, as well as the RP General Synod (1958), at Coulterville, Ill., which approved them. Dr. Harris' comments concerning *Reformation Principles Exhibited* are interesting: 'They still have among their documents a statement called "Reformation Principles" which our committee has studied and which we could not agree to as written, but which has been modified in such ways by their Synod's actions that we could accept it just as they do. They do not appear to insist that these reformation principles should constitute a basis of union. We should add that much of the document is simply a splendid statement of Presbyterian doctrine' (10).

Hutchinson, The History Behind the RPC,ES (1974), pp. 352-407.

except the last. The preferred name is the Presbyterian Church in North America. With regard to the doctrinal basis of the union, Synod instructs the committee to include a statement to the effect that the united Church is a premillennial Church but allows eschatological liberty. It also demands that an appropriate statement on ecclesiastical separation be included in the plan of union.³²

In his account of the 1958 Synod in the *Reporter*, Dr. Harris indicates that the main hindrance to union seems to be the name of the united Church. However, as someone remarked, no parents ever give away a baby because they cannot decide upon a name! Churchgoers read the following account in the *Bulletin Supplement*: ‘Talking cautiously about the prospects of union in 1960 with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, an unmistakable return from “splintering” to “welding” was shaping in the thought of our men.’³³

The August, 1958, issue of the *BP Reporter* carried an article, reprinted from the *RP Advocate*, by Reformed Presbyterian newcomer Gordon H. Clark, entitled ‘Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Billy Graham.’ This article may very well express the BP-RP ecclesiastical consensus taking shape in the late 1950’s. Dr. Clark has high regard for the original fundamentalists who wrote *The Fundamentals* in the early twentieth century; that is, those whose ecclesiastical behavior squared with their fundamentalist profession. However, the natural tendency of the fundamentalist movement, given the

32. *Ibid.*, 26, 11 (cf. 19).

33. *Bulletin News Supplement (BNS)*, 2:23 (July 1, 1958); *BPR*, 3:6 (June-July), 1958, 15. The full recommendation of the committee, as amended by Synod, is found on p. 15 f. Dr. Harris’ characterization of the RPC in the *BPR*, is again interesting: ‘The Reformed Presbyterian body was described as a small, but worthy group which came from Ireland years ago and which had separated from the Covenanters over the principle of the right to vote. They had for many years retained some of the old practices, such as Psalm singing, no instrumental music and closed communion, but now have given these up and are in testimony very much like ourselves. Some of their documents of years ago give a very clear presentation of the principle of separation. They appear willing to accept our Harvey Cedars declarations on the separated life. The majority of their ministers are premillennial, but they also give eschatological liberty.’

nature of modernist opposition, was to concentrate on the fundamentals to the neglect of the whole counsel of God. Moreover, later fundamentalism became more and more infected with Arminianism, dispensationalism, and sensationalism. ‘Nevertheless with all their faults even the later fundamentalists stood like Elijah against the prophets of Baal.’

In recent years there has been, from within the fundamentalist camp itself, a reaction against this fundamentalism in the form of a movement zealous to call itself ‘evangelicalism.’ This movement is represented by the National Association of Evangelicals and the newly founded periodical *Christianity Today*. However, these ‘evangelicals’ are not fully evangelical in the traditional Protestant sense of the term since many of them are hazy on the basics of the material principle of the Reformation, namely its doctrine of salvation. Moreover, they tend to lean in a neo-orthodox direction with regard to its formal principle, that is, the infallible, indeed inerrant, authority of Scripture.

Foremost among the evangelicals is Billy Graham. ‘Into this present complicated situation of decadent fundamentalism, energetic but ambiguous “evangelicalism,” dominant neo-orthodoxy, and the remains of modernistic liberalism, comes the phenomenal Billy Graham.’ However, Graham does not preach the whole counsel of God. For instance, he does not warn against modernism and neo-orthodoxy, but even accepts the sponsorship of modernists and refers converts to neo-orthodox churches! In that he refuses to accept the basic Biblical principle of separation from apostasy, Billy Graham’s ecclesiastical practices belie his evangelical convictions.

No, whatever good there may be in present-day fundamentalism and evangelicalism, we cannot go along with, or get along with, either of them in our churches. We must stand for the whole counsel of God, not just half a dozen fundamentals.

To be faithful to God’s commands, we cannot be content with less

than a full fledged Calvinism. Evangelicalism is good as far as it goes. But Calvinism goes further and is better. . . . Let us then in this adulterous and sinful generation choose our path and policies in the light of the full gospel. We will not oppose their good efforts; we will not rejoice over any of their failings in forgetfulness of our own. But we must insist on loyalty to all the revealed will of God.³⁴

The April, 1959, issue of the *Reporter* carried an account from Dr. Harris of the activities and attitude of the Fraternal Relations Committee. The committee is not trying to proceed too rapidly toward union, but simply seeking to find possible bases for union. For this reason the account is a report and not a propaganda document. ‘It should be understood that the Fraternal Relations Committee is not concerned to “agitate union” nor does the Reporter wish to push the matter. Various views may be presented in the Reporter and the Committee will welcome study and discussion as well as prayer and wisdom.’

Dr. Harris again describes the RP’s as those who agree with the BP stand in all essentials. For example: ‘They are in accord with our Harvey Cedars declarations on apostasy and worldliness. . . . The RP practices have in the past been more strict than ours.’ This strictness is seen in *Reformation Principles Exhibited* to which every RP church member is supposed to subscribe. However, the RP’s are patient, cooperative, and conciliatory. They have been willing to dispense with this standard and agree on an early American form of the Westminster Standards. Although the majority of them are premillennial, they prefer that the united Church guarantee eschatological liberty.

The committee feels that there are real advantages to be seen in such a union, but only desires it if the Church at large is unitedly behind it. For one thing, the union would increase the size and resources of the denomination resulting in a wider testimony.

34. *BPR*, 3:7 (Aug.-Sept., 1958), 10 f.

The committee feels that it would honor the Lord in giving to other Christians and the world an example of a union brought about on a right basis that holds high the truths of the Gospel. Much union today among the Modernists is mechanical. Among the orthodox groups we have had a history of sad division. We believe that we ourselves and many friends outside of our ranks would take heart at a union like this that could glorify the Lord and advance his Word.³⁵

The Fraternal Relations Committee emphasized the conciliatory character of the RP's to the Synod of 1959, passing along their enthusiastic resolution in favor of union. The RP churches are not perfect, but then neither are the BP churches. Moreover, there is no need to be afraid of whatever undesirable elements may exist in the RP Church; for 'there is not much chance that the small R.P. minority will dangerously sway our Synod!'³⁶

To move in the direction of union, the committee recommends that the Harvey Cedars Resolutions be included in the plan of union, as well as a declaratory statement guaranteeing eschatological liberty. Synod approved these recommendations as well as a resolution favoring merger provided that the proposed plan of union could be satisfactorily worked out.³⁷ There was, however, much sentiment in the Synod against amending the constitution to remove the premillennial doctrinal position of the Church. Nevertheless, Synod did uphold the eschatological liberty resolution of 1938. At the same time premillennialist sentiment was strong enough to push through a resolution favoring preservation of the *status quo* with regard to the Church's official position on the millennial question for one year until the whole matter could be studied on the local level. The considerations underlying this resolution are the historical position of the Bible Presbyterian Church from the beginning, and the fact that any present

35. *BPR*, 4:4 (April, 1959), 15, 18.

36. *Minutes*, 1959, 18-20.

37. *Ibid.*, 21 f., 29, 47. The name favored by Synod for the united Church was the *Reformed Presbyterian Synod* (27). The discussion on the name question is exceedingly difficult to follow in the *Minutes*.

change in the constitution on the millennial question, or steps in that direction, would most certainly prove ‘disastrously divisive.’³⁸

There is much discussion on the millennial issue in the Church at large throughout the remainder of 1959 and early 1960. Church members read Dr. Harris’ sentiments in the *Bulletin Supplement*:

We want no union at the expense of unity. . . . We should remember, however, that more than just this union is at stake. There are others vastly dissatisfied with Modernism who want a church home that truly carries on the spiritual heritage of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and similar groups, as we have claimed to do. That heritage surely involves liberty on the millennial question. We shall attract some of these men and churches if we put first the great truths of the Gospel in opposition to Modernism, if we turn from extremism to evangelism, and if we major on worthwhile cooperation instead of fruitless controversy.³⁹

Perhaps the mind of the Church may have been moved toward consensus by the March issue of the *Reporter* in which editor William A. Mahlow discusses the relationship between the Bible Presbyterian Church and premillennial doctrine. The Church is historically, and in fact, a premillennial Church which allows its members to dissent from the prevailing opinion of the Church. Unlike the Collingswood Synod, it does not interpret the statement that the BP Church is premillennial to mean that there is no room in the Church for those who do not accept the premillennial, pretribulational view of the return of Christ.

What do we mean when we say that the Bible Presbyterian Church is a premillennial church? We mean that its founders and historic documents both recognize that premillennial doctrine is consistent with Reformed and Presbyterian systems of doctrine and that the majority of those who founded the church held to this position. We also mean that ‘as a whole’ the church witnesses to the truth of this position. However, we do not mean and never have meant that this doctrine is the touchstone of fellowship or of standing in the church. The emphasis in our church is on the great historical doctrines of the church—

38. *Ibid.*, 9 f, 24, 46 f.

39. *BPR*, 4:5 (May-June, 1959), 2; *BNS*, 4:9 (March 22, 1960).

separation unto Christ, the Great Commission, the communion of the saints and the like—not on whether the Blessed Hope includes a pre-, mid- or post-tribulation rapture, or whether it precedes or follows the millennium. . . .

We are glad for a church with such emphasis on the historical and grammatical interpretation of the Bible that the premillennial position predominates, but also happy for a church with liberty in a realm where much is admittedly ‘interpretation’ and forecasting on incomplete information.⁴⁰

The Synod of 1960 was again taken up with the Church’s relationship to the millennial question. The Fraternal Relations Committee reported that union was now further away than in 1959 due to the eschatological issue. It appears that most BP men are in favor of a declaratory statement on eschatological freedom, but that the small minority is so strong in their opposition to it that further progress at this point would be divisive and unwise. Moreover, the RP men will not agree to union without eschatological liberty; nor on the basis of premillennial standards, since this arrangement would, from their standpoint, overemphasize the doctrine. The committee feels that the BP Church must settle this question of eschatological liberty before union negotiations can profitably proceed.

Furthermore, progress toward union has been impeded by the rise of a new problem. The RP Fraternal Relations Committee has found that the General Synod will not agree to the Harvey Cedars Resolution on the ‘separated life.’ Indeed, ‘the reaction of their Synod was that these matters were part of the old wound of our separating from the O.P.C. and had no relevance to them today.’ They do, however, claim to adhere to a testimony regarding the separated Christian life as set forth in the Larger Catechism. ‘The feeling of some of those [i.e., BP’s] present was that they [i.e., RP’s] were not opposed to the matter of the Harvey Cedars declarations, but that they regretted any action apparently aimed at the O.P.C. . . . Some felt that if we could join with them in

40. *BPR*, 5:3 (March, 1960), 1. Cf. the *Free Press* (Nov. 20, 1959).

Hutchinson, The History Behind the RPC,ES (1974), pp. 352-407.

approaching the separated life principle in a new statement we could come to agreement. . . . We must remember that lasting and profitable unions in the past have been slow in coming about. Premature union may be dangerous. The committee is not discouraged and favors further patient consideration.⁴¹

Synod readily consented to continuing negotiations. As to the doctrinal basis of the union, Synod answered the strongly premillennialist overtures by reaffirming the eschatological liberty declaration of 1938 as of constitutional force, adding to it a statement to the effect that the Church holds that the premillennial view of the Lord's return is the Biblical one.⁴² This action was passed by the necessary two-thirds majority and sent down to the presbyteries for their approval.

As the 1961 Synod rolled around, Dr. Harris gave a renewed appeal for union. 'We are not ecumenists. We do not believe that union is the end-all and the goal of Christian progress. We do not believe that we have a mandate in the Scriptures for entire organizational unity with all and sundry. We are already united in the faith. We have done a good work separately and can continue to do so. We do not even want union except it be on a sound and scriptural basis. But there are also positive, practical advantages to union.' Once again there is also an appeal to the effect of this union on interested bystanders.⁴³

With the convocation of the Synod of 1961, the stated clerk read a communication from RP stated clerk, Harry H. Meiners, Jr. He mentions that the union is progressing slowly

41. *Ibid.*, 25 f.

42. *Ibid.*, 26-28, 38 f., 41. The declaration begins as follows: 'Although our standards include the pre-millennial view of that blessed hope, the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we hold this view to be taught in God's Word; nevertheless, . . .' One wonders how the Synod could reconcile this declaration with its action to make the Church's doctrinal standards 'clearly neutral as to millennialism' (41).

43. *BNS*, 5:17 (May 16, 1961).

as indeed it should, for the old adage ‘marry in haste but repent at leisure’ applies to church unions. It is Meiners’ personal desire that any eventual union will be a strong and genuine one as the result of a unanimous decision. Regarding the declaratory statement on eschatological liberty, the clerk informs Synod that ten of the eleven presbyteries have approved it, and that it is now an official part of the Church’s constitution.

The Fraternal Relations Committee recommends steps toward union, chief of which is the acceptance of the joint union committee’s statement on personal and ecclesiastical separation. It also urges a conciliatory attitude on the part of Synod with regard to such things as the name of the united Church. ‘If our wives had been as touchy on adopting our names as we have with the RP’s, we would all be bachelors.’ The basic issues are the important issues, and on these the RP Church is one with us. ‘The Committee believes that a merger of its honored history and considerable assets with our youthful enthusiasm would benefit both churches and the causes of Christ as a whole.⁴⁵

The resolution on the ‘separated life’ was readily accepted by Synod. The preamble of this statement appeals to the teaching of the Westminster Confession regarding the importance of determining the whole counsel of God through deducing doctrinal and ethical principles by good and necessary consequence from Scripture (I, iv); also, regarding the authority of synods to determine not only controversies of faith but also cases of conscience in an administrative, but not legislative, manner (XXXI, ii, iii). It also appeals to the Larger Catechism’s interpretation of the moral law as forbidding not only specific sins mentioned in Scripture, but ‘all of the same kind’ and ‘all of the causes, means, occasions, . . . and provocations thereunto’ (Q. 99, 6); as well as to the fact that the Catechisms ‘specifically and correctly apply the prin-

44. *Minutes*, 1961, 13, 16, 22. Cf. *BNS*, 5:27.

45. *Ibid.*, 38 ff.

ciples of the Word of God to numerous moral problems quite outside of the literal denotations of the Scripture passages from which they are deducted.⁴⁶

Acting chairman, Dr. Robert G. Rayburn, gave an optimistic fraternal relations report to the Synod of 1962.⁴⁷ Dr. Harris' report to the Synod of 1963 is more realistic. The committee has not been too active the preceding year because it seems as if the Synod is not yet unified as to an acceptable basis of union. There is much feeling in that direction, but also some definite hesitations for fear each Church will lose something of its traditional testimony. The issue of the 'separated life' is approaching solution with the adoption of the RP statement on the Christian life. 'The practices of the two churches are very much alike. Our church emphasizes the separated life somewhat more.' The millennial issue is not yet resolved. 'Our standards now make explicit the liberty we have felt, but ours is a predominantly pre-mil church. In theirs there is no apparent emphasis on the matter and both a-mil and pre-mil views are well represented.' However, Synod's final approval of the proposed neutral doctrinal basis would lead toward solution.

The committee's recommendation to this end was adopted by a vote of 69 to 10. This vote is to some extent due to the persuasiveness of Dr. Buswell who argued, as one who

46. *Ibid.*, 42 f. (includes text of resolution—which, due to its similarity to the eventual Plan of Union need not be reproduced here). It is interesting that the Catechism's original words 'and appearance thereof' are left out of the committee's statement. It is, however, contained in the statement finally adopted in the Plan of Union (Paragraph Four). There is also an appeal to WCF, XX, iv: 'And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the Church.' This last sentence, however, is also left out of the committee's statement.

47. *Minutes*, 1962, 32-34. For the encouraging sentiment of RP fraternal delegate Ward, see the *Evangelical Presbyterian Reporter (RPR)*, 7:6 (July-Aug., 1962), 3. Cf. *BNS*, 6:24 (June 12, 1962).

had ‘fought and bled and died for pre-millennial truth,’ that premillennialism need not be legislated into the Church or its agencies, such as Covenant Seminary. ‘Our premillennial beliefs are strong enough to defend themselves.⁴⁸ Likewise the RP resolution on the Christian life was accepted as an acceptable basis for union. Also, it was decided to plan that both Synods meet the following year at the same time and place.⁴⁹

These positive steps toward union were no doubt hastened by appeals such as the following by Dr. Rayburn: ‘Gentlemen, there is not a single church in the RP denomination which we would not gladly receive on an individual basis, nor a single minister among them that we would not welcome with open arms if he applied to one of our presbyteries. Why do we strain then at the idea of taking them all at once?⁵⁰

Then the union spirit in general was no doubt furthered by the appeal of two carloads of RP’s headed by fraternal delegate Gray:

Soon after we all left the liberal Presbyterian church, we were forced to make a choice again between two sets of leaders. My heart was rent when I had to make that decision. Then followed 10 silent years. One of the great tragedies of that crucial time was the little contact between the churches. . . . But then we came to see the follies of that kind of separation.

The need for union is both timeless and contemporary. Timeless, because God’s Word teaches the completion of the body of Christ. Contemporary, because men of similar persuasion are looking for a place to go from the big denominations. Let us facilitate their movement. . . . Our splitting days are over, but we haven’t got this across to the Christian public.

I don’t understand this hesitancy. I think we’ve got some timid

48. *EPR*, 8:8 (Aug., 1963), Special Summer Supplement Issue.

49. *Minutes*, 1963, 31 f., 57. The following recommendation of the committee was also adopted: ‘That we reaffirm millennial liberty, but recognize the right of any church to consider a man’s views in judging his pastoral acceptability and that we endorse the idea that existing agencies in either Synod may expect to continue with the millennial emphases they now prefer, always granting the right of missionaries, students, and professors to choose agencies congenial to their millennial views whether in or out of our Synod if said agencies are not otherwise unacceptable.’

50. *EPR*, 8:9 (Sept., 1963), 8.

people around—we've got everything worked out, and now we're afraid to go to the altar to tie the knot.⁵¹

Dr. Gray's impatient patience would be rewarded. A little more courting and a formal engagement would have to precede the tying of the knot. The headline in the special summer supplement of the *Reporter* reads 'Synod Tackles Union Issue Sees Completion in 1965.'⁵²

Lookout Mountain Wedding

Through the remainder of 1963 both Churches were looking toward a formal engagement by the spring of 1964. There were those, however, who experienced cold feet. For instance, the session of the Enon Valley Bible Presbyterian Church (EP) went on record as opposing the union on the ground that the RP Church, while doctrinally sound, had never taken a stand against apostasy. 'We believe the merger would disrupt the peace of many of our churches which would result in injury to many of the lambs and scatter the sheep from the flocks, and, with the Apostle Paul, we say, "let the churches rest" such issues and carry on the basic biblical responsibility of reaching the lost for Christ (Acts 9:31).'⁵³

The General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Synod of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church met as appointed in St. Louis in early April, 1964. Both Fraternal Relations Committees presented reports to their respective Synods in the form of a detailed Plan of Union—which was readily approved to be sent down to the presbyteries, first, by the RP's and then by the EP's. The substance of the Plan of Union, as approved almost unanimously, is as follows:⁵⁴

51. *Ibid.*, 9. Cf. *BNS*, 7:30 (July 23, 1963).

52. *EPR*, 8:8 (Aug., 1963).

53. *BNS*, 7:44 (Oct. 29, 1963).

54. *Minutes* (RP General Synod), 1964, 20 ff, 33; *Minutes* (EP Synod), 1964, 14 ff., 25, 31, 52. Dr. Harris prefaced his report with the remark: 'The Committee has not strongly propagandized, for this union, feeling that union can only be successful if it is the will of the individual churches to effect it' (52). For

1. The Constitution, which includes: a) the Westminster Confession of Faith in the early American form (as specified in Philip Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*) except for the prohibition of marriage to a dead wife's sister (XXIV, iv) and the designation of the pope as the Antichrist (XXV, vi); b) the Shorter Catechism in its original form; c) the Larger Catechism in its original form except for certain amendments to make it neutral on the millennial issue;⁵⁵ d) the Form of Government as prepared and approved by the two Synods; and e) the present EP Book of Discipline to be revised later as needed.

2. Resolutions on:

- a. The Christian Life and Testimony⁵⁶ as follows:

Since the standards of our church mention many of the sins commonly committed in the day in which they were drawn up.

Be it resolved that we counsel our ministry and membership against the temptations to impurity that are found in pornographic pictures and magazines, the moving picture theater, television programs, and the modern dance.

Be it resolved that we warn against the harmful effect on the body

a brief account of the Plan of Union, see T. G. Cross, *Historical Background and Development of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod*, 1968, 22 f.

55. The changes in the Larger Catechism are four in number:

1. Q. 86: Change 'last day' to 'return of Christ.'

2. Q. 87: Change 'last day' to 'last time.' Omit 'general' before 'resurrection.'

3. Q. 88: Omit 'immediately' in the question. Make the answer read: 'After the resurrection of the just and the unjust shall follow the final judgment of angels and men. That all may watch and pray and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord, the day and hour whereof no man knoweth.'

4. Q. 89: Make the question to read, 'What shall be done to the wicked when they are judged.' Make the answer to read, 'When they are judged, the righteous, having been caught up to Christ . . .'

56. It is interesting, in the light of the distinctively *Reformed* Presbyterian tradition, that the RP's amended the original 'The Christian Life' to read 'The Christian Life and Testimony' (*Minutes*, 1964, 22). Cf. N. E. Clark, *A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Butler University), 1966, 87. Clark's nutshell analysis of the 1965 RP-EP union is that, while the RP's sacrificed *Reformation Principles Exhibited*, the EP's sacrificed their pre-millennialism and distinctive position on 'Christian liberty.' She may very well be right, although one may wonder just how much sacrifice was involved in the formal dropping of *Reformation Principles Exhibited* as a subordinate standard.

caused by the use of tobacco, and the influence its use may have on the young, and that we oppose the liquor traffic and the traffic in harmful drugs.

Be it further resolved that we warn against the sin of gambling, including gambling to raise money for church or benevolent causes.

Be it further resolved that with regard to moral questions we remind our people that in the Ten Commandments under one sin all of the same kind are forbidden, ‘together with all the causes, means, occasions and appearances thereof and provocations thereunto.’ (Larger Catechism, Q. 99, ans. 6.)

Be it further resolved that we counsel our ministry and membership that there is widespread apostasy and unbelief in church organizations today, and that we are not to be partakers with unbelievers in their religious activities.

Be it finally resolved that whenever we have connections with believers who maintain associations with liberal church organizations, that we exercise great care and take every precaution to preserve an uncompromising stand with the Lord and His infallible Word, yet all the while dealing with others in grace and love.

We acknowledge that we are speaking in the area of the application of Scriptural principles to Christian living. In such application we recognize that sincere Christians differ. These resolutions therefore are passed with the knowledge that they do not constitute an attempt to legislate.

b. Eschatological liberty as follows:

We declare that subscription to the system of doctrine of our Church upon the part of all ministers and ruling elders shall be understood as leaving them free to hold and teach any eschatological view which includes the visible and personal return of our Lord to earth and which is not otherwise inconsistent with the system of doctrine of the Bible and the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Church, and that the Synod, the presbyteries, the boards and agencies of the Church shall adopt no rule or by-laws imposing doctrinal requirements other than those of the Westminster Standards.

3, 4. Certain recommendations for combining boards and agencies and for adjusting presbytery boundaries and standing rules.

5. A new name for the united Church, to wit, the *Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod*.

There was considerable interest in the Plan of Union both within and without the two engaged Churches. For instance, members of the EP church in Sarasota, Florida, read in their

church bulletin: ‘With our Synod courting the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, what assurance do we have that the marriage is God’s will? Tonight’s sermon will explain our plan of union, and how God is leading.’⁵⁷ Readers of the evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* read that the union constitutes the first wedding involving any of the ‘separatist’ Churches of the twentieth century, and as such stands as a powerful witness to the Church’s progressive movement.⁵⁸

The summer of 1964 witnesses the fact that not everyone in the EP Church was enthusiastic about union. For instance, Dr. Preson P. Phillips challenges Dr. Buswell’s affirmative answer to two basic questions: 1) Has the denomination ever changed its views concerning the second coming of Christ since it was first organized? 2) Has it ever changed its views regarding Christian liberty and separation? Phillips maintains that both are being sacrificed in the interest of church union.⁵⁹

On the other hand, there was no opposition to union in the RP Church; the four RP presbyteries were quick to give their approval to union; and with the unanimous approval of the Philadelphia Presbytery of the EP Church, on January 9, 1965, the merger was assured.⁶⁰ All that remained now was the tying of the knot.

The formal union was to take place at Covenant College on top of scenic Lookout Mountain on April 6, 1965. The 142nd General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church had already met under the moderatorship of Dr. Harold S. Laird, and had unanimously consented to the wedding.⁶¹ A

57. *BNS*, 8:18 (May 5, 1964).

58. *EPR*, 9:5 (May, 1964), 6. Cf. *Christianity Today*, 8:15 (Apr. 24, 1964), 710.

59. For an account of the debate, see *EPR*, 9:6 (Summer, 1964), 13 f. Here Phillips, who left the united Synod not long after the merger, raises some interesting historical issues.

60. *BNS*, 9:3 (Jan. 19, 1965). Cf. *BNS*, 8:47 (also 8:24, 30).

61. *Minutes* (142nd General Synod), 1965, 9. The uniting action as it relates to the Charter of the RPC is found on pp. 61 f. Evidently neither the General Synod nor the legal authorities thought that it had relinquished the distinctive principles of the Church so as to forfeit its right to hold certain endowed funds in trust. For instance, we read in the will of Francis Lamb, donator of the Lamb

similar action had been taken by the 29th Synod of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church under the moderatorship of Frank Smick.⁶² By means of a ‘Service of Uniting’ at 10:00 a.m., the two Churches became one the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod.⁶³

‘It is impossible to transfer to paper the sense of wonder that could be felt everywhere in the building that morning,’ observed Covenant College Professor Leonard S. Pitcher. ‘For days commissioners from the two groups had been getting acquainted with each other, real friendships had been springing up, and Christian laborers from each group had been discovering how much those from the other group had to contribute in the way of spiritual insight. To those present, the service at 10 o’clock that morning seemed to be in the most natural sequence possible. Anything else would have left us all feeling rather tragically incomplete.’

Particularly moving, to those who had witnessed the formation of the Presbyterian Church of America in 1936 was Dr. Buswell’s prayer of dedication—since it was he who, along with Dr. Laird and others, had led many of the brethren in obeying the Scriptural command to withdraw from ‘unrepenting denominational apostasy’; and now many of

fund for the education of ministerial students: ‘If the General Synod relinquishes the principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church I do hereby require that the bequest made to General Synod shall come into the hands of the heirs of my sister Eliza Jane Jordan’ (probated Sept. 7, 1868) — *The Charter and By-Laws of the Church Boards of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America; Together With A Statement of Such Trusts and Conditions Under Which Any of Their Funds May Be Held* (2nd ed.), 1921, 8.

62. *Minutes of the 143rd General Synod, Reformed Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Synod)*, 1965, 7 f.

63. For the order of this service, see *ibid.*, 2 f. The stated clerks of the two bodies each read a brief history of his denomination. See R. Hastings, *A Brief History of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (Mimeo graphed), 1965: ‘Today we take another step forward. May it introduce the time in our history when we shall see the evident blessing of the Lord on the work of this Church.’ See also H. H. Meiners, *A Brief History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod* (Mimeo graphed), 1965. Dr. R. Laird Harris presented a statement regarding the goals of the united Church.

those who had taken that historic stand were back in one denomination again. This union, it was felt, was not the work of man, but of God the Holy Spirit. The mood of the entire assembly was: ‘This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes’ (Ps. 118:23). ‘In those holy moments, it seemed impossible that any man should be exalted or wish to be exalted.’ As Dr. Laird, himself, remarked, it was indeed a mountaintop experience!⁶⁴

However, as Pitcher noted, the joy of consummated union is but the prelude to work in the face of all the obstacles facing the Church today. As Dr. T. Stanley Soltau put it: ‘Not only was the Synod characterized by a spirit of joyous exhilaration over the working of the Holy Spirit in the Synods and in the hearts of those present, but it was also characterized by a sense of vision, in which the commissioners were enabled to take a long look into the future, and in faith, plan for big things, in the belief that the God who delights to do the impossible for His children, would again show His power on their behalf.’⁶⁵

Dr. Gray preached to the united Synod from the first four verses of Psalm 60. The preacher spoke of the exhilaration and enthusiasm of 1936 and then reviewed the tragic history of the Presbyterian Separatist Movement since then. The banner of truth was then unfurled by the Church militant. That same banner needs to be unfurled today. It is the banner of truth raised against compromise ecclesiastically, compromise culturally, and compromise doctrinally. This banner must be displayed today in a united Presbyterian testimony to the truth. We must stand for the purity of the visible church. We must stand for a Christian world and life view. We must stand for the whole counsel of God. ‘We must

64. *Reformed Presbyterian Reporter (RPR)*, 99:5 (May, 1965, mistakenly numbered 14), 3 f; ‘United At Last’ (L. S. Pitcher), ‘His Gracious Providence’ (H. S. Laird). The *RP Reporter* took the place of the old *RP Advocate*, which was in its 99th year of publication.

65. *Ibid.*, 8: ‘Exhilaration, Then Vision.’

cling to the system of truth set forth in the Westminster standards. We are thanking God for the fundamentalism that brought us to Christ, but we are Presbyterians and we must hold to this system of truth which we believe is truly Scriptural and satisfying.' The preacher gave his own personal testimony: 'I feel today the way I felt in 1936, when I thought I was about to launch upon a crusade with great promise. Before us at this synod there stretches the vista of large opportunity. It is the feeling one gets as he looks from the tower of Covenant College across vistas that include seven states.'⁶⁶

Shortly afterward, church-goers read in the *Bulletin Supplement*: 'A New Church Is Born.'⁶⁷

The Evangelical Synod

What is the character of this *new* Church—the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod? One thing is certain: if there is in the Church a sense of a new beginning, or fresh start, there is also a profound Sense of that which is old. This sense of continuity with the past comes out in the basic challenge given to the newly-formed Evangelical Synod in the first issue of the *Reformed Presbyterian Reporter* by editor John W. Sanderson, Jr.: 'Never in history has such an opportunity been presented to the people of God if they will present the *old faith* with an understanding of the times.'⁶⁸ The desire to respond to this challenge, indeed command of God, to present the historic Christian Gospel to modern man seems to be the spirit of the Evangelical Synod.

How is the Church to go about this task? In response to this question, Sanderson would make a plea for Christian maturity defined in the following terms: the ability to remember our former lost condition; to live in a world where everything is not according to our wishes; to recognize the

66. *RPR*, 99:6 (June, 1965), 9-12, Dr. Gray's Synod Sermon: 'Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?'

67. *BNS*, 9:15 (April 13, 1965).

68. *RPR*, 99:5 (May, 1965), 2.

needs and worth of others, and to do something about them; to put the best possible construction on another's deeds; to recognize limitations of knowledge; to submit to properly constituted authority; and finally, the ability to distinguish between what is important and what is more important. 'After 27 years in the ministry I can testify that most of the ills of the modern church with which I have become acquainted stem from the inability to see that not all things are equally important.'⁶⁹

Dr. Gray, in reporting on the Synod of 1966, would summarize and crystallize these marks of Christian maturity in one word—unity. However, this unity is not to be construed as uniformity but a sense of oneness in the work of the Lord and His Church. There will be, there must be, debate and differences in the Church—'differences which suggest diversity within the framework of the Reformed Faith which united us.' 'Agreement is not what we want; provoking to love and good works is.' An indication of such is reflected by the spirit of the united Church. As stated clerk Harry Meiners put it: 'This is a union that really is a union. The sense of the "we" and "they" seems almost to have disappeared.'⁷⁰ There would even be diversity as to how to characterize this spirit of unity. To some, such as Max Belz, it would mean 'disciplined denominationalism' in the face of so much nondenominational confusion. Others, such as David C. Jones, would take offense at this language.⁷¹

With regard to the matter of allegiance to the old Gospel in this modern age, it is significant that the *first* resolution passed by the first united Synod in 1965 concerns the contemporary relevance of Reformed theology. In the light of the fact that certain Churches in the Reformed tradition have denied the substance of Reformed theology due to its sup-

69. *RPR*, 99:10 (Oct., 1967), 6 f. This article has been reprinted by Covenant College in pamphlet form.

70. *RPR*, 100:6 (May, 1966), 2 f.

71. *RPR*, 100:7 (June, 1966), 11; 100:9 (Aug.-Sept., 1966), 2.

posed irrelevance to the faith and life of this age, the Synod resolves 1) to affirm its adherence to the preaching and teaching of Reformed theology with its distinctive emphasis on the sovereignty and providence of God; and 2) to reaffirm its allegiance to the Westminster Standards as embodying that Scriptural system of doctrine which alone really satisfies the deepest need of the heart of man and has dynamic impact on the world.⁷²

The second resolution adopted at the 1965 Synod calls for a renewed emphasis on Christian stewardship and appeals to the Church to support the agencies of Synod.⁷³ This resolution reveals the Evangelical Synod's concern for its agencies as channels of the Lord's work, and leads to a brief account of the major agencies of the Church.

In 1965 the total missionary personnel of World Presbyterian Missions came to 76. The outlook of the Mission is summarized in the words of the General Secretary, William Mahlow: 'While the message of the Gospel, the essential nature and work of the Church, the authority of the Word of God are all unchanging and unchangeable, the missionary's outlook and approach must be contemporary.' Mahlow goes on to inveigh against the paternalistic 'poor native' attitude so often adopted by Christian missionaries,⁷⁴ or as RP missions leader Arthur Glasser has put it, it is imperative that the missionary of today take the stance of a servanthood. His peculiar symbol must be the towel, the symbol of service. 'In servanthood we shall discover the key to reaching our generation with the Gospel.'⁷⁵

By 1967 the number is up to 86. However, apparently there has been developing in the Synod, as a response to the many problems faced, an attitude which Mahlow calls 'mis-

72. *Minutes of the 143rd General Synod*, 1965, 15. Cf. *RPR*, 101:4 (Feb., 1967), 12; 101:3 (Jan., 1967), 3-7.

73. *Minutes*, 1965, 15 ff.

74. *Ibid.*, 10 (cf. 8 ff.).

75. *RPR*, 100:6 (May, 1966), 8-11. Cf. *RPR*, 99:10 (Oct., 1965), an issue devoted to WPM. Cf. *Minutes*, 1966, 19.

sion-phobia.' This attitude considers missions an elective as far as the work of the Church is concerned rather than her major imperative. It looks upon missions as a minor work of the Church, one in which every respectable Christian Church must participate, rather than as a work of major proportions. This outlook applied to the Evangelical Synod means that it is better for the Church to establish itself in America first, with a view to laying a good foundation for someone else to engage in the work of foreign missions in the next generation. Needless to say, Mahlow and WPM are fearful of this sentiment.⁷⁶

By 1968 the number of missionary personnel is down to 78, laboring in ten fields: Chile, Peru, India, Arabia, Jordan, Kenya, Japan, Korea, Formosa, and Australia. According to Mahlow, the sovereignty of God must encourage a renewed enthusiasm for world evangelism. 'Indeed, it would be only empty scholasticism to give intellectual assent to the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Christ, but do little to carry out His commands. The very nature of sovereignty is the right to command; obedience to the commands is recognition of that sovereignty. . . . So the measure of our involvement in missions and evangelism is a good indication of the reality of our faith in the sovereignty and lordship of Christ.'⁷⁷

It is the *purpose* of National Presbyterian Missions, under the energetic leadership of Donald J. MacNair, to assist the establishment of local churches in America. The moving spirit behind NPM is the sense of America's deep spiritual need at the present time along with the conviction that the RPCES represents not only God's answer to America's spiritual need,

76. *Minutes*, 1967, 92 f. 'To evangelize the world is not an elective nor is it a "minor" subject. It is our God-given imperative, the King's command. Nor may our fears of the "dangers" of missions, be they social, economic or personal, keep us from the all-out effort to which we are called. May the Lord give us a new vision of our call to cut across every national, social, racial barrier and plant the Church of Jesus Christ in all the world.'

77. *Minutes*, 1968, 27 ff. See the brochure *World Presbyterian Missions: Principles, History, Work, Practices*.

but also the divine pattern of church life, including doctrine and organization, laid down in the Scriptures. NPM is also only a tool of God the Spirit, the real moving spirit behind the agency. ‘NPM does not start churches. It is a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to expedite the work.’ This indeed is the policy of the agency: to be simply a tool in the hands of the Spirit with which He may accomplish the work of the Church, working through the presbyteries of the RPCES.⁷⁸

To accomplish its purpose, NPM’s *program* includes the following: intensifying the Church’s burden for the lost in the U.S.A.; assisting in the organizing of believers into churches, and in the contacting and orienting of seminary students to the RPCES; administering a support program for ministers of new or small churches until such time as they are self-supporting, a fully-supported missionary program for establishing churches, as well as a church extension work among the Cherokee Indians; providing building funds and guaranteed bonds for new church buildings; and, finally, presenting the RPCES to the public.⁷⁹

Another important agency of the Evangelical Synod is Christian Training, Inc. (CTI), streamlined successor to the old Committee on Christian Education pioneered by Robert H. Cox from 1954 to his resignation as General Secretary in 1964. CTI is the result of Cox’s vision of a strong Christian Education emphasis and program in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.⁸⁰ The committee was formally renamed in 1965. Its threefold aim, according to early promoter Robert

78. *RPR*, 99:11 (Nov., 1965), 2, 12. The whole issue is devoted to the work of NPM.

79. *Ibid.*, 12. Cf. *Minutes*, 1965, 43 ff.; 1967, 45 ff.; 1968, 45 ff.; also the brochure *National Presbyterian Missions*.

80. *Minutes*, 1965, 26: ‘The name of Robert H. Cox, former General Secretary, is synonymous with Christian Education in the E.P. Church. . . . But there were too few who ever shared this vision with him.’ A resolution of Synod’s appreciation of Cox’s work is found on p. 34, e.g., ‘Mr. Cox can be credited with having pioneered in promoting the vision of Christian Education in the minds of our ministers and churches, which in recent years has increased and we see signs of a far greater increase in coming days.’

Palmer, is: to bring people to Christ (evangelism), to bring them up in Christ (nurture), and to send them out for Christ (missions).⁸¹

The special interest of CTI is to promote the training of youth in the home and local church. Indeed, when National Youth Director, Arthur L. Kay, was appointed Director of CTI in 1967, the youth and training ministries of the Synod were combined. It is Kay's conviction that the various independent youth organizations of the day have arisen as a result of the spiritual and educational breakdown of the home and local church. These movements should not be opposed, but other programs and materials should be developed to meet the needs of youth in a better way, that is, through the home and church. For it is the influence of the home and church which is the primary impetus toward a life of dedication and service. Movements come and movements go, but as divine institutions home and church will remain.⁸²

The next Synod agency to consider is Covenant College. In 1965 efficient chemist and RP elder Dr. Marion Barnes left a successful career in science and business to accept the Synod's call to succeed Dr. Rayburn as president of Covenant College. The sense of divine calling, as well as the challenge of the Lord's work at Covenant, would not permit Dr. Barnes, president of the board of trustees at the time, to turn it down.⁸³ In 1966 Synod formally separated the College from Covenant Seminary. In his report to the Synod of 1967, Dr. Barnes describes the character of the College in the following terms:

1. Christian in its commitment, believing that the truth of saving faith in Jesus Christ as presented in the Scriptures offers the only meaningful answer to a secular society.
2. Liberal arts in its academic emphasis, believing that it is more meaningful and useful to learn how to live than how to make a living. Many of the courses offered, however, carry great vocational value.

81. *BNS*, 9:28 (July 13, 1965); 10:49 (Dec. 6, 1966).

82. *Minutes*, 1965, 36; 1967, 15 f. For a more specific account of objectives and activities, see *Minutes*, 1968, 58 ff.

83. *RPR*, 100:3 (Jan., 1966), 3 f.

3. Reformed in its theology, believing that a sovereign God has established the affairs of all men and that He will bring about His purposes in all matters.

4. Evangelical in its outreach, believing that the significance of the Christian faith must be shared with all men.

“. . . that in all things, Christ might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

By 1968 Dr. Barnes could—despite certain disappointments in the spiritual life of the College—indicate substantial progress to Synod with regard to the growth of the school since 1965. The faculty had been increased from 13 to 31, student enrollment from 145 to 315, and seniors graduated from 21 to 47. Of these, 37 are now affiliated with the RP Church although only 28 were RP’s when they entered. Indeed, there are other indications of Covenant’s value to the Church. For instance, 62 percent of all degree alumni are employed in church-related vocations. Nevertheless, the College is in serious financial difficulty. It is not being supported by the RP Church. In fact, the RP gifts to the College in 1968 are only half of what they were in 1965.⁸⁴ Churchgoers were confronted with the following question in the *Bulletin Supplement*: ‘Can Covenant College Survive If Reformed Presbyterians Don’t Support It?’ The RPCES does not realize the jewel it has in Covenant College, is the response of WPM General Secretary Mahlow. The school is likely to be lost to the cause of Christ and missions. ‘The meager giving and the lack of wholehearted support of Covenant College in our own denomination is nothing less than a disgrace. The RP Church should wake up, shape up, and get behind the College.’⁸⁵

Last but not least there is Covenant Seminary under the sober leadership of Dr. Robert G. Rayburn. Dr. Rayburn is zealous to preserve the orthodoxy of the Seminary for the service of the Church. ‘We are called upon to build a strong

84. *Minutes*, 1968, 20-22. For a splendid statement of Dr. Rayburn’s vision of the college, see *Minutes*, 1965, 19 f.

85. *BNS*, 12:46 (Nov. 12, 1968).

Reformed and truly Presbyterian church; and in this the theological seminary is the most vital instrument. It provides the ministry and leadership that will build the church. Our stand on the Scriptures, and upon every important doctrine of the Christian faith must be utterly without compromise. Many a denomination has started on the downward path when just a little error was allowed to creep into its theological seminary. This we must guard against zealously.⁸⁶

That the Seminary is in fact serving the Reformed Presbyterian Church is crystal clear according to Rayburn's ten-year anniversary report to Synod of 1966. For instance, of the 54 Covenant men serving the RPCES, 30 of them were not in the denomination when they enrolled at the Seminary. By 1967 one fourth of all RP ministers are from Covenant; and by 1968, one third.⁸⁷

Nevertheless the seminary, like the college, is periodically faced with serious financial problems due to lack of support by RP churches. It was at the point in late 1966 that Synod moderator William B. Leonard, Jr., could write fellow pastors: 'We must not . . . we cannot afford to lose Covenant Seminary.' In the light of this pressing problem, the Seminary would wish that every presbyter in the Church had the attitude of elder Arthur Stoll of the Elgin, Illinois, church: 'The whole future of our denomination is tied to Covenant Seminary. We are putting the school on our prayer list and church budget.'⁸⁸

It should be mentioned at this juncture that many local RP churches and church members support various independent Christian agencies such as Quarryville Presbyterian Home, Cono Christian School, and various foreign mission boards.⁸⁹

86. *Minutes*, 1965, 21.

87. *Minutes*, 1966, 9 ff.; 1967, 34. *BNS*, 12:24 (June 11, 1968). Cf. *RPR*, 100:7 (June, 1966), 6 f.

88. *BNS*, 10:52 (Dec. 27, 1966); 10:13 (Mar. 29, 1966).

89. Cross, *op. cit.*, 25 f.

The *third* resolution of the 1965 Synod is an illustration of one of the many concerns of the Church. It is an appeal to RP churches and church members to keep the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath in obedience to the fourth commandment.

The Lord's Day is an acknowledgment of the completed work of the New Creation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, and is a day freed from the ceremonial restrictions of the Levitical system. Hence this Synod declines to legislate as to specific requirements of prohibitions for the observance of the Lord's Day beyond those contained in the Bible, as expounded in the Westminster standards, but declares emphatically that Christians ought to put the things of God first on that day, such as faithful attendance at the worship services of the Church, works of mercy, prayer, the reading of the Bible and of good Christian literature, and such activities as are designed to further the worship and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

There are many other matters which are of concern to the members of the Evangelical Synod besides Sabbath observance. A related one is an interest in a revival of Puritanism. The RP leader perhaps most interested in neo-Puritanism is Dr. Gray, the sponsor of the first Puritan conference in America. To Dr. Gray 'Puritanism is Calvinism with a heart.'⁹¹ Puritanism is Reformed in its theology. However, whereas Calvinism is often a purely intellectual thing, Puritanism is personal, practical, and pastoral. The Puritans were great pastors and psychologists long before the day of modern psychology. 'Today, when Calvinism is either purely intellectualistic or is combined with a Fundamentalist kind of piety which is at some important points basically inconsistent with it, we need to look to the Puritans.' Behind the neo-Puritan revival is the conviction that Puritanism was strongest just where the protestant church of today is weakest.⁹²

As one might expect, another concern of the Evangelical

90. *Minutes*, 1965, 16 (*cf.* 53). Cf. articles on Sabbath-keeping in *RPR* by L. T. Van Horn (March, 1967) and G. H. Clark (Dec, 1967).

91. *BNS*, 9:25 (Jan. 3, 1967).

92. *RPR*, 99:9 (Sept., 1965), 10 f. All those interested in neo-Puritanism ought to read this article by Dr. Gray. Cf. *RPR*, 99:12 (Dec, 1965); 3 ff., 7; 100:6 (May, 1966), 5 f.

Synod is evangelism. For instance, the Synod of 1966 is called upon to discourage participation in cooperative evangelistic campaigns whose methodology contradicts the doctrine of the purity of the Church. This Synod does, but at the same time encourages campaigns which do not suffer from this defect, and especially encourages the study of ‘simple and effective methods of personal evangelism, including a helpful system of follow-up Bible study, under truly responsible leadership.’⁹³

In late 1966 Covenant Seminary professor of evangelism Rayburn reported on the World Congress of Evangelism in Berlin. ‘The Congress brought plainly into focus the fact that the fields are white unto harvest. Time is running out. The world must be evangelized. We have no excuse for not getting the job done. Millions are facing a Christless eternity. If we of the Reformed persuasion retreat from our responsibility, in the light of the clear command of our Lord, our theological soundness will mean only that we are “sound asleep.”’ The Congress itself, however, suffered from two serious faults—the one ecclesiastical, the other theological. First, there was little said about the Biblical command to separate from apostasy, and second, there was little clear witness to Biblical doctrine as witnessed to in the Reformed faith. Nevertheless, the Reformed separatist position was given a hearing in the person of RP evangelist, Dr. Francis Schaeffer.⁹⁴

Dr. Schaeffer’s paper is entitled ‘The Practice of Truth.’ Historic Christianity rests upon the truth of what God has revealed. Indeed, it rests upon an antithetic concept of truth—that is, if what the Bible teaches is true, then the opposite of what the Bible teaches is false; as opposed to the

93. *Minutes*, 1966, 57 f., 7, 31 f. To some, however, the Church’s interest in evangelism was just so much talk. For instance, Preson P. Phillips, Jr., would leave the RPCES on this account in 1965 to become a Baptist, having come to the conviction that Presbyterian ecclesiology—not soteriology—by its very nature precludes vigorous evangelistic outreach. This is not to imply that there were no other factors involved in Phillips’ leaving the RPCES.

94. *RPR*, 101:2 (Dec, 1966), 6-9. Cf. *BNS* (Sept. 27, 1966).

synthetic view of truth, which has obsessed the modern mind since the time of the German philosopher Hegel, according to which opposite things can be both true and false, right and wrong, at the same time.

Historic Christianity rests upon truth—not truth as an abstract concept, nor even what the 20th century man regards as ‘religious truth,’ but objective truth. . . . Part of this truth is the emphasis that certain things happened in history. . . . Behind the truth of such history is the great truth that the personal infinite God is objectively ‘there.’ He actually exists (in contrast to His not being there); and Christ’s redemptive and finished work actually took place at a point of time in real space-time history (in contrast to this not being the case). Historic Christianity rests upon the truth of these things in absolute antithesis to their not being true. This carries with it the possibility and the validity of that personal antithesis which occurs at the new birth, wherein the individual passes from death to life. To weaken the historic Christian concept of antithesis is eventually to make meaningless the personal antithesis of the new birth.

Thus evangelism must also be based on the truth, *true truth* in the historic Christian sense as opposed to the modern mind’s conception of ‘truth’ which is not really true. Modern man must be faced with the truth, and with the practice of the truth in love the evidence that the Christian takes truth seriously. There can be no compromise with that cooperative evangelism which refuses to take the truth seriously. Evangelism that does not lead to purity of life and purity of doctrine is just as faulty and incomplete as an orthodoxy which does not lead to a concern for, and communication with, the lost.⁹⁵

95. *Ibid.*, 9-12. For a similar challenge to the modern view of truth, see the article by RP philosopher G. H. Clark in *RPR*, 101:7 (May, 1967), 12. Dr. Schaeffer attempts to put these principles into practice at *L'Abri*, a successful mission to intellectuals in the Swiss Alps. He has had wide influence both within and without the RPCES. His ministry is professedly one of speaking historic Christianity into the post-Christian world and church of the twentieth century. He calls for a reformation unto pure doctrine and a revival of the Spirit-filled life resulting in a constructive revolution in the evangelical church at large. This is the basic need of the church at this moment in history. Cf. F. A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, 1969, 12 f., et al. Schaeffer’s evangelistic principles are presented against the background of his critique of modern culture in two other recent works of significance: *Escape From Reason*, 1968; and *The God Who Is There*, 1968. Also to be consulted is Schaeffer’s wife’s recent account of the work at *L'Abri*: E. Schaeffer, *The L'Abri Story*, 1969.

Such a strong emphasis on the antithesis between truth and falsehood would naturally lead to strong aversion to the apostasy of the modern church with its anti-intellectual notion of ‘truth.’ The ministers of the RP Church are constantly warning their people against the apostate National Council of Churches, and calling for Christians affiliated with it to ‘obey the command to separate in accordance with the Word of God.’ This is the burden of a 1965 sermon of RP pastor, Dr. Thomas G. Cross. However, this separation should be on proper grounds: namely the false theological position of the Council’s leaders, not their political, social, and economic pronouncements.⁹⁶

With regard to the United Presbyterian Confession of 1967, RP theologian Sanderson concurs with the criticism of others that it is indeed a *concession* of the faith instead of a *confession* of the faith. The new confession claims to be relevant. However, there are at least two kinds of relevance. The criterion of the one, which is obvious to the person, is the person himself. He feels that something is relevant to his case. The criterion of the other, which is not always so obvious to the person, is the once-for-all revealed word of God, without which nothing is ultimately relevant. ‘In trying to appeal to the modern mind, the framers of the new confession have sacrificed real relevancy for a superficial, and passing relevancy.’⁹⁷

The Synod of 1967’s response to the Confession of 1967 is as follows:

To all true Presbyterians whose Churches are now involved in the adoption of new confessions which are neither catholic, evangelical, nor Presbyterian, to those whose church is engaged in planning a union in which their Presbyterian standards would be lost, we extend a sincere invitation to join with us in the work of seeking to preserve the Presbyterian tradition by building a church committed to genuine Presbyterian standards and of proclaiming the saving gospel of Christ to our lost world.⁹⁸

96. T. G. Cross, *A Christian’s Responsibility Toward the National Council of Churches in the Light of the Scriptures*, 1965, 18, 8-10.

97. *RPR*, 99:6(June, 1965), 2. 98. *Minutes*, 1967, 131 (*cf. BNS*, 11:32).

This thrust of this declaration is the burden of Dr. Rayburn's contemporaneous pamphlet *The Hour of Decision in American Presbyterianism*.

At the same time WPM General Secretary Mahlow is careful to warn the Church against spiritual snobbery: 'Let us not ... be spiritual snobs. We may not espouse the new Confession (praise God!) but do we believe and live the old one? Do we believe the Bible? Embrace the Reformed Faith? Love our Lord enough to obey Him? As we are quick to criticize others for their doctrinal folly, let us examine our own lives as they relate to the Great Commission.'⁹⁹

The Evangelical Synod has also been concerned with the racial issue as it has come to the fore in American society in the 1960's.¹⁰⁰ In 1966 a committee on racial questions presented a comprehensive statement of Biblical principles on racial questions. It is a strong affirmation of the unity of the human race and the universal offer of the Gospel as prohibitive of racial discrimination in the church of Jesus Christ. Its spirit is expressed in the concluding paragraph: 'We look upon our approach to the Negro, whether Christian or unbeliever, in a spirit of repentance, and we exhort one another to greater obedience to the Great Commission to make disciples, and to Christ's commandment to His disciples of whatever race "that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).'¹⁰¹

Synod did, however, revise the committee's original recommendation on interracial marriage so as to avoid any impression that the Church encourages intercultural marriage, especially in a prejudiced society. In 1967 an overture from the Southern Presbytery came before Synod to make Synod's

99. *BNS*, 11:8 (Feb. 21, 1967).

100. Cf. *Minutes*, 1963, 50, 66, 68; 1964, 43 f.; 1965, 54. As already noted in Ch. 8, the racial issue first came before the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 1963 in the wake of current racial tension and civil strife. A statement on Biblical principles regarding racial discrimination was accepted by Synod in 1964. These principles were reaffirmed in 1965 with the provision that the matter be further studied by an enlarged special committee on racial questions.

101. [*Minutes, 1966, 51-54*](#). This statement as accepted was reprinted in pamphlet form.

warning regarding interracial marriage more explicit. ‘While we still find no definite Scriptural basis for opposing marriage between believers of different racial background, we feel that the experience of many, if not the great majority, of interracial marriages has proved that the children born of such unions are great sufferers from prejudice and isolation.’ This request was denied, and the matter referred to a committee to report to the Synod of 1968.¹⁰²

The final statement adopted by the Synod of 1968 reads as follows:

It is striking that in all of Paul’s discussion of marriage this is the one principle that is stressed in regard to whom one should marry in this sphere. This is not to say that marriage to any Christian is necessarily expedient, but the only marriage clearly prohibited is that of a believer to an unbeliever. The Bible does not teach that interracial marriage of believers as such is morally wrong. We do recognize that children of a mixed marriage born into a prejudiced society face a serious problem of identity. This problem of identity is largely overcome, however, where the commitment to Christ is uppermost and where the church welcomes all who are in covenant relationship to the Lord into its fellowship. Although marriage between the races should be approached with caution because of the serious nature of the difficulties involved, nevertheless we are persuaded that God’s blessing is available to all who marry ‘in the Lord.’¹⁰³

102. *Minutes*, 1967, 120-123. The overture continues: ‘Because young people in our churches are increasingly confronted by this question and because fear of inter-racial marriage evidently lies at the heart of segregation in American churches, we desire to make it perfectly clear that in our view the Bible does not disallow the marriage of two believers in accordance with their personal preference. At the same time we recognize in all wisdom the danger of inter-racial marriage in a prejudiced society, and, in counseling young people in regard to such marriages, we urge them to consider seriously that any children of such union may be regarded as belonging to the minority group or may be ostracized by both groups.’

103. *Minutes, 1968, 25 ff.* The Scriptural basis for these conclusions is in part I Cor. 6:15-17; 7:16, 39. Headlines in the papers on the next day are ‘Reformed Presbyterians ok mixed marriages’ and ‘Interracial Marriages Approved by Reformed Presbyterians.’ Due to such misunderstandings there are many in the Church such as Dr. Cross who feel that this statement of Synod was unnecessary and unwise. The 1966 statement was adequate. ‘The action of 1968 was not called for by the Scriptures or the social conditions which exist.’ T. G. Cross, Letter to T. Stigers (April 9, 1969). Quoted in T. Stigers, ‘The Development of the Statement on the Racial Question of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod’ (Unpublished Paper, Covenant College), 1969. This paper,

By far the most talked-about matter within the Synod has to do with the proposed merger with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. As already noted, there was much talk in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church about merger with the OPC, although this was overshadowed by the prospect of union with the RP's. For instance, in 1958 Synod encouraged the Fraternal Relations Committee to continue negotiations and friendly discussions with the corresponding committee of the OPC.¹⁰⁴

In 1959 Dr. Harris reported for the Fraternal Relations Committee that a joint committee meeting had been held with such OPC leaders as Professor Paul Woolley, Calvin K. Cummings, and LeRoy B. Oliver.

The meeting was a cordial exploratory meeting. We found them seeking fellowship and not opposed to union ultimately if found desirable. It seemed agreed that our differences have been overemphasized. They felt the Christian Beacon had grossly caricatured their position. They believe that Christian liberty should be exercised with due care and love for the weaker brother. They were relieved to learn that we do not call certain questionable practices sinful in themselves nor legislate against them. Very few (only about six) of their ministers smoke. More of their ministers attend movies, but with discrimination. They are not far from us in theory and also in practice, in most of their churches. They did not seem to be acquainted with our Harvey Cedars resolutions on separation, and expressed great interest in them.

They feel we may have been guilty of schism in the past, but do not hold that to be a bar to cooperation now. They very much appreciate the resolution passed at our 1956 Columbus Synod in which we

despite certain factual errors, is a very helpful introduction to the subject, and contains information from sources, not readily available, such as the private correspondence of those involved. Cf. Wilmington, Del., *Morning News* (May 16, 1968); *Evening Journal* (May 16, 1968). For Synod's response to this publicity, see *Minutes*, 1968, 79: 'The headline in yesterday morning's *Wilmington News-Journal* did not say all that we said. We said what we said. If people are offended by the headline, we ask them merely to study what we said in our statement. We realize that the world may misunderstand or distort much of what the church says. We can only speak the truth in love and depend fully on the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of those who hear.'

104. *Minutes of the Twenty-Second General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church*, 1958, 26. For random references to relations with the OPC throughout the period 1956-1963, see for example: *BNS*, 1:6; 6:47; 4:8, 7:51. *EPR*, 7:6; *BNS*, 7:30.

expressed regret at the harshness of certain actions. They and we suggested cooperation on the local and presbytery level.¹⁰⁵

At the Synod of 1961 fraternal delegate Albert Edwards made a stirring appeal for reunion and received a standing ovation.¹⁰⁶ In 1962 there were overtures before Synod requesting closer relations with the OP's. For instance, the Presbytery of the Upper Midwest overtured Synod 'to seek reunion with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on the same doctrinal basis that we had before the schism of 1937.' In reply, Synod directed the Fraternal Relations Committee to proceed with more definitive action on the matter. In 1964 the committee was instructed to work with the joint EP-RP union committee for the purpose of discussions with the OPC with a view to producing a spirit of meaningful unity among the Churches.¹⁰⁷

No sooner had the merger with the RP's been effected than there was renewed agitation in the Church for union with the OPC. In 1966 the Fraternal Relations Committee reports that the majority feels that the two Churches should recognize the importance and advantage of moving toward organic union. Both Churches hold to the infallible Scriptures. The subordinate standards of both are identical except for the RP revisions in the Larger Catechism to render it neutral on the millennial question, which revisions seem acceptable to the OP men. Moreover, the principles of worship, government, and discipline of the two Churches are basically the same since both are in line with historic Presbyterianism. The only real obstacle to union seems to be differing attitudes toward the Christian life with reference to par-

105. *Minutes*, 1959, 17. It is a curious fact that the Harvey Cedars Resolutions would be unknown to OPC men. This fact is an indication of the tragic lack of communication between BP's and OP's in the 1940's; as well as evidence that the Harvey Cedars Resolutions were not primarily directed toward the OPC, but rather toward differences on the issue of separation within the BP Synod itself. On this point, see Ch. 7.

106. Cf. *EPR*, 6:8; *BNS*, 5:28.

107. *Minutes*, 1962, 12, 50; 1964, 45.

ticulars. This area, though apparently not an insoluble one, demands further study. Synod authorized the Fraternal Relations Committee to work toward a plan of union.¹⁰⁸

In 1967 the committee presented to Synod what it termed part of a possible plan of the eventual union, prepared in conjunction with the corresponding committee of the OPC. Appended to it was a joint statement regarding the history concerned with the division of 1937. This statement mentions what it considers to be the two specific issues of that controversy, namely, the attitude to be taken by the Presbyterian Church of America toward the use of alcoholic beverages and the premillennial view of eschatological doctrine. It then concludes:

It is noteworthy that neither church has ever made the use of alcoholic beverages in itself an offense requiring discipline, while both churches have cautioned their members concerning the Scriptural requirement of temperance. Neither church has required either its officers or its members to hold or to reject premillennial, amillennial or post-millennial views of a supernaturalistic character in eschatology.

The differences in the early days of the existence of both churches, therefore, were in the realm of emphasis and practical method in the teaching of temperance and of eschatology, rather than in formal requirements.

During the course of years it has become apparent that these differences in emphasis and method are not sufficiently grave to warrant their being a ground for continued ecclesiastical separation.¹⁰⁹

Synod did not adopt the plan of union but was content to commend the committee for its work and to encourage it to persevere in future negotiations. As reported in the *Reporter* Synod gave the committee a ‘hesitant nod’ to go ahead. The Synod of 1968 did, however, accept the plan as a statement of Synod’s present position on the merger issue, and voted to continue negotiations and cooperation with the OPC.¹¹⁰ In 1969 the Synod would be presented with a *Basis*

108. *Minutes*, 1966, 2, 8, 32, 51.

109. *Minutes*, 1967, 69. The statement also mentions merger problems relating to the divergent attitude of the two communions toward the church’s relationship to educational institutions. For the text of the plan of union, see p. 67 f.

110. *Minutes*, 1967, 71 f.; 1968, 42 f. *RPR*, 101:8 (June-July, 1967), 6. The

of Union with a view to the acceptance of a *Plan* of Union in 1970 and eventual union perhaps in 1972.¹¹¹ The outcome of the matter would remain to be seen. Meanwhile the two Churches would continue to engage in various cooperative endeavors, and RP's would express themselves on the merger issue.¹¹²

So much for the convictions, character, concerns, and cares of the Evangelical Synod. The official statistics of 1968 credit the Church in America with 11,070 communicant members,¹¹³ involving 5,642 families and 3,292 covenant children.

Reformed Presbyterianism

What is the nature of the distinctively Reformed Presbyterianism represented by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod? Much of the answer to this question has already been set forth in the preceding account of the Evangelical Synod. Indeed, one thing is sure: different members of the Synod would express their understanding of this Re-

1968 Synod also adopted the following resolution: 'We affirm our sincere and unequivocal desire to fulfill all aspects of Christ's revealed will for His Church. However, recognizing that in so complex a matter as the contemplated union with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church there is real possibility for the equally undesirable errors of selfish delay or presumptuous haste, we urge that all members, officers, sessions, presbyteries, boards, and committees of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod approach all considerations of union in a spirit of fervent prayer and supplication, remembering to look continually to the Lord for mercy, wisdom, discernment, and true obedience.'

111. *Mandate*, 103:1 (July, 1969). This is the new RPCES magazine. The complete text of the Basis of Union is found on the back page of the issue; also in the *Presbyterian Guardian*, 38:4 (April, 1969) 39 ff.

112. *BNS*, 12:2 (Jan. 9, 1968); 12:18 (April 30, 1968). For a sampling of opinions on the merger question, see *RPR*, 100:7 (June, 1966), 2, 4 (R. W. Gray, P. Stam, K. A. Horner); *RPR*, 101:8 (June-July, 1967), 7; cf. 102:1 (Nov., 1967), 11 f.; 101:10 (Oct., 1967), 10. *BNS*, 10:4 (April 5, 1966); 131:6 (Feb. 11, 1969). T. G. Cross, Letter to RPCES Ministers, March 21, 1969. *RP Letter Exchange* (Mimeographed), 1969 (esp. A. F. Glasser, S. Smallman, R. A. Wildeman, J. O. Buswell, W. A. Collins, G. H. Clark, T. S. Soltau, W. J. Brooks, R. Tevebaugh, J. E. Hanson). *Mandate*, 103:1 (July, 1969), etc.

113. *Minutes*, 1968, 133. These figures do not include presbyteries overseas, nor figures relating to 12 U.S. churches which did not submit statistical information.

formed Presbyterianism in different ways. There are certainly many varied ideas within the Church about the precise nature of a truly Reformed Church. Yet there must be some consensus which holds the Synod together. Perhaps the best way of getting at this is to examine what the Church claims to be in its public appeal to outsiders.

This appeal is directed by National Missions General Secretary MacNair. It is often summarized in the official publications of the Church in terms of the threefold cliche: Historical Presbyterianism, Biblical in Doctrine, Contemporary in Outlook. In answer to the question as to the kind of church the RPCES is, the Church is presented as ‘an old-fashioned Presbyterian Church with a modern outlook.’ The Church is said to couple doctrinal commitment with a contemporary outlook.¹¹⁴

What is generally meant by these cliches is elaborated by MacNair in an article in the *Reporter* on the distinctive witness of the RPCES.¹¹⁵ The distinctives of the Church are those characteristics which give it cause to exist as a separate ecclesiastical entity; they are not radical extremes propagated under the Presbyterian name. These distinctives are set forth in the following terms.

The *first* distinctive has to do with the historic Reformed faith, but there are other Reformed Churches. The distinctive witness of the RPCES is the Reformed faith *applied*. In the RPCES the Reformed faith is therefore ‘a stirring, enthusiastic, and vital way of life.’ It is relevant to life. ‘The RPCES strives for that preaching and teaching of the Bible which makes Christianity relevant to the twentieth century.’

The *second* distinctive is the lordship of Christ, as the only Head of the Church, over both the individual church member and the corporate body of believers. Consequently the RPCES teaches the authority of Christ in every area of one’s personal life. All are commanded to put on the Lord

114. E.g., NPM pamphlets like, *YES! we're that kind of a Church*.

115. *RPR*, 101:5 (March, 1967), 4ff.

Jesus Christ and to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:14). However, the lordship of Christ extends to the corporate testimony of each local church and the Church as a whole, and this lordship demands the doctrinal purity of the visible Church—including separation from those Churches whose cumulative testimony has become heretical, as well as a witness unattached to such organizations as the National Council of Churches.

The *third* distinctive MacNair describes in terms of *living* the Great Commission. ‘The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, believes that these words of Jesus involve the witness of each Christian, not just a specialized command for the few who become missionaries and ministers. . . . Therefore, in each individual’s life, in the program of our home churches and in the program of the missionaries under World Presbyterian Missions (the foreign missionary board of the RPCES) the emphasis has been and must continue to be personal witness by each to his own circle of contacts.’ Every Christian is a full-time servant of the Lord.

The *fourth* distinctive is true Presbyterian church government which balances orderly procedure with the rights of the local congregation. As we read in the Form of Government, each local church holds title to its own property so that the presbytery cannot use property as a lever of control (II, 8ab). Further:

Particular churches need remain in association with this denomination only so long as they themselves so desire. The relationship is voluntary, based only upon mutual love and confidence, and is in no sense to be maintained by the exercise of any kind of force or coercion whatsoever. A particular church may withdraw from this denomination at any time for reasons which seem to it sufficient, by orderly ballot at a legal meeting of its congregation or corporation (II, 8c).

These provisions of the Form of Government are ‘unamendable forever,’ constituting ‘a solemn covenant’ between the courts of the denomination and the particular churches which adhere to it (II, 8c).¹¹⁶ Because they are vital to the

116. *Form of Government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod*, 1974, pp. 352-407.

Hutchinson, *The History Behind the RPC,ES* (1974), pp. 352-407.

life of each member of the congregation, the RPCES is a unique Presbyterian Church.

The *fifth* distinctive is an attitude of worship which centers in God the Sovereign Creator and Redeemer and not in Christian ‘fellowship.’ The RPCES, while not undervaluing the importance of fellowship believes that the center of worship must be the person of God Himself.

The *sixth* and final, distinctive has to do with a pronounced emphasis on the second coming of Christ absent in other Reformed communions. ‘The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, believes that it is a distinctive Presbyterian body, already graciously blessed by our Lord, and trusts that it will be “in the way of God” to be used by Him in any way He may see fit.’ Or as we read in one of NPM’s brochures: ‘The RPCES may have been raised up as a tool of major importance in Christ’s Church for this particular hour. It stands ready to be used as He chooses.¹¹⁷

At the same time, the Church is not without earnest self-criticism. For example, WPM General Secretary Mahlow sees danger ahead for the RPCES if the spiritual condition of the Church is not remedied. The Church is certainly not all it pretends to be. What it professes is one thing; what it performs is something else again. For instance, the Church must cease making it so easy to become a Christian. There must be a sterner Christianity. Likewise there must be more Bibles: ‘We must have a renewed emphasis on Bible study, Bible preaching, Bible reading, Bible knowledge. Church members today are more literate and educated than ever, and more ignorant of God’s Word than ever.’ Then, more discipline:

gical Synod (As revised May, 1967, by the 145th General Synod), 1967, 13 (*cf.* 11 ff.). These sentiments are taken from the old Bible Presbyterian Form of Government (20:4, 5; 3:2). Note also the following Bible Presbyterian sentiment (1:9): ‘All ecclesiastical rights, privileges and powers not expressly designated for the officers, boards, or courts of the church by the Word of God and by the doctrinal, governmental, or disciplinary standards of this denomination, are reserved to the congregations of the several particular churches’ (II, 6). MacNair in his article does not spell out all these specifics, but simply alludes to them.

117. *National Presbyterian Missions: Establishing New Churches*.

there must be a renewed emphasis on church government. Moreover, there must be a return to that honesty which leads to repentance; along with a willingness to give to the church a spirit of thinking not of what my church can do for me, but of what I can do for my church. Finally, there must be a fresh application of truth to life. So often the great doctrines of the Church are merely so much head knowledge, rather than living realities in the heart.¹¹⁸

To some the spirit of Reformed Presbyterianism is not taken seriously enough, so as to produce a dynamic sense of togetherness and loyalty to the Church. This is the burden of Nelson Malkus' remarks to the Synod of 1967. He is not advocating the blind denominational loyalty demanded by the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., back in the 1930's. 'But we ought to cultivate a greater sense of unity and loyalty to a church into which we believe a sovereign God has placed us and to which we have voluntarily committed our lives—so long as that church remains faithful to the Holy Scriptures as we see them.' Somehow the Church seems to lack this spirit of cooperation so integral to Reformed Presbyterianism.

Do we really believe that the RPCES is a church come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Do we really believe that—as far as we are concerned—this church, above all others, can do God's work best in this world as its people are filled and led by the Holy Spirit? Is this what has induced us to become a part of it? Just as the word 'reformed' leads us away from independency in doctrine, so I believe, 'Presbyterian' leads us away from independency in action. If we are not sold on what we are doing as a church, we short-circuit the dynamo of our dynamic.¹¹⁹

So then, what of the future of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod? It is the conviction of Dr. W. Harold Mare that the Church will still preach the unchanging Gospel, but in new ways and with a warmly evangelical spirit.¹²⁰ In the words of Dr. Cross: 'The future is bright because of the promises of God to those who love Him and honor His Word.'¹²¹

118. *RPR*, 102:2 (Dec, 1967), 2 f., 'Danger Ahead for Our Church.'

119. *RPR*, 101:8 (June-July, 1967), 11. 120. *BNS*, 13:21 (May 27, 1969).

121. T. G. Cross, *Historical Background*, 25.