

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The specific subject matter of this book, as the title indicates, is the history behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES). In this connection, it would be well to point out immediately what the book is not. It is not a history of Presbyterianism in America, nor of Reformed Presbyterianism in America, nor of the Presbyterian Separatist Movement in America—although there is much in the book for the reader interested in these areas. Its scope is more narrow in that it aims to be precisely what is expressed in the title.

There is a sense in which Christians should not be bound to the past as they face the duties of the present and prepare for the demands of the future. There is an enslaving traditionalism which can paralyze the people of God so as to preclude their present obedience to the Word of God rather than the traditions of men. But at the same time it is impossible to escape the past, indeed illegitimate to want to do so. For if God's purposeful providence governs all, then all of history is significant; and, as an integral segment of His sovereign plan for the ages, must in no way be despised by the Christian. This does not mean that God approves of all that has happened in history—certainly not in the history behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod! However, it does mean that God's sovereign hand has been in it all for a purpose, and that therefore it must not be taken lightly. No, we must not despise history, but stand before it with awesome reverence because above, within, behind, and beyond it all, despite all its confusing details, stands the Almighty!

If we ought to revere human history in general, how much more as Christians should we respect Christian history. Yet how often are we tempted in our conceit to think that history began when we stepped upon the scene. We are interested enough in our own personal history as Christians. How much more should we be interested in the history of others, particularly those without whose life and testimony there would be no Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and without whom many of us, from the human standpoint, would be unacquainted with the Gospel of God.

Fascinating indeed is the history behind the RPCES! Through the mist of time, we see Patrick Hamilton burning at the stake! We see Andrew Melville informing James Stuart (James VI) as to who is the head of the Church in Scotland! We see thousands signing the National Covenant 1638 with their own blood. We see the Westminster divines gathered together to formulate a confession of faith for the ages! We see Oliver Cromwell's soldiers dispersing the General Assembly of 1653! We see Covenanters secretly huddled together in out-of-the-way places for prayer! We see Richard Cameron publicly renouncing the authority of Charles II! We see Donald Cargill ascending the scaffold at Edinburgh with less fear than ever he had ascending a Christian pulpit! We see John McMillan shepherding the Reformed Presbyterian remnant of Scotland, Alexander Craighead renewing the Covenants on American soil, and John Cuthbertson establishing the first 'Reformed Presbytery' in America! We see James McKinney passionately proclaiming the rights of God!

To bring the story into the more recent past, we see Charles A. Briggs denying the infallibility of the Bible in the name of Biblical authority! We see Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen discussing the future of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.! We see Machen pitting Christianity against Liberalism, pleading for the separateness of the church, being tried and suspended as a minister for his deter-

mination to send forth the historic Christian Gospel, and rejoicing in a true Presbyterian Church at last!

If we look closely, we see Cornelius Van Til and Carl McIntire escorting J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., to the rostrum as Moderator of the Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America! We see a small group of fourteen ministers and three elders establishing the Bible Presbyterian Church as the true spiritual succession to the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.! We see Carl McIntire preaching the Twentieth Century Reformation Movement in a Collingswood tent! We see Kenneth Horner lamenting the Bible Presbyterian Church torn asunder! We see the Columbus Synod repudiating the Collingswood Movement and reaching out for fellowship with Reformed Presbyterian brethren! We see, believe it or not, a Presbyterian wedding—Evangelical and Reformed—on Lookout Mountain!

In short, we see Jesus—magnified and minimized, beloved and belittled, among his professing people!

The origin of this book may be traced to this sense of fascination, as well as to a kindred sense of duty. The initial research was undertaken in connection with the church history paper required for licensure by the RPCES. The design of this paper was at first small; but then, due to the fascination of the material, the paper grew to become something more substantial. In time, there developed a sense of obligation to share the fruit of this research with the Church as a whole. The work was finished in February of 1970.

At this point something should perhaps be said about the author's approach to the subject at hand.

First, with regard to the historical reality involved, I do not claim to have written the history behind the RPCES as it actually happened. This, in the nature of the case, only God, the ultimate touchstone of all objectivity, could do. At the same time, historical objectivity has been my ideal. I have attempted to be as objective as possible in the treatment of

the sources, viewing the available sources themselves as the proximate touchstone of objectivity.

Second, the reader should be aware of two serious limitations regarding the author's research: lack of time for research in the midst of other duties and the difficulty of obtaining relevant source materials. Thus this history has been produced in a comparatively short period of time and solely on the basis of the sources available at the time of writing, as opposed to the vast amount of existent material relevant to the course of events, but unavailable to the author. It must be recognized that the research is limited to the historical sources and temporal resources at the author's disposal. Furthermore, it must be recognized that these limitations, along with the fact that some areas have been well covered by others, account for the obviously uneven level of research underlying the various chapters.

Third, regarding the historical record produced, I have tried to base this narrative squarely upon the sources at hand with little interpretive analysis of an explicit nature. The intent is to allow the sources to speak for themselves as much as possible with a view to reproducing the atmosphere, or spirit, of the history discussed. This attempt, plus the difficulty in obtaining many of the sources, has led to more quotation from them than would be otherwise desirable. Nevertheless, a certain amount of interpretive analysis is implicit in the selection of sources and the structure into which the history has been organized.

This leads to a word about organization and content. The whole is divided into ten chapters of five sections each. The intent is that each chapter be a respectable unit in itself. The final section of each is intended to serve as somewhat of a summary, in a more interpretive mood, of some of the more basic issues raised by the material covered.

A special word is in order concerning the first and last chapters. As their titles reveal, they are not a part of the narrative, but reflect more the personal views of the author—

regarding how to state the nature of Presbyterianism in the one case and one's response to this history in the other. As such they may be omitted by the reader who is more concerned with absorbing the historical data and forming his own conclusions. At the same time, the author does feel that these chapters may be of help in grasping the subject, and therefore includes them. It is hoped that the first chapter will provide somewhat of a background to the narrative along with a better comprehension of the basic materials out of which the story is produced, and that the last will stimulate each reader to reflect more profoundly upon, and respond more passionately to, what he has read.

Finally, the author takes pleasure in thanking all the many people who helped in the preparation and publication of this book, especially the following: the Reverend Professors Paul Woolley and William S. Barker; the Reverend Harry H. Meiners, Jr. (deceased), the Reverend Robert H. Cox, the Reverend J. Wyatt George, Mr. McGregor Scott, Mr. Chalmers Elder; Mr. Joel Belz, and Mr. Waldo Chesnut, Sr.; the Reverend and Mrs. Lynden H. Stewart and the Session of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Camden, New Jersey (see Dedication); and last but not least my wife, who not only spent countless hours typing the manuscript but had to put up with me while it was being written.

George P. Hutchinson

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