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Dear Dr. Clark,

Enclosed is a paper sent to Steve Smalmon containing some of my thoughts on the matter of apostasy. I am sorry that it did not get to you sooner, but I did not realize until recently that you were a member of the Committee.

I must apologize for the errors of mis-typing and format, but the lady who usually types for me was on vacation and I was thrown upon my own resources. I hope you will overlook the errors of which I am painfully aware.

I am deeply concerned with the subject of apostasy due to my personal experiences in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. I pray that we as a denomination will do what is right and not that which is merely pragmatic.

Cordially yours,  
Benjamin K. Short.

A Statement On Apostasy

Submitted by Benjamin R. Short.

On The Evangelical and Presbyterian side of our history there has been a consensus of opinion that the U.P.U.S.A. was apostate. That consensus was responsible for the actions of many men. It may be true that the R.P.C.E.S. has not officially stated that the U.P.U.S.A. is apostate, nevertheless historically a segment of our denomination susceded from that body because of the actions it took, actions which arose from its opposition and negative attitude towards the truth of God. Certainly that church was regarded as apostate even though there may have not been any official action taken denouncing that body as apostate. We may be Questioning the term apostasy today but historically in our denomination the term has been used by our leaders without any semantic problems being raised. Within the historical milieu of forty years ago the consensus was so widely held that the need for official statements was not felt.

The division that took place when Machen and others were defrocked had a history preceding it. It was not a bolt out of the blue but was the climax of a history of events of a gradual departure from those confessional truths which we regard as biblical. The revision of the Confession Of Faith in 1903 was opposed by the Princeton men who discerned a broadening of the church that was eclectic in nature.

Without going into the whole history of the departure of the U.P.U.S.A. from the scriptures there are high points that should be considered. Certainly the Auburn Affirmation was one such high point. The subscribers to the Affirmation confessed adherence to the Westminster Standards, but they at the same time with marvellous double think refused to be bound to " any one interpretaion of the doctrines of the Confession," under the flag that God alone is Lord of the conscience and not the church. The historic reformed and evangelical understanding of various biblical truths were regarded only as theories. There was a distinction made between doctrines and their interpretations. It was possible in the minds of the signers to hold to certain doctrines and yet have differing interpretations of those doctrines. Such doctrines as Innerancy, Substitutionary Atonement, etc. were placed within the categorie of interpretation. This liberal indifferentism was deplored by many in the church. That the Auburn Affirmation was a cloak for theological liberalism can hardly be doubted.

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In 1927, according to George Hutchinson the General Assembly without debate accepted the "toleration".

" The general Assembly may not demand conformity to any doctrine apart from merely quoting the exact language of the Confession. The position of the Auburn Affirmation became the official *position* of the church."

(The History Behind The Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, Pg.190 )

The other great high point was the reorganization of Princeton Seminary. Machen regarded these events as the triumph of a religion alien to the christian faith. Writing in the Presbyterian Guardian he said,

" The issue in the Prebyterian Church in the U.S.A. is an issue between modernism and the Christian Religion."

(Prebyterian Guardian, April 1936.)

He saw liberalism as grounded in the emotions of men, and Christianity as biblical. The one subjective the other objective. Liberalism was a departure from the truth of the bible.

Machen in Christianity and Liberalism declared,

" If the liberal party really obtains full control of the councils of the church, then no evangelical Christian can continue to support the church's work. If a man believes that salvation comes through the atoning death of Jesus, he cannot honestly support by his gifts and by his presence a propaganda which is intended to produce an exact opposite impression. To do so would mean the most terrible blood guiltiness which it is possible to conceive. If the liberal party therefore, really obtains control of the church, evangelical Christians must be prepared to withdraw no matter what it costs."

Christianity And Liberalism, Pg. 166.

Machen and those who stood with him did not talk of seperation hastily or lightly. We know that Machen and others did not leave the U.P.U.S.A. of their own accord. They fought a battle trying to make sure that the liberals did not gain control of the church. They failed in their endeavours and they were ultimately defrocked. The action of the General Assembly in defrocking these men was the signal for many more that the battle was indeed lost and that the church was in the hands of a force alien to biblical christianity. A new denomination came into existence and Presbyterian seperatism became a reality instead of a theory.

The old church was, by those who left, regarded rightly as apostate. The church could no longer be regarded as a true church

of Christ. It had departed from the moorings of scripture and was adrift on the sea of naturalism and subjectivism.

Surely when our seperatist fathers used the word apostasy in reference to the U.P.U.S.A. they understood it to mean that the church had turned away from Biblical Authority, and Biblical Christianity. In spite of exact confessional language there was the rejection of the bible's understanding of the events it records. Man's subjective responses were placed above the Word of God. Unbelief had taken over. The church had ceased to be the church of Christ.

Whatever the dictionary meaning of the word might be, that was the historical use and understanding of apostasy, and all understood it to be such. Our seperatist fathers whatever the differences they had among themselves were of one accord in their view of the U.P.U.S.A. It had departed from the word of God, thence it was apostate. They may ~~have~~ not have used the word apostate in a Synodical statement, but individually they used the term and there was a general concensus as to its meaning. The idea of apostate had a profound influence upon their attitude towards the U.P.U.S.A. That attitude is reflected in our F.O.G. in the term "deemed heretical".

When we review the history of those crucial days we must ask ourselves on what basis did Machen and his supporters act. Certainly not all evengelicals left when Machen was defrocked. Even some of his strong friends remained to continue the battle. That however is not the concern. What we need to discover is the principles which motivated the men who left. Evidently Machen did not expect to be treated as he was, and to be summarily dismissed. Even he had misjudged how far the church had departed from its biblical foundations. Machen talked of separating, and many who formed the new denomination did so by a voluntary withdrawal from the old denomination. Not all to be sure were of one mind with Machen in their understanding of the church as is evidenced by the subsequent splintering of the separatist movement.

It seems to me that we can discern in the actions of the more Reformed brethren Reformed principles in action. They did not have a Fundamentalist view of the church which tends to spiritualize the

church and downgrade its corporate visibility. Many who were part of the separatist movement were dispensationalist. Dispensationalism to all intents and purposes is a Plymouth Brethren teaching. There is a close connection between Brethren Ecclesiology and Dispensationalism. The early Brethren thought nothing of dividing churches, for they placed little store on the visible denominational structures, regarding them as "the systems of men" and the work of Satan. The denominations pragmatically viewed seemed to bear out Darby's famous contention that the church is in ruins.

Certainly the Reformed could not espouse a view that so blatantly denied the promise of Christ to build his church and to prevent hell from prevailing over her. The talk of separatism amongst the Reformed was not born out of a low view of the church, but rather out of a high view of the church. Machen insisted that separation could only be contemplated when the liberals actually gained control over the church. Machen was a churchman not a fundamentalist.

The separation, it seems to me, was rooted in the Reformed view of what constitutes a true church of Christ. The church was regarded objectively not subjectively. The purity of trueness of the church did not depend upon the regenerate state of the people in it. The marks of a true church are objective and discernable. This is an important point to keep in mind in the present discussion in which the committee is engaged. It is my impression that we in the R.P.C.E.S. tend to view the church subjectively, and lean towards a baptistic position. Because we see within the U.P.U.S.A. and the P.C.U.S. individual congregations that are evangelical we are hesitant to call them apostate. The boards and seminaries and educational programs do not evidence a commitment to Biblical or Reformed christianity. When we consider these organizations we are not simply looking at organizations that are Arminian evangelicals but churches that promote a non biblical theology, that militates against God's truth and the salvation of men. If our Reformed principles are correct then we need not fear to regard these denominations as apostate, nor should we hesitate in declaring that we regard them as such.

Our Westminster Confession in Ch XXV:2, states that the visible church "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion." Paragraph 3 states further, "unto the catholic

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church visible Christ has given the ministry, and ordinances of God." The Belgic Confession declares,

"The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein, if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin- from such church no man has a right to separate himself."

The two statements of these confessions are complimentary and sum up the Reformed understanding of a true church. If Christ has given the ministry and ordinances of God to the church and the church in reality denies the true ministry of the gospel, then one of the marks of the church is missing. If the church refuses to discipline those who deviate from the true word of God then, another mark of the church is missing. That is what the men who separated from the U.P.U.S.A. saw. They could not regard that body as a true church of Christ. While they may have not used the word apostasy officially there is no doubt that is what they saw and suffered under. Subsequent history has borne them out. Certainly the U.P.U.S.A. has departed even more from those marks that make up a true church of Christ. The point I am trying to make is, that semantics of official stands are not the issue. The issue is the historical reality. Is the Word of God controlling the U.P.U.S.A. or the P.C.U.S.? Is its principles controlling the decisions made by the boards and courts of these bodies? Is there a strong biblical christianity being taught in their seminaries? Can evangelicals remain within their ranks without compromising the true gospel not only in the pulpit, but in acquiescing to the churches life? If truth is not prevailing in the ministry and life and discipline of these bodies how can they be regarded as true churches of Christ? Have they not, in spite of what they may say, rejected the Kingship of Jesus Christ? If the marks are missing, even though there are some evangelical ministers and congregations amongst them, are those denominations not in reality apostate? Have they not ceased to be true churches of Christ.

If such is not the case in the P.C.U.S. then our attitude towards the P.C.A. ought to be very different. We should regard the P.C.A. as schismatic, and ought not to be considering any union with that denomination. If the U.P.U.S.A. is not what Machen and his

fellow seperatists thought her to be, then a terrible mistake has been made and we with great grief and repentance should be striving to rejoin her ranks. Of course such a course is unthinkable because we know that our seperatist fathers were not mistaken. History has vindicated them again and again. I contend that the issue before us is not one concerning the meaning of a word or of an official pronouncement, but of a condition. We can use any word we choose to describe the condition, such as heretical. Certainly the word apostasy is legitimate and describes the condition well and accurately. The condition justifies the use of the term today whether we have used it officially or not. There has been in the history of our denomination a tacit understanding that the U.P.U.S.A. <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>apostate.</sup> It did not have to be said in a Synod pronouncement, it was not necessary, all agreed it to be so, and that agreement underlies such terms that we now find in our F.O.G. "we deem heretical." Surely that term arises out of our history.

II. The chairman of the synod's committee has raised the matter of our recognizing ordinations and baptisms administered within the precincts of the U.P.U.S.A. and the P.C.U.S. The idea appears to be that if we regard these denominations as apostate, then we ought not to recognize the ordinances administered in them, and that we should readminister these ordinances upon those who seek admittance into our communion if coming from those denominations.

In addressing that question, it seems to me, that certain distinctions must be kept clearly in mind. We must remember that ordination is a recognition of something already conferred by Christ. Ordination does not create or impart something. Ordination is a setting apart of men who evidence ministerial gifts to the task of teaching and preaching the Word of God. The office is opened up to the individual by the church in ordination. Ordination is giving the right to a particular individual to hold office within the institution of the church on the basis of gifts that Christ has bestowed upon him. That is why Presbyterians place a strong emphasis upon examinations for ordination.

It may indeed be true that in a liberal apostate Presbyterian body there are men <sup>who</sup> have been ordained who have not been gifted of Christ for the task of the ministry. There may be, and no doubt are false shepherds who occupy the pastoral office. On the other hand

it is equally true that individuals who are qualified for the pastoral office by the Head of the church may be ordained and inducted into pastoral charges. If we bear in mind that ordination does not confer any spiritual gift, but simply admits to an office, then the question of who does the ordaining is not a burning point. The ordination surely is recognized by Christ if He has bestowed the appropriate gifts upon the individual.

*would a person  
or person  
be acceptable  
to*

When such an individual leaves a body deemed heretical by us, and applies to enter into our communion to minister, we examine that individual as to the qualifications that are necessary for the ministry. If we find him qualified ~~and life~~ then we recognize that the apostate body in spite of its heretical condition has in the case of the particular individual done that which was right in ordaining him. We recognize the ordination as valid. On the other hand if we find in examining the individual that he does not possess the ministerial gifts we then recognize that the ordination was not valid.

X The nature of the church does not either validate or invalidate ordination. The key point is the qualifications that the individual possesses. It is possible for a man in the R.P.C.E.S. to be wrongly <sup>ordained</sup> because he may be devoid of the gifts required for the task of the ministry. The fact that he belongs to our denomination which is committed to the scriptures and to an evangelical reformed gospel does not of itself make his ordination valid. If the gifts are present then the ordination is valid. Equally because a denomination may be apostate it does not follow that all of its ordinations are invalid. I would refer you to Bannerman's Church of Christ, Sec IV, Ch.I The Ministry A Divine And Standing Ordinance in the Church-Pg.421, Banner Of Truth-1960.

In the matter of Baptism we are involved in a different issue. Baptism is a sacrament, and as such it lies at the heart of our covenantal understanding of the church. More is involved in the sacrament of Baptism than in the ordinance of ordination. But even here the question is not that of the state of the denomination. The efficacy of Baptism is not dependent upon the condition or intention of the person who administers it. Even in Baptism or The Lords Supper the efficacy is not in the sacrament itself. The efficacy of the sacrament lies in the work of the Spirit, Our confession pointedly states that to be the case. The Confession is equally pointed in

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stating that the efficacy does not " depend upon the piety or intention of him who doth administer it." The Westminster Divines had the priesthood of the Roman Church in mind when they made that statement. The framers of the Confession were anxious to rule out any notion of a sacerdotal priesthood, or the idea that the church has the power to dispense the grace of God. W.C.F. Ch. XXVII: III.

*Could a minister baptize?*

If we question the validity of Baptism on the grounds of the apostate condition of the denomination in which it is administered, are we not giving to the church some kind of sacramental power? Are we not saying that in the rite of Baptism the church through the minister is conveying some kind of grace. If the Baptism is administered in the name of the Trinity, can we require anything more. Our Confession does say that those who are eligible for Baptism are those, " who actually profess the true faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized." W.C.F. Ch. XXVIII: 4. But even here we are not in a position of certainty because we have no way of guaranteeing the reality of the profession of faith of the one being baptized, or of the parents who are presenting their child for baptism. It is possible even within the R.P.C.E.S. that the adult applying for Baptism may be what the Puritans called a hypocrite. The true state of the soul is known only to the Lord. It may be that parents presenting their child for Baptism may be doing so out of superstition and without any real faith. We can only deal with people on the basis of their profession. We cannot infallibly guarantee the faith of anyone. The validity or efficacy of Baptism is not in the hands of the church, but resides in the Sovereign disposing of the Spirit.

Surely we would not contend that a true believer who was baptized in the U.P.U.S.A. was not truly baptized because the person administering it was apostate. If faith was truly present then the Baptism was valid, and as it was received by faith the sign was expressed and the seal was administered by the Spirit.

Likewise when a child is presented by believing parents, the condition of the person administering the Baptism, or the state of the denomination can in no way affect the efficacy which alone is bestowed by the Spirit.

I contend that there is no reason why we cannot accept either the ordination or the Baptism administered within the U.P.U.S.A or for

that matter the R.C. Church. The validity does not depend upon externals, but on the internal and spiritual realities. If we say that the efficacy of the sacraments depend upon externals and upon the condition of ministers or churches, then we are perilously close to espousing a sacerdotal view of the church if indeed we are not actually doing so.

### Conclusions

If the committee decides that we dare not officially state that the U.P.U.S.A and the P.C.U.S.<sup>are</sup> apostate, then it seems to me that the committee has to demonstrate that these churches have not departed from Biblical Christianity in their official life and doctrine, or present to synod an explanation as to why the Reformed Principles as to what constitutes a true or false church is no longer valid. It will also, it seems to me, have to explain why we as a denomination should remain separate from these churches if they be not apostate. The committee will also have to explain wherein our separatist fathers erred in their judgement of the historical situation which prompted their actions.

If the committee does conclude that we must call those bodies apostate and hence we cannot accept ~~accept~~ the validity of their ordinances, then the committee must explain why the Confession is wrong in its statements regarding Baptism and the "intent of the person administering it.

### III.

The third matter upon which I wish to comment is that of our responsibility toward those whom we recognize as evangelicals who choose to remain within denominations which we deem heretical.

There are several stances we might take. We might assume that we have no responsibility towards them at all. Such an attitude would of course be wrong for we cannot simply ignore brethren who are in need. We must recognize that they are in need of spiritual encouragement and strengthening. I know that to be the case from personal experience.

Our responsibility might be understood as simply that of denouncing them and cutting them off from all fellowship. That attitude too is false for we have no right to cut brethren off from fellowship unless they are engaged in personal immoral living or espousing heretical views. There may be times however in which their continued

associations might be a supporting of heresy and immoral actions.

Again our responsibility might be construed as that of urging them to leave their association with apostasy and to join with those who in the past have left heretical bodies, or to link with a body that is true to the Biblical gospel. This view it seems to me has a great deal to support it. Yet it cannot be simplistically applied.

There are several things to be kept in mind. For evangelicals to remain in a denomination that is heretical is to be in a position of compromising the gospel that the evangelical espouses. The only way the evangelical can escape compromising the gospel and Christ is by himself refusing to compromise. That is, he must stand openly against the heresy of the body in which he lives and works. He cannot preach one thing and do another. In my experience I saw evangelicals preach the gospel on Sunday but act as if all was well within the church, and without explanations to their congregations support Boards that were not true to the gospel that the evangelical preached.

The only way a Presbyterian evangelical can function within such a situation without compromising is by actively engaging in opposing the heresy and false position of the denomination within which he labours. If he does not engage in such activity he appears to give consent. The nature of the Presbyterian system is such that all elders have a right in rule and are responsible for the whole work of church courts. If a man does not exercise his right and responsibility to combat error, then he becomes a party to the error.

A man who does not fulfil his obligations in the unbelieving situation places himself in great danger. He is in danger of becoming domesticated and of losing his ability to discern truth from error. I have seen that happen to men, men who once were zealous for truth but through constant battle grew weary and discouraged and ceased to speak out. They excused themselves on the basis that they were waiting for the right issue to come along. They became pragmatic and as issue after issue arose they remained silent

waiting for the auspicious political moment. Meanwhile the church of which they were apart moved further and further from the truth. Some of them are still waiting while the church has done a wholesale rejection of the truth. When they do finally move it will be over some kind of peripheral matter of procedure instead of over a major matter of truth. If we are going to be faithful christian brethren

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we must warn them of their danger. We must point out to them that the battle is an all embracing one. We must also warn them of the danger of relying upon their own strength and ability to weather the storm. Surely we must deal with brethren who have become weary and have ceased fighting error as we would any other christian brother. We must urge him to gird up his loins, and if he is unable to do so we must point out to him the anomaly of his position. It is not an indifferent thing for Christ's gospel is being compromised by his lack of courage.

If he cannot fulfil his obligations to Christ because the situation will not allow it, then are we not under the obligation to council him to leave that situation? One of the true marks of the church is discipline. We generally think of discipline in a positive way. There is however a negative or reverse discipline. In the normal situation men who depart from the truth are to be disciplined by removal from their pastoral and ecclesiastical positions. If however the situation is such that the denomination has so departed from the truth that discipline cannot be exercised, then those who wish to remain true to the Word must exercise discipline. They are not relieved of their responsibility. If they can only do so by a reverse procedure then they should do so. That means that they exercise discipline by removing themselves from the denomination. That is a form of discipline. By so doing they are rejecting falsehood and error. I believe we have an obligation to encourage those in such a position to do what they ought to do in the matter.

Would we encourage true believers to stay in a local congregation if their minister was false, and if the session was false and refused to make charges against the minister, or if the Presbytery refused to discipline? Would such people <sup>we council</sup> to jeopardize their spiritual welfare and that of their families? Surely we would encourage them to leave. Is it any different with the minister who is in a similar position on the denominational level?

I believe it is wrong to think that we should not say that those in such circumstances should not of necessity do what we did. The question is whether what our fathers did was right or wrong. Are there no principles at stake in the matter, or is it only a case of expediency or personal preference? Could our separatist

forefathers have done differently and still have done righteously? If there was another route that was righteous that could have been taken without dividing the church, then surely unrighteous<sup>ness</sup> was done by our seperating fathers.

The question at bottom, it seems to me, "s"to be that of right and wrong. I do not believe the seperation should be done lightly or needlessly. We must be prepared to accept the fact that no church is perfect on earth. But surely there are times when seperating is the only possible course if we are to be true to Christ. If truth is being compromized before the world, if men's souls are being placed in great danger by unbelief and serious error; if young men are being systematically taught not to have confidence in the scriptures, and there souls placed in danger of being damned thereby; how can we say that those who believe should not of necessity leave. I believe that that was the situation in Machen's day and I do not believe the situation has improved over the passing years. Does there not come a time when the church ceases to be a true church of Christ, and is not that condition objectively discernible.? Does there not come a time when the church ceases to be a church but becomes a synagogue of satan? When a church condones homosexuality, or when by a thin margin a motion allowing homosexuals to occupy the pulpit fails by ~~a thin margin~~, and when those homosexuals who presently are ordained cannot be removed, has the time not arrived? When a church before the world ceases to do the work of Christ, but consistently promotes the cause of darkness, has the time not come for those in the midst of the apostasy to depart, thus making their testimony to the world.? To stay is only to contribute to the error and apostasy.

Are not those who dream of reversing the situation really deluding themselves? It is true they should not act in a particular way because we have done so, that is not the point. They should so act for Christ, for truth, for right. There comes a time when remaining within an apostate situation is to partake of other mens' sins, no matter how noble or idealistic the reasons for staying. In fact the situation can be such that we may have to exercise discipline on such brethren to impress upon them the sinfulness of their position, just as we would any brother who repeatedly and consistently compromized the gospel by false associations, therbye

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giving the appearance of evil.

The committee has a very serious task before it. I pray that the Lord will give you great wisdom and courage, that righteousness and truth will be held up before our denomination.