

MEMO to Members of "Ecclesiastical Separation" Subcommittee

FROM Stephen Smallman

August 30, 1979

The time is drawing nearer for our Fall committee meeting, and I wanted to be in contact about specific plans. As I suggested in my June 27 memo, I would like to meet on Thursday, Sept. 27 at Covenant Seminary. We should try to meet at 2:00 p.m. until 5:00, then break for supper and then regather for the evening. My desire would be to use the time to briefly review the research done in Scripture and history then try to hammer out the essence of what we want to say in our conclusions and recommendations.

Please review the suggested Outline of the Report I submitted to you last spring. The four areas which needed some conclusions were arrived at during our January meeting. The writing I did--submitted to you last spring--was only an attempt to present something to Synod. As it turns out there was agreement that it should not be submitted so it represents just some speculation about how to handle the four matters.

What is of immediate importance is that we get the background studies completed so that our conclusions are well founded. John Sanderson has made wonderful progress on his Biblical studies. If those of you who are writing would try to think in terms of having material prepared so that it could be incorporated into the final report with only minor editing, that would help me considerably. If the background studies can be pretty well completed by September and we can agree on what conclusions they lead us to, I think we could have a final draft ready for our January meeting. Please review the June 27 memo for your particular area of interest.

I am pleased that our committee has been given some press attention (primarily through Joel Belz) and that has given me added incentive to make our report something of benefit and substance for the whole body of Christ.

I look forward to seeing you in September. Please make your own travel arrangements--including contacting the seminary about a ride from the airport. The two of you not connected with the seminary (Dr. Young and Dr. Clark) should contact Charles Donaldson about travel expenses.

Dr. Clark:

I am enclosing the material other committee members have (which I could not locate in June when I wrote before). This includes a proposed outline for the Report and my writing to the four areas where conclusions are needed. Your comments will be appreciated.

Sincerely,
Stephen Smallman

REPORT ON APOSTASY AND ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION
Interim Report to the 157th Synod

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the charge and background

Seriousness of issue (seriousness re doctrine of the church -
truth, unity)

Initial investigation

Need for current statement

Statements in F.O.G., etc.

Implications of issues raised

Problem of definition

BACKGROUND STUDIES (to be included in final report)

1. Apostasy and separation in Scripture
2. Apostasy and separation in the Early Church
3. Apostasy and separation in the Reformation churches
4. Apostasy and separation in American Presbyterianism
 - a. the 1835 General Assembly
 - b. the formation of the PCA/OPC/BPC church
 - c. the issue to the present day
 - d. Ecumenical discussions 1965, RP/OPC Union

CONCLUSIONS

1. With regard to Apostasy
2. With regard to Ecclesiastical Separation
3. With regard to remnants of true church in corrupt
4. With regard to relationships with those from whom we have separated

RECOMMENDATIONS (to be submitted with final report)

- ~~1. Need for Biblical unity~~
- ~~2. Reaffirmation of separatist position~~
- ~~3. Changes in F.O.G.~~

The following are tentative conclusions reached by the committee after presentation and discussion of the background studies. They cover the four areas of concern mentioned above.

1) With regard to Apostasy -

In the strictest definition of the word "apostate" there is a real question about whether any church of the so-called "main-line denominations" who continue to pay lip service to the doctrines of "the faith" could be so labelled. This would involve the church's actually renouncing and turning back from the name of Christ. This is not to say that a church cannot be apostate as God looks upon it as a corporate entity; furthermore, we would hold that the Lord Himself could and very possibly has "deemed" a church apostate (as He did Israel). But for one church to do so to another church which continues to confess Christ as Lord is in our understanding presumptuous. We believe the implications of such a declaration are too enormous for a church made up of sinful people to undertake. *No. This depends on defn.*

At the same time we maintain that the objective witness of Scripture gives us a basis for judging the statements and actions of a church or the leaders of a church. And it is possible therefore to identify actions or statements which signify an actual turning away from "the faith" [as apostasy.] Thus we can discern and point out the presence of apostasy as a developing condition as our FOG states without labelling a church as "apostate" in some final sense. The specific Biblical instruction to declare false teaching "anathema" (Gal. 1:8) and to separate from those who deny the doctrines of Christ (I Jn. 2:18, 19; II Jn. 7-11; etc.) is too clear to allow us to remain silent when the honor of the Lord is undermined by those who supposedly are His followers. *Yes.*

"When those who claim to be God's people turn aside from the Word of God and from the Christ of history, this is more heinous in the sight of God than the worst case of infidelity in marriage, for it destroys the reality, the great central bridegroom-bride relationship. I have taken care to emphasize that God does not minimize promiscuity in sexual relationships, but apostasy--spiritual adultery--is worse. And the modern liberal theologian is in that place. How do we look at it? I would suggest we must be careful to look at it no less clearly than God does. Consider the liberal theology of our day. It denies the personal God who is there. It denies the divine historic Christ. It denies the Bible as God's verbalized Word. It denies God's way of salvation. The liberals elevate their own humanistic theories to a position above the Word of God, the revealed communication of God to men. They make gods which are no gods, but are merely the projection of their own minds... Apostasy must be called what it is--a spiritual adultery. We must have politeness, and struggle for human relationships with the liberal theologians with whom we discuss. But as to the system they teach, there is to be no toning down concerning what it is--spiritual adultery." (Francis Schaeffer, The Church Before the Watching World, ch. II "Adultery and Apostasy: The Bride and Bridegroom Theme")

2) With regard to Ecclesiastical Separation -

We conclude that there are circumstances which not only justify but actually mandate the separation of one body of Christians from another. It is not necessary to "prove" total apostasy before such separation is legitimate Biblically. In terms of the particular stance of our own denomination, we would call attention to the existence of a great deal of literature written about this matter during the years 1934-37 by Dr. J. Gresham Machen or those associated with him. Because of his total commitment to the Biblical teaching of the visible unity of the Church, Dr. Machen took very seriously the charge of schism levelled at those considering separation. He felt it necessary to prove (to his satisfaction at least) that the PC USA was apostate before he felt fully justified in helping to form a new church. We would wish the church today would be as profoundly committed to the unity of the Body of Christ. But from the comfortable perspective of another generation, we believe a separation for Biblical reasons could have occurred without feeling it necessary to prove the apostate status of the church from which they separated. Furthermore, is it necessary to find some particular event (such as Machen did) to find apostasy in a church, or can it be discerned in more obvious ways?

As we have noted, discussions of when ecclesiastical separation is the most Christ-honoring path to take can be found coming out of almost every era of church history. In our judgment the most helpful discussion for our current situation is Calvin's discussion of the propriety of separating from "the corrupted church" in his Institutes, Book IV, Chap. II. Ecclesiastical separation was a central issue of the Reformation; apostasy was not.

One unresolved issue among members of the committee with reference to separation is the possible difference between the legitimacy and the necessity of separation. As one member stated: "I would like to see our report make a sharp distinction between the legitimacy of separating from a corrupt (dominated by liberal theology) church and the necessity of separating from such a church. Our separatist movement was completely legitimate but I don't think we are in a position to say that after we had made the separation it was absolutely necessary for others to do the same; in other words, that it was sinful for them not to do the same." Resolution of this matter will have great bearing on our stance toward the non-separated churches. (cf. "Harvey Cedars Resolution" 1-3, cited on p. 61, Minutes of 153rd Synod).

3) With regard to recognizing remnants of the true church in one that has apparently fallen away -

We think it is important to face squarely the matter of what extent remnants of the true church can be found in the "corrupted church." If a church is actually apostate, in the classic sense, then there would be no truth left in any way that we could recognize. What "truth" might appear would only be serving the anti-Christian ends (such as in the case of a cult group) and would not really be truth.

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Biblical

This matter comes into focus through an examination of how we treat the sacraments and ordinances of those whom we would "deem apostate". If a group is truly apostate could those ordinances be in any sense Christian? This question was faced squarely by the 1845 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. In 1835 that church declared the Roman Catholic church had "essentially apostasized from the faith and could not be regarded as a Christian church." That raised the question of the validity of Roman Catholic baptism and in 1845 the G.A. sought to hold a consistent position and therefore voted overwhelmingly (173-8) to declare such baptism invalid. (This is carefully documented as part of an unpublished doctoral thesis by David C. Jones, "The Doctrine of the Church in American Presbyterianism Theology in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.") One of the dissenting votes was that of Charles Hodge. Hodge felt that the G.A. was stepping beyond the bounds of the Reformed understanding of the church on this matter. Hodge, along with Calvin, would speak of the "corrupt church" as opposed to the "pure church" (or at least one that would seek purity) but not an apostate one. Therefore, he found no problem in admitting the validity of Roman Catholic baptism while at the same time speaking against the errors of Rome. Further consideration of this important episode in Presbyterian history will be included in the final report, but here it should be noted that right or wrong, the 1845 G.A. was consistent. If the Roman Catholic church was apostate, as they seemed to feel they could state, then its baptism should not have been considered Christian--even though such position was much more extreme than that of the Reformers or the Confession of Faith.

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Synagogue
of Antichrist

The practice of our own denomination from its inception has been to follow that of the Reformation. We have not ruled the baptism of a church such as the United Presbyterian, USA as invalid nor have we insisted that their teaching or ruling elders' ordination was false. Remarkably the Judicial Commission of the Bible Presbyterian Church of 1959 did not even call for the reordination of a Roman Catholic priest. Thus we have been consistent with our heritage unless we insist on the right to declare a particular body, although professing the doctrine of Christ, to be apostate. Then our practice becomes inconsistent, unless we also reject the ordinances of such a body as unchristian.

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We have concluded that the concepts suggested by Calvin are most helpful. It leaves to the Lord of the church the final judgment as to what is an apostate church and allows those endeavoring to build a church obedient to her Lord to rejoice in what remnants of the true church are to be found. It is no compromise of our witness to discern these vestiges and even to encourage them.

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"In them [the congregations of the corrupt church] Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out. In them, briefly, everything is so confused that there we see the face of Babylon rather than that of the Holy City of God. To sum up, I call them churches to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people, however woefully dispersed and scattered, and to the extent

that some marks of the church remain--especially those marks whose effectiveness neither the devil's wiles nor human depravity can destroy. But on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay particular regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church." ("Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion 2, Book IV, ch. 3, 12)

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4) With regard to relationships with those from whom we are separate -

Finally there is the issue that provoked this study, that of cooperation or fellowship with those in "the corrupted church." Instances of such fellowship are increasing (cooperative efforts for Bible schools, invitations into our pulpits of ministers from such denominations, solicitation of their funds for our agencies, etc.). We need to confront the matter rather than permit the de facto situation to develop. Is this a compromise of our witness? Or is this a sincere and Christ-honoring desire to encourage the unity of the true Body of Christ? A conclusion on this question appears to be the final practical reason for this study.

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We find very helpful Calvin's observation that refusing to call a church a true church is no reason to impugn the existence of churches among them. In other words particular congregations and individuals true to the faith may exist within the corrupted church. In the case of a confessional, or heirarchical church, the local church or minister is part of the larger body in a legal sense. But due to the present tolerance of "contentless" Christianity such local situations frequently exist in which the Word is proclaimed and we should rejoice in that fact and encourage those believers. Here the question posed by Mordecai (Esther 4: 14) could be pressed: "Who knows but that we have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?" Instead of taking a defensive posture, we need to go to these brethren and help them. In some cases they are close to suffering persecution for their faith. We would wish that they would be convinced of the need to separate from unbelief for the honor of Christ, but short of convincing them of that need, there are other ways to minister to them, and serve Christ with them. At this point the Report to the 153rd Synod on "Guidelines for Ecclesiastical Separation" could supply some practical help.

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As a final comment it would be appropriate to note that the seriousness with which one considers this study on Apostasy and Ecclesiastical separation is largely dependent on how seriously one takes the doctrine of the visible church. If on the one hand the visible church is essentially a convenient place to gather for worship and for the exercise of one's gifts then such a study might seem superfluous or even a distraction from the true purpose of the church. If on the other hand one sees the formation and care of the visible church, both locally and regionally, as essential to the work of Jesus in building His Church (as we think our Reformed doctrine teaches) then a study of how to keep the church

Included in Report to Synod

Rev. Stephen Smallman
McLean Presbyterian Church
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McLean, Va. 22101

September 8 1979

Dear Mr. Smallman,

First of all, I wish to thank you for the note and the papers you sent me on Aug. 30. Since I am new on this committee, there is much I do not know. In fact I need to learn about everything the committee has done. For this reason some of my comments may be inappropriate. I trust I can work my way into your accomplishments.

Because of my ignorance your desire, expressed in the middle paragraph of your MEMO of Aug. 30, that those who write should prepare their materials so that they can be incorporated in the final report, cannot begin to be met until after I have met with the committee. Nevertheless there are some comments which I hope you will consider.

These are comments on pages 6 - 9 (there were no pages 1 - 5 nor 10 ff.) with four numbered "tentative conclusions."

May I say, with regard to the first paragraph of point 1, that I think the wording is confused because of the definition of apostasy. In a previous paper that I sent you, I tried to say that on the dictionary definition, neither the Mormons, the Roman Catholics, nor the Unitarians could be called apostate. Hence the term is useless for us, and unless redefined should be dropped.

Once, however, the word is redefined, or replaced, then "the implications of such a declaration are too enormous for a church made up of sinful people to undertake," is a statement that precludes all discipline. The church is authorized to judge of cases. We judge that a man is guilty of murder, or of adultery, or of embezzlement. The Westminster Assembly judged that the Pope was the Antichrist, and our present Confession judges that the Romish church is a synagogue of Satan. Not to judge is to renounce our responsibilities. This is surely made clear in I Corinthians. You refer in the paragraph to a church that continues to confess Christ as Lord. A seminary professor whom I knew confessed Christ as Lord, but asserted rather forcefully that he did not accept anything as true merely because Jesus said it.

The second paragraph under point one, with the exception of the word 'apostasy,' is a statement with which I am in hearty agreement. Let us use the terms heretical and anathema. The latter means a curse. We should curse the synagogues of Satan. We should do all we can to rescue confused believers from their clutches.

In the first paragraph under point 2, I believe there is a historical misstatement. There is a slight possibility that I may be wrong, but I believe that Dr. Machen never "felt it necessary to prove that the PCUSA was apostate. Ed Rian in his book, The Presbyterian Conflict, never used the word apostate. I think we were all very careful not to use that word. If I am mistaken, I wish someone would provide me with the contrary documentation.

With respect to paragraph three under point 2, I have no objection against distinguishing between the legitimacy of leaving a denomination (because there is no congregation in the town to which we just moved) and the necessity of leaving a denomination. But I strongly object to the last half of the paragraph. It says that we are not "in a position to say that after we had made the separation of 1936" ~~that~~ it was absolutely necessary for others to do the same. "You remember that in 1934 the General Assembly decreed that the ministers and people were under the same obligation to support the boards and agencies of the denomination as they were to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Dr. Machen refused to obey. He was adjudged guilty of breaking one of the laws of the church. Had he submitted, he would have had to support, not only financial but by personal inclusion in the body, the anti-christian activity of Pearl Buck, the translation and distribution on our mission fields of Fosdick's peril of worshipping Jesus, and many other unchristian policies. The point is that the General Assembly commanded the church to commit sin, and the Judicial Commission upheld the penalty imposed on Machen. People who remained in the USA church by their actions supported these conditions, whether they knew it or not. Today, with even the ordination vows gone, a candidate cannot be ordained without promising to take part in ordaining women, etc. etc. etc. I conclude that it is clearly sinful to support those actions and that body. Incidentally, when in 1965 the Evangelical church united with the Reformed church, we required the Evangelical body to drop the Harvey Cedars statements.

On page eight, just below the middle, if the Bible or Evangelical church did not require a man who was previously a Romish priest to be ordained, all I can cry is Shame! In the previous paragraph, although it cites Hodge correctly, my reply is that however great a theologian Hodge was, his ecclesiology was deplorable. We today should bring our practice into conformity with our doctrine. I do not think the Reformed Presbyterians ever committed such sins; and I feel sure that my grandfather in the old GP church would have been aghast at such conduct.

With respect to the first paragraph under point 4, I would like to say that the conduct there described is an evidence of deterioration and the first steps toward the positions already taken by the heretical bodies. The declension of the denominations, of organizations such as the YMCA, of the originally Christian colleges, begins with small steps. Then comes acceleration. We should resist the beginnings.

The first half of the middle paragraph seems to be based on a Congregational rather than on a Presbyterian view of the Church. Of course we should "encourage" believers in depraved churches -- we should encourage them to leave. To cooperate with them, with their evil denominations, is to compromise and to weaken our doctrinal position. If we give the impression that they are not so bad off in their bodies, we encourage them to sin -- encourage them to support all sorts of liberalism.

It seems to me that it would be useful to study the steps by which originally orthodox churches and universities began to decline. This is the real and present danger to us now.

Dear Mr. Smallman, I thank you for your letter, and I recognize the time and effort that you have put into the subject. This is a letter to you. I am not sending it to the other members of the committee. Of course, I shall use the ideas in discussion wherever the occasion demands. I take all this very seriously, for I foresee the possibility that our denomination may go the way of all flesh.

Very sincerely yours,

Gordon H. Clark

June 12, 1980

MEMO to Members of A,ES Committee

from Stephen E. Smallman

You will find enclosed what I believe will get us close to the final draft of our report. If you review the outline, you will note that the only things I am not including are the Biblical studies portion (which John Sanderson is revising) and the historical portion concerning the Presbyterians of the last century (which I have somehow misplaced). In terms of changes over earlier drafts I have done the following:

- rewritten parts of my study on the Reformation (thanks to suggestions from Dr. Clark) with particular reference to Calvin's view of the apostasy of the Roman church,

- added a paragraph to Dr. Clark's study of Reformed Presbyterians,

- edited Paul Alexander's good review of the Confession of Faith,

- revised John Young's work on Presbyterian separation. This includes documenting the quotes from the BPC/EPC split (sec. 4) and enlarging the comments on the issue that caused this report (sec. 7). In that section I identify what is the critical problem - whether it is possible to consider a local congregation apart from its denominational affiliation.

- I tried to speak specifically to this matter by enlarging the fourth conclusion. Based on conversations with some of you, I in effect have us concluding yes, it is not consistent but as things stand today, because of poor teaching in ecclesiology there are true churches within the false.

- I also added another recommendation, one which speaks to the chaos in Presbyterianism today.

Please pass on your recommended changes to me by phone before June 20. On that day I want to send a draft to long-suffering Paul Gilchrist. If necessary we could refine our report and change it on the floor of Synod, but I would rather not.

Church number - (703) 821-8896
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Thanks for your help.

Steve

REPORT ON APOSTASY AND ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

INTRODUCTION

- Statement of the charge and background
- Statements in current RPC,ES documents

BACKGROUND STUDIES

1. Scripture
2. The Early Church
3. The Reformation Churches
4. The Westminster Confession
5. The Reformed Presbyterian Church
6. American Presbyterianism of the Nineteenth Century
7. The Presbyterian Separatist Movement

CONCLUSIONS

1. With regard to Apostasy
2. With regard to Ecclesiastical Separation
3. With regard to remnants of true church in corrupt
4. With regard to relationships with those from whom we have separated

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fathers and Brethren:

The following is a report prepared by a committee appointed during the 156th Synod, meeting at Grand Rapids, Michigan on June 16-22, 1978. The motion which brought this committee into existence stated "that Synod erect a Study Committee on Apostasy as it relates to Ecclesiastical Separation."

Some attention first of all should be given to the context of the motion. Synod was asked to sustain a ruling of the Judicial Commission relative to the action of the local session of an RPCES church. The church had decided to enter a cooperative evangelistic venture with another local church belonging to a denomination known for its liberal theological leadership. (cf. Minutes of 156th Synod, pp. 158-162) The ruling was based on several assumptions which after preliminary investigation by the committee were shown to be in need of careful discussion. For instance the ruling stated that cooperation with the church was justified "because our denomination has not officially or explicitly declared" that church ^{to be an apostate body.} "The statement appeared to assume that our denomination makes such declarations. We could not find that making such declarations had been the practice of our denomination. The issue of apostasy has been very much discussed by leaders in our church (as will be shown) but that is a different matter than one ecclesiastical body declaring, either "officially or explicitly" (to use the wording of the Judicial Committee) another ecclesiastical body to be apostate. Finally the committee was puzzled about the instruction that in the proper circumstance local cooperation among churches was permissible "until the general synod should declare that it deems a Presbyterian body professing to adhere to our Confessional standards to be apostate." Does this mean our Synod should publish an index of apostate churches as a guide to local sessions?

The point here is not to criticize the report of the Judicial Commission but to use that report to illustrate the fact that the thinking of the Commission and then the entire Synod rests upon assumptions which can and should be examined. We are convinced there is also a need to restudy and reapply any principles involved to the current ecclesiastical situation. Our very existence as a Protestant and Reformed church, and as a denomination called the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod is rooted in a willingness to examine our ecclesiastical practices in the light of the Scriptures and reform ourselves accordingly, even at the greatest cost. This has to be a continuing process and in defining its task the committee felt that Synod, by its motion, was calling for such a study.

The study will begin with a review of statements about apostasy and separation in Reformed Presbyterian standards and other current documents. We need to bear in mind the fact that when speaking of the position of our denomination we are speaking of an entity that has existed since 1965. The numbering of our Synods reflects our Reformed Presbyterian heritage but our governmental standards reflect our Evangelical/Bible Presbyterian heritage which was shaped by our heritage in the Presbyterian Church, USA before 1936. Each one of these roots will be examined for insights they can provide on the matter of apostasy and separation. But at this point it cannot be said that

the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod has a carefully articulated position on ecclesiastical separation other than the occasional statements found in our current standards. It is for this reason that the committee felt it was necessary to go to some length in setting forth Biblical and historical data before drawing its conclusions and subsequent recommendations.

In the preparation of this report several matters seemed to be of particular importance to the committee and this has affected the specific material selected for study. First of all was the need to define "apostasy." The classic use of renouncing even the name of Christ seemed to be at odds with the several uses it had come to take on in our own denominational history. Secondly was the matter of the appropriateness of ecclesiastical separation in circumstances less severe than clearcut or total apostasy. Thirdly was the need to explain the presence of the true in the midst of apostasy; in particular the dilemma of recognizing the validity of the sacraments or ordination of any body "deemed apostate." Finally, the practical matter of the extent of ecclesiastical cooperation possible needed to be realistically and sensitively examined in reference to the current situation.

This is a study for consideration by members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod but the committee hopes to be of service to the wider Body of Christ. The doctrine of the visible Church has been the object of a great deal of study in our own generation. From the "mainline" church such study has been due to a desire to further the ecumenical movement. On the other hand studies among separated Evangelicals have focused on issues of truth and faithfulness to Scripture and the historic creeds, even if it made separation necessary. (cf. "The Nature of the Church and Its Ecumenical Calling" Report to the 1967 Reformed Ecumenical Synod.) Our own church has stood in the latter tradition. Recent studies among Evangelicals have concentrated almost exclusively on the charismatic aspects of the visible church (what Howard Snyder calls the community model instead of the confessional model: ch. 2, The Community of the King). These have been most constructive, but with the renewed interest in the vitality of the Body, the matter of the purity of Christ's bride has tended to be overlooked, ignored, or even scorned as irrelevant. Furthermore, among Presbyterians there has been a loss of the historic conviction of the unity of the whole church and a retreat to congregationalism as an alternative to confronting error in the larger church. This is not an anachronistic issue. In every age of the church the tension between the twin foci of unity and truth has existed. That tension continues today and the committee hopes this study will contribute in a positive way to the discussion of the building of a church which is truly Biblical.

Finally we ask that readers appreciate the limited scope of this report. We are dealing with matters concerning false doctrine. We recognize the need to bear in mind that dealing with false practice and disobedience in life are as crucial to the life of our church as dealing with false teaching. It is certainly possible to describe as "apostate" those whose lives deny their Lord. We further recognize that a study in the unity of the church is as important as studying separation. However, what follows is our attempt to speak to the particular issue assigned to us by the Synod.

1 Apostasy and ecclesiastical separation in Reformed Presbyterian Standards and other current documents

The word "apostasy" is used only twice in our Standards. It is used in F.O.G. Chapter IV, par. 9 with reference to "...particular churches free from apostasy," and in the Directory of Worship, Chapter XVIII, 1, "Every true and faithful follower of our Lord ought to take a definite stand against the apostasy of the day...". Beyond our Standards, we find reference to apostasy in such a document as the 1965 Plan of Union between the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Synod, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Synod Minutes, 1965, page 13). Under Resolutions on Christian Life and Testimony, this document refers to "...widespread apostasy and unbelief in church organizations today,...". Also, the proposed (but not adopted) 1975 Plan of Union for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, under paragraph 2 of the Section on the Testimony of the Churches, states that "...the spread of apostasy brings division.", and that "The apostasy that casts off authority of God's Word of commandment revealed in Scripture is at the last more destructive than guilty sensuality."

Though these few usages provide a relatively slim data base for a definition of the term "apostasy," they can be regarded as truly representative of the mind of our Synod, since they are all derived from documents approved in one way or the other by our Synod. It is true that the last quoted document was not finally adopted by the requisite 2/3 majority, it was, nevertheless, approved by 57% of the Synod and the references to apostasy were never called into question in the Synod debate (Minutes of Synod, 1975, pages 110-141).

Appropriate consideration should be given to related terminology in the context of these documents. In the context of the Form of Government, for instance, are references to churches "not deemed heretical," Chapter II, par. 2, and 10, o, and 10, p. The Book of Discipline uses the same or similar phrases in Chapter II, par. 5 and Chapter VII, pars. 9, 10, and 13. In this same vein, the F.O.G. contains a reference to "...a church...not in an unsound denomination," Chapter II, par. 10, p. These concepts stand alongside "apostasy" as related and mutually illuminating ideas.

One other phrase from our Standards seems helpful in defining this word. In Chapter I, par. 1, we find a reference to "...denial of basic principles of the Gospel,". Terms like "Apostasy," "heresy," and "unsound" are extreme and should be reserved for extreme cases, but are not too extreme to apply to "denial of basic principles of the Gospel." That such denial not only exists, but actually dominates many churches and denominations today is too well documented a fact to require argument at this point. Our Standards seem to recognize apostasy not only in an absolute sense but in the relative sense of a developing condition. From this same first paragraph of the F.O.G. it may be argued that a church is not to be

regarded as apostate simply because it is infected with denial. By this definition, most if not all churches would be apostate. The full sentence including the above quotation reads, "Any organization for worship in which the Gospel is faithfully preached and faithfully shown forth in sacraments or ordinances, and in which denial of the basic principles of the Gospel, whether in word or in deed, is faithfully disciplined, may be regarded as a branch of the Universal Church." The terms "apostasy," "heresy," "unsound" should be reserved for organizations in which this disciplinary process is subverted and effective control has passed into the hands of those who themselves are guilty of "denial of the basic principles of the Gospel."

In summary, "apostasy" may be defined from its usage in our Standards and other current documents. There are two elements in this definition:

- (1) Undisciplined denial of basic principles of the Gospel.
- (2) Control of a church or denomination by those guilty of such denial, so that discipline of their denial cannot be exercised, or at least is not exercised.

APOSTASY AND ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In the formative years of the church the question of apostasy was a pressing one. It was not uncommon for those who professed the Christian faith and were baptized into it to turn away and so return to their pagan religion or to Judaism. This apostasy was at first considered unforgivable and those guilty of such sin were not readmitted to the church. By the third century the severity of the persecutions caused large numbers to apostasize who then begged for readmittance and forgiveness for their lapse. The issue of whether or not to restore these "lapsi" became a cause of division within the church.

For purposes of this study it should be noted that:

(1) Apostasy was considered to be the action of an individual who totally renounced the faith and would no longer even be called a Christian.

(2) At that early date, apostasy was not difficult to discern in that one's confession about Christ was the essential focus of the persecutions.

With the gradual establishment of the church, apostasy was not discussed as much as the issue of heresy. Few desired to leave the church or renounce the name of Christ but there was the difficult matter of deviant teaching among those who continued to call themselves Christian. In one sense apostasy was seen to differ from heresy only in that it was heresy carried to its ultimate deviance. In another sense apostasy could be said to be qualitatively different in that it meant consciously renouncing the name of Christ. Those guilty of heresy frequently formed new groups, but they would continue to claim the name Christian, which would not be true of those who were apostate.

Related to the issue of heresy was that of schism. The former involved doctrinal error and the latter ecclesiastical separation or dissent. Augustine said, "...you are a schismatic by your sacreligious separation and a heretic by your sacreligious doctrine" (cf. Calvin's citation of Augustine in Institutes, Book IV, Ch. II, Sec. 5).

In practice however the two terms were used almost synonymously. Thus the division of the Eastern and Western churches beginning in 1052 is thought of as a schism, but both sides regard the other as heretics. With the coming of the Middle Ages and the preoccupation with ecclesiastical rather than doctrinal questions it could be observed that the most objectionable heresy was schism. This would help to explain why the apologetic of the Reformers in ecclesiastical issues constantly dealt with the question of whether or not they were schismatic. The Reformers however were eager to return to matters of doctrine rather than organizational unity as the basis for any discussion of schism. (Cf. De Ecclesia by John Hus; On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church by Martin Luther)

For purposes of this study it should be noted that:

(1) Up to this point in the history of the church apostasy continued to be used exclusively of individuals who totally renounced even the name of Christ.

(2) Heresy became the term used for those who claim to be Christian but teach false doctrine. A contemporary Catholic scholar, Karl Rahner, has raised

the issue of whether or not in the Christian milieu of today it is possible or likely that anyone would be truly apostate ("On Heresy"). But even in terms of the classic understanding of the word, it seems entirely conceivable that a person (or a church) could become heretical to such a degree that it is for all practical purposes apostate.

(Cf. Articles on "Apostasy" and "Heresy" in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958; New Catholic Encyclopedia, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967)

APOSTASY AND ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION IN THE REFORMATION ERA

During the Reformation one of the most vital areas of discussion was the nature of the visible church. The place of Scripture and the doctrines of salvation were reasserted, but they had been well established in antiquity. In ecclesiology, however, a new situation presented itself for solution. The body which could claim historical and perhaps even organizational continuity with the Apostolic church had now departed substantially from the faith it professed; at least so argued the Reformers. It became a question of who could call whom a heretic - who was the true church. This was no light matter for the Protestants regarded schism as gravely as did the Romanists (Calvin twice identifies as apostates those who leave the church for insufficient reasons (Institutes, Book IV, ch. 1, sec. 5, 10)).

The Protestant argumentation began from Scripture and soon revolved around what were called the "marks" of a true church. "He has moreover, set off by plainer marks the knowledge of his very body to us, knowing how necessary it is to our salvation." (Institutes, Book IV, Ch. I, Sec. 8) There was some variation as to just what these marks were, but it was agreed by all that the two principle "marks" were "the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution." (Institutes, Book IV, Sec. 9) Luther in 1539 listed four others but because his ecclesiology focused essentially on the invisible church he was reluctant to add the traditional third mark of the church, that of discipline. The Reformed churches were more concerned with defining the visible church and therefore insisted that discipline must accompany the first two marks so that the church could remain true. Calvin never listed this third mark because he felt it belonged to the proper administration of the church, not its essence, but he did insist on its importance. Constant reference to the three marks are found in the Reformed creeds of the 16th century as the basis for distinguishing the true and false church.

"We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church. (Then the three marks are listed) As for the false church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ...These two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other." Belgic Confession (1561), Article XXIX

The issue of the nature of the true church as discussed during the Reformation has great significance for enlightening current discussions of this same issue. Many of the larger ecclesiastical bodies can claim historical and organizational continuity with the churches that came from the Reformation but they have departed from the faith they once professed. Those who consider

separation are once again labelled schismatic. But in fact is the true church determined solely by organization? Is it schismatic to have a body that does not manifest the marks?

Special attention should be given to the careful presentation of John Calvin in chapters one and two of Book IV of his Institutes. These chapters represent the mature reflections of this reformer. Chapter I is titled "The True Church with which as Mother of all the Godly we must keep Unity." This chapter is a strong affirmation of the importance of the church, which he does not hesitate to call our mother as God is our Father. As noted above he twice refers to those who are indifferent to the unity of the church as apostates (the only time he speaks of apostasy in this discussion of the church). In this chapter he explains the importance of the marks and the necessity of staying within the church if they are present regardless of the "quality of the members" (thus he disagrees with the Anabaptist view that the purity of the church is based on the sanctification of its members rather than the truth of its confession). Chapter II is titled "A Comparison of the False and the True Church." In this chapter, while reaffirming the importance of unity in the true church, he is clear that that begs the question of what happens when the church is no longer true. "But, as soon as falsehood breaks into the citadel of religion and the sum of necessary doctrine is overturned and the use of the sacraments is destroyed, surely the death of the church follows...If the foundation of the church is the teaching of the prophets and apostles, which bids believers entrust their salvation to Christ alone - then take away that teaching, and how will the building continue to stand? Therefore, the church must tumble down when that sum of religion dies which alone can sustain it. Again, if the true church is the pillar and foundation of truth (I Tim. 3:15), it is certain that no church can exist where lying and falsehood have gained sway." (Institutes, Book IV, Ch. II, Sec. 1) In the discussion of separation that follows, Calvin carefully shows that when the marks have disappeared the charge of schism cannot be made since it is no longer a church in any Biblical sense of that word. Section 10 has the title "Why we must separate from the corrupted church." In the concluding sections Calvin acknowledges that "vestiges" of the true, particularly baptism, remain and he ends the discussion with this remarkable paragraph:

"In them Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out. In them, briefly, everything is so confused that there we see the face of Babylon rather than that of the Holy City of God. To sum up, I call them churches to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people, however woefully dispersed and scattered, and to the extent that some marks of the church remain - especially those marks whose effectiveness neither the devil's wiles nor human depravity can destroy. But on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay particular regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church." (Institutes, Book IV, Ch. II, Sec. 12)

It is interesting to note that the question of apostasy is not raised as a necessary prerequisite to legitimate separation. There can be little question that Calvin, in common with other Reformers, considered the Roman See to represent "nothing but horrid apostasy" and the pope the Antichrist (Institutes, Book IV, ch. VII, Sec. 24, 25). But the more easily identified "marks" were the actual criteria used in discussing separation. In the context of the contemporary issue it should at least raise the question of whether apostasy must be claimed or proved before separation can be justified to lay claim to faithfulness to our Reformed heritage.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

"Whereas, amongst the infinite blessings of Almighty God upon this nation, none is nor can be more dear unto us than the purity of our religion;...". So begins the document which formally established the Westminster Assembly of Divines on June 12, 1643. It was concern for the "purity of our religion" which lay at the foundation of our Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. This purity could not be maintained without protest against impurity. This same document specifies further that the Westminster Assembly was convened in protest against "...that present church-government by archbishops, their chancellors, commissars, deans..." etc. because such a "hierarchy is evil, and justly offensive and burdensome to the kingdom, a great impediment to reformation and growth of religion..." In undertaking their work the members of the Assembly were "...resolved...that such a government be settled in the church as may be most agreeable to God's holy Word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the church..."

Separation from an established church was a significant part of the historic matrix in which the Westminster Confession of Faith was conceived. In the minds of its authors, the WCF was part of a protest against a church which had become intolerably corrupt. The entire document is influenced by this fact, and parts of three chapters may be seen as having direct bearing on the related issues of apostasy and ecclesiastical separation.

CHAPTER XX.2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience; and reason also.

King Charles I of England, like so many other monarchs of his day, had been trying to force his subjects to yield to his will in "matters of faith or worship." The Westminster Divines were representative of those who were in revolt against Charles and against the church which he championed. To yield would have been to betray "true liberty of conscience;" yes, it would even "destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also." The WCF and the entire Reformation, for that matter, were a protest against a concerted effort to bind men's consciences contrary to Scripture. For the Westminster Divines, separation was not only justified, it was required in order to maintain integrity of conscience before God.

CHAPTER XXV. 4. This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

5. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to His will.

These paragraphs are concerned with the purity of the church. They recognize the impossibility of an absolutely pure church, and give no support to those who would separate from a church on trivial grounds. At the same time, it is noted that some churches "...have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan." Surely such a state of degeneracy within a church is grounds for separation. Though they do not formally declare it, we may assume that the Westminster Divines had judged that the Church of Charles I as well as the church of Rome was just such a degenerate body, and that this was the reason for their writing a new confession and establishing a new church.

6. There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense be head thereof.

This is severe enough in itself, but represents a revision by deletion from the original version. The original version adds, concerning the pope, "but is that Anti-christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God." It is important to note that the authors of the WCF were willing to make such a judgment of the Roman Catholic Church and its head. Though the word "apostate" is not invoked here or elsewhere in the WCF, surely the language used is equivalent, implying that the Roman Catholic Church is a "synagogue of Satan" and stating specifically that the pope is "that Antichrist." On the basis of such judgments, these men and those whom they represented separated from the established church.

CHAPTER XXIX. 2. In this sacrament [the mass] Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sins of the quick or dead, but only a commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same, so that the Popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it, is most abominably injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect.

6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament; and hath been, and is the cause of manifold superstitions, yea of gross idolatries.

Here are concrete examples of the "doctrines and commandments of men" referred to in general terms in WCF XX, par. 2. Such error was "most abominably injurious" and "repugnant" both to scripture and "even to common sense." There must be a protest against such dangerous teaching and practice, and the authors of the WCF willingly made this protest both in these words which they wrote and in the ecclesiastical separation which they made between themselves and the Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter XXX might also be added to the three sections cited above. Its treatment of CHURCH CENSURES may be seen as a preventive measure against the abuses noted above as well as against other evils which might invade the church. Separation may itself be seen as an act of church censure. It is one part of the body of Christ declaring that another part is guilty of grievous sin.

SUMMARY

To 17th Century England and Scotland, the WCF held out a clear alternative to the superstitions and corruptions of Medieval Roman Catholicism. Our age needs an equally clear alternative. To offer this alternative it will at times be necessary for ministers and congregations to separate from ecclesiastical alliances which compromise the Word of God.

It is important also to note the key role of conscience in this matter. Four times the word "conscience" is used in Chapter XX, par. 2 of the WCF. It is the conscience that must be convinced that a church has declined so far that separation is the only suitable recourse. While we must stand firmly for what our own conscience may dictate, we must, at the same time, be patient with one whose conscience may not agree with ours.

THE ISSUE OF SEPARATION AMONG SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIANS

The Covenanters and other groups in Scotland in their devotion to the Scriptural ideal of a pure church carefully stated reasons for breaking ties with unfaithful groups and organizing new ecclesiastical bodies. (An important source of this information is A History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church by Ray A. King, published by the Board of Christian Education of the ARP Church, Charlotte, N.C., 1966.) Though their problems differed from those of the twentieth century, we today can learn wisdom from their documents. The earliest official pronouncements of the Covenanters are printed in Testimony-Bearing Exemplified, (Paisley, 1791, reprinted in New York, 1834).

Sections I and II note the difference "between a church in her infancy, and growing up into reformation, and an adult church, which hath arrived at a higher pitch of reformation; in the former many things may be tolerated, which may not in the latter."

This contrasts with the view that a church can tolerate much more serious defections from the faith in its maturity than it did at its organization.

Section IV can be seen to be pertinent to our predicament in 1936. It reads in part, "We distinguish between a reformed church enjoying her privileges and judicatories and a reformed church denuded of [them]. In the former people are to address themselves unto the church judicatories and not withdraw from their ministers, especially for ordinary scandals, without making prior application to these. But in the latter when ministers are really scandalous, though not juridically declared so, and duly censurable according to the word of God and their own church's constitutions...people may do what is competent to them...by withdrawing from such ministers even without the presbyterial sentence."

Still more strictly the document says, "We can join with none whose sin we may be interpreted to homologate...or which might be so looked upon as... a badge of our compliance with them, or sign of approbation of their sin, directly, or indirectly. For in our joining in worship or church communion, we must advert to what it may be interpreted...in our own or others' consciences... for to that we must also have special respect, lest we offend and stumble others...We can join with none from whom a church duly constituted...would enjoin us to withdraw."

Then finally in Section V the document says, "We judge we have sufficient ground to withdraw, not only from these who are actively and actually guilty of the foresaid compliances...but also from such ministers who take the defence and patrociny of these courses, who palliate and plaster them, and strengthen the hands and harden the hearts of these that are engaged in them."

There is ample evidence that the Reformed Presbyterian Church continued to affirm its willingness to separate for principle. In the Reformation Principles Exhibited, of 1806, Ch. XXI:5 is stated: "When⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ any church...the administration is corrupt, and attempts at its reformation have proved ineffectual, it is the duty of Christians to separate from it." (cf. The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, by George P. Hutchinson, ch. 2 and 3.) Thus in the Plan of Union with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 1965 there was no hesitation on the part of the Reformed Presbyterians in agreeing to the statement about apostasy cited earlier.

THE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT IN PRESBYTERIANISM, 1922-1979

The roots of the Presbyterian separatist movement stretch back into the controversy with liberalism of the early twenties. It came to a crisis point when Harry Emerson Fosdick preached his now famous and aggravating sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?", boldly upholding Modernistic doctrine. The Philadelphia Presbytery overtured the next General Assembly to direct the Presbytery of New York to bring the preaching of the Presbyterian Church, where Baptist Fosdick was supplying the pulpit, into line with the system of doctrine of the Confession. The overture passed the 1923 Assembly by only a 439-359 majority, showing the strength of the liberals or those who argued toleration for the sake of peace.

Early in 1924 the minority, with many other ministers, issued the Auburn Affirmation (eventually signed by 1,274 ministers) to "safeguard the unity and liberty" of the Church. The five themes reaffirmed by the 1923 Assembly - Biblical inspiration, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection and Christ's supernatural power - were stated to be facts but the Assembly's descriptions of them were said to be "theories," which only some of the Affirmationists chose to accept. Biblical inerrancy was specifically mentioned as being unacceptable.

The "toleration group" in successive assemblies increasingly supported the liberals and together, in 1929, they voted for the reorganization of Princeton Seminary along liberal lines. This led directly to the establishment of Westminster Seminary as an independent school. In 1934, following the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions as an outlet for the support of sound Presbyterian missionaries, the Assembly in effect mandated that Presbyteries put to trial and expel the new Board's members. The so-called "Mandate of 1934" stated "A church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper or any of the prescribed ordinances of the denomination as set forth in Chapter VII of the Form of Government." (cf The Presbyterian Conflict, Edwin H. Rian, p. 152ff, 309ff.) Dr. J. Gresham Machen insisted that this established a policy of "exclusion from the ministry of all who will not support the propaganda of the Modernist boards and agencies." ("Presbyterian Guardian," May 4, 1936) The action of the 1934 General Assembly was siezed upon by Dr. Machen and others of the growing separation movement as illustrating clearly the apostasy of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. In a lengthy tract published in the "Christian Beacon" of 1937 and later issued as "The Case for Compromise," lawyer H. McAllister Griffiths argued that if the General Assembly of 1936 upheld the judicial appeals of the "Mandate of 1934," then clearly the church as a whole was apostate. The church had placed its authority above the Word of God. Referring to this issue Machen himself wrote in the "Guardian" article noted above that "A church that places the word of man above the Word of God and that dethrones Jesus Christ is an apostate church. It is the duty of all true Christians to separate from such a church." Machen's reasoning about the charge of schism was essentially the same as that of Calvin and the Reformers; "Here then, is the principle of the thing - it is schism to leave a church if that church is true to the Bible, but it is not schism if that church is not true to the Bible. In the latter case, far from its being schism to separate from the church in question, it is schism to remain in it, since to remain in it means to disobey the Word of God and to separate oneself from the true Church of Jesus Christ." ("Presbyterian Guardian," April 20, 1936)

It was out of this crucible that the Presbyterian Church of America was founded in 1936, not as a new church but to carry on the "spiritual succession" of the Presbyterian Church, USA.

Unfortunately, the move to separate was easier to take than the establishment of a new identity. And in the years that followed, "Apostasy" and "separation" were integral to the struggles of the new church. What follows are brief references to some of the discussions (cf. The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod by George Hutchinson).

1) On June 4, 1937 a small group of men separated from the PCA and met in Philadelphia to draw up "Articles of Association" for the formation of a new Presbyterian church. They stated the reasons for their new association as follows: "For the sake of fellowship in the principles for which we stand, and as a testimony to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and because of the official apostasy of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and because of the departure of the Presbyterian Church of America from the historic position of American Presbyterianism, we...do associate ourselves together in the Bible Presbyterian Synod." (Hutchinson, p. 247) The next year the first synod was organized on the above basis. In subsequent years the Bible Presbyterian Church frequently issued calls to separate from the PC, USA because of its apostasy.

2) In August 1944 two ministers of the BPC published a new paper called the "Clarion" to advance a very strong separatist position. It was presented as believing "not only in separation from infidels, but also in separation from disorderly brethren who, while personally sound in their views, insist on remaining in organizational fellowship with modernists." The answer of Carl McIntire, Editor of the "Christian Beacon," is interesting. "There are many godly people still in the apostate denominations, ignorant, leaderless, confused, heartbroken, whom we must reach. We must not separate further from them than God's Word requires, or place unnecessary barriers between them and us...we must beware of these influences which may arise in our midst which would pull us to an extreme position and hinder our testimony...I am convinced that if the view held by Dr. Dillard (Clarion) shall prevail...the BPC will wrap its own 'extreme separation' robes about it and lie down to its internal nightmares." (Hutchinson, p. 257)

3) The Synod of 1945 tried to resolve the dilemma through the adoption of the Harvey Cedars Resolutions. There were two resolutions; the first dealt with personal separation and the second with ecclesiastical separation. The second reads as follows:

1. We hold that it is a Christian's duty to separate himself from all cooperation in religious activities with those who deny the full authority and dependability of the Word of God, and that no consideration of expediency could ever warrant such cooperation.

2. As concerns cooperation with those who, while themselves believing in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, continue in membership in denominations which include known unbelievers, and fail to see clearly and to observe fully the scriptural injunction to separate themselves from such organizations, we hold that this is a sphere of expediency, that is, one in which no man's conscience may be bound by other men; however, we as a Synod feel that great harm is done in many cases by such cooperation, and hence that it is unwise to enter upon or continue in them without careful consideration.

3. Regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph one, we should seek by every possible means to win them to Christ; regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph two we urge that they be dealt with in a spirit of brotherly love, seeking by every proper means to win them to the scriptural position of separation rather than to drive them from us, and yet not violating our conscience.

It should be noted that the same Synod fully endorsed membership in the American Council of Christian Churches which at that time provided associate memberships for individuals still in denominations of the Federal Council of Christian Churches.

4) The mid-fifties witnessed the development of further controversy, this time growing out of the increasingly restrictive separation of the American Council of Christian Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches. The president of these councils, Carl McIntire, was accused of "alienating more and more persons and groups" and of making "even the very word 'separation' a stench in the American Council world." (Hutchinson, p. 288) The majority of the 1955 St. Louis synod voted to withdraw from the two councils. By the end of the next year the church was split in two, with approximately 40% following McIntire's lead. The continuing BPC Inc. officially declared at its Columbus Synod: "While we affirm and maintain unyielding loyalty to the doctrine of the priority of the visible Church, we repudiate that extreme separation which ignores our responsibility to demonstrate the love of God toward our Christian brethren as the distinguishing mark of our discipleship." (Hutchinson, p. 293) This stance was not to be interpreted as repudiating the importance of separation from unbelief and apostasy, only of tactics. Dr. Francis Schaeffer, a member of the Bible Presbyterian Church from the outset, would later say, "We took the right stand but in the wrong way." (cf. The Church Before a Watching World, especially his essay, "Adultery and Apostasy - the Bride and Bridegroom Theme.")

5) The Plan of Union, approved by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod, in 1964, spoke to the issue of separation with these words: "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." As for "believers who maintain associations with liberal church organizations" it was resolved "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." (Hutchinson, p. 382)

6) The Synod of 1974 approved the appointment of a study committee "to define the biblical bounds of ecclesiastical separation and to formulate guidelines for specific application for the sake of the purity of the church." A lengthy report was received and adopted in 1976. It was declared that "The motivating principle behind biblical separation is submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ... The church which aggressively attempts to be a pure church... will attempt to win over before separating from anything or anyone opposing this commitment." In writing on "Defining the Bounds of Ecclesiastical Separation for the Local Church" guidelines are given stressing the responsibility of the elders of the local church adequately to assess the past, present, and probable future ecclesiastical purity of the body with which the union (or assumedly cooperation) is contemplated. The report then affirms the need of "a judgment about the kind and degree of influences at work in the contemporary situation which apparently are leading the organization

to its probable future;" and the need of arriving at "a reasonable prognostication concerning the continuing commitment of the organization to the doctrine of the purity of the church." The accent here is not one of automatic prohibition when union or cooperation with another body on the local church level is being considered but one emphasizing the need of the session carefully to assess where the body presently stands and where it seems to be going. (Minutes of 154th Synod, p. 144ff.)

7) The concept of judging the appropriateness of cooperation at the level where it will take place was argued by the Southern Presbytery at the 1978 Synod, to be incorporated in the Form of Government, IV, 9, e. "Particular churches shall not be prevented from participation in such activities as local Bible conferences, evangelistic programs, or interdenominational associations of particular churches free from apostasy." The Judicial Commission's recommendation that the Presbytery's position be sustained quoted the Plan of Union as quoted above in (5). Synod sustained the recommendation and thus recognized the right of the Lookout Mountain RPCES to hold a joint Summer Bible School with the local PCUS church. Left unresolved by the ruling was whether the phrase from FOG, "particular churches free from apostasy," could be descriptive of the local church exclusively or also must include the denomination with which the local church is affiliated. The Southern Presbytery's argument was based on interpreting FOG in the former manner and the Judicial Commission reasoned from the latter. However the Judicial Commission supported the presbytery because the local church was involved in a denomination that had not been "declared apostate."

CONCLUSIONS

(1) With Reference to Apostasy -

Biblical and historical studies do not seem to provide some final definition of apostasy. We conclude that such a definition is not required. Its use has not been and need not be limited to some sort of final, total, and irrevocable repudiation of everything Biblical and Christian. If such were the case, the term could rightly be used only of Satan or the Harlot of Revelation 17-18. Our studies suggest that apostasy can be described as a process of moving away as well as a condition or state of denial of the faith once believed in. For this reason, trying to define an "apostate church" has proved to be our most difficult task. What is the line to be crossed before that label pertains? How blatant must the denial of Christ and His Word be? We did not want to abandon use of the word but we also felt great reluctance to call another church apostate even though we might agree that under the judgment of God He might so label a church in our day as He did Israel. However, we did not feel it at all inappropriate for the Church today to discuss the issue or to help Christians desiring to be faithful to Christ to recognize that such faithfulness must at times include "earnestly contending for the faith" (Jude 3) and pronouncing the "anathema" when a false gospel is preached (Gal. 1:6-9). In our thinking, the weight of the matter before us did not fall on the issue of apostasy but of separation.

(2) With Reference to Separation -

The committee did not conclude that ecclesiastical apostasy and ecclesiastical separation were identical issues. Much of the need to "prove" apostasy seems to have come from an assumption that apostasy was the only legitimate basis for separation. We have concluded that there are discernable circumstances which not only justify but mandate separation from an ecclesiastical body. As explained above, the Reformers identified three "marks of the church" whose presence meant that a church was true and therefore separation would be schism but whose absence made separation a necessity if the true church was to continue. We believe the thinking of the Reformers and their creeds on this issue needs to be restudied and newly appreciated for our own age. In particular, our study has focused on the question of discipline. In the light of the importance of the ability of a body to discipline itself in accordance with Scripture, a practical criterion for considering separation as most honoring to Christ is the point at which discipline for aberrant doctrine or life can or will no longer be administered. We recognize that such a criterion has many possible interpretations. We also recognize that separation when done is a painful process, but we nevertheless feel the issue of discipline, particularly in the area of false teaching, cannot be overlooked in this discussion. We cannot find any basis for tolerating that which denies Christ. In particular we are dismayed by contemporary statements about a "pluralistic" church. The context of such a term is the assumption that since false teaching, including even denial of the deity of Christ, cannot be disciplined then we should have a church in which the true and the false coexist. This may be true of the world, but not of the church purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.

(3) With Reference to the Remnants of the True -

We rejoice that in many instances remnants of true orthodoxy can be found even where denial of basic Christian doctrine seems to prevail. This is true in the case of many believing individuals and particular congregations. It is also the case with regard to such ordinances of the church as baptism or ordination. It was the practice of the Reformers, reaffirmed by the Confession of Faith and followed by our denomination in its various branches, to not rebaptize or reordain those coming from denominations at least professing the historic Faith. We see no reason to change this practice.

(4) With Reference to Cooperation with Those Who Have Not Separated -

A corollary issue to that of separation is the stance that those who have separated from "unsound" (to use the language of the FOG) churches or denominations are to take toward those true brethren in Christ who have not. Prudence must be exercised in two directions. On the one hand we must avoid an unnecessary aloofness that can lead to a false pride and even further separations over less and less crucial issues. On the other hand we should avoid fellowship on an ecclesiastical level that will lead to participation with or tacit approval of those who undermine the Faith in doctrine or life. Specific instances in applying this are so varied that the Form of Government (IV, 9, e) has wisely urged that each instance be handled by the judicatory involved when questions of propriety arise. It must also be noted that unless there is latitude to interpret the phrase "free from apostasy," there could not be fellowship with anyone, including ourselves.

With reference to the matter which gave rise to this report, we agree with the Judicial Commission and the Synod that the local church involved had a right under our Form of Government to decide for itself to cooperate with another local church. We do not agree with the reasoning that such cooperation was proper because the denomination to which the church belonged could be called "free from apostasy." As noted above (1) whether or not a church is apostate is a judgment we do not feel is necessary to make even though we can defend the Scripturalness of our separation from that body. We would agree with those who point out that a local church cannot be considered totally apart from its parent body, but we nevertheless conclude that we must recognize that a de facto situation exists in which local congregations or ministers true to the faith continue to participate in denominations whose leadership and direction give every evidence of apostasy. In many instances our own judgment might be that the time has long past to separate for the honor of Christ, nevertheless we believe that we must not be closed to extending encouragement to these brethren. Particular encouragement should be given to those who are open to consider the importance of working for the purity of the visible church.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1) That Synod adopt this report and its conclusions as expressing the mind of our church on this issue and send it to Presbyteries and Sessions for study.

2) That the Form of Government not be changed with regard to its references to apostasy and separation. Further clarification should be sought through application at local levels, not through amendment to the F.O.G.

3) That Synod reprimand the California Presbytery for allowing to appear in Synod minutes as its own a paper that is (a) unbiblical and unsound in its reasoning, and (b) representative of a position in contradiction to the positions of most of that presbytery as well as Synod.

4) That members of Synod pray for continued awakening to the importance of the purity of the church throughout the Christian community; and that they offer appropriate encouragement to those of the UP,USA and the PCUS who are considering separation as a Biblical response to the continuing evidence of apostasy.

5) That this committee be dismissed.

McLEAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANGELICAL SYNOD

PASTORS—
REV. STEPHEN E. SMALLMAN
REV. RANDALL C. MARTIN

7144 OLD DOMINION DRIVE
McLEAN, VIRGINIA 22101
PHONES: 821-8896
AND 356-8383

June 25

Dear Dr Clark,

This morning I received your comments on the revision of the paper I mailed out in late May. I am sorry that the incorrect address in last year's directory was the one you used because your comments were most helpful (as were those you supplied on previous occasions) and I would have liked to incorporate them into the paper. Unfortunately, to meet Synod's deadline I mailed in the report last week. I trust by now my memo of June 12 and that revision has caught up with you. I am enclosing the final changes to complete the report. You will note that after the recommendations I listed the committee members without committing you to the report.

If you are not coming to Synod, I would be happy to communicate your feelings to them with regard to the report: agree, disagree, agree with reservations as follows, etc. I suggest you write to me c/o the First E.P. Church of Seattle, rather than chance missing me here.

With reference to the recommendation from the Calif Pres.; I modified that wording after carefully reading the accompanying note in Synod minutes from their Stated Clerk. They did not submit the paper as their position, but as a "commentary" on the paper on Ecclesiastical Sep. I think it was a poorly written paper and should not have come to Synod, but I didn't want to impugn their motives. Thank you for your wisdom and help, I'm sorry we have not had better channels of communication for so important matter. It has been an honor to work with you.

Sincerely,
Stephen Smallman

17001 05.22

June 25, 1980

Final Memo to Members of A,ES Committee

From Stephen Smallman

Enclosed please find the final pieces of the puzzle. I made some last minute changes thanks to your suggestions:

- A paragraph in the introduction on the overture from the California Presbytery
- A rewrite of recommendation 3 to remove the idea of reprimand. My reading of the note accompanying the overture in Synod minutes make me question whether they ever intended to present it as their position.
- A slight revision of recommendation 4.

I am also including the revision of the Biblical studies portion and the missing section on the 19th Century Presbyterian Church.

This should complete your file on the report. There are a total of 27 separate pages. When it will be typed in sequence it will be several pages shorter, but it is still a substantial report. I am quite pleased with what finally emerged and I believe it will prove quite helpful to those wanting some rationale for Biblical separation.

Once at Synod I will call a meeting for those of us who are there to plan our presentation.

Thanks very much for your time and effort. It has been a great privilege to serve with you.

(Please insert the following paragraph after the third paragraph on p. 2, and before the fourth:)

An additional impetus for the study came in the form of a communication from the California Presbytery to the 157th General Synod (cf. Minutes of the 157th Synod, pp. 111-115). The presbytery overtured the Synod to "consider the attached paper as a commentary" on the Synod report on "Guidelines for Ecclesiastical Separation" (153rd General Synod). The paper, which was referred to our committee, consisted of a series of rhetorical questions asking for a study of the separation that was integral of the traditions of both branches of our church. Questions were "posed" to the Scripture and John Calvin. Calvin's answers were given through quotations limited to Chapter 1 of Book IV of the Institutes. The committee did not feel it necessary to respond in specific detail to the paper, but has tried to answer the questions raised in a general way throughout this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

1) That Synod adopt this report and its conclusions as expressing the mind of our church on the issue of apostasy and ecclesiastical separation and send it to Presbyteries and Sessions for study.

2) That the Form of Government not be changed with regard to its references to apostasy and separation. Further clarification should be sought through application at local levels, not through amendment to the F.O.G.

3) That this report serve as Synod's response to the overture of the California Presbytery (Overture I, 157th Synod). We do not think the sense of the paper it submitted is representative of the wisdom of Synod in the matter of ecclesiastical separation.

4) That members of Synod pray for continued awakening to the importance of the purity of the church throughout the Christian community; and that in particular we offer appropriate encouragement to those of our brethren in the UP,USA and the PCUS who are working for that purity, even to the point of considering separation as a Biblical response to the continuing evidence of apostasy.

5) That this committee be dismissed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul Alexander

Clark Breeding

John Sanderson

John M. L. Young

Stephen Smallman, Chairman

(Gordon Clark served on the committee but was unavailable for comment on the Conclusions and Recommendations.)

BIBLICAL STUDIES

The God of Scripture is a God of truth. This teaching is set over against the theme of false teaching and false teachers throughout the Scripture. While it would be pleasant to be able to dwell exclusively on the positive aspects of the Gospel, that cannot be done if one is to consider the whole counsel of God (Jude 3ff). What follows are brief studies in particular areas of concern and then a focus on what the committee felt was the heart of the issue - the question of the Biblical teaching about discipline.

APOSTASY

The Greek words from which "apostate" and "apostasy" are derived are apostasia, apostates, and aphistemi. They do not occur frequently in the New Testament. Apostasia is used but twice in the New Testament: in Acts 21:21, where Paul is accused of teaching Jews to "turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs;" and in II Thessalonians 2:3 where "the rebellion" is predicted, and the appearance of the man of lawlessness. In the New Testament no one is called an "apostate." However, other words may indicate that such a condition has occurred; e.g. parapipto (used only in Hebrews 6:6) and arneomai (as used in Matthew 10:33; I Timothy 5:8; II Peter 2:1; I John 2:22f; Jude 4.)

Twice aphistemi has a direct bearing on our study: in I Timothy 4:1 Paul predicted that some will "abandon the faith in later times;" and in Hebrews 3:12 the writer warns against "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." In the former case, the act consists of following devilish teachings such as forbidding to marry or to eat certain foods; in the latter case, it was a case of disobedience repeated many times during the desert wandering. As to LXX usage, Hatch and Redpath lists 41 Hebrew words translated by aphistemi. A study of those examples as well as the New Testament usages leads to the following conclusions: (1) apostasy is abandonment of a belief or practice once publicly held to, (2) a variety of acts may be called "apostate," (3) the term "apostasy" should be applied to public detectable acts only, and individuals and churches should be able to use the word in the Biblical sense, and to apply it to those who commit such acts.

FALSE TEACHERS AND FALSE TEACHING

False teaching is not tolerated in the Bible because of the affront which it is to God and evil results it will bring upon the congregation. Hence, warnings against it are always accompanied with a threat of judgment, and a warning of what false teaching will cause the people to do. False teaching takes different forms: it may be a call to follow other gods, or the teaching of another gospel, or the view that the resurrection has already taken place. False teaching is always dangerous because it works like leaven; it always affects people adversely, and cannot be cured except by drastic action. Conversely, sound doctrine does not work like leaven, and it is furthered by clear teaching, godly living, and consistent discipline.

Because these things are so, false teachers must be dealt with by extreme measures. They are to be "cut off," "stoned" and an anathema is placed on them. In Deut. 13:12ff false teaching and apostasy are closely linked: the false prophet's message, "let us go after other gods," must be met with the death penalty. The penalty must be carried out against a member of one's own family, or against a town which has been infected with the error. The purpose is: "Then all Israel will hear and be afraid" (v. 11a). It should be noted that this is one of the prime reasons for discipline, the effect false teaching will have on the people of God (v. 11). The Scriptures consistently stress this, for no one is immune to its effects. Frequently the Lord insists that if the people themselves do not cut off the offender, He Himself will do so.

At the same time it should be noted that the punishment for false teaching is no more severe than that for any other overt transgression of the commandments, even those dealing with ceremonies (cf. Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15, 19; 31:14; Lev. 7:20ff; 17:9, 10).

HERESY AND HERETICS

This group includes haireisis, hairetikos, hairetizo, and haireomai. These words mean "choose," "pick," "choices," (both good and bad), "schools," "factions," "dissensions," "opinions," "ways of thinking." These words became technical terms, usually, but not always, with negative connotations."

Our group is brought into sharper focus by Titus 3:10 where hairetikon (NIV - "a divisive person") is to be warned and then rejected; by Galatians 5:20 where haireisis (NIV - "factions") are among the works of the flesh and "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God;" by I Corinthians 11:19 where haireisis (NIV - "differences") seem to be classed with schismata, and both are set over against oi dokimoi (NIV - "those who 'have God's approval'"). Clearly, "heresies" and "heretics" have no place in the church. However our group of words is so little used in the New Testament that a word-study per se is not very productive.

The New Testament mentions Diotrephes (III John 9f) who may have been a heretic, or an incipient heretic, who in any case comes under John's censure. He is not accused of false teaching, but of loving to be first and of not recognizing John's authority. John determined to confront him (publicly? privately?) regarding malicious gossip. Diotrephes was also guilty of imposing his will on the saints so as to require them to refuse to receive traveling (?) brethren and, if they did, of excommunicating them. Clearly Diotrephes was not teaching false doctrine, but he needed discipline. Marshall writes (NICNT, p. 91): "It is not Christian to refrain from exercising legitimate authority where there is need to do so; the modern church is perhaps too chary in exercising brotherly admonition and even discipline when it is required."

It is important to keep Marshall's remarks in mind. The one causing division is not the one who institutes discipline, but the one who teaches and acts contrary to sound doctrine (cf. I Kings 18:18).

II John 7ff speaks of "deceivers" with whom the recipients of John's letter must break fellowship: "do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." Here we have an advance over III John. The coming of deceivers was predicted by Jesus (Matthew 24:5, 23f), by Paul (Acts 20:28ff). They are now present in John's day. They do not "confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh." The participle is present indicating continuous action: He came in the flesh and is still in the flesh. To reject that truth is to be anti-Christ, and John is not loath to pass such a judgment. Even so, to say such a terrible thing about another human being is consistent with walking in love; it is in fact "keeping the commandments." (v. 6)

The presence of deceivers called for self-examination by believers because adopting their false teaching would mean great loss (v. 8). "Progressing beyond" the doctrine which Christ brought (or, the doctrine concerning Christ) is indication that one is god-less. (v. 9) Such a one should be rejected (perhaps a traveling preacher) and not even given a welcome. To do so would entail complicity in his evil deeds. (v. 11)

Often discipline of false teachers was called for in order to protect believers from their error (Acts 20:28ff). Here it should be pointed out the "fellowship" with false teachers entails "fellowship" in their evil deeds.

DISCIPLINE

Introduction

The discussion as to whether a given church or denomination is apostate or heretical is simply too abstract. It is evident that "separation" cannot be studied and expounded in isolation from the rest of Scripture. Actually, "separation" is part of a process of discipline. Discipline, however, is a function of the church. The church is the creation of God who is holy and intends His church to be holy. There is and can be no holiness in a sinful world apart from the grace of Cavalry and the power of the resurrection. Hence, much of the following study focuses on discipline as the holy God outlines it for His people.

From the beginning, God's purpose for His people has been holy living. His call to Abraham was "...be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). To Israel it was "Therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:4-5), a command repeated in the New Testament (I Peter 1:16). This holiness is not the product of sinful striving; it is a gift of grace and the human effort which produces holiness is an ability which comes from the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the holiness God requires is the fruit of the Spirit. There is a series of divine activities which see to it that we are holy. We have been chosen for holiness (Eph. 1:4). Jesus died to make us holy (Eph. 5:27); we are called to holiness (I Thess. 4:7, ii Tim. 1:9); God disciplines us for holiness (Heb. 12:10).

But holiness is also a human activity, and it is here that discipline becomes a vital concern. Self-discipline is required for that obedience which produces holiness, and corporate discipline is required if the individual is to receive the support and admonition of the community. One does not become holy on a desert island buy only within the church where members warn, rebuke, expel, one another as occasion demands (I Thess. 5:14, Rom. 15:14; I Tim. 5:20; II Tim. 4:2; I Cor. 5:13).

Holiness is also maintained by vigilance regarding outside influences. Paul not only warned the Ephesians against men who would arise "from your own number and distort the truth..." (Acts 20:30), he was also compelled to call for vigilance because "savage wolves will come in among you" (v. 29). The danger was real, and the figure Paul chose was not that of a puppy dog, but of a marauding animal intent on destruction. Clearly, the holiness of the Ephesians could not be taken for granted.

The dual warning noted above, regarding wolves outside and false teachers within, was given to Israel at the time of the Sinaitic covenant. Discipline is imbedded in Biblical revelation from start to finish. Israel was not to make a covenant with any other nation (although there was provision that individual members of other nations might join the covenant and congregation), and the nation was to deal strictly with covenant breakers from within.

Old Testament Covenant Breakers

A. Purpose of the Command to Discipline (and Subsequent Value When Obeyed)

It upholds God's righteousness - Lev. 19:2

It keeps the congregation pure - Deut. 17:12; 29:28

It makes the offender an example to rest of people - Deut. 19:16-21; 21:18

Although the punishment was severe in the Old Testament theocracy, it was never hasty or vengeful. The rights of the accused were strictly enforced, and cities of refuge were designated to provide for protection against vengeance.

A wide variety of sins was to be judged: sins against God (blasphemy, idolatry, etc.), and sins against the neighbor (kidnapping, dishonoring parents, etc.). Also, the death penalty was to be carried out for offenses against the ceremonial law (worshipping while unclean), and against the civil law (showing contempt for a judge). We are reminded of James 2:10, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

B. Agents of Discipline

Congregation (represented by elders, priests) acting as God's agents

Individuals, sometimes when congregation did not, sometimes when individuals were witnesses

God, acting either initially or when congregation did not (Num. 11:1, 4ff; 12:1ff; 14:37; 16:1ff)

C. What Happens If Discipline Is Not Exercised

God will take over (Lev. 20:4ff; 26:1ff; Deut. 27:9ff; 28:15ff)

The undisciplined will become root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood (Deut. 29:18)

The Old Testament records show that Israel did not discipline. But God did, and the record is terrible indeed. (Heb 3:16-19 and I Cor. 10:6-10)

New Testament Discipline

When we come to the New Testament, there are a few principles which should guide our study. There is no longer corporal discipline: elders do not stone, whip, or use any other method of physical punishment. Nor is the church called upon to exercise the ban on sinful nations.

Yet it would be a mistake to infer from this that discipline is less important in the New Testament. God is still righteous; sin is still detestable; sinners must be reclaimed both by evangelism and discipline; the wrath of God will still come upon the ungodly.

Moreover, the Old Testament procedure for discipline prevails in the New Testament (e.g., Deut. 17:6 and 19:15 are quoted in Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; II Cor. 13:1; I Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28). Jesus reinforces the restitution called for in Lev. 5:14ff as an essential part of the trespass offering, when He told His disciples, "First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24).

In Hebrews there is an a fortiori argument which we must not ignore; "If the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore..." (2:2); also, "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished..." (10:29). To which we should add, "But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment" (I Cor. 11:31).

A. Purpose of the Command to Discipline (and Subsequent Value When Obeyed)

- It is an act of obedience (II Cor. 2:9; 7:12)
- It should be done out of reverence for God (II Cor. 7:1)
- It makes offender ashamed (II Thess. 3:14)
- It restores the offender (I Cor. 5:5, 6; I Tim. 1:20)
- Others will fear to sin (I Tim. 5:20)
- You will not lose what you have worked for (II John 8)

Consider particularly the impact of Matthew 18:17 - "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." This verse should be read in relation to Leviticus 19:17 and Luke 17:3. The Leviticus context is one of love to neighbor (v. 18): to love another is to rebuke him. Also, there is a certain self-interest in rebuke "so you will not share in his guilt." The point is that sin acts like yeast and quickly defiles the whole congregation. Therefore out of a sense of love for the offender, and of concern for one's self and the community - call sin, sin. On the other hand, when one knows of a sin and does not rebuke the offender, the former shares in the latter's guilt. We have a similar thought in II John 11: "Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." In legal parlance, one becomes an accessory after the fact when he fails to follow the procedures of discipline.

In the Luke passage Jesus stresses the continuing character of this discipline - a man might sin against you seven times in a day. As the offense persists, Jesus says, so should the rebuke, and so should the forgiveness.

In Matthew 18, Jesus is talking about scandals, or causes for sin. It is a terrible thing to cause someone else to sin (v. 6). It is a perilous matter when we allow any of our bodily parts to cause us to sin (v. 8, 9). In this context, He speaks of rebuking a brother who sins against you. We are probably to understand the sin here as a scandal, something which might be a cause to sin.

The following passages should be consulted for aspects of discipline: Romans 16:17; I Cor. 5; II Cor. 11-13; Ephesians 5:3; Philippians 3:2; II Thess. 3:6, 14; I Tim. 1:18, 4:1-6, 5:20; II Tim. 2:16ff, 3:1ff; Titus 3:9f; II Peter 2:1ff, 3:3; II John 17ff; III John 9; Jude 3, 22f; Revelation 18:4.

B. Summary

1. We cannot avoid the conclusion that discipline is important. The references are many. They are found throughout Jesus' teaching and in almost every epistle; the churches to whom the instructions come are scattered over the whole world known at that time. It is evident that no church, no area is exempt from the responsibility of continuing vigilance against the inroads of false teaching and false practice.

2. This injunction to so widely scattered churches was of course necessitated by the equally widespread opposition to the Gospel in the forms of false teaching, sexual abuse, idleness, etc. In this connection we should note the awareness of Satan's activity in most of the churches on the part of all the writers of epistles.

3. It is clear that the New Testament has no one technical word for the practice of discipline which is parallel to the Old Testament "cut off." On the other hand, the richness of the vocabulary points to the manifold character of discipline. It entails constant vigilance, continual reminder, a hatred and even fear of any sin and its consequences, the importance of gentleness and of private admonition in the early stages, the necessity for sternness and public rebuke later on, and finally the step of isolation, separation.

4. While church leaders are involved in the more public processes of discipline, it is evident that there must be total congregational commitment to the principle. The congregation must support and implement discipline at each level once the offense has reached the state where it must be known.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A very significant situation developed in the Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century. (This is presented in detail as part of an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Dr. David Jones of Covenant Seminary entitled: "The Doctrine of the Church in American Presbyterian Theology in the Mid-19th Century.") In 1835 the G.A. was asked by the Presbytery of Baltimore to rule on the status of the Roman Catholic Church. The ruling was as follows:

"It is the deliberate and decided judgment of this Assembly, that the Roman Catholic Church has essentially apostatized from the religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be recognized as a Christian Church."

The declaration of the apostasy of that church led logically to a consideration of the validity of its ordinances, particularly baptism. In 1845 the matter came up in the G.A. of the Old School. (The division of the Presbyterian Church into Old and New School led to slightly different handling of the issue by the two bodies although the results were the same.) By a vote of 173 to 8 the assembly rejected the validity of R.C. baptism on the grounds that it could no longer be called Christian baptism since the Roman Catholic body was not a true church. "Though once a branch of the visible Church, (she) has long since become utterly corrupt, and hopelessly apostate." (Statement of the G.A. of 1845)

One of the eight dissenting votes was that of Charles Hodge of Princeton. Hodge spoke to the matter in The Princeton Review of 1845 (an article reprinted in his volume, Church Polity, 1878). Hodge argued that the G.A. had gone beyond the position of the Reformers and the Confession of Faith. "The question of whether the church of Rome is a true church, may be affirmed or denied according to the sense attached to those terms." By this he meant that the Reformers on the one hand could identify the Roman system to be antiChrist and apostate and on the other hand by looking at their profession of the Triune God and the presence of true believers could call Rome a church in the sense that apostate Israel was still under a covenant. Thus the issue for Hodge was not whether Rome could be called a true church, but a pure church. "All the definitions given in our books, tell us what a pure church is. And when Protestants deny the church of Rome to be a church, they deny that she comes within their definition of a pure church, though they admit her to be a corrupt and apostate church" (Church Polity). Hodge's view was not universally accepted among Presbyterians. James H. Thornwell, reflecting the direction the Southern Presbyterians would take, supported the General Assembly. In later years the G.A. position was dropped.

It should be noted that the practice of our denomination (both as presently constituted and in its Bible Presbyterian tradition) has been to accept the baptisms and ordinations of the Roman Catholic and UPUSA churches as valid in spite of the fact that both could be considered to have been "declared apostate" by our denomination at one time or another. In its report to the 23rd General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church, the Judicial Commission recommended that a former Roman Catholic priest not be reordained but be received only on the basis of a doctrinal examination. The Synod supported this recommendation.