

To the Ministers and Ruling Elders of  
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church,

Fathers and Brethren,

At the coming General Assembly you may be called to vote upon the following resolution or one similar to it. The papers attached offer certain considerations that may wisely be studied beforehand. On the assumption that the resolution can be changed before the Assembly convenes, suggestions for its improvement are welcome.

Yours very truly,

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The Resolution.

WHEREAS false statements and malicious rumors have been published by irresponsible persons and have been spread, to the detriment of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, by some who may be well intentioned but ill informed;

AND WHEREAS the ninth commandment forbids all prejudicing of the truth, including our own good name;

AND WHEREAS the apostle Paul, though not obliged by the law of God, voluntarily made a vow in order to silence slander; and the late and beloved J. Gresham Machen followed this procedure in abstaining from alcoholic beverages;

AND WHEREAS the Scriptures give authority to the Church to make pronouncements on matters expedient;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this General Assembly do hereby denounce the efforts to besmirch the good name of the Church, and commend total abstinence as expedient conduct in the propagation of the reformed faith.

## The Argument

In Apostolic times the Jerusalem council deemed it wise to offer to the churches specific advice on a special situation. From Acts 15:20,21 it is apparent that the Gentile custom of eating strangled animals was so revolting to Jewish neighbors that the peace of the Church was disturbed and its effectiveness lessened. In view of this the Jerusalem council, at the risk of seeming to make a ritual requirement inconsistent with the doctrine of justification by faith, advised the Gentiles to change their habits of eating.

On the basis of this part of Scripture, therefore, the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has the right, and when occasion demands is under obligation, to make pronouncements of expediency. To deny such right and obligation is to reject a Scriptural principle of church government.

With the Holy Scripture as the major premise of a practical syllogism, minor premises vary with the peculiar conditions of a given time and place.

For the last hundred years a situation in principle identical with that discussed at the Jerusalem council, though different in detail, has existed in the United States of America. It is a question of expediency that seems to some to conflict with true doctrine. But instead of being a question of Jewish neighbors and justification by faith, it involves the American people and the doctrine of Christian liberty.

The liquor traffic, because it has encouraged drunkenness, because it has damaged family life, and because it has corrupted political institutions, is guilty of great evil, just as idol worship was evil and eating things strangled was forbidden. For this reason the large majority of Protestants in this country, like those of Moses in Acts 15:21, have been taught from childhood a horror of strong drink and have come to believe that in America at least total abstinence is an essential method of combatting these evils. If someone argues that the commendation of total abstinence in this resolution obscures the doctrine of Christian liberty, how much more ought the Jerusalem council to have refrained from obscuring the doctrine of justification by faith? And conversely, since they were willing to commend expedient conduct for the sake of Christian brethren, so too the Orthodox Presbyterian Church should follow their example.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., whose heritage the Orthodox Presbyterian Church claims to preserve, repeatedly urged total abstinence. In fact, the Old School Assembly went much further than merely advising total abstinence. In 1865

it said, "It is not adopting any new term of communion to exclude persons from sealing ordinances on the ground of their manufacturing and vending intoxicating drinks as a beverage. On the contrary, it is only falling back upon the teachings of the Bible and the constitution of the Church, which requires visible Christianity, in a credible form, of those who would partake of these ordinances, and refuses the privileges to those who by overt acts of offence fail to present such evidence." In 1877 the Assembly called upon "the Sessions of our churches to guard carefully the purity of our Church, by refusing to admit to membership, or to retain those within her pale, who are engaged in the manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, or who derive their livelihood from this sinful traffic."

Before this time the Assemblies of 1829 and 1830 encouraged the formation in each congregation of temperance societies founded on the practice of total abstinence. Vigorous statements were also made by the New School Assemblies of 1840, 1864 and 1866.

Furthermore, the expediency indicated by the history of Presbyterianism in our country is accentuated by the fallacious implications drawn from the pronouncement on this subject by the General Assembly of 1937, by mininterpretations published, and in some cases by malicious gossip that has harmed the cause of Christ. As in apostolic times the doctrine of justification by faith was misrepresented as antinomianism, so in our day the doctrine of Christian liberty is widely misunderstood. To refrain from making a serious attempt to remove the misapprehensions of the Christian public would not only involve laxity in procedure but would indirectly aid the propagation of a counterfeit doctrine already widely held.

In the present circumstances our Church faces a deplorable situation. Because the General Assembly of 1937 did not make a complete pronouncement on the liquor question, the Church has been called a wet Church. Because of rumors of drinking by persons connected with Westminster (popularly identified with the Church), students have chosen to go to other seminaries. Insofar as these rumors are true, the individuals concerned are responsible for placing a stumbling block in the path of prospective students.

The attitude of the faculty and students of Westminster, on this and similar matters, is widely and plausibly interpreted as smugness and stubbornness. Well-authenticated cases can be produced of students making themselves unreasonably objectionable and bringing reproach upon the Church. The matter of drinking alcoholic beverages seems

to be the center or at least a prominent part of this attitude. The faculty of the Seminary has been requested privately to remedy the situation, but the reply was completely unsatisfactory. Unless something unforeseen should happen, the only Presbyterian procedure remaining is to bring the matter before the Assembly.

The resolution commends total abstinence. To one born and brought up in the Presbyterianism of our country, it is a mystery how anyone can object to commending total abstinence. And if the Assembly should refuse to commend total abstinence, it should be clear even to one not in sympathy with our heritage what the world and other churches will conclude. They will conclude, and rightly so this time, that our Church is a wet church.

Some fear bitter words on the floor of the Assembly. This can be avoided. Each minister can acquaint his elder delegate with the situation before the Assembly convenes, and, if he judges it wise, can refrain from speaking on the resolution. This procedure would decrease the risk of bitterness without causing the commissioners to vote ignorantly, for it is doubtful that there will be any hitherto-unthought-of considerations to be placed before the Assembly.

Let the sons of Old School Presbyterianism continue its noble history.