

A CENTURY OF ECUMENICAL AND UNIONIST  
TENDENCIES IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN  
AMERICA: 1850-1950

A Dissertation for the Degree of Ph. D.  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Ernest H. Post, Jr.

1966



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REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA: 1850-1950

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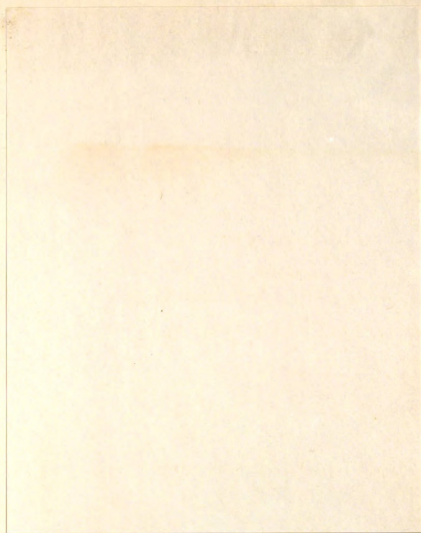
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Harold B. Fields".

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Date 5/19/66





A Century of Ecumenical and Unionist Tendencies in the  
Reformed Church in America: 1850-1950

by  
Ernest H. Post, Jr.

An Abstract of a Dissertation

in  
History

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
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The Graduate School

positions of leadership. Some of the immigrants also settled in the East, and added a new ingredient to that section of the Church.

The Reformed Church in America is the current name for the Netherlands-originated, Calvinist-bred Church planted in New Amsterdam in 1628. Prior to the period of this study it had Americanized slowly and consequently grown rather slowly too. Preponderantly a sectional church located in the States of New York and New Jersey, it still bore some traces of previous factionalism.

The key to the century was Western expansion and the crux of the expansion for the Dutch Reformed Church was a new influx of tens of thousands of immigrants from the Netherlands. This movement began with the arrival in 1847 of the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte who established a colony in Western Michigan. Soon there was a group of immigrant churches which set an example by uniting with the Dutch Reformed Churches of New York and New Jersey. It was more than kinship which had prompted this initial Union of 1850, for these early Dutch immigrants were mainly seceders from the State Church in the Netherlands. In the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church they felt they had found a doctrinally sound Church which could provide the oversight and assistance they so desperately needed.

Their influx assured a Western branch to the Church whose own initial plantings in the West had not proven very successful, for all but a few had either died out or transferred to larger more Americanized denominations. The immigrants and their descendants soon came to dominate the Western section of the Church and by their growth and vigor gained an ever increasing amount of influence in the denomination as a whole, until today they occupy many of its most responsible

positions of leadership. Some of the immigrants also settled in the East and added a new ingredient to that section of the Church.

The schismatic background of the new arrivals and their concern for orthodoxy, as they understood it, led to two schisms within the Western branch. Out of these schisms of the 1850s and 1880s emerged the Christian Reformed Church whose active competition for the allegiance of new Dutch immigrants was instrumental in shaping the character of the Western branch of the older Dutch Reformed Church. This branch, in order to strengthen its position, established educational institutions and showed an affinity for fundamentalism and revivalism. It soon became evident that there was developing a dichotomy of interests and views between the older and newer sections of the Church.

Until after World War II the denomination made little effort to reach out and establish churches for those who were not of a Dutch or a Reformed Church background. An exception was an active program of missions which early produced various degrees of interdenominational co-operation. Already in the latter half of the nineteenth century individual members actively supported various Bible and tract societies as well as non-denominational organizations like the Y.M.C.A. The denomination established fraternal correspondence willingly with other denominations and lent its support to the Evangelical Alliance and the world-wide Presbyterian Alliance. The activities of such interdenominational organizations and the world missionary gatherings helped usher in the modern ecumenical movement whose nominal birth is frequently associated with the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America and its successor, the

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National Council of Churches of Christ, are national personifications of that movement which seeks a oneness of witness of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. The Reformed Church, a charter member of each of these ecumenical organizations, also joined the important World Council of Churches formally founded in 1948. Yet not all the sections of the Church have had their heart in this movement, especially when it has seemed to imply the necessity for organic union of the denominational divisions of Christ's earthly Church.

Large sections of the Eastern branch have been ready for a selective union for some time but the West has generally been adamant in its opposition to all unions since the Union of 1850. While the Reformed Church participated in relatively few serious union efforts, since the 1870-75 approaches each has served to emphasize the dichotomy within the Church. In the aforementioned approaches the problem of the Mercersburg Theology helped prevent serious negotiations with the Reformed Church in the United States (German Reformed), and the fear of absorption negated further talks with the Northern Presbyterians, while an innocuous and ineffective plan of co-operation was agreed upon with the Southern Presbyterians. Once again in the period 1929-31 the Northern Presbyterians evidenced an interest in a union of the two churches, but despite the willingness of a few Eastern Classes, the threat of absorption again precluded the discussion of any type of a union plan.

In only two instances in one hundred years had this cautious denomination presented union plans for the approval of its lower courts and each time Western opposition proved to be the largest obstacle. In each case the proposed partner would have provided a

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bridge for the geographical gap between the sections of the Church. After six years of negotiations, in 1892 a Plan of Federal Union was drawn up with the German Reformed Church. This plan was approved by the necessary two-thirds of the Classes in each Church but through a technicality, a Pan-Presbyterian distraction and the vigorous threat of schism by elements in the West, union was circumvented. Again in the period 1944-50 careful negotiations were carried out with the United Presbyterian Church of North America which produced a detailed plan of organic union containing a local option clause. The acceptance of a new multiple three-fourths voting regulation suggested by a Western pastor, coupled with a solid vote of rejection by the sixteen Western Classes, insured the defeat of the proposed union. In each approach much of this opposition stemmed from a fear of liberalism in the membership of the negotiating denominations and the fear that the distinct Dutch Reformed heritage and mission would be lost. Such negative thinking about what the Church might lose rather than what it might bring to a union, as well as the disunity within the negotiating bodies and tactical errors in the procedures employed for achieving union contributed to these defeats.

The Reformed Church in America has evidenced a consistent willingness to co-operate with other denominations and even to court with them in union negotiations but owing largely to the one union it did achieve in 1850 it probably will never unite again. Nevertheless, the idea of a union has refused to die and since 1962 the Church has been negotiating with the Southern Presbyterians. Whatever the outcome of this approach it is unlikely that the Church can long maintain both its current distinct identity and its present degree of unity.

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The Michigan State University

The Graduate School

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A dissertation

by

Ernest H. <sup>Post</sup> Post, Jr.

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
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April, 1966

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this research through an investigation of the Church's ecumenical and unionist tendencies.

The author wishes to record his appreciation and gratitude for the guidance and encouragement provided by Dr. Harold Bond Fields of the Department of History of Michigan State University. The co-operation of several librarians greatly facilitated the research and writing of this dissertation. Especially helpful was the assistance of the Rev. Peter H. Vanden Berge and staff at the Gardner Sage Library, New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the invaluable usage of this library's Church Union file and archives of the Reformed Church. Miss Mildred Schuppert and staff at the Boardman Library, Western Theological Seminary as well as Mrs. Anne Oetlin and staff

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## PREFACE

While there are several twentieth century histories of the Reformed Church in America they have normally been written as brief introductory works for the use of catechism or Sunday school classes. This Church has produced no serious historian comparable to the nineteenth century's Edward T. Corwin. A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, which he initiated, is now in the process of being updated after the passage of more than forty years, yet a great deal remains to be done. The official histories of the Church's boards remain to be written and many areas of its social and intellectual attitudes in relationship to our developing nation remains to be explored in depth. This study is an attempt to make a beginning in this research through an investigation of the Church's ecumenical and unionist tendencies.

The author wishes to record his appreciation and gratitude for the guidance and encouragement provided by Dr. Harold Bond Fields of the Department of History of Michigan State University. The cooperation of several librarians greatly facilitated the research and writing of this dissertation. Especially helpful was the assistance of the Rev. Peter N. Vanden Berge and staff at the Gardner Sage Library, New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the invaluable usage of this library's Church Union file and archives of the Reformed Church. Miss Mildred Schuppert and staff at the Beardslee Library, Western Theological Seminary as well as Mrs. Anne Catlin and staff

at the Beeghly Library, Juniata College proved both interested and co-operative. Ready access to the resources of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Lancaster Theological Seminary library and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary library was granted respectively by Miss Elizabeth Kieffer, Dr. George H. Bricker and Dr. James S. Irvine.

An indebtedness to Dr. Lester J. Kuyper for making available his collection of papers covering the entire period of union negotiations from 1945-50 can be only inadequately expressed. To the officers of the Church, its clergy, seminary presidents and faculty members, those both acknowledged and unacknowledged in the following pages who in any way helped, the author would express his thanks.

This must apply also to Dr. Don H. Yoder of the University of Pennsylvania and many others outside the Church.

continuous existence of well over two hundred years, is worthy of record.<sup>2</sup> If such a statement has validity the recording of a century of the history of an institution scarcely over 100 years old is justified.

The Reformed Church in America in 1890 was a small Protestant denomination in a nation where official church membership was not always

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<sup>1</sup>This current name for the Church had been adopted in 1867. Its official designation in 1890, at the beginning of this study, was the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. The Dutch Reformed Church or even the Dutch Church were unofficial appellations used during much of the period and will upon occasion appear on the following pages.

<sup>2</sup>H. M. J. Klein, A History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster, Pa.: Eastern Synod, 1937), Preface. The Rev. Klein's history deals with the formation and growth of what formerly was known as the German Reformed Church.

practicable or highly regarded. Only an estimated 25 per cent of the nation's 23,200,000 population were members of Christian churches; of this number, 33,500 were communicant members of the Dutch Reformed Church.

## CHAPTER I

Historically, the most important aspect of the next one hundred years for this church was its expansion into the West.

### INTRODUCTION

About the time the Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries helped blaze the Oregon trail, this Dutch church finally crossed the Allegheny history of the Calvinist-bred Reformed Church in America.<sup>1</sup> This Church, begun in New Amsterdam and based predominantly in New York and New Jersey, had slowly become Americanized during its previous 222 years of continuous ministry in North America. Now it embarked on a century of expansion and internal development during a period denoted by the great development and expansion of both the United States of America and the worldwide Christian movement. "In a young country like the United States, any institution, civic or ecclesiastical, that has a continuous existence of well nigh two hundred years, is worthy of record."<sup>2</sup> If such a statement has validity the recording of a century of the history of an institution currently over 330 years old is justified.

The Reformed Church in America in 1850 was a small Protestant denomination in a nation where official church membership was not always

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A Brief History of the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Doornik Publications, [1958]), p. 1.



practicable or highly regarded. Only an estimated 15 per cent of the nation's 23,200,000 population were members of Christian churches; of this number, 33,500 were communicant members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Historically, the most important aspect of the next one hundred years for this church was its expansion into the West. About the time the Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries helped blaze the Oregon Trail, this Dutch Church finally crossed the Allegheny Mountains and organized a church at Fairview, Illinois. The year the North and South compromised politically to permit California to enter the Union as the thirty-first state, the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church negotiated the important union that brought the immigrant Holland Classis, centered around Holland, Michigan, into its fold.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while "West" meant West Coast to the people of the United States in 1850, to the Dutch Reformed Church it meant Illinois and Michigan. This two thousand mile lag in respective spheres showed how drastically this forerunner of American Protestant denominations had failed to keep pace with the challenge of the American frontier and the expanding American population growth.

Before the end of the nineteenth century the Reformed Church in America had pushed its limited frontier out into the Dakotas, only to

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<sup>3</sup>The incorporation of these and succeeding immigrant congregations assumed additional importance when the initial plantings, encouraged and aided by the Reformed Church Board of Domestic Missions, failed to prosper. By 1850 the Classes of Illinois and Michigan, in existence since 1841, had recorded the names of sixteen churches of which eleven were still on the Church's roll. Of the first twenty-one congregations organized within these early Western Classes all but four eventually died out or transferred to other larger and more Americanized denominations. See the yearly Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America (New York: Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1842-1850); cf. Elton M. Benigenburg, A Brief History of the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Douma Publications, [1958]), p. 76.



find that the United States Census Bureau had already declared the American frontier non-existent. On the world scene the picture was different. The Reformed Church had found it easier to carry the Gospel to Asia than to their non-Dutch neighbors at home. Frequently in conjunction with others but also on its own initiative, the Reformed Church in America had planted missions in Arabia, Borneo, Ceylon, China, India and Japan.

In the twentieth century, during the interval following the revivalism of Dwight Moody, Ira Sankey, Billy Sunday, and preceding the crusades of Billy Graham, this incompletely Americanized church had reached the West Coast. The Church's geographical and physical growth during these one hundred years proportionately strengthened its Western branch in relation to its Eastern branch. The introduction into the membership of the Church of a stream of Dutch immigrants with a schismatic background in the Netherlands led to new internal stresses. Their professed zeal for doctrinal purity and Dutch heritage led the Western branch to adopt an isolationist attitude as well as a receptivity to revivalism and fundamentalism. This zeal proved inadequate to prevent schisms in the 1850s and 1880s within the Western branch itself and it almost developed a dichotomy within the Reformed Church. As the Rev. Herman Hammelink described this situation, "the old Eastern and the newer Western branches of the church live together and work together within the same household in a somewhat uneasy, but also perhaps somewhat healthy tension."<sup>4</sup>

By 1950, along with other Protestant denominations, the Church had witnessed an internal struggle concerning "Modernism", and a declining interest in its Sunday School and catechistic instructional

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<sup>4</sup>"Christian Unity and Church Union: a Study of the Ecumenical Approach of the Reformed Church in America" (unpublished M. S. T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 5.

programs. The country, now 150,700,000 strong, found 53 per cent of its citizens professing church membership. The Reformed Church in America had grown to over 183,000 communicant members, gathered into 763 churches, organized into 42 classes, serviced by 884 ministers. It received guidance from a group of professional administrative officers and support from three colleges and two theological seminaries.<sup>5</sup>

The great population growth and increasing desire for church membership had raised one central question: "In providing for the growing religious needs of the United States, shall the various churches work singly or together?"<sup>6</sup> How did the Reformed Church in America respond to these ecumenical and unionist opportunities that arose within the United States during these one hundred years?<sup>7</sup>

The word "ecumenical" has today become a common word in the vocabulary of ever increasing numbers of people both in the United States and throughout the world. Its current vogue owes much to the meetings of the Vatican II Councils and the gatherings of the World Council of Churches. The word derives from the Greek word "oikoumene" by which they

<sup>5</sup>Though the number of communicant members in the Reformed Church in America remained in almost the same ratio to the total national population during this one hundred year period, it declined relative to the number of church members in the nation. In 1850 it contained approximately 0.96 per cent of the estimated church members in the United States while by 1950 this figure had fallen to about 0.23 per cent.

<sup>6</sup>Howard G. Hageman, Lily Among the Thorns (New York: Curriculum Committee of the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, 1953), p. 139.

<sup>7</sup>This study concentrates mainly on the United States because on the Afro-Asian mission fields it had become less a question of whether one would work singly, and more a question to what extent one would co-operate. Cf. Norman Goodall, The Ecumenical Movement: What It Is and What It Does (2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 38-39.

<sup>11</sup>The Reformed Church in America, a charter member of the World Council of Churches, participates in the Alliance of Reformed Churches



referred to "the whole inhabited world."<sup>8</sup> This word also appears fifteen times in the New Testament, usually in a geographic sense. After the fall of Rome it apparently acquired the Christian connotation of representing the whole of the Christian church. The Reformation shattered this concept but the world wide missionary endeavors and the various interdenominational gatherings of the nineteenth century helped resurrect the word. Today it has again become almost synonymous with Christian unity and universality.

Presently the word is seldom employed alone, mainly being used in the context of the "ecumenical movement." Martin Marty's definition of the ecumenical as "the movement or spirit which seeks to find and show forth the oneness of Jesus Christ's Church in the whole world"<sup>9</sup> is a rather typical definition. The beginning of the modern ecumenical movement is frequently attributed to the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>10</sup> The three major movements emanating from this conference, Faith and Order, Life and Work, and the International Missionary Council, have since found union within the World Council of Churches. Though the World Council of Churches appears at the focal point of this movement, there are additional ecumenical organizations of an international and interdenominational character which extend down to the local churches.<sup>11</sup> Ecumenism to some members of the clergy is the

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<sup>8</sup>Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill (ed.), A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 735 ff. lists and explains seven historical uses of this term.

<sup>9</sup>Church Unity and Church Mission (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Rouse and Neill, op. cit., p. xxi.

<sup>11</sup>The Reformed Church in America, a charter member of the World Council of Churches, participates in the Alliance of Reformed Churches

most dynamic force in Christianity today, a force which even its opponents are compelled to notice. The literature on the movement has grown so voluminous that bibliographies on its various facets are now being published.<sup>12</sup> earthly church.

The Reformed Church in America is based on a reformer who was willing to cross ten seas to heal the divisions in Protestantism, one whose "passion for ecumenical unity induced an ecclesiastical tolerance that was unusual in his day and is still distasteful to many who profess themselves Christians."<sup>13</sup> The Reformed Church historian Edward T. Corwin described his Church as one which "cheerfully recognized all evangelical Christians as brethren in Christ. . . . It has ever been among the foremost in organizing and supporting all the great union societies for evangelistic publication or work."<sup>14</sup> This statement has continued to remain true during the twentieth century, though not without protest against the enlarged programs of some ecumenical bodies. In 1962 a section in its annual budget was labelled "Ecumenical Appropriations" (now termed "Support of Inter-Church Relations"). Yet this Church has

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Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian System of Government, The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and various united church and interdenominational mission efforts on the world mission scene.

<sup>12</sup>Paul A. Crow, Jr., The Ecumenical Movement in Bibliographical Outline (New York: Department of Faith and Order, National Council of Churches, 1965).

<sup>13</sup>John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 229.

<sup>14</sup>A Manual of the Reformed Church in America (4th ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), p. 285.

had an ambivalent attitude toward the ecumenical movement. A sub-structure to this drawing together through large ecumenical organizations is the closer union and not mere cooperation of two or more of the divisions of Christ's earthly church.

The Church's attitude toward union, since the incorporation of the Holland Classis in 1850 and the development of a Western branch, has fluctuated only in the warmth and duration of the courtship, but the outcome has always been the same. During the one hundred years from 1850-1950, only two union approaches reached the important stage of a vote by the Classes, and both ended in defeat. Despite this unfavorable precedent from the past, the Reformed Church in America is again deeply involved in union negotiations. The advocates of this union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States have approximately three years in which to correct the tactical errors of previous negotiations, to overcome the fears of the opposition, and to deal with the "rule or ruin" threat by elements primarily prevalent within the Western branch of the Church.

over the entire country. By 1517 the way had been prepared for a reforming faith, but conditions among the Dutch were not conducive to the immediate acceptance of Protestantism. The teachings of the Reformers had much in common with the teachings of a previous local movement, "The Brethren of the Common Life." This preaching and teaching movement was founded by Gerhard de Groot in 1378 at Deventer. His

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<sup>1</sup>The Netherlands of this time consisted of 17 provinces which encompassed most of the present day Netherlands and the present day Belgium, an area still referred to as the Low Countries. These provinces were culturally divided with the Dutch in the North, the French-speaking Walloons in the South and the Flemish in between. The northern half has frequently been called Holland, though technically the name belongs to but a single province.



statistically motivated disciplines gave place to the movement when they pooled their resources and lived in common. Their objective was to lead a moral life, do good and revive the desire for learning through the providing of schools. CHAPTER II The New Testament, read in the vernacular, provided their main guide for living and text for study.

#### THE REFORMED CHURCH BACKGROUND: NETHERLANDS AND AMERICA

Erasmus, one of their pupils, supplemented their labors with both a new translation. Understanding the Reformed Church in America during the period

from 1850 to 1950 requires some knowledge of its history both in the Netherlands and in America. This is true whether one considers this Church in its entirety or by its geographical areas, for Dutch immigrants have played a vital role in its growth and development. Yet the Reformed faith, the basis for this Church, did not originate in the Netherlands and once it reached the Low Countries it did not initially receive an enthusiastic reception.<sup>1</sup>

Missionaries had established the first Christian church in the Netherlands in the eighth century and in less than a century had spread their religion over the entire country. By 1517 the way had been prepared for a reforming faith, but conditions among the Dutch were not conducive to the immediate acceptance of Protestantism. The teachings of the Reformers had much in common with the teachings of a previous local movement, "The Brethren of the Common Life." This preaching and teaching movement was founded by Gerhard de Groot in 1378 at Deventer. His

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pietistically motivated disciples gave name to the movement when they pooled their resources and lived in common. Their objective was to lead a moral life, do good and revive the desire for learning through the providing of schools and teachers. The New Testament, read in the vernacular, provided their main guide for living and text for study. Erasmus, one of their pupils, supplemented their labors with both a new translation of the New Testament and through his famous satirical book, In Praise of Folly. This movement helped to create an enlightened and somewhat purified Church.<sup>2</sup>

Politically, the Netherlands was the inheritance of his Catholic majesty, Charles V, King of Spain and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Charles, born in the Netherlands and influenced by his early contacts, at first granted concessions and a benevolent rule to these commercially prosperous and materially minded people. Thus, without major complaints, though religiously curious, the Dutch initially appeared unlikely to disturb their status quo.<sup>3</sup>

The strong feelings of Charles V against the Protestant heresy and the easy communications with the centers of the Reformation via the Rhine River, made non-involvement an impossibility. In the 1520s Lutherans and Luther's writings appeared but soon they were outnumbered

<sup>2</sup>Howard G. Hageman, Lily Among the Thorns (New York: Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, 1953), pp. 32-37. Cf. John T. McNeill, The History and Characteristics of Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 256-57.

<sup>3</sup>William H. Prescott, History of the Reign of Philip The Second, King of Spain (6 ed.; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1891), p. 151. Prescott, contrary to the popular contention that materialism competes with religion for the loyalty and devotion of man, felt that the prosperous Netherlanders with their wide commercial contacts were "well advanced in the arts of civilization . . .", giving them an inquisitive frame of mind that "naturally turned to those great problems



by a group known as the Anabaptists. The most noteworthy Anabaptist leader proved to be Menno Simmons.<sup>4</sup> Charles' decrees, the introduction of the Inquisition in 1522, and subsequent executions beginning in 1523 could not stop the spread of these teachings. However, the increasingly severe decrees did cause thousands to flee the country.

The Protestant Reformation did not originate as a united movement but prior to the year 1529 there remained the hope that a unity might be achieved. The same year the Diet of Spires labelled as Protestants the adherents of the Reformation, the leaders of this reforming movement finally met but failed to reach complete agreement. The failure of Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther to agree on the question of sacraments at this Marburg meeting doomed the Protestant movement to a seemingly endless period of disunity, the current ecumenical movement notwithstanding. The faith as interpreted by Zwingli and given organization, doctrinally and governmentally, by John Calvin became known as the Reformed faith and the basis of the future Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands. This faith spread from Western Europe into Central Europe and as Reformed, Presbyterian or Congregational churches throughout much of the world.<sup>5</sup>

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in religion which were agitating the neighboring countries of France and Germany."

<sup>4</sup>Their stress on religious liberty, separation of church and state, and unwillingness to serve the state as office holders or soldiers made them particularly repugnant to the Spanish authorities. Today Mennonite followers of this sixteenth century leader are still in evidence even in parts of the United States.

<sup>5</sup>On the European continent the Reformed Churches of France, Germany, Hungary and Switzerland are still in existence though the initial Bohemian, Polish, Italian and Spanish Reformed Churches succumbed to the persecution they encountered. E. T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America (4th ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), p. 3.

The Dutch Reformed Church owes its beginnings to groups of refugees who gave birth to the Church outside the boundaries of Holland. John á Lasco, a Polish nobleman, in 1550 organized the first of several churches formed among some four thousand Dutch religious refugees and residents in London. The order of worship he developed for this Church of the Austin Friars later became the basis for a revised liturgy accepted throughout the Dutch provinces. Other Dutch refugee churches of the Reformed faith were organized in various cities of the Palatinate. Meanwhile, persecuted French Calvinists had sought refuge among the French Walloons of the southern provinces. From small churches meeting secretly in the southern area, the Reformed faith spread northward, frequently under the guise of literary societies.

The scattered congregations stood desperately in need of organization and mutual support. To help unify the beliefs of his Walloon congregation, Guido de Bres drew up a confession of faith in 1559 which, though slightly modified, is known as the Belgic Confession of Faith and remains today as one of the three standards of unity of the Reformed Church in America. The second standard, the Heidelberg Catechism, was written in 1563, at the behest of Elector Frederick of the Palatinate, by Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. It failed to unite the Lutheran and Reformed in the Palatinate, but it did help unite the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and proved a great instrument of indoctrination of succeeding generations of their young. These two church standards were adopted provisionally at a meeting of Dutch and Walloon pastors and nobles in Antwerp in 1566. In June of the same year, the first public meeting and preaching took place in the North. This and later services were held under the protection of armed men, for the Spanish authorities were still opposed to such heresy. From such field preaching, the



Church adopted the emblem of the "Lily Among the Thorns."

The Church, now sorely harassed, completed much of the organization of its polity outside the Netherlands at the Synods of Wesel (1568) and of Embden (1571). Thus the initial formation of the Dutch Reformed Church took place before there was an independent Dutch nation. Yet its final organization and the achievement of its position of dominance occurred only after its cause and the cause of national independence became one and triumphed.

The political rupture between Spain and the Netherlands had several causations. In 1555 Charles V, frustrated in his ambition to dominate all of Europe and in his desire to crush the Protestant heresy, resigned in favor of his son Philip II. Spanish born and with no special attachment for the Netherlands, Philip decided to tighten his rule over them in order to enforce the decrees of the recently adjourned Council of Trent (1545-63). His resolve was further strengthened by an iconoclastic outburst in 1566 which damaged a large number of Catholic churches and cathedrals throughout that country. While before he had tried to re-activate the Inquisition in a covert manner, he now prepared to unleash a reign of terror to stamp out all Protestantism in the Netherlands.

His earlier attempts were looked upon as a subversion of power and liberties by the leading members of the gentry, Catholic and Protestant alike. The Netherlander already possessed more guaranteed political immunities and rights than any other people within the Empire and possibly all of Europe. Their gentry to secure peace, the necessary prerequisite to their continued prosperity, was now willing to permit religious toleration also.<sup>6</sup> Yet the very boldness of the chief

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<sup>6</sup>Correspondence de Philippe II, tom. i. p. 240 in Prescott. op.

beneficiary of this toleration, the Reformed, encouraged further resistance to the king. Meanwhile, the Church held its first national synod.

The entrance in 1567 of a Spanish army under the Duke of Alva to enforce Philip's will led to armed resistance. The fight begun for religious toleration, with the goal of ridding the country of the Duke of Alva and the Spanish Inquisition, turned into a war for independence. Prince William of Orange-Nassau, who in the course of this opposition adopted the Reformed faith, became the main leader of the resistance movement. The religious overtones of the movement became so prominent that the ten southern provinces withdrew to remain loyal to the Roman Catholic faith. The seven northern provinces laid the basis for the Dutch Republic when they came together in 1579 in the Union of Utrecht with the motto, Eendracht Maakt Macht.<sup>7</sup> These provinces invited William, already Stadholder of Holland and Zeeland Provinces, to be their leader and declared their independence from Spain. The most serious fighting was now past and in 1609 a twelve year truce ended the war. Finally in

<sup>cit.</sup>, p. 205, recorded the comment of the country's regent, Margaret of Parma, "I accuse none of the nobles of being heretics, but they show little zeal in the cause of religion, while the magistrates shrink from their duty from fear of the people." Ibid., p. 142. In ruling the Netherlands, Charles V was in reality the head of a confederacy of republics and this is the position that Philip II also inherited.

<sup>7</sup>This political motto meaning "union makes strength" appears below the coat-of-arms adopted by the Reformed Church in America. This Church's most prominent historian, E. T. Corwin, while writing about this preliminary period of the Netherlands' church history, in an outburst of ecumenical feeling stated: "This ought now to be made the motto of Protestantism in the federation of all evangelical churches." op. cit., p. 7. A second motto appearing above the coat-of-arms is Nisi Dominus Frustra, "Without the Lord all is vain." David D. Demarest, The Reformed Church in America: Its Origin, Development and Characteristics (4th ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1889), p. xii, noted this latter inscription was found on a coin issued at Ghent in 1582.

1648 Spain acknowledged what Europe had already accepted, the independence of Holland. Meanwhile, the Church held its first national Synod within the country in 1576 at Dort (also known as Dordrecht) but the organization of the national Dutch Church did not reach its completion until the famous Synod of Dort (1618-19). Its full recognition as the established church, though by no means the only legal church, was not achieved until 1651.

Before such a state of outward security was reached, a theological dispute threatened the unity of the Reformed Church. As it attempted to settle this dispute, the Synod produced the final standard of unity accepted by the Reformed Church in America, the Canons of Dort.<sup>8</sup> The controversy evolved around the doctrine of predestination and liberty of conscience and found its chief spokesmen on the faculty of the University of Leyden. Unfortunately, the dispute also assumed political connotations.

Jacob Arminius, a professor of Theology for six years prior to his death in 1609, proclaimed the idea of the co-operation of human will in achieving salvation, or conditional election. This meant that "the decree of election embraces only those who repent, believe, and persevere . . . ."<sup>9</sup> After his death, Arminius' followers, especially Simon Episcopius, gave form to his views through the Remonstrance of 1610 and the Confession and Declaration of 1622. Francis Gomarus, also

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<sup>8</sup>The Reformed Church in America, in accepting the doctrinal canons elucidated by this ecumenical gathering, omitted its preface and conclusion as well as its rejection of the errors of the Remonstrants and the sentence imposed against them. These parts were not considered necessary in the environment found in the United States of 1792.

<sup>9</sup>McNeill, op. cit., p. 264.  
*U. S. Bureau of Census, The Reformed Church in the Netherlands: From 1600 to 1800*, p. 135.



a professor of Theology at the University of Leyden, led the orthodox Calvinist group and was the chief opponent of Arminius and Arminianism. Gomarus restressed that those elected of God to salvation were unconditionally called solely through His grace and incapable of sliding away from their calling.

The controversy not only disturbed the students at Leyden but led to antagonism among congregations and their ministers. It caused the intervention of the magistrates, led to riots and some felt, threatened a civil war.<sup>10</sup> Arminius desired a revision of the Confession and Catechism and was even willing to accept the support of the government to convene a national Synod for this purpose. The Reformed Church rejected this interference and the government's contention that the magistrates should share "in the ecclesiastical business relating to the calling of ministers and discipline."<sup>11</sup> They countered by questioning whether those who openly dissented from the doctrines of the Church should still be allowed to minister in that Church. The States-General under the leadership of John Olden-Barneveldt consistently supported the Remonstrants and prevented any ecclesiastical disciplining of their ministers. Neither numerous negotiations nor an offer to divide up the property of the Church had been able to restore harmony. The Reformed Church now stood ready to call a national Synod to resolve the sad state of affairs.

In 1617, the tide suddenly shifted. Prince Maurice, son of William of Orange and the elected Stadholder or military leader of the

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Maurice G. Hansen, The Reformed Church in the Netherlands: From A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840 (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1884), p. 135.



nation, gave his support to the Gomarists. He claimed the oath he took in 1586 upon assumption of office bound him and the States-General to defend the Reformed religion. While this may have had some bearing on the case, it is more likely that Prince Maurice used this situation to curtail the power of the Dutch aristocracy and their republican tendencies. His apparent goal was to make the House of Orange the hereditary Stadholders of the Netherlands. After he had imprisoned Olden-Barneveldt and Hugo Grotius, the leading supporters of the Arminians, the States-General passed a resolution on November 11, 1617, that called for the gathering of a great Synod of the Reformed faith to settle the controversy. So in the end, the government intervened and not only called this great synod into being, but underwrote its cost through an assessment on the provinces. A new basis for the alliance of church and state had been laid which approached the degree of togetherness the Arminians had previously advocated.

The Synod of Dort opened on May 13, 1618. Approximately twenty-eight foreign delegates from England, Germany, the Palatinate and Switzerland, along with thirty-one Dutch ministers, twenty elders and five professors, mainly of the Gomarist party, composed the Synod.<sup>12</sup> From the moment it convened, the Synod conducted itself as an ecclesiastical court before which the Arminians (Remonstrants) appeared as

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<sup>12</sup>There are slight discrepancies in the various sources concerning the number of delegates. In contrast to the above figures by Corwin, *op. cit.*, p. 11, cf. Hansen, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-44, claims there were 26 foreign delegates, 21 elders and 15 political deputies. Neither account contains the total number of Remonstrant ministers and professors present though a diagram of the meeting hall in Hansen's account indicates twenty places at the center table assigned to the accused. Demarest, *op. cit.*, p. 38, notes 13 Remonstrant ministers were cited to appear for whom Episcopius, Arminius' successor at Leyden, acted as the spokesman. This account again differs slightly on the number of delegates and political observers sent by the States-General.

the accused party. They, for their part, claimed that the gathering had no authority and should be a conference for the exchange of opinions. Despite an able defense by Episcopius, the evasive and obstructionist tactics of the Arminians caused them to be banned from the Synod on January 16, 1619. For the remainder of the 154 sittings extending over a six month period, the accused were judged solely on the basis of their available writings. Except for the Bible, no other reference works were permitted in the meeting room.

It has been claimed the result was a foregone conclusion. In the end, the Arminian party stood convicted of views inconsistent with the Scriptures and the Confession of Faith. After much discussion, the Synod restated as canons of doctrine the tenets which the Remonstrants had sought to mitigate. These included unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints, tenets commonly called the "Five Points of Calvinism." This was the major accomplishment of this ecumenical Synod. After the departure of the foreign delegates, an additional twenty-six sittings produced legislation regulating the internal affairs and the relations of the Church. These Post-Acta gave special attention to the Heidelberg Catechism. Declared to be in accord with the Scriptures, it was to be the basis for instruction in the home by the parents and also the source for the Sabbath afternoon sermon by the ministers. The Synod also sought and received authorization from the States-General to proceed with a new Dutch translation of the Bible, which was completed in 1634.

The fact that the Synod suspended the cited Remonstrants from their offices until they acknowledged their errors was not too surprising.

The lower judicatories were asked to take appropriate action against

those not already cited who remained inclined to error. The States-General approved the decision of the Synod and soon about two hundred ministers were deposed. Those who refused to accept this action were deported out of the country and all Remonstrant meetings were forbidden. This seemed out of keeping in a nation where the Pilgrims and other religious groups had found sanctuary and toleration. This temporary lapse in tolerance may have resulted from exasperation at the prolonged period of controversy and the fact that the Remonstrants refused to withdraw from the Church and be known as a sect. Without a doubt the lack of tolerance resulted from political complications due mainly to "an intensely bitter, personal controversy between two ambitious high dignitaries."<sup>13</sup> Four days after the departure of the foreign delegates Prince Maurice had his political rival and the supporter of the Remonstrants, Olden-Barneveldt, beheaded. The dependence of the Reformed Church upon the secular powers of the State during this crucial period proved to be an irreversible trend. "The State felt it had gained an advantage and it was not disposed to give it up."<sup>14</sup>

In a recent evaluation of this period a minister of the Reformed Church in America wrote:

Though we must approve the theological decisions reached by the Synod, we can only be ashamed of its political consequences. For while it represented the triumph of the orthodox Reformed faith, it also represented the triumph of Prince Maurice.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Demarest, *op. cit.*, p. 30. The political involvement appears evident from the fact that in the same year after Prince Maurice died (1625) full toleration was granted to the Remonstrants permitting the establishment of Remonstrant congregations.

<sup>14</sup>Hansen, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>15</sup>Hageman, *op. cit.*, p. 55. This was borne out by the increasing influence of the State over the Church as well as by the fact that Maurice's family, the House of Orange, eventually became



The defeat of the Spanish Armada and the twelve year truce which began in 1609 ushered in a period of unparalleled commercial expansion and colonization. The Dutch, already well known for their commercial enterprise and naval daring, enjoyed the golden period of their history. By 1614, Holland had more sailors than the British, French and Spanish combined.<sup>16</sup> It was in this period that Henry Hudson (1609) established not only the Netherland's claim to North America but also the beginnings of a lucrative fur trade. Therefore, business reasons rather than religious reasons, prompted the first settlements in New Netherlands.

Still the Church and the State did not allow the businessmen to ignore the claims of religion. It became common practice for the great trading companies, chartered by the State, to carry a chaplain aboard their ships. In the aftermath of the great Synod of Dort, the Dutch West India Company in 1623 sent out its first colonists, mostly Walloon refugees, to supplement the traders who had established posts in New Netherlands as early as 1614. When Peter Minuit, the new director, arrived in 1626, he brought seeds, plants, domestic animals and tools to help establish New Amsterdam; he also brought the beginnings for the establishment of a Reformed Church. He had been accompanied by two Comforters of the Sick, Jan Huyck and Sebastian Jansen Krol, who acted

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hereditary Stadholders of the Netherlands and in 1815 hereditary monarchs.

Cf. F. H. Ditchfield, The Church in the Netherlands (London: Wells Gardner, Darton and Company, 1893), p. 269 ff. for a critical pro-Roman Catholic interpretation of this Synod of Dort. He feels the entire Arminian-Gomarist controversy awakened men to the true nature of Calvinism with its intolerant spirit and caused increasing defections from that faith.

<sup>16</sup>Edward R. Tannenbaum, European Civilization Since the Middle Ages (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965), p. 143.

as lay chaplains.<sup>17</sup> Requested by the Company and appointed by the Consistory of Amsterdam, their duties included not only looking after the sick, especially the dying, but the reading of the Scriptures and sermons on Sunday. Governor Minuit, an elder in the French Reformed Church at Wesel, made sure such services were held. Because they had always believed in an educated and trained ministry, the organization of the first church awaited the arrival of an ordained minister.

Nine years after the 1618-19 Synod of Dort, the Rev. Jonas Michaelius, a graduate of Leyden and a former chaplain to Brazil, arrived at Manhattan Island. On April 10, 1628, three days after his arrival, he organized a Dutch Reformed Church with about fifty communicant members and celebrated the first Lord's Supper in New Netherlands. In 1642 the Rev. Johannes Megopolensis formed a church at Albany. Altogether, thirteen churches or preaching stations served by fifteen ministers were established prior to the English conquest of the area in 1664.<sup>18</sup>

The Church in America during these years stood in relationship to the Dutch West India Company much as the Church in the Netherlands did to the State. The Synod of North Holland held ecclesiastical supervision over the colonies. This Synod in 1624 delegated the calling of ministers, Comforters of the Sick and schoolmasters to the Classes within whose boundaries the headquarters of the various trading companies

<sup>17</sup>Jan Huyck is also referred to in other sources as Jan Huygen and described as Minuit's brother-in-law and a deacon in the Dutch Reformed Church at Wesel. Cf. John R. Brodhead, History of the State of New York (New York: Harper and Bros., 1853), I, 165, and Elton M. Benigenburg, A Brief History of the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Douma Publications, [1958]), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Corwin, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

<sup>19</sup>Brodhead, op. cit. I, 617.





were located. By 1629 most of these companies had centralized their operations in Amsterdam so the Classis of Amsterdam maintained the immediate oversight of New Netherlands. The West India Company reserved the right to approve the calls extended by the Classes and in return agreed to pay the salaries of the appointees. When the Company sought to improve the prosperity of their colony and increase its population by creating patroonships, it likewise required the patroon and his colonists to provide for a minister and a schoolmaster.

In 1640 the Reformed Church formally became the established church and the only church publicly permitted in New Netherlands. Religious tolerance did exist nevertheless as in the mother country. While no one was persecuted for his views, the non-Reformed could worship only in his home, unless he obtained special permission. After Peter Stuyvesant became Governor (1641-64) a less lenient attitude toward the sects developed. "The immediate cause of the first exhibition of religious intolerance in New Netherlands was ecclesiastical jealousy and a too rigid construction of duty."<sup>19</sup> The years 1656-59 and 1661-63 were periods of persecution, especially against the Quakers, although the Company firmly rebuked Stuyvesant several times for his policies. Stuyvesant, who had been elected an elder in the Church on Manhattan, also sought to improve the observance of the Sabbath. A series of Sabbath laws including an anti-liquor law were passed and a second worship service instituted in the afternoon.

After the English conquest of New Netherlands in 1664, the Dutch received excellent terms of surrender. Domine Samuel Drisius wrote to the Classis of Amsterdam:

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<sup>19</sup>Brodhead, op. cit. I, 617.

It is stipulated in the articles (of surrender) that the religion and doctrine should continue as heretofore, and the ministers shall remain. We could not abandon our congregations and hearers. We judged we must continue with them, for a time at least, and perform our offices, lest they should become entirely scattered and grow wild.<sup>20</sup>

The control of the Classis of Amsterdam could only be a nominal relationship over these new English citizens. The condition of the Dutch Church, despite its recognized existence, at first deteriorated after the conquest. The six remaining ministers no longer received a salary from the Dutch West India Company and their congregations were not accustomed to providing for their support. Soon their number was reduced to but two; replacements for the pulpit and additions to the pews were few when Dutch immigration all but ceased. A thirty year dispute now occurred when the Dutch, French and English dissenters who constituted ninety percent of the population resisted the attempts of the English governors to make the Church of England the established church. This common opposition could not prevent the passing of a Ministry Act in 1693 meant to establish the Anglican Church nor did it prevent the Dutch Church from taking separate action to protect itself. Fearing for the privileges granted her in 1664, the Dutch Church in New York City petitioned William III, King of England and former Stadholder of the Netherlands, for a charter safeguarding these privileges. The "Charter of the Reformed Protestant Church in the City of New York" granted on May 11, 1696, formed the basis for a Dutch Collegiate Church

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<sup>20</sup>Letter dated Manhattan, September 15, 1664 as quoted in Ecclesiastical Records: State of New York, comp. Hugh Hastings (7 vols.; Albany: James B. Lyon, State Printer, 1901), I, 560-62. Also reproduced are the "Articles of Capitulation on the Reduction of New Netherlands," pp. 557-59 in which Article 8 insures the Dutch their liberty of conscience in Divine Worship and church discipline.

Corporation which still exists today.<sup>21</sup> The local assembly dominated by the Dutch had already sought in 1683 and 1691 to secure toleration for all "Persons or Person which profess Faith in God by Jesus Christ, His only Son,"<sup>22</sup> except Romanists.

Ecumenism looks forward to more than just toleration of other Christian groups. Interestingly, in describing William III and his Reformed Church upbringing, Corwin sheds some light on just what tolerance had meant to the Reformed faith in the Netherlands since 1625. "He was, therefore, very tolerant in matters of church government and modes of worship; hence he could easily become an Episcopalian."<sup>23</sup> This interflow of members between various Protestant denominations, even more common on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, should provide a local basis for ecumenism. In America, the Dutch had granted English Presbyterians religious freedom in the 1640s: The Dutch Church in the Fort (New York City) for some fifty years permitted the Anglicans to use their sanctuary following their own services each Sunday and for a number of years baptized children of Lutheran parents. In the 1680s the French Huguenots, who fled to New York after the Edict of Nantes was revoked, were welcomed into the membership of the Reformed Church. The same was true of the German Reformed members from the Palatinate who settled in the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys beginning in the second decade of the eighteenth century. This integration of nationalities continued to such an extent that by 1850 frequently half of the names of the consistory members of many Dutch Reformed Churches in New York

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<sup>21</sup>Corwin, op. cit., pp. 79-81. This was the first of a series of charters issued to the Dutch Reformed in America.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 61.



and New Jersey were non-Dutch. The reluctance of the Church to abandon its exclusive use of the Dutch language and ways conversely caused many of its young people, those born in a predominately English-speaking environment, to seek out more Americanized churches.

By the beginning of its second century in America, the Dutch Reformed Church had not only been firmly rooted, but a new spirit moved the Church. From 1701-37 the number of congregations increased by thirty-six, an increase of almost 100 percent. From now on the only threat to its existence would come from internal disputes, unless one considers the ecumenical movement a threat to denominationalism.

Revivalism, education and ordination were the crux of the problems faced. Prior to the Revolutionary War, much of the history of these problems could be traced through the life and activities of the Rev. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) and his sons. Frelinghuysen's evangelistic preaching in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey in the 1720s foreshadowed the Great Awakening which rekindled a new interest in religion in many of the American colonies.<sup>24</sup> He shook up the more conservative ministers with his attack on the complacency and dry formalism of the Church and his questioning of their own converted status. He found no difficulty in preaching in Presbyterian pulpits or in evidencing a brotherly spirit toward evangelists of other denominations.

Wherever he travelled he saw the immense need for more ministers. He was disturbed by the cumbersome process of asking the Classis of Amsterdam to seek out pastors willing to emigrate or the even slower process of sending ministerial candidates from America

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<sup>24</sup>McNeill, op. cit., p. 344.

to the Netherlands for education and ordination. He sought a means by which the American branch of the Dutch Reformed Church could educate and ordain its own ministers. A possible solution was a Coetus, a sub-classical ecclesiastical assembly or, if need be, an independent American Classis. Such thinking also made a Reformed Church college in the colonies a necessity. History has vindicated his ideas and eventually they all came to pass.

In 1738 a conference of ministers and elders petitioned the Classis of Amsterdam for permission to form a Coetus. Though delayed for nine years, such permission was finally received, but it had little authority and lacked that one most desired prerogative, the right to examine and ordain candidates to the ministry.<sup>25</sup> Later, after two of his brothers had died while returning from two years of study and ordination in the Netherlands, the Rev. Theodore Frelinghuysen of Albany, son of the revivalist, led a campaign to create an American Classis with sufficient authority to make such voyages unnecessary.

In 1753 the Coetus adopted a draft of such a proposed Classis. Domine Johannes Ritzema, of the New York Collegiate Church and the secretary of the Coetus, now led a small minority of other ministers into the formation of an opposition group called the Conferentie. This small group of conservative Calvinists who opposed the revivalistic faction wanted to abandon the Coetus and renew the old ties with the Classis of Amsterdam; they realized the importance of a learned ministry but opposed a Dutch Reformed college in the colonies and warned the

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<sup>25</sup>During these nine years the Synods of North and South Holland tried unsuccessfully to unite all Presbyterian, German and Dutch Reformed churches in America. Only after the Synod of South Holland granted a Coetus to the German Reformed Churches of Pennsylvania, which it was supervising, did the Dutch secure their Coetus.

Classis that "American-made ministers would bring about a total separation of the church from Holland. . . ."26

The majority group, the Coetus, which met again in May, 1755, assumed the powers of a Classis and authorized the Rev. T. Frelinghuysen to solicit funds abroad for a denominational college. During the next sixteen years a controversy raged between these two groups which divided congregations and families and led to acts civil and physical which disgraced religion. The Coetus group proceeded to ordain ministers as it saw fit and in 1766 obtained a charter for Queen's College in New Jersey.<sup>27</sup> The Classis of Amsterdam suggested the groups compromise and support the establishment of a Professorship of Divinity in conjunction with Princeton College, but both parties objected.<sup>28</sup>

To add to the turmoil, the Rev. Archibald Laidlie delivered the first sermon in the English language ever preached in a Dutch Reformed Church on April 15, 1764, in New York City.<sup>29</sup> This measure

<sup>26</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 109. At that very same time they were warning of American-made ministers, the Collegiate Church of New York City had a petition before the New York Assembly to create a Dutch Professorship of Divinity in the proposed King's College so that the youth of the Dutch churches would not have to reside several years abroad. This petition proved unsuccessful.

<sup>27</sup>Demarest, op. cit., p. 73. This charter from Gov. William Franklin had several serious defects and a new charter was secured in 1770 with the object of providing a well trained ministry for the Dutch churches.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 76. Demarest noted even the Classis of Amsterdam was weary and grieved by the American controversy and was quite willing to grant them the right to manage their own affairs as soon as they could come to an agreement and insure the perpetuation of an educated ministry.

<sup>29</sup>Alexander Gunn, Memoirs of the Rev. John H. Livingston (New York: Rutgers Press, 1829), p. 103. The young people educated and living in an English speaking environment frequently had such imperfect

adopted to help maintain the interest and allegiance of the younger Americanized element in the church, caused the filing of a lawsuit by those diehards who not only loved the sound of the Dutch language but apparently felt the truth was not as easily elucidated in any other language. This civil suit failed and with increasing rapidity, especially in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, English replaced the Dutch language for the main worship services. By the 1830s the transition had been made but in 1764 this seemed to indicate that the Collegiate Church consistory had adopted a relatively neutral attitude toward the contending factions.

The final reunion of these parties awaited the conversion and ordination of the Rev. John H. Livingston (1746-1825). Livingston, a Yale graduate, abandoned his law studies to pursue a call to the ministry. Initially undecided whether to enter the Dutch Reformed, the Episcopalian, or the Presbyterian ministry, he chose the church of his parents as the one most in need of his services. He left in 1766 for his training in the Netherlands determined to find a way to heal the breach in the Church in America. He received willing co-operation from the Synod of North Holland and the Classis of Amsterdam in producing a plan of union and independence. Both his own correspondence and that of these ecclesiastical bodies revealed conditions in America were favorable for a settlement. "The members of the Coetus of course would not object, and those of the Conferentie were disposed

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knowledge of the Dutch language as to make most sermons meaningless. The Rev. Gunn, who wrote these memoirs at the behest of the General Synod, discusses in more detail the English language controversy ( pp. 99-109 & 131-55). He concluded that the English language should have been introduced 50 years earlier "if the future prosperity of the church had been properly consulted." Dr. Livingston felt it should have commenced 100 years before.



to listen to anything that came from Holland."<sup>30</sup>

In 1771, his studies completed at the University of Utrecht, Livingston was duly ordained and proceeded to New York City as pastor of the newly built Fulton Street Church. Soon his consistory sent out invitations to all the Church's congregations for a convention in New York City in October. This meeting delegated to a Committee of Twelve the preparation of a plan of union. With the selection of Dr. Livingston as one of the four neutral members, the committee also inherited a prepared plan. This Plan proposed the organization of a system of American church judicatories, though correspondence would continue with the Church in Holland which could also act as a court of last appeal on doctrinal differences. The Plan further proposed both the establishment of a Professorship of Divinity and the founding of schools. With the twenty-five year old Dr. Livingston presiding, the convention accepted the Plan subject to the approval of the Classis of Amsterdam. The requested approval arrived in January, 1772, and before the end of the year most of the congregations had approved the Plan. Henceforth peace and a presbyterial form of government descended upon the Dutch Reformed Churches in America. This accomplishment and his later contributions to education and missions caused later generations to acknowledge John Henry Livingston as the "Father of the Reformed Church."

The success of an independent church to these education-conscious people rested upon the Church's ability to supply a well educated and trained ministry in adequate numbers to permit its perpetua-

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<sup>30</sup>Demarest, op. cit., p. 76.

tion and expansion.<sup>31</sup> The heart of the Plan of Union was the agreement to provide both schools and a Professorate of Divinity. In 1770 an agreement had been reached to locate Queen's College (Rutgers) at New Brunswick, New Jersey, and instruction commenced shortly thereafter. The conditions of its founding and the unsettled times left it a weak, struggling institution. Its future, much in doubt before 1810, improved when the college instituted a Theological Department under Dr. J. H. Livingston who also became the president of the college. This combination of the Professorship of Divinity and the college did not occur earlier because of the partisan feeling of the former Conferentie and Coetus adherents.

The Revolutionary War, which complicated the beginning of the denominational college, destroyed or damaged over half the Dutch Reformed Church's buildings and postponed initiation of professorial instruction in theology.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Livingston had been suggested for this position in 1775 by the Classis of Amsterdam, in lieu of a requested Dutch theologian. Nine years later he was finally elected Professor of Theology by the same Synod which appointed Dr. Hermanus Meyer as Instructor of Sacred Languages.<sup>33</sup> The earlier history of the Professorate is one of inadequate support and multi-locations. In 1812 a new constitution was

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<sup>31</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 126. The need was obvious for there were about 100 congregations and <sup>34</sup>ministers at the time of this reunion.

<sup>32</sup>The war was fought mainly in the areas where the Church was located. The British were not too disposed to respect the property of a church which considered the revolution a "JUST AND NECESSARY WAR." Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>33</sup>Proceedings of the Reverend General Meeting of Ministers and Elders of the Dutch Reformed Churches in the States of New York and New Jersey, 1784, as published in The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America (Vol. I

adopted; soon the faculty was enlarged and a sincere effort to endow the seminary was undertaken. Fortunately, New Brunswick Seminary has never had to depend solely on Rutgers (Queens) College to provide her with ministerial candidates. Until about 1840 Union College, a non-denominational college which had grown out of Domine Dirck Romeyn's Schenectady Academy, had contributed as many students as had Rutgers.

Like the nation, the Church had been partially prepared for separation. The Revolutionary War cut communications with the Netherlands and "with the success of civil liberty (1783) came to all denominations ecclesiastical autonomy with all that is involved therein . . . ."<sup>34</sup> As an indication of their ecclesiastical autonomy, the vague titles for their judicatories were dropped. The "General Body" became the "Synod" and the five "Particular Bodies" became the five "Classes." In 1788 a committee was appointed to draw up a constitution for the Church in the English language. This meant a review and translation of all the creeds, standards and articles of government in the light of the American environment. There were few changes made in the standards or creeds, but seventy-three "Explanatory Articles" were drawn up mainly by Dr. Livingston to explain their application to the Church on this side of the Atlantic. With the Church increasing in size and with great opportunities for future growth, the organizational structure was enlarged.

Consistories, Classes, Particular Synods and a General Synod governed the Church within the provisions of this new constitution. As the Church grew, full time officers were employed to supervise its mission, education, publication, welfare and retirement concerns.

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[1771-1812] New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church, 1859). The latter hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.P.D.C., [year].

<sup>34</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 132.

The Church had evidenced a firm trend toward Americanization in every aspect except its name. The charters received from the English Crown beginning in 1695 referred to the church as either the Low Dutch Reformed Church or the Low Dutch Reformed Protestant Church. The 1771-72 Convention called the highest church court the General Assembly of the Low Dutch Reformed Church in the Provinces of New York and New Jersey. Following the Revolutionary War the "General Assembly" became the "Most Reverend Synod" and the word "Provinces" yielded to the word "States." At the time of the 1792 constitution this had changed to the General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America. The 1819 New York legislature incorporated the Church as the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. A running debate ensued until the word "Dutch" was dropped from the Church name in 1867. Some claimed these previous names had kept the Church from attempting to reach others than the Dutch and those already of the Reformed faith in New York and New Jersey. An article of May 23, 1840, in the Christian Intelligencer (p. 178) revealed not only the depth of feeling this topic engendered but also revealed the tenacious, schismatic, suspicious conservatism of many Dutchmen. The writer claimed he would just as soon see the ministers and congregations who opposed the name Dutch in the Church title withdraw from the Church. He felt this would be but a preliminary step to further change which would dismember the Church anyway.

Such separations were not unknown in the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. In 1822 the Rev. Dr. Solomon Froeligh and four suspended ministers with portions of their consistories and congregations had seceded and formed "The True Reformed Dutch Church in the United



States of America." The Rev. Froeligh had been called in 1786 by the Church of Hackensack and Schraalenburgh which were legally joined as a single corporation but with each retaining its own consistory. These churches had been split and feuding since 1748; factions had developed over support for favorite ministers, the Coetus and the Revolutionary War. The Rev. Froeligh brought a temporary peace but lost control of the situation and through indiscretion was about to be disciplined by the Church when he seceded. An "attempt was made to vindicate the secession on doctrinal grounds and looseness of discipline."<sup>35</sup> They charged the Church had failed to support strongly a strict interpretation of the Five Points of Calvinism and was wide open to error. This secession never prospered because it continued to be schismatic and because it was too much the product of one man's efforts.

During these early formative years, all was not dispute and schism for the need for co-operation and brotherhood was also recognized. A large degree of local ecumenicity prevailed within the Church by 1850. Baptised members received from other denominations never had the validity of their baptism questioned. Likewise, educated ministers quite easily stepped across denominational lines despite the varied requirements for licensing and ordination. The Dutch Reformed were also in the forefront of a movement which opened her Communion observances to Christians of other churches.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 479. Jacob Brinkerhoff, The History of the True Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America (New York: E. B. Tripp, 1873), pp. 30-31. Brinkerhoff, who attended the organizational meeting of this church, claimed Froeligh seceded because while he had been a Lector and Professor of Religion at Hackensack since 1792, Dr. Livingston had been chosen over him as Professor at the New Brunswick Seminary in 1810. The Presidency of Queens College went with this appointment which he greatly desired.

Friendly relations existed with most churches of the Reformed family. The establishment of Presbyterian churches had been unopposed during the Dutch colonial period and the German Reformed in Pennsylvania had had their first minister ordained by his Dutch brethren. Neither the Dutch nor the German churches had been enthusiastic about the suggestion made by their supervising Synods in Holland (1743) that they unite with the Presbyterians into one body. Yet the respected Dr. Livingston also hoped that within his lifetime "some genius equal to the task would arise, to draw a plan for uniting all the Reformed churches in America into one national church."<sup>36</sup> This he failed to witness but in 1784 attempts were begun to promote fraternal correspondence between the Presbyterians, the Associate Reformed and the Dutch Reformed.

Articles of Correspondence were signed in 1785, a revision proposed in 1800 and new articles signed with the Presbyterian Church in 1822. Initially this resulted directly in a few friendly visits, an exchange of church Minutes and some comity agreements. These churches, more accurately individuals and congregations of these churches in and around New York City, co-operated in founding the New York Missionary Society (1796) and the following year a similar grouping in upstate New York founded the Northern Missionary Society. The efforts of these voluntary missionary societies centered primarily on the American Indian. To enlarge the scope of their operations these churches approved in 1817 a constitution for the United Foreign

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<sup>36</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 287.

Missionary Society.<sup>37</sup> In 1821 this society absorbed the New York Missionary Society.

A tract published by this society reputedly led Dr. John Scudder, a medical doctor in New York City, to exchange his practice there for the life of a medical missionary. Dr. Scudder, unable to go to India under the auspices of the Reformed Church, left in 1819 under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.<sup>38</sup> The Dutch Church, short on ministers and money, and with numerous opportunities in the established areas, that same year abandoned a promising beginning in Canada which the Rev. Robert McDowell of the Classis of Albany had cultivated for twenty years. In 1826 an amalgamation of the United Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners took place. The Church was finally aroused to the duty and challenge of foreign missions but felt too inexperienced to attempt it alone. From 1832-57 it sent out missionaries in co-operation with the American Board. There were numerous other interdenominational agencies which the Dutch Reformed Church urged its congregations to support during the early years of the nineteenth century. Besides the

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<sup>37</sup>Dr. Livingston acted as vice-president of the New York Missionary Society which also received the participation of the Baptists' churches of the area. He also acted as vice-president of the United Foreign Missionary Society. This ardent supporter of missions stimulated an interest in domestic and foreign missions not only among the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church, but also among its aspiring young ministers. In 1811 he helped found the Berean Society (Society of Inquiry) at New Brunswick Seminary "to diffuse among ourselves a zeal for the missionary cause." Mrs. Wm. I. Chamberlain, "The Church in Foreign Lands," Tercentenary Studies 1928: Reformed Church in America: a Record of Beginnings, compiled by Tercentenary Committee on Research and Publication. (New York: Reformed Church in America, 1928), p. 495.

<sup>38</sup>Later when the Dutch Reformed Church began its Arcot Mission in India three of Dr. Scudder's sons soon arrived on the field and there are descendants to this day laboring in India.

above organizations, The American Bible Society, The American Tract Society, The American Colonization Society (Liberia), The American Seaman's Friend Society, The American Sunday School Union, and The American Temperance Union all were supported with funds and personnel. The American Bible Society still receives support from and makes an annual report to the General Synod.

Union opportunities also continued to materialize. In 1816 an approach was made to the Associate Reformed Church. This culminated in 1820 in the development of a plan to bring union under the name of the Reformed Protestant Church in North America. Under this Plan "the standards of the two churches were adopted and individual congregations were allowed their own customs and usages."<sup>39</sup> This demanded very little sacrifice of the Dutch Reformed Church. The General Synod accepted the Plan and its Classes, by the constitutional two-thirds majority, also accepted the Plan, but the Associate Reformed had failed to vote its approval. In 1838 and 1840 the Associate Reformed Synods now joined with the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the Convention of Reformed Churches and invited the Dutch Reformed to discuss a "close union."<sup>40</sup> Although this invitation was declined, closer ties with the Presbyterian family remained a possibility for the Dutch. The Church in 1839 had approved the standards and catechism subscribed to by the Presbyterian churches.<sup>41</sup> One more Pan-Presbyterian attempt for closer

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<sup>39</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>40</sup>Christian Intelligencer, June 13, 1840, p. 186. This report on the General Synod meeting notes that the Committee on Correspondence desired instead to restore correspondence with the Presbyterian Church which had been broken off in 1838.

<sup>41</sup>Minutes, R.P.D.C., 1839, p. 261. This occurred when the Church included the Westminster Catechism and Confession as suitable



union occurred when the Presbyterian General Assembly proposed a conference in 1847 to include the Associate Reformed, the Associate Presbyterian, the Reformed Presbyterian and the Dutch and German Reformed churches. The resulting Convention of Representatives of Presbyterian Denominations resolved to co-operate in correspondence, in ministerial exchange, in missions, and in further conventions. The General Synod of 1849 was given this report but further action was never recorded.

Union efforts did not end here. All during the nineteenth century, and even prior to that, a peculiar attraction existed for its sister church, the German Reformed Church. What constituted a sister Reformed Church during this period? Dr. J. W. Nevin, a professor at the German Reformed's Mercersburg Theological Seminary, in 1840 said the name "Reformed" referred to a collection of churches in various countries, under a variety of constitutions and evidencing other differences, which had "rejected Rome without following Luther."<sup>42</sup> In America differences developed despite the common shepherding of these two churches by the Synods of Holland and the common problems each faced.

The most serious problem was a shortage of ministers and the handicap of a foreign language. The Dutch Church made offers in 1762, 1770, 1818 and 1819 either to found joint seminaries or to permit the German Reformed to share her educational facilities. The older sister had passed her language crisis before the German Reformed Church faced

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for use in the Union Sunday School program.

<sup>42</sup>Christian Intelligencer, December 19, 1840, p. 85. There is no mention of Calvin but the less precise Heidelberg Catechism is offered as a worthy authoritative standard for all the Reformed Churches.

up to this problem. The announced intention to use the English language in the belatedly founded German theological seminary caused a temporary split in her church from 1822-37.<sup>43</sup>

The Dutch Reformed General Synod of 1794 announced its intentions to seek friendly correspondence "and prosecute it to a union with the German Reformed Church of Pennsylvania."<sup>44</sup> Transportation difficulties and the distances involved conspired at first to limit correspondence to friendly letters and an exchange of General Synod Minutes, but after 1827 a rather regular exchange of fraternal delegates occurred. This correspondence continued uninterrupted until 1853, but its influence was limited. The Dutch delegate to the German Reformed Synod of 1840 acknowledged his ignorance of the importance of the German Reformed denomination before attending their Synod and felt "many of our members and ministers are in a similar state . . . ."<sup>45</sup>

The Dutch Church suggested a union in 1820 but the German Reformed continued to be more interested in a union with the German Lutherans. After these Lutheran talks collapsed in 1837, the interest of scattered Classes in union with the Dutch Reformed brethren became evident. Offsetting any tendency toward hasty action, the Eastern

<sup>43</sup>John B. Frantz, "The Return to Tradition: an Analysis of the New Measure Movement in the German Reformed Church," Pennsylvania History - Quarterly, XXXI (July, 1964), 314. Prof. Frantz contends the new period of revivalism which swept many American churches during the first half of the 19th century was fed by confident Americans who refused to acknowledge doctrines which did not permit them to help determine their own salvation. Revivalism also lent an impetus to the language transition in the German Church and attacked its normal emphasis on tradition. J. Nevin's article in 1843, "The Anxious Bench: a Tract for the Times" attacking revivalism was a turning point in this controversy. This is an early stage in the development of the Marcersburg Theology.

<sup>44</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1794, p. 258.

<sup>45</sup>Christian Intelligencer, November 21, 1840, p. 70.

Synod issued a statement in 1840 which evidenced an attitude so like that frequently associated with the Dutch Reformed Church.

Let the idea be forever silenced that the interests of religion require the German Reformed Church in this country to merge itself in other denominations, or to lay aside its distinctive character as something unique. For . . . upon the alternative of her existence or non-existence, there would hang most fearful odds to the Christianity of America.<sup>46</sup>

Despite this proud, confident statement, by 1842 the Rev. Joseph F. Berg as a delegate from the German Church proposed discussions for a closer union.<sup>47</sup> The Dutch General Synod immediately accepted this suggestion and both churches appointed committees. These committees scheduled a Committee of Conference which met at Philadelphia on March 28, 1843 and drew up a plan of co-operation. Neither church was ready for organic union at this time and accordingly the Plan called for the formation of a thirty-six member advisory Triennial Convention, two-thirds of whose members were to be from the German Synods and one-third from the Dutch General Synod. It suggested that the congregations of the two churches beyond the Ohio River which were too weak to support a minister should join together and affiliate with either church. The Dutch Reformed agreed to seek to divert some of its seminary graduates into the German Reformed Church which had a desperate ministerial shortage.<sup>48</sup> The first

<sup>46</sup>H. M. J. Klein, The History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster, Pa.: Eastern Synod, 1943), p. 188.

<sup>47</sup>Donald H. Yoder, "Church Union Efforts of the Reformed Church in the United States to 1934" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), p. 52, claimed the 1841 centenary celebration of the German Reformed recalled its American origin and its close relations with the Dutch Church during the colonial period and helped prepare the way for Berg's suggestion.

<sup>48</sup>"Plan of a closer connexion between the Reformed Protestant Dutch and German Reformed Churches, adopted by the Synods of the said Churches respectively," Minutes R.P.D.C., 1843, p. 180. The German

Triennial Convention, if approved, was to meet in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on the second Thursday of August, 1844.

The 1843 Dutch General Synod passed the plan down to its Classes which approved it eight to five, though this was not a majority of the twenty-two Classes. The General Synod of 1844 took three days to approve the plan and then did so only after a motion for postponement failed.<sup>49</sup> Almost immediately the plan came under scrutiny in the Dutch paper because the advantages of this union seemed to lie so predominantly with the German Church.<sup>50</sup> In a fashion reminiscent of the colonial shepherding of this church, the Dutch Reformed were again being asked to provide ministers and money. The German Reformed Church in one century had grown to more than twice the size of the Dutch Church. The much larger influx of German immigrants seemed to promise an even greater disparity in size, if ministers could be procured. Such speculation did not in itself mean abandonment or failure for the Triennial Convention plan. The Dutch Committee on Correspondence had noted

although we descend from a more cautious and calculating race than theirs, yet we trust they will find that if we are apt to be slow, we are sure, and once linked to them in the race toward perfection our strife will be to outdo them in brotherly kindness and charity.<sup>51</sup>

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Reformed had become a decentralized church because of the distance and transportation difficulties. Most of the power to govern was in the hands of independent regional Synods which normally convened together triennially. Both the Eastern Synod and the Ohio Synods were participants in this agreement with the Dutch Reformed.

<sup>49</sup>"General Synod," Christian Intelligencer, June 15, 1844, p. 190. Article Two on voting occasioned most of the debate.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1844, p. 206.

<sup>51</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1844, p. 310.

The meeting at Harrisburg, August 8-9, 1844 gave no indication of the trouble soon to develop. Ten delegates represented the Dutch Reformed while the German Synods had fifteen. A committee appointed to introduce new suggestions for action proposed five. The first three again showed a tendency to seek union by way of the seminaries. They provided for the close co-operation of the seminaries whose graduates could accept calls in either church. The Dutch also pledged assistance for the German domestic mission field. With a one thousand dollar grant its General Synod in 1845 took the first step in fulfilling this pledge. Only the suggested use of the same didactic theological text-books failed to win the approval of the denominational bodies.<sup>52</sup>

Real progress toward union seemed possible but the two men who were to stir the disruptive fires of controversy had both been present at Harrisburg. John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886), a former Presbyterian, an emphazizer of tradition and the current one man faculty at Mercersburg Theological Seminary, was a delegate. Philip Schaff (1819-1893), completing his journey from his native Germany to Mercersburg to join Dr. Nevin, was an observer. In fact, the inaugural speech of Dr. Schaff late in October 1844 entitled "The Principles of Protestantism" initiated a "hue and cry" both within and without the German Reformed Church.<sup>53</sup> This address emphasized

<sup>52</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1845, pp. 426-30, contains these proposals including the selection of Reading, Pennsylvania as the location of the next meeting.

<sup>53</sup>Yoder, op. cit., p. 56, feels Dr. Nevin's sermon on "Catholic Unity" at Harrisburg "was one of the earliest fruits of the developing 'Mercersburg Theology'." That Dr. Nevin had ideas similar to Schaff's is not denied but he did not have to defend publicly the views expressed in that sermon.



his belief in the historical organic development of the Protestant church out of what was good in the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation. For Protestants this provided a new line of succession back to the Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament Church. Even more alarming at that time was his idea that this development would continue until Protestants and Catholics finally united again. This speech, made by a recent emigrant in the aftermath of the Kensington riots in Philadelphia and during the era of Know-Nothingism, was ill-timed politically and unacceptable to much of American Protestantism theologically.

Dr. Joseph Berg of the German Church first attacked Schaff in the summer of 1845. By August the Dutch organ, The Christian Intelligencer, joined the attack followed by the Lutheran Observer and much of the rest of the Protestant press. The Philadelphia Classis made a six count indictment of his expressed views before the Eastern Synod at York in October. After four days of investigation, a large favorable vote showed the charges had not been substantiated.<sup>54</sup> His triumphant enlargement the next spring of these views in book form, along with Nevin's The Mystical Presence, completed the basis upon which the Mercersburg Theology evolved. This theology, with its high church emphasis, shows Nevin and Schaff's

emphasis on the visible, objective Church, their placing the Church over the Bible in authority and between the believer and Christ, their objectifying of sacramental

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<sup>54</sup>James I. Good, History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Board of Publication of Reformed Church in America, 1911), p. 227. Professor Good devotes six chapters to the discussion of the Mercersburg Theology controversy and tries to prevent his Calvinistic background from prejudicing this coverage. He notes Nevin was not a Romanist but at points his influence was Romanizing. Ibid., p. 314.

grace, their veneration for Catholic liturgical forms and their admission that the Catholic Church is a "true Church."<sup>55</sup>

The Committee on Correspondence of the Dutch Church was sorely vexed. After working so hard and apparently successfully for closer relations with the German Reformed Church, it had now received an overture from the Classis of Bergen to abrogate the new ties with that body. The delegates to the York Synod meeting had duly reported back the struggle which had ensued and still continued. The Committee claimed a proper interest in points raised by the debate and the publications of the Mercersburg professors because of "the great influence which, from the terms of correspondence between us, each Church may exert upon the other . . . ."<sup>56</sup> It appointed a special committee to discuss the situation with the German Church. The latter church felt a matter concerning doctrine should more appropriately be dealt with at the next Triennial Convention at Reading in 1847. This decision did not spare Dr. Schaff from having to defend himself before the 1846 German Synod, this time for asserting a view similar to that of Purgatory. Once again Dr. Schaff escaped a reprimand but only because he apparently had not yet taught this view at Mercersburg and professed no intention of doing so.<sup>57</sup>

The Dutch Synod met in June, 1847 and considered a summation presented by the Committee on Correspondence of the Triennial Convention relationship with the German Church. The report noted that there

<sup>55</sup>Yoder, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>56</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1846, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 242. This is the "Middle State" controversy.

had been only perfect tranquility in the relations of the two churches prior to the Plan of Union. Yet shortly after embarking upon a plan, whose ultimate design must be complete amalgamation, diversity of opinion on some important points was revealed. This had not been resolved nor had any of the objectives been achieved for which the Convention had been formed. "Our union is not closer, neither have plans for usefulness been set on foot; there are none in prospect, none in progress."<sup>58</sup> The proposal adopted called for dissolution of the Triennial Convention agreement unless the 1847 Convention fully removed all doubts and questions from the minds of the Dutch delegates. An alternative relationship also involving the German Reformed arose in the Presbyterian General Assembly's invitation to a Pan-Presbyterian conference on Christian Union.

The German Reformed historian James I. Good stated, "The most important event of 1847 was the abrogation of the Triennial Convention because of the Mercersburg theology."<sup>59</sup> The meeting took place at Reading, Pennsylvania, August 11-13. Nothing happened to resolve the difficulties the Dutch felt existed and by the third session they notified the Convention that they were unanimous in favor of its dissolution. The Germans were reluctant but in the debate that followed the "Rev. Dr. Taylor brought matters to a crisis by reading from Nevin's book on the Heidelberg Catechism of 1847, where he declared there was no doctrinal unity between the German and the Dutch

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<sup>58</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1847, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 259. Dr. Schaff always considered his controversy was with the dominant Puritanism and Methodism of that period. Ibid., p. 227.

Reformed."<sup>60</sup> Finally, Dr. Berg proposed a resolution for dissolution and with the vote of the Rev. Leinbach and the nine Dutch delegates it carried. This occurred despite a last minute effort by the President, Dr. Wolfe, to declare the vote void for lack of unanimity. The Germans scheduled the next meeting for Chambersburg but the Convention was doomed. The June 1848 gathering of the Dutch Church confirmed the action of its delegates and a fledgling union effort had failed.

The union effort failed because of the withdrawal of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church despite the pleadings of the German brethren. It had not existed long enough to justify the predictions that this type of union must lead to organic union or that the problems of any part must infect the whole. The action was premature in that it did not wait for the outcome of the disquieting debate within the sister church. Failure resulted also because of the differing degrees of Americanization within the two churches. The German churches were still in the midst of a lengthy language transition which complicated both denominational understanding and the assistance the Dutch Church could render the German domestic fields. This, coupled with concern over being a perpetual minority in the union, led to frustration and a foreboding sense of failure.

Regardless of the fairness and accuracy of branding the evolving Mercersburg Theology as a Romanizing influence, it remains the official reason for the rupture.<sup>61</sup> It continued to be the major

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>61</sup>McNeill, op. cit., p. 368, claims the Mercersburg Theology was a modernization and enrichment of American Calvinism, though he sees inclinations toward Lutheranism in the stress on Christology and liturgical worship. Cf. Harmelink, "Church Unity and Church Union (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1964), pp. 53-55.

source of controversy in the German Reformed Church. By 1851 severe criticism caused the Mercersburg Seminary professors to offer their resignations. Both the trustees of the Seminary and the Eastern Synod of 1851 expressed confidence in their orthodoxy. Though the Synod later claimed this was not an endorsement of all their views, this was the impression gained by the Dutch fraternal correspondents. The General Synod of 1851 accepted the interpretation placed on this action by their delegates and reduced the size of their delegation for the next year as a sign of protest. Relations further deteriorated and in 1853 after another review of the Mercersburg Theology it suspended Correspondence between the two churches with the following resolution:

That this Synod do hereby express, in the most decided and unequivocal manner, their protest against all those sentiments of a Romanizing nature and tendency which are technically known as the "Mercersburg Theology," as being essential departures from the faith, as calculated to lead yet farther astray from the old landmarks of truth and to undermine the great principles of the Reformation from Popery.<sup>62</sup>

The same conviction had caused Dr. Joseph Berg and several other German Reformed pastors to leave their church as early as 1851. The same reason was cited by the German Classis of North Carolina when it declared its independence in 1853.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile two hundred years of religious toleration and the Enlightenment had led to controversy and schism within the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Since the toleration of the Remonstrants in 1625, the Canons of Dort "never seem to have been regarded as having quite the same authority in Holland as the [Belgic] Confession and the

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<sup>62</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1853, p. 319.

<sup>63</sup>Klein, op. cit., p. 226.



[Heidelberg] Catechism."<sup>64</sup> The increasing liberty of thought undoubtedly lessened the evangelical ardor of a portion of the Dutch clergy. This, however, did not prevent John Livingston and others sent over by the Reformed Church in America from returning home with an acceptable orthodox training.

The French Revolution brought a change in the relationship of the Church and State in the Netherlands. Conquered by the French, whose republican government had enthroned "reason" as its atheistic religion, the national church was disestablished in 1796. The theological faculty of the universities was absorbed in the philosophy faculty from which dogmatics were excluded. Next, the country yielded to a Napoleonic regime but the Church was still adrift. In 1812 the political fortunes of the Bonapartes began to wane and on November 13, 1813, William Frederik of Orange returned from England and was enthroned as King William I.

William had new ideas of the position of a State Church in its relationship to the government. On January 7, 1816 a new law reorganized the Church and made its main officials appointees of the king. The old reformed name "Gereformeerde Kerk" yielded to that of the reorganized Church, the "Hervormde Kerk."<sup>65</sup> This became a fact accomplished but a controversy arose over the introduction of a slightly

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<sup>64</sup>James H. Mackay, Religious Thoughts in Holland During the Nineteenth Century (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 36.

<sup>65</sup>The Gereformeerde Kerk organization had been seriously disrupted by 1816 and some new plan of reorganization was essential. Netherlands born Professor James Eelman, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, interviewed September 9, 1965, felt the condition of the church was so hopeless that William's reorganization saved the original church. He based his belief in part on J. Th. De Visser, Kerk en Stat (Groningen, The Netherlands: n.n., [ca. 1927]), III, 229-30.

modified ordination vow. In the past, candidates accepted the standards of the Church because (quia) they were in harmony with the Scriptures; in 1816 they only pledged to accept them in so far as (quatenus) they harmonized. This permitted liberals and later modernists to enter the Church and made doctrinal discipline almost impossible. This made for some very uncomfortable situations for the Government allocated the number of State Churches and ministers to a community upon the basis of population. In towns with multi-churches the ministers did not have a specific church to serve but circulated according to a published Domine list.

In the 1820s the poets Willem Bilderdyk and Issak da Costa led a reaction to eighteenth century liberalism which restored some hope to those struggling to preserve the purity of the Church's doctrine.<sup>66</sup> Shortly after this Robert Haldane of Switzerland began a new evangelical awakening which reached some of the educated people of Holland. Eventually even the common people were stirred by a new religious revival. By 1834 those who considered themselves the defenders of the old Reformed faith petitioned the General Synod for an authoritative interpretation of the 1816 ordination formula. The action of the General Synod did not satisfy this group.

Soon afterwards Hendrik De Cock made a vicious rebuttal to an attack on his negative attitude toward national church policy and the use of unsound hymns in worship services. For this rebuttal and his known attitude he was suspended from his ministerial office. De Cock publicly announced his act of separation from the Hervormde Kerk on October 13, 1834. Up to this time they had debated their predicament

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<sup>66</sup>McNeill, op. cit., p. 369.

as had the earlier Puritans and the Separatists. Soon five other supporting ministers were disciplined and seceded with their congregations from the State Church.<sup>67</sup>

A country whose government had countenanced religious toleration for over two centuries now would not permit freedom of worship to this small number of Seceders whose numbers by 1850 did not exceed five thousand. The government employed old articles of the Napoleonic code to prevent these people from meeting for worship.<sup>68</sup> The result included fines, intimidation and the quartering of troops among these people. Their economic circumstances deteriorated along with this persecution, and with the failure of the potato crop in 1845, many were now willing to embark on a new life elsewhere. It is out of these early Seceders and the following flow of Dutch immigration that "practically all the churches of the Reformed Church in America west of the Alleghenies find their origin . . . ."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup>These ministers were H. P. Scholte, A. Brummelkamp, S. Van Velzen, G. F. Gezelle Meerburg and C. D. L. Bahler. A. C. Van Raalte, a brother-in-law of Brummelkamp and Van Velzen, was rejected for ordination in the State Church because of his views and was ordained instead by a Synod of fellow Separatists on March 2, 1836. See Albert Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 35.

<sup>68</sup>Jacob Van der Meulen, Hollanders: The Development of Their Objectives in Europe and America (n.p., First Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan, n.d.), p. 19, quotes Article 291 prohibiting association of more than 20 persons without government consent and Article 294 which requires consent of municipal authorities to use one's house as a meeting place.

<sup>69</sup>Eenigenburg, op. cit., p. 78.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SUCCESSFUL UNION AND ITS AFTERMATH

1850-1886

Dutch immigration was not a new phenomenon either to the country or to the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church. The Church and past immigrants had become Americanized to the extent that only for sentimental reasons did the Church still retain the designation "Dutch" in its title. Proud of its heritage, it considered itself a child of the pre-1816 Gereformeerde Kerk rather than the Hervormde Kerk and sympathized with the plight of the persecuted Seceders (Afgescheidene).

On the eve of an immigration that began a new and decisive chapter in the history of the Reformed Church in America, the Church continued to experience a new growth while its educational institutions had almost solved the perennial minister shortage, the bane of American Protestantism. The nation round about it had doubled in population in the last twenty years and confidently looked forward to increased size and importance. Growth, mobility and optimism challenged the Calvinistic ideas established by the Puritan and Dutch forefathers. Unitarianism had risen out of a revolt against the traditionalism of the Congregational Church in New England. Those who could not go this far tended to replace Calvin's wrathful God with a

benevolent God of love. Pressures existed on the churches to overlook the necessity of creeds, doctrines and an educated clergy for the sake of material progress. These were pressures the Reformed Church had been resisting.

The ten thousand Dutch immigrants who flowed into the country in the next quarter century were an insignificant number among the millions of arrivals. However, they had significance for the numerically small Dutch Reformed Church. They came mainly from the Seceder group in the Netherlands. These ministers and members had initially desired only a provisional separation until the State Church resumed a faithfulness to its standards.<sup>1</sup> By 1839, first the Rev. H. P. Scholte and then the others felt compelled to apply for legal status as a new sect. The following year William II ascended the throne and their official persecution ended but not the discrimination against them in employment nor the ridicule of their children in the schools. The great majority were from the lower economic classes and suffered greatly from the poverty, overpopulation and taxation policies current in Holland. They suffered also from the quarrels and divisions which rent their little denomination. Letters from previous emigrants and the movement of large numbers of Germans and even some Dutch neighbors to America helped cause them to view this as a possible solution to their problems.

The ministers and other leaders selected the United States

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<sup>1</sup>William O. Van Eyck, The Union of 1850: a Collection of Papers, ed. by the Permanent Committee on History and Research of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 2.



rather than a Dutch colony because it permitted religious and educational freedom.<sup>2</sup> To the majority of their followers, while this was important, it may have been of secondary importance to the improvement of their dire economic position. To help prepare the way a letter was written dated May 25, 1846 and addressed "To the Believers in the United States of North America," which explained why they were emigrating and what they hoped to do in America.<sup>3</sup> This letter found its way to the Rev. I. N. Wyckoff, a Dutch Reformed pastor of Albany, New York, who had a translation published in the Christian Intelligencer, the official paper of his church. The letter had not been addressed to any particular denomination because, after their trials and tribulations in the Netherlands, they were not yet seeking out new ecclesiastical bonds.

Contact had been established inadvertently with the Dutch Church in America, though the latter had been following the Secession in the pages of the Christian Intelligencer for several years. The Rev. Dr. Thomas De Witt of New York City, while in Holland during the summer of 1846, had visited with Domine Scholte and learned first-hand of these plans. He noted in a report to the General Synod that "the tide of emigration has commenced, and soon, two important colonies

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<sup>2</sup>Albert Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), pp. 46-47. Brummelkamp and Van Raalte expressed this in their 1846 pamphlet, Emigration: Why We Favor Emigration to North America and Not to Java. Dr. Hyma feels there were practical reasons also, i.e., distances involved and an established trend of emigration to America.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

from this class will be founded in the West."<sup>4</sup> While the majority of the Seceders may not have previously known about this small Reformed Church in America, their educated leaders knew of its existence. Learned Dutchmen remembered the recent presidency of Martin Van Buren, a member of this Church, and some knew of the visits of the Revs. Abeel (1834) and Ferris (1842) who had sought permission to do missionary work in the Dutch East Indies. There also had been an exchange of General Synod Minutes with the State Church.

In the Netherlands, emigrant societies had been formed to give organization and direction to the proposed settlements as well as to assist destitute Seceders. Now societies were formed in Albany and New York City to aid and protect the expected Holland emigrants. On November 18, 1846, Dr. Thomas De Witt and an elder welcomed the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte (1811-76) and fifty-three followers to New York. This advance guard of several thousand had been sent to find a suitable location and buy adequate land for the colony. Though originally planning to settle beyond the Mississippi River or possibly in Wisconsin, Van Raalte had wintered in Detroit. Before spring he had inspected, purchased and moved to a site which became Holland, Michigan.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America for 1847 (New York: by the Church, 1847), p. 134. Hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.P.D.C., [year]. This is the first reference in the Minutes to what is later called the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

<sup>5</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, trans. Joint Committee of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1943), p. 17, dates the beginning of this settlement as February 9, 1847 when six men and one woman reached the site.

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Fortunately, enroute to America he had acquired the ability to converse in English which enabled him to negotiate the necessary land transactions and profit from the proffered assistance both in New York and Michigan. The first of the organized congregations arrived in June when the Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen and about four hundred followers founded nearby Zeeland, Michigan. Then followed the Rev. M. A. Ypma at Vriesland and pastorless congregations at Drenthe and Graafschap. The following year the Rev. S. Bolk's congregation founded Overisel. By 1849, about three thousand inhabitants populated the colony. Others, because of the difficult times and lack of sufficient employment opportunities, settled instead in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and other Western Michigan cities.

While they provided the initial nucleus for the next union effort of the Eastern based Dutch Church, other extension areas had also become known. By 1844, Dutch settlers had come to Wisconsin, the initial goal of the Van Raalte group. Some of the earliest Dutch emigrants went to Milwaukee, although in 1845 Alto became the first Dutch settlement in the state. In 1847 church buildings were constructed in both places and the following year a church was organized at Cedar Grove.<sup>6</sup> About the same time, Dutch congregations were formed also in the areas of Chicago, Illinois and Pella, Iowa.

Another of the original Seceder ministers, the Rev. H. P. Scholte, led the 788 followers who had preceded him to St. Louis

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<sup>6</sup>Elton M. Eenigenburg, A Brief History of the Reformed Church in America (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Douma Publications, [1958]), p. 84. Domine Zonnie's church at Cedar Grove soon united with the Presbyterian Church. This occurred much more frequently with the English speaking churches planted by the Board of Domestic Missions than with the immigrant Dutch churches.

over the prairies to found Pella in August of 1847. These people arrived via New Orleans and, having settled beyond the organized limits of the Reformed Church, had not at once come in contact with the old Dutch Church. Domine Scholte, on the other hand, had landed on the East Coast and spent much of the winter near Albany, where he reputedly declined the offer of an area church.<sup>7</sup> Scholte, whose independent mind had caused his suspension by the Seceder Church in the Netherlands in 1840, continued his independent ways in Iowa and refused to unite with any church. His settlement prospered, being a way station for many on the way to the gold fields of California. His church prospered for a time, but it was too much a one-man movement. In 1856 a group broke away and affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church, and upon his death in 1868 his church further divided.

The immigration that finally established the Western branch of the Church was not confined solely to Dutch immigrants. The German immigrants to America greatly outnumbered the Dutch and a segment of this movement, mostly East Friesians, soon joined the Dutch Reformed Church. This was not an entirely new situation for there had been German sister congregations in New York and Eastern Pennsylvania for over a century. A Dutch Reformed pastor, the Rev. Dr. John C. Guldin, had charge of the German Evangelical Mission in New York City for over twenty years. He had also been the General Missionary to all German immigrants at this port from 1842-52. This minister, spurred on partially by distaste for the Mercersburg Theology, helped the Dutch

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<sup>7</sup>Leonora R. Scholte, A Stranger in a Strange Land: the Story of a Dutch Settlement in Iowa (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), p. 36.



Board of Domestic Missions open up a new field of endeavor among these incoming German Reformed Brethren.<sup>8</sup> An early group established itself at German Valley, Illinois in 1847, but the real influx began after the 1848 Revolution in Europe. Additional settlements were made in Iowa in 1854 and then in South Dakota and Minnesota. Fifty-one more German congregations had joined the Church by 1870.<sup>9</sup> Further gains were realized from those of both nationalities who never proceeded any farther than New York and New Jersey.

The Reformed Church had been hesitant about the opportunities and responsibilities in its own backyard. Earlier it had forfeited a beginning in Canada, and neglected an opportunity to expand into Kentucky because they seemed beyond the pale of an Eastern Church. The Board of Domestic Missions, created in 1832, had organized two feeble Classes in the West within whose boundaries there suddenly appeared thousands of kinsmen. The opportunity was unique, but it required men and money, and for a year the Church hesitated again.

Frontier life proved demanding and left little time for cultural activities, but the necessities for the Dutch of church and school had to be satisfied. Inadequate food and shelter produced sickness and death and even some question as to the success of this venture in the woods of Western Michigan. The churches not only

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<sup>8</sup>Edward T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America (4th ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), pp. 501-02.

<sup>9</sup>George Schnucker, "The German Element in the R.C.A.," Tercentenary Studies 1928: Reformed Church in America: a Record in Beginnings, compiled by the Tercentenary Committee on Research and Publication (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1928), p. 419.

tended to the immigrants' spiritual needs and physical well being but even solved local judicial disputes. This helped to create a cultural apartness which additional waves of immigrants tended to perpetuate.

To strengthen the spiritual life of the colony, representatives of the churches gathered at Zeeland on April 23, 1848 and created a self-styled Classis.<sup>10</sup> These people represented the spectrum of Seceder beliefs held in the Netherlands. The first meeting produced debates and decisions on the nonretirement of Consistory members and the non-observance of definite Christian festival days, sources of later trouble. Indicative of the nature of these Dutchmen and their past associations, the Clerk, Domine C. Van Der Meulen, thought it noteworthy to record that "Psalm 133:3 was sung, in the conviction that we have had a meeting in peace and love, to edification."<sup>11</sup>

The Board of Domestic Missions in 1848 called on the Reformed Church to beware lest the active measures of other denominations swallow up their kinsmen. As a result, the newly organized Holland Classis received an invitation to attend the annual Synodical meetings of the Dutch Reformed Church. The 1848 fall meeting of the Classis acknowledged receipt of this first official recognition by the Church in the East but felt compelled to decline the invitation. They based their refusal on the difficulties connected with a new settlement, but the expense involved was a major consideration. The

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<sup>10</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, p. 18. The church at Drenthe was not represented at this first meeting.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

Board of Domestic Missions in November commissioned the Rev. I. N. Wyckoff to visit these Michigan settlements and seek to establish some official relationship with them. The Board had selected a known friend of the colonists and one fluent in the use of the Dutch language. The Rev. Wyckoff proposed to carry out his assignment after first completing a prior commitment to represent his Church at the Presbyterian General Assembly in Pittsburgh in May of 1849. His appearance before this group revealed an ecumenical concern. On this occasion, convinced that these Presbyterians were brothers "good and true," he expressed the hope "that this fraternal correspondence and union may continue until all the divisions of the 'sacramental host' shall be marshalled into one great army of truth and love."<sup>12</sup>

After his arrival in Western Michigan on June 1st, he toured the various villages of the colony. On June 4 the ministers, many of the elders and interested members met in a day-long meeting at the call of the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte. Besides the information each party received about the other, the importance of the conference was summed up in the three questions asked by the Eastern delegate and the answers of the Western brethren. Wyckoff reportedly asked:

I. What confession and form of government is held by the churches emigrating from the Netherlands, and settling in Michigan, and what is the state of their development?

II. Do these churches desire to unite themselves with the Dutch Reformed Churches in the United States of North America?

III. Are those churches in want?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1850, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>Taken from a report made on this conference and its request

The answer to the last question was visually obvious. Some of the brethren, while thankful for past individual assistance, were a bit disappointed it had taken the Church two years to discover their plight. In a report made to the Board of Domestic Missions the answers to the first two questions were summarized as follows:

On comparison of doctrine, a perfect agreement with our standards was found. In the order of their churches, they believe each church and consistory should direct and manage its own concerns; and they incline to the idea that an appellate jurisdiction of superior judicatories is not so scriptural as a kind and fraternal conference and advice. Each of their churches appoints as many elders as seems desirable, and they are always in office until they are dismissed as guilty and unworthy, or removed by death. As the result, they agreed, with those explanations, to join our Synod . . . but as a separate Classis . . . .

Because of later events, the most quoted part of this report is Domine Wyckoff's assurance at their hesitancy over a new ecclesiastical connection

that it was the farthestest from our thoughts to bring them in bondage to men, or to exercise ecclesiastical tyranny over them. And I stated they would be most perfectly free, at any time they found an ecclesiastical connection opposed to their religious prosperity and enjoyment, to bid us a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again.<sup>14</sup>

Wyckoff may have exceeded the immediate intention of the Board in proceeding to terms for a union. Regardless of the logic behind this assurance, he exceeded an individual delegate's authority if this was meant to grant a conditional nature to an organic union.

Van Raalte's report on the proposed union, dated July 10, 1849

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for union signed by twenty elders and four ministers, dated July 10, 1849 as quoted in Van Eyck, op. cit., pp. 72-74.

<sup>14</sup>Reports of the Board of Domestic Missions (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1849-59), p. 14.

and signed by twenty-four ministers and elders, was sent to the churches. It claimed the colonists had always considered themselves part of the Dutch Reformed Church and desired to unite with the American branch and send their delegates to its ecclesiastical assemblies. At its April, 1850 meeting, Classis commissioned Dr. Van Raalte to attend the Particular Synod of Albany "to give and to ask all necessary information which may facilitate the desired union."<sup>15</sup> They felt prompted to do this because such oneness was the declared will of Christ and their common confessional standards and principles of church government made such a step seem natural. They frankly admitted that the help and encouragement they had received since arriving in America awakened "in us a definite desire to make manifest our fellowship and to ask for the hand of brotherly fellowship in return."<sup>16</sup>

The forethought of the Rev. Isaac Wyckoff and the generosity of the members of the Particular Synod of Albany made it financially possible for Commissioner Van Raalte to appear at their meeting in May of 1850 at Schenectady, New York.<sup>17</sup> All agreed after an exchange of information that union was desirable but a long debate broke out on the proper procedure. The debate centered on the propriety of the Western Michigan churches constituting themselves as a Classis and

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<sup>15</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, p. 37. The letter bestowing this Commission was signed by the Rev. S. Bolks, the president of Classis for that particular meeting.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 38. Also in his report to the October 30, 1850 meeting of Classis, Van Raalte noted that he had called upon the old Dutch Church to assume the responsibility for the gathering into churches of other Dutch immigrants and the need for help in the education of their youth.

asking for admission as the same when the Dutch Reformed Church required Classes to be organized by a Particular Synod with the permission of the General Synod. Some members would have preferred admitting them as individuals or separate churches but in the end the General Synod was asked to decide the matter.

On the recommendation of a special committee of the General Synod, the latter body on June 5, 1850, simply passed a resolution "that the Classis of Holland be received under the care of the General Synod and be joined to the Particular Synod of Albany."<sup>18</sup> The Northern Presbyterian Church had made organic additions in this manner before but the method differed greatly from previous approaches to both the Associate Reformed and the German Reformed Churches.

Union had been accomplished because of the common origin of the two church groups and their common standards of faith. The initiative of Drs. Wyckoff and De Witt played a distinct part. The Reformed Church in America being almost thirty-five times as numerous as the Holland Classis had no fear of these kinsmen for whom they felt a moral responsibility to shepherd. A second resolution of the 1850 General Synod had

Resolved, That the religious conditions and necessities of the Holland emigrants, wherever they are dispersed throughout our country, be commended to the particular attention of the Board of Domestic Missions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1850, p. 69. No mention was made of any conditional nature to this union. Neither Van Raalte nor Wyckoff protested that such an omission was an oversight of a previous agreement, nor did the following sessions of the Classis of Holland.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



The 1854 General Assembly further instructed the Board to make additional plantings in every prominent place so as to provide a continuous line of churches westward from the Atlantic. That the Board took this assignment seriously is evidenced by the founding of approximately 150 churches during the next decade. It was ably assisted by the new Classis of Holland which initially took oversight of all new immigrant churches from Buffalo to Pella, Iowa before additional Classes were formed in the West. Yet the gap between East and West was never successfully closed.

The leadership of the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte is the primary reason why the immigrant Dutchmen made an ecclesiastical connection in 1850.<sup>20</sup> His superior education and the respect due one's Domine solidified his position as the founder, sustainer, and leader of the Holland colony. To Dr. Van Raalte this was not an absorption of his people but a reunion with the true Church he had never deliberately abandoned. He alone knew the extent of the assistance already received from the Dutch Reformed Church and the need for continued assistance and fellowship. Already the Rev. Pieter Zonne at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin had joined his congregation to the Presbyterian

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. Hyma, op. cit., pp. 201-02 and 210-11. He not only records Van Raalte's positive influence in Michigan for union but in the areas of Wisconsin and Illinois as well. Hyma feels he was so influential he could even check his opponents in all these areas. "Not until after his death did the Christian Reform Church, which was founded by his adversaries[1857], gain much headway."

Most Christian Reformed writers stress the influence of Van Raalte in the colony and in promoting the union but conclude that these negotiations, which extended a little longer than a year, were hasty and bound to cause dissatisfaction. Cf. John Krommings, The Christian Reformed Church: a Study in Orthodoxy (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 29.

Church and, without an acceptable church home, a further scattering of the immigrant flock seemed probable. Not all the diverse elements in the colony were completely happy with this association but the vast majority of the Holland Classis approved. Their letter to the 1851 General Synod, which they did not attend, spoke of their "desire to form continually closer and more cordial union."<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this union, so widely discussed in the Michigan settlement and so important to the future growth and development of the Reformed Church. During the next fifty years, the Western branch grew in numbers until it constituted one-third of the Reformed Church in America, primarily as a result of the action pioneered by Dr. Van Raalte.<sup>22</sup> However, numbers alone do not illustrate the importance of this union, for the Dutch dedication to an educated ministry also proved influential. With the encouragement of the Rev. John Garretson, Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions, an English academy began operation in Holland in October, 1851. Van Raalte donated five acres of land to insure the school's establishment which soon came under the care of the General Synod.<sup>23</sup> In 1863 a collegiate department was added which in 1866 emerged as Hope College. Its main purpose being to

<sup>21</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1851, pp. 147-48.

<sup>22</sup>Corwin, op. cit., p. 141. His son, Charles E. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1922 (5th ed.; New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work of the Reformed Church in America, 1922), p. 89, provided the statistic that 50,000 immigrant members joined the Church from 1850-1920.

<sup>23</sup>Dr. Van Raalte is reported to have said, "This is my anchor of Hope for this people in the future." E. T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1902, 4th ed., p. 148.

train Western men for ministry in the West, it was only natural that theological studies were offered at its inception. After a struggling and intermittent existence, the theological department separated in 1885 and was renamed the Western Theological Seminary. Additional academies and parochial schools also had their origin in the succeeding years but the further development of the public high schools eventually crowded most of them out of existence.<sup>24</sup>

In 1915 a Baptist institution, which had been founded in Pella, Iowa in 1853 with the Rev. Scholte's assistance, was deeded to the Reformed Church in America and chartered as the Central University of Iowa. At the time these educational institutions were rising in the West, Rutgers College was slowly slipping from the control and domination of the Reformed Church. The State of New Jersey organized a college of agriculture and mechanical arts in 1865 to qualify for the benefits of the Morrill Act. Originating as a department within Rutgers College, it continued to grow in size and influence until 1917, when Rutgers was named a State university. This wrought a change, for before the end of the century under consideration, the majority of ministers in the denomination were no longer alumni of Rutgers and Union College but of these two Western colleges.

The Rev. John Garretson, on the same visit to the West in 1850 that produced a plan for the Holland Academy, had continued on to Iowa. His visit and questions were reminiscent of Dr. Wyckoff's

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<sup>24</sup>Parochial schools seemed necessary in the 1850s to the people in the Classis of Holland because they felt the district school only imparted a "colorless Protestantism." Annual Report of the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1853, p. 73.

visit to the Holland settlement the preceding year.<sup>25</sup> In Iowa he encountered a warm reception but the leadership dominated by H. P. Scholte was not ready to resume any wider ecclesiastical relations at this time. In 1856, after a visit by Van Raalte and others from the Holland settlement, a segment broke away from Scholte's leadership and organized a Reformed Church. Initially this church became a member of the Classis of Holland.

In New York City the Church had already begun the relocation of its churches as its members retreated uptown in the face of the settlement by large numbers of immigrants in various downtown areas.<sup>26</sup> The ambitious plans of the Board of Domestic Missions did not always receive the necessary financial support requested from all the Eastern churches. The Board appealed to the General Synod to urge the large number of congregations that never contributed to the Board's support to live up to their responsibility in this matter. Appeals were also made in the Christian Intelligencer. Dr. G. W. Bethune reminded them that if the Dutch Church was worth maintaining in New York or Buffalo, it was also worth expanding.<sup>27</sup> In the same medium some Westerners wanted more Eastern pastors and laymen to visit

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<sup>25</sup>Annual Report of the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1851, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>Christian Intelligencer, February 10, 1853, p. 126. The article did not object to churches moving uptown with the wealthy but deplored the failure of the Dutch Reformed and Presbyterians to leave some churches below Canal Street to minister to the new incoming people.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1855, p. 177. Dr. W. R. Gordon, trying to motivate the churches around New York, said he would pledge 3% of his salary to the support of Domestic Missions.

their new churches to encourage brotherly love and a feeling of living unity.

Dissatisfaction on the part of a few of the Hollanders over this union produced a schismatic by-product which the Eastern branch of the Church did not for many years properly assess. The Rev. Van Raalte's action in 1850 was consistent with his previous attitude evidenced in the Netherlands. The presence of Van Velzen's followers in the colony "made a dispute on the matter of union almost inevitable."<sup>28</sup> Shortly after the completion of the union, an immigrant, Gysbert Haan, who had spent almost two years in the East, arrived at Vriesland, Michigan. He had come out of the Van Velzen faction in the Netherlands. This group had opposed the continued intercourse and co-operation between the Brummelkamp-Van Raalte faction and the orthodox elements remaining within the Established Church in the Netherlands. Mr. Haan was a dissatisfied and restless spirit. Arriving after the hardships of the first few years, his tales of laxity in the Eastern branch of the Church and his questioning of the wisdom of the union of 1850 may have caused these earlier pioneers to reject his bid to be an elder in their church. His appearance before the Holland Classis in 1851 to protest the non-retirement of elders and the non-observance of Christian festival days brought a rebuke for his dangerous manner of making accusations.<sup>29</sup> He soon moved to Grand Rapids, a well-established American city, where

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<sup>28</sup>Kromminga, op. cit., p. 31. Dr. Kromminga is currently the President of Calvin Theological Seminary at Grand Rapids, Michigan, the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church.

<sup>29</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, pp. 58-61.

he became an elder. Yet his agitation continued, now against the conduct of affairs within the Grand Rapids Church, the Classis of Holland and the entire Dutch Reformed denomination.

Elder Haan soon found sympathetic listeners, despite the proven inaccuracy of some of his charges and the fact that others in the Holland settlements had likewise resided among the Eastern brethren. These latter colonists, the delegates to General Synod, and the committee sent to visit the New Brunswick Theological Seminary raised no question about the Dutch Reformed Church's orthodoxy. Many Eastern churches had long used numerous hymns as well as psalms in their worship services and evidenced some irregularity in the preaching of the catechism, but neither practice was forced on the new Westerners. Many of the immigrants could not understand or appreciate the aspects of religious toleration permitted by the separation of church and State in America. Later arrivals could not appreciate the need felt by the early struggling pioneers for the Union of 1850. Haan acted as a catalyst, a spokesman who turned a spirit of distrust and complaint into a movement of dissent and ultimately secession.<sup>30</sup>

After two previous minor splits and secessions by parts of the congregations at Graafschap (South Holland faction) and Drenthe,

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. George Stob, "Gysbert Haan and the Secession of 1857," Reformed Journal, March, 1964, p. 14. This article by the pastor of the Wheaton (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church was an answer to a three part article, "Gysbert Haan: a Study in Alienation," by a Reformed Church layman, Dr. R. John Hager. This series from November, 1963 through January, 1964 was meant to lay a foundation for the reunion of the two churches by destroying the credibility of Haan, the major cause of separation, both as an expert in Reformed Church theology and practice, and as an ambitious but unstable individual.



Haan began a small but significant secession movement in 1856. On April second, he had appeared before the Holland Classis accused of having spread from hearsay evidence a rumor among the churches that the General Synod had agreed to an open communion among all denominations.<sup>31</sup> He also had caused discord in his local church by disputing the re-election and orthodoxy of a fellow elder. After a hearing, Classis declared the elder duly elected and a classical examination satisfied everyone but Haan as to his orthodoxy. Producing a thirty year old brochure of charges by the seceded True Reformed Dutch Church, he felt he could not vouch for the orthodoxy of the denomination either. On April 14, 1856, he wrote a letter of resignation from the Grand Rapids Consistory and left the Church.<sup>32</sup>

The seed thus planted and continuously watered bore additional fruit when a year later four letters of secession greeted the spring Classis meeting of 1857.<sup>33</sup> The Rev. K. Van Den Bosch, the pastor at Noordeloos, having arrived in the country eight months earlier,

<sup>31</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, pp. 187 & 204-07. Also recorded was the fact that Haan had previously written to the Netherlands complaining about church government as exercised by the Classis.

<sup>32</sup>R. J. Hager, "Gysbert Haan: a Study in Alienation," Reformed Journal, December, 1963, p. 12. Hager noted that after four years Haan apparently reversed his position regarding the life elderships which resulted in another quarrel and a temporary return to the Reformed Church from 1861-69. Ibid., November, 1963, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>The Rev. Henry Beets in his book The Christian Reformed Church: Its Roots, History, Schools and Mission Work (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1946), p. 60, has stated the Rev. Kleyn and the larger part of his congregation had withdrawn on January 25, 1857. Haan's persistence and arguments had temporarily won him over. "Haan with all his faults was one of our men of the hour. There would, humanly speaking, have been no Return in 1857 to the standpoint left in 1849, without Gysbert Haan." Ibid., p. 70.

renounced his fellowship with the Zeeland Consistory with vague charges of church-destroying heresy. The Rev. H. G. Kleyn of Grand Rapids, originally the first pastor at Graafschap in 1849, stressed the need to separate from all Protestant denominations, implying there could be but one true church. The consistory at Polkton (Coopersville) withdrew because "your denomination fraternizes with those who are in opposition to the doctrine of our fathers." Only the consistory at Graafschap, speaking for 113 of the Church's 130 members, listed any specific reasons for their secession. They stated as their reasons:

(1) The collection of 800 hymns, introduced contrary to the church order.

(2) Inviting (men of) all religious views to the Lord's Supper, excepting Roman Catholics.

(3) Neglecting to preach the Catechism regularly, (to hold) catechetical classes, and (to do) house visitation.

(4) That no religious books are circulated without the consent of other denominations . . .

(5) And what grieves our hearts most in all of this is that there are members who regard our secession in the Netherlands as not strictly necessary, or (think that) it was untimely.

(6) In the report of Rev. Wyckoff he gives us liberty to walk in this ecclesiastical path.<sup>34</sup>

The Classis merely accepted the letters as notifications and took no

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<sup>34</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, p. 243. The four letters are recorded on pp. 240-43. Haan offered additional reasons in 1871 (i.e. Free Masonry) when he finally published his justification for the 1856-57 secessions. Stem Van Een Belasterden (Grand Rapids: C. Nienhardt, 1871); see Van Eyck, op. cit., p. 107.

action to censure or excommunicate those who separated, though it denied their right to secede for the reasons given. In the discussion that ensued, the charges were labelled as unsubstantiated accusations and were refuted, except numbers three and six, which were ignored. The fifth reason to which they attached so much importance disregarded the fact that the Classis of Holland regularly took collections to support the Seceder's Seminary at Kempen in the Netherlands and paid the fare of destitute Seceders to emigrate to the United States. The supposed faults of an isolated few were attributed to the whole.

Ever since April, 1857 these American seceders, who organized themselves into a Classis on October 7, 1857 and took the name of the Holland Reformed Church in 1859, have found it necessary to justify their separate existence. Over the years the main justification for this church, now known as the Christian Reformed Church in America, has centered on the necessity of preserving a pure and orthodox Calvinistic faith. In the early days of the secession, this contention was rebuffed, for the Rev. Kleyn returned to the Classis of Holland in a matter of weeks acknowledging his error and acknowledging the Dutch Reformed Church as a doctrinally sound church.<sup>35</sup> The seceder's first appeal of April 29, 1857 and succeeding appeals to the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands for recognition and affiliation were not well received until the early 1880s.<sup>36</sup> Even the independent and elderly Seceder minister, H. P. Scholte in Pella,

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<sup>35</sup>Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, pp. 252-54; Van Eyck, op. cit., pp. 136-37, illustrates Kleyn's attempt by letter and speech to influence other seceders to return.

<sup>36</sup>Beets, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

Iowa, had only the harshest words for their action. Some are of the belief that the real cause for the separation lay with the leadership of Dr. Van Raalte and the steps he took to encourage the Americanization of the area.<sup>37</sup> Once the colony had been securely established, opposition to the policies of this leader broke into the open. The diverse and schismatic nature of these poorly educated settlers proved to be a contributing factor in this separation. A bitterness and a competitiveness developed between these separated Dutch immigrants which colored all their reflections and judgments on the justification for this separation. Ninety years later, Dr. Albertus Pieters described the current Christian Reformed Church in America as a splendid Christian denomination, but could say nothing good about the original secession in 1857. He judged

it was compounded of the dense ignorance of the Graafschap Consistory, the unchristian malice of K. Van den Bosch, the unexcusable weakness of G. Klein, the stubborn will of Gijsbert Haan, and the base slanders circulated about Dr. A. C. Van Raalte.<sup>38</sup>

The Eastern section of the Reformed Church at first paid no attention to the loss of a few more Western churches in the year 1857. The Holland Classis had failed to make a report to the newly

<sup>37</sup>Siebe C. Nettinga, "The Church in Michigan," Tercentenary Studies, p. 458.

A collateral source of criticism was Van Raalte's endorsement of a book, The Call to the Unconverted, by the English Puritan, Richard Baxter. While preponderantly sound doctrinally, it contained a few passages on the doctrine of election which the ministers of the Classis chose not to defend; cf. Kromminga, op. cit., p. 32, or Classis Holland: Minutes 1848-1858, pp. 144 & 181. Hyma, op. cit., p. 233, felt this opposition to Van Raalte was enlarged to include an antagonism of the whole of the Dutch Reformed Church.

<sup>38</sup>Church Herald, July 11, 1947, pp. 5 & 14. Dr. Pieters, raised in Holland, Michigan, was a former Reformed Church missionary

created Particular Synod of Chicago or to the Board of Domestic Missions. Only a reflective study of the General Synod's statistical tables of the Classis of Holland for 1858 and 1859 evidence the disturbance which agitated this Classis. The Reformed Church historian, E. T. Corwin, in his 1869 edition of A Manual of the Reformed Church in America makes no mention of this beginning of the Christian Reformed Church. His third edition in 1879 acknowledged that some "elements of hyper-Calvinists and reactionary tendencies separated themselves . . ." <sup>39</sup> but he failed to recognize the significance of a movement which had grown from 250 to a little over 3,000 communicants. <sup>40</sup> After 1882 the East finally became aware of this struggling little church, although it still failed to understand its importance as a factor in the molding of the character of the Western branch of the denomination.

The pronounced policy of the Board of Domestic Missions since 1857 had been to foster new churches in the destitute areas of the West instead of supporting feeble congregations in the older church sections of the East. <sup>41</sup> This policy had resulted in an exceptional

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to Japan and an emeritus Professor at Western Theological Seminary.

<sup>39</sup>A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1878 (3rd ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1879), p. 81.

Both the 1889 history of the Church by David Demarest and that of his son William H. S. in 1927 refer to the Christian Reformed Church as originating as a result of a new secession in 1882. See letter from Professor Albertus Pieters, Western Theological Seminary, December 23, 1927 to W. H. S. Demarest, ex-Professor of Ecclesiastical History, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, correcting this misconception (Church Union file, folder entitled "Secession of 1882," N.B.T.S.).

<sup>40</sup>Kromminga, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>41</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1857, pp. 220-21.

amount of growth, particularly prior to 1882. In that year, a smoldering difference of opinion over whether the General Synod should prohibit church members from membership in secret oath-bound societies caused a new secession and ramifications in relations with the Christian Reformed in the Netherlands.

Most Dutch immigrants from Europe viewed such societies as radical, liberal and anti-Christian. As early as 1853, a statement against Free Masonry had been expressed in the Holland Classis. Each year from 1868 to 1870, Holland and Wisconsin Classes sent overtures to the General Synod proclaiming Free Masonry a great and growing evil and asking that the General Synod disapprove it for church members.<sup>42</sup> In 1868 the Overture Committee declared that the General Synod should not even offer an opinion on such an abstract question. This recommendation was sustained by a vote of eighty-nine to nineteen.<sup>43</sup> Renewed overtures the following year caused the creation of a special committee to consider the matter. It reported in 1870 that

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<sup>42</sup>This is not meant to imply that Anti-Masonic opposition was unique with this immigrant people. Baptists also felt membership in secret societies to be inconsistent with church membership. An Anti-Masonic agitation had broken out in 1826 which affected the politics of Western New York and Pennsylvania and spread to other parts of the country. Perhaps the overtures of 1868 were spurred on by a National Christian Convention opposed to Secret Societies which assembled that year at Pittsburgh. Kenneth S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Vol. IV: The Great Century in Europe and the United States of America: A.D. 1800 - A.D. 1914 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 401.

<sup>43</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for 1868 (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America, 1868), p. 463.

Ibid., p. 335. General Synod by a 112-7 vote officially approved a constitutional amendment changing the name of the Church from the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church to the Reformed Church in America. Hereinafter all Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod after 1867 will be referred to as Minutes R.C.A., [year].

the General Synod could not properly act on a question not purely ecclesiastical which might involve consistorial prerogatives of discipline. In an attempt to grant a degree of satisfaction, it mentioned that it believed the "path of prudence and safety lies outside of all oath-bound secret societies in connection with which obligations may be expected which conflict with the liberty of individual Christian conscience."<sup>44</sup>

This did not satisfy the Western branch of the Church which considered the lodge an evil threat but differed on how to deal with this threat. The alternatives were to bar lodge members from church membership or to allow them to remain, patiently trying to convince them of their error. In the East, the question of lodge membership seldom arose. Confessing acceptance of the Church's standards and leading a blameless life was adequate. The Christian Reformed group had already barred lodge members and they "constantly reminded the new immigrants in the Dutch Reformed Church of their failure to gain their point in this respect."<sup>45</sup>

The Classes of Grand River, Holland, Illinois and Wisconsin raised the problem anew before the General Synod of 1880. The editor of the Christian Intelligencer predicted in May that the Free Masonry controversy would cause the most debate and attention at the General Synod. To end the agitation over this question, he hoped that the problem would be met squarely and one final deliverance made on this

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<sup>44</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1870, p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>John Kromminga, "The Christian Reformed Church: a Study in Orthodoxy" (abstract of unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1949), p. 2.



matter.<sup>46</sup> The General Synod met in Brooklyn on June 2-10 and a serious debate on the subject occupied parts of three days. The editor published the complete discussion, convinced it "will be interesting as one of the most memorable discussions in our ecclesiastical history."<sup>47</sup> In their overtures the four Western Classes warned that the continued agitation of the question had caused a critical situation which could lead to division and discord among them and also the loss to the denomination of new emigrants from the Netherlands. They then presented testimonials from Masonic books and persons who had renounced the order and asked for a blanket declaration against Free Masonry. The charges were met by respected members who admitted to being Masons and denied the accuracy of many of the charges or that a conflict of interest arose between their oaths to Christ and His Church and those to the lodge.

Under such circumstances how many concessions could this judicatory be expected to make when these four Classes only represented 8 per cent of the membership of the Church? While they had not been subjected to coercion on this matter, they already debarred lodge members from communion in their churches. This was actually tantamount to setting up a new test for church membership, a practice which the constitution forbade. The Western delegates admitted this was the practice in their local congregations but noted "when we attend our Particular or General Synod we are sometimes obliged to hear the gospel preached and to receive the communion from the hands

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<sup>46</sup>May 20, 1880, pp. 1-2.

<sup>47</sup>Christian Intelligencer, June 17, 1880, p. 12. The entire debate is found on pp. 3, 4 & 12.

of those we would disfellowship. Hence we are necessarily inconsistent and offend our conscience."<sup>48</sup> Some of these delegates had refused to accept communion at this 1880 General Synod session because they thought a serving elder to be a lodge member.

After several unsuccessful attempts to pass amendments, the Committee on Overture's resolutions were adopted. The second resolution summarized the majority viewpoint

that while, on the ex parte evidence of the memorials now before it the Synod cannot properly give its official testimony for or against Free Masonry and other oath-bound secret societies; and while it holds as sacred the indefeasible rights of all its ministers and members to their individual conscientious convictions and liberty of speech and action, subject only to their prior loyalty to Christ and His Church, yet it hereby declares that no communicant member, and no minister of the Reformed Church in America ought to unite with or remain in any society or institution, whether secret or open, whose principles and practices are anti-Christian, or contrary to the faith and practice of the Church to which he belongs.<sup>49</sup>

The General Synod would not make what it considered "a hypothetical decision, leaving it to the individual conscience and the individual church to apply to the individual case."<sup>50</sup> Additional but decreasing numbers of overtures were presented over the next three years.

The 1883 General Synod asked its members for the sake of Christian love and the unity of the Church to refrain from joining the Masonic lodges and similar orders, but this appeal was both too

<sup>48</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1880, p. 534.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>50</sup>Old Colony [F. N. Zabriskie], "The Synod," Christian Intelligencer, June 17, 1880, p. 2. This writer, absent from General Synod for a number of years, was deeply impressed by the Western delegates who no longer sought out the back seats but now freely entered into the Synod's action and discussions.

little and too late. To some in the West, Free Masonry had become a test case of the Church's purity of practice and being. After failing to gain the object of their overtures, some three hundred families containing one thousand members seceded in 1882, most joining the Christian Reformed denomination.<sup>51</sup> To others in both the East and the West, the debate and vote in 1880 had "transferred the question to one of loyalty or schism."<sup>52</sup>

The Holland Christian Reformed Church, mainly because of its strong stand against Free Masonry, now received the open recognition of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands. This recognition helped them gain the adherence of a majority of a new wave of Dutch immigrants who arrived in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In the continuing struggle to win the allegiance of the new immigrants and to win members away from each other, both stressed their Dutch heritage and conservative orthodoxy. The Christian Reformed Church prolonged the retention of the Dutch language and the cultural isolation of its members until their positions could be reinforced by the creation of a parochial school system.<sup>53</sup> In the

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<sup>51</sup>E. T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 4th ed., p. 141. Eight churches including Van Raalte's First Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan were seriously affected. Those who remained made a strong demand for the resumption of theological instruction at their Western institution, Hope College, to be supervised by the Particular Synod of Chicago. This was a matter of economics but it also insured a Western education for Western men. Ibid., p. 207; Minutes R.C.A., 1883, p. 320.

<sup>52</sup>Christian Intelligencer, June 21, 1882, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup>John Kromminga, "The Christian Reformed Church: a Study in Orthodoxy" (abstract of unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1949), p. 4.

ensuing years the Western branch of the Reformed Church in America, while continuing to Americanize, showed some tendencies to align itself with the revivalistic and fundamentalistic movements as a bulwark against liberalism in religion. Thus the outward appearance of Americanization only served to camouflage the fact that within the Church the Eastern and Western sections had failed to achieve the true brotherly oneness envisioned by the Union of 1850. This union and its secessionist aftermath affected the Western branch's attitude toward all future union approaches and consequently the receptivity of the entire denomination.

This proved particularly true in the negotiations with the German Reformed Church. The Holland Classis had united with the Dutch Church in time to participate in the bitterness which disrupted relations in 1853 with the German Synods. They had helped pronounce that church doctrinally unsound as a result of the dominant position gained within it by the supporters of the Mercersburg Theology. Since the continued presence of a Dutch Reformed delegate might have been interpreted as an endorsement of the German Church's views, correspondence was suspended. The German delegates left, feeling their church had been misunderstood because of the slanderous attacks made in the press. They predicted the General Synod's action would consolidate their church.

This prediction did not come true for another ten years. At the outset just the opposite seemed to be happening. In 1855, the German Reformed Classis of North Carolina sent a Commissioner, the Rev. Thorton Butler, to seek admission as a Classis into the Dutch Reformed Church. Their aversion to the Mercersburg Theology had

caused their withdrawal from the German Reformed Church. The precedent of the Union of 1850 was still fresh, but suddenly the General Synod found itself diverted by a lively discussion on slaveholding. The Committee of Correspondence eventually secured the acceptance but not the adoption of a resolution by which the General Synod acknowledged favoring this union if the Classis would testify to its acceptance of the Standards and Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church.<sup>54</sup> The presentation of this resolution at an extra session of the General Synod on October 23-26, 1855 occasioned such sharp debate that the representative of the North Carolina Classis, upon request, withdrew its application for union. The widespread opposition headed by the Rev. Dr. Bethune of Brooklyn and the Rev. Duryee of Schenectady centered on the two contentions that the admission of members who were slaveholders would disrupt the peace of the Church and that slaveholding was a sin. The Rev. Dr. Samuel How of New Brunswick proved to be the main spokesman for admission of this Classis.<sup>55</sup> The debate continued in the Christian Intelligencer into March of 1856. This union movement collapsed when the General Synod of 1856 took no new action on the matter. In 1858, the North Carolina Classis temporarily resumed affiliations with the other German Reformed Synods, only to have the Civil War disrupt relations again.

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<sup>54</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1855, p. 536.

<sup>55</sup>The withdrawal of the papers seeking union had been prompted by a fifty-five to thirty-four vote on October 26 for such action. The best source of the debate and issues is found in the Christian Intelligencer, November 1, 1855, pp. 68-70; see also Minutes R.C.A., 1855, Special Session, p. 14 and Samuel B. How, Slaveholding Not Sinful (New York: J. A. Gray, 1855).

Meanwhile, the war of words in the church papers continued with the Christian Intelligencer providing an organ of expression for Mercersburg opponents within the German Church. Invectives filled the air. Dr. Nevin was referred to as Pope John at Mercersburg, and a reviewer of Phillip Schaff's Church History found evidence of research but called the author a concealed Jesuit. The Dutch Church began an expanded program of evangelism among the immigrant Germans to keep them from dependence on a church contaminated by this Mercersburg Theology. A German hymnbook was compiled in 1854 to assist in this work which the Presbyterians in 1863 adopted for their missions among the Germans also.<sup>56</sup>

The year 1863 marked the beginning of a new phase in the relations of the Dutch and German Reformed Churches. By this time Dr. Nevin had become inactive and Dr. Schaff had left Mercersburg and later accepted a position at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Using the occasion of the Tercentenary Commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism, a standard accepted by both churches, the Dutch now sought to reopen the correspondence they had terminated ten years earlier.

The 1863 Dutch General Synod, feeling the need for closer contact with other kindred bodies, appointed fraternal delegates to the judicatories of both the German Reformed and the New School

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<sup>56</sup>Donald H. Yoder, "Church Union Efforts of the Reformed Church in the United States to 1934" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), pp. 71-72, concluded the German Reformed Church suffered more from this competition among the immigrants than from the withdrawals of dissatisfied individuals or even Classes.

Presbyterians.<sup>57</sup> This mood continued to develop. The Committee on Correspondence in 1864 reported a growing desire among evangelical denominations in the interest of common work "for a more intimate intercourse and even substantial alliance" more fully to demonstrate the "unity and power of the Church of Christ."<sup>58</sup> The General Synod directed the Committee to initiate correspondence with the United Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church and evidenced a willingness to expand such contact to the entire Presbyterian family as soon as possible.

The German Church had responded to these efforts to reopen fraternal relations by appointing a delegate to the 1864 Dutch General Synod meeting at Schenectady. Many of the members of the Synod expressed surprise that this German delegate, the Rev. George B. Russell, spoke such good English. In his address before this body he had predicted "Brethren, when you come to know us better, you will learn to love us more."<sup>59</sup>

What began as a general reapproachment on the part of the Dutch Church assumed a more specific nature in some of the German Reformed Synods. The still somewhat loosely connected German Reformed Synods met triennially in a General Synod. The "Old Reformed" Synod of Ohio overtured the gathering in 1866 to adopt "such measures as will be best calculated to effect a speedy union between these two

<sup>57</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1863, pp. 274-75.

<sup>58</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1864, p. 423.

<sup>59</sup>George B. Russell, Four Score and More (Philadelphia: by the author, 1908), p. 247.



Churches."<sup>60</sup> Though the committee appointed to study this overture evidenced a willingness to begin negotiations with the Dutch, the General Synod postponed the matter of union until its 1869 session. By that time the Ohio Synod had been joined by the Northwestern Synod in seeking favorable action toward such a union. Once again the German General Synod saw fit to postpone action until union could be consummated with the cordial consent of both churches.

We rejoice in the growing friendly relation of these two Protestant bodies, and are ready to co-operate in all proper movements looking to a closer union, but we do not see our way clear at this time to take any more definite action on this subject.<sup>61</sup>

The Ohio Synod, annoyed at the delay and hopeful of securing additional assistance for their work with immigrant Germans, encouraged the establishment of its own official correspondence with the Dutch Church. The Rev. Dr. I. H. Reiter, as their delegate to the 1871 General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, spoke in terms which implied the possibility of a formal union.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, the General Synod appointed a committee to consider union with the Synod of Ohio, the Northwest Synod and the Classis of North Carolina. In its report, the committee parried the request for organic union but noted that the

<sup>60</sup>Minutes of the General Synod of the German Reformed Church for 1866 (Philadelphia: James B. Rogers, 1867), p. 59.

Yoder, op. cit., p. 73. Dr. Yoder felt it was the common pietistic inclinations of the Dutch Reformed and the Ohio Synod that prompted this overture.

<sup>61</sup>Minutes of the General Synod of the German Reformed Church for 1869, p. 85.

<sup>62</sup>Franklin K. Levan, "The Late Union Movement of the Two Reformed Churches," The Mercersburg Review, XXII (April, 1875) 242, claims Dr. Reiter had no authorization either from his Synod or his Church to propose a union.

previous barriers to union with the Classis of North Carolina had disappeared.<sup>63</sup> Delegates were appointed to enter into correspondence with the Classis of North Carolina and also represent the Church before the annual meeting of the Synod of Ohio. On July 5, 1871, the Mercersburg men launched a number of attacks in the Reformed Church Messenger against the "new Dutch Crusade" to steal away German churches.<sup>64</sup>

The Dutch correspondents found a warm desire for union on the part of this southern Classis. Nevertheless, they took no steps in this direction when they discovered the North Carolina Classis was an integral part of the Reformed Church in the United States, the name adopted in 1869 by the increasingly unified German Synods.<sup>65</sup> The Ohio Synod approved the idea of union but perhaps because of the newspaper debate, overtured the now more meaningful German General Synod to bring it about. In all, five ecclesiastical courts overtured this judicatory for action on union, while the corresponding Dutch body at an earlier meeting had received no such evidence of union interest on the part of its Classes. Yet Dr. Philip Peltz, as fraternal delegate, assured the German Reformed brethren that the Reformed Church in America favored a closer union with them. A fifteen member

<sup>63</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1871, pp. 222-23.

<sup>64</sup>James I. Good, History of the Reformed Church in the U.S. in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), pp. 529-32. Here Professor Good traces not only the campaign in the Messenger but also the attempt of the Christian World, the organ of the Ohio Synod, to defend the constitutionality of the actions taken by this Synod, even its advocacy of a Dutch union.

<sup>65</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1872, p. 438. The Classis of North Carolina reputedly said that if her ecclesiastical status changed she anticipated a speedy union with the Reformed Church in America.

committee representing all the Synods of the Church was appointed to confer on such a union.

Lacking an organized foreign mission program of its own, the German Church had sent out its missionaries under the care of the German Evangelical Missionary Society. Several times since terminating its association with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1857, the Dutch Reformed had invited the German Reformed to send out their men under her Board of Foreign Missions. Now in 1872, in conjunction with this union approach, the German General Synod agreed to divide her foreign mission work between the Dutch board and the German Evangelical Missionary Society.<sup>66</sup>

The annual gathering of the Reformed Church in America in 1873 found the Church confronted with offers to discuss closer relations with the Southern Presbyterians and the feasibility of union with the Northern Presbyterians, as well as the Reformed Church in the United States. The Committee on Closer Relations with Other Denominations speculated on just what effect union with each of these three would have on the Dutch Reformed Church. It evaluated the German offer as a cry for help in men and money, while such a union itself would not strengthen the Church except in numbers. Despite this less than enthusiastic feeling, it did secure the appointment of an able committee of fifteen to discuss union with all three of these churches.<sup>67</sup>

After several delays, a Dutch committee of nine headed by Dr.

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<sup>66</sup>Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States for 1872 (Cincinnati: Elm Street Printing Co., 1872), pp. 32, 61-62; cf. Yoder, op. cit., pp. 75-77.

<sup>67</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1873, pp. 670-77.

H. D. Ganse and a German committee of fourteen headed by Dr. E. V. Gerhart met on November 18, 1874 at the Race Street (German) Reformed Church of Philadelphia.<sup>68</sup> A free discussion on the doctrines and practices of the two churches occupied the morning and early afternoon. Shortly the question rose on whether the Heidelberg Catechism, the one common church standard, should be interpreted from a Calvinistic or an Arminian point of view (predestination or free will). Most of the German delegation felt that the catechism authors had not been primarily concerned about this controversy and therefore had made no final decision either way.<sup>69</sup> As a result, a candidate for the German Reformed ministry was never rejected for holding either view, but the Dutch Reformed demanded acceptance of a strictly Calvinistic view. This proved to be much more important than the minor differences over confirmation, festival days' observances, and the mandatory degree of liturgy usage.

Before the resumption of the afternoon session, each committee met to decide whether union was feasible and under what terms. The German delegates felt that since the Dutch had initiated this latest union approach, they should also make the first offer of terms and thus bear "the greater responsibility in furthering or defeating the

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<sup>68</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 612. From the Dutch Church, in addition to the chairman, there was E. T. Corwin who acted as the secretary and the Rev. Drs. Van Zandt, Gordon, Taylor, Peltz, and Van Cleef, and Elders Pryn and Sturgis. The entire Committee on Conference appointed in 1873 is listed in Minutes R.C.A., 1874, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup>Levan, op. cit., p. 246. The Rev. Levan had been a delegate from the Pittsburgh Synod to this meeting and fortunately recorded quite fully the happenings at the conference and his own reactions to them.

movement."<sup>70</sup> They believed their Church desired this union and they personally though not overly enthusiastically felt it could be consummated. The Dutch delegates could reach no consensus of views and asked for a continuation of the discussion. Meanwhile, the Rev. Levan had put together an outline basis for union which had won the approval of his fellow committeemen. With the acquiescence of the Dutch brethren, he presented the following Plan for discussion:

1. Organic union.
2. Heidelberg Catechism, the common standard.
3. The Belgic Confession, the Articles of Dort, of great historical importance to the whole Reformed Church, and of authority next to the Heidelberg Catechism.
4. One General Synod. Powers limited and defined.
5. No existing rights of District Synods or Classes to be interfered with in either body.
6. The status of colleges, theological seminaries, orphan homes, liturgies, orders of worship, hymn books, publications interests to remain unaffected by this union[though the new General Synod could establish additional institutions and practices].
7. Church cultus and customs, including confirmation, to be left free to the congregations of each body as now.  
These things to be fundamentally and absolutely reserved from all legislation by the General Synod.<sup>71</sup>

The Reformed Church in America delegation hardly knew how to tell these brethren that they could not possibly recommend article three to their Church. Finally Professor Van Zandt from New Brunswick reputedly stated he felt the current union sentiment sweeping Protestant Christianity to be a fad which would soon abate.

They had served the Master in their separate organizations, and had made themselves a blessing to men. Why should they not continue in the same course? He could see no good reason: none, especially, that could make union between them imperative.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 241-42.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 251-52.

<sup>72</sup>This summarization of Dr. Van Zandt's views appears in Levan, op. cit., pp. 252-53; cf. Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States for 1875, p. 26.

He noted the Dutch had also heard rumors of divisions in the German Church and they "naturally would rather not be a party to them." Others spoke more directly to the doctrinal issue but it was obvious "the union movement was at an end."<sup>73</sup>

A six man committee appointed to summarize the feelings of the conference for the respective General Synods declared "there were likenesses sufficient to warrant the hope of an ultimate union." The opportunity to get better acquainted had further diminished some supposed difficulties, but those of doctrine remained unresolved. The summary recognized that "the differences in doctrinal views between many parts of the two churches would make organic union unacceptable."<sup>74</sup>

Levan, in trying to outline the chief objections in the minds of both committees, placed the doctrinal difficulties involving the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as number one on each of his lists. Even if the Dutch could be persuaded to accept the inevitable necessity of down-grading these two standards, when "backed by so active and intelligent a people as our Dutch brethren, they would still be an uncomfortable element in the united body."<sup>75</sup> He also felt the Dutch still opposed the Mercersburg Theology "and as this would have been an active factor in the united body, it deemed it judicious to keep clear of it."<sup>76</sup> The Ohio Synod's paper,

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>74</sup>Good, op. cit., pp. 612-13; cf. Minutes R.C.A., 1875, p. 253.

<sup>75</sup>Levan, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

Christian World, acknowledged that the confessions and the Mercersburg Theology caused the failure of this union approach but questioned how active a factor this theology would have been in the united church. It claimed "the only persons who did not regret the failure were the Mercersburg men who would have been largely in the minority if it had happened."<sup>77</sup>

The Reformed Church in America showed little remorse in the 1874-75 period over the failure of its approach to the Reformed Church in the United States. It had been conducting a multi-church approach and not all these other possibilities had collapsed yet. In the background also loomed the intriguing prospects of a Pan-Presbyterian Ecumenical Council.

A knowledge of and an intimate acquaintance with another denomination is a prerequisite for union, but not necessarily a prerequisite for all ecumenical affiliations. Fraternal correspondence which can provide the beginnings of such knowledge and acquaintance had been maintained with the American Presbyterian Church during most of the nineteenth century. The New School-Old School schism of 1837 and the later divisions over slavery had complicated matters of correspondence.<sup>78</sup> It was further complicated by protests registered by the Dutch Church in 1850, 1854, 1866 and 1868 over the acceptance

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<sup>77</sup>Good, op. cit., p. 613; cf. Levan, op. cit., p. 255, who felt union would create such a predominance of the English-speaking element that this would create friction with the increasing numbers of German-speaking brethren.

<sup>78</sup>After the rupture with the German Reformed Church in 1853, for a few years the only correspondence the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church maintained in the United States was with the Old School Presbyterians. Minutes R.P.D.C., 1855, p. 530.

of ministers, members and even entire congregations by various Presbyteries prior to their proper release by the Classes involved. On the other hand, the reuniting of the Southern Presbyterian Old School and New School elements in 1864 and the healing of a similar breach by the Northern Presbyterians in 1869 gave great impetus to a widespread feeling for union.

While seeking an expanded correspondence and evidencing a selective willingness to co-operate with other evangelical bodies, the Reformed Church proved as yet unwilling to talk in terms of organic union. This was evident in 1867 when she declined an invitation from the Reformed Presbyterian Church for a general union conference of churches of the Presbyterian order. The General Synod had responded that it would take no part in movements "which are so evidently tending toward organic union of Presbyterian bodies in this country."<sup>79</sup>

In 1868 the Rev. J. M. Matthews sought the support of the General Synod to create a National Council of evangelical denominations in the United States. This plan pledged the Council to seek a fraternal rather than an organic union for the maintenance of common Christian doctrines and ethics. Though purely advisory, it sought to promote harmonious and combined efforts to spread the Gospel throughout the world.<sup>80</sup> This first meeting was enthusiastically reported to

<sup>79</sup>Minutes R.P.D.C., 1867, p. 195. In 1865 the Reformed Church had appointed a committee to meet with a committee from the Northern Presbyterian Church (Old School) but only for the purpose of promoting the efficiency of the evangelical churches and not to create an anti-Catholic organization as the invitation stated. Minutes R.P.D.C., 1865, pp. 574-75.

<sup>80</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1868, pp. 420-21.



the 1870 General Synod by the Rev. Thomas De Witt. The delegation was continued but the Rev. Matthews, one of its chief promoters, had died in 1870 and the experiment evidently failed to win the support of the other denominations. It shared many points of similarity with the international Evangelical Alliance which had been organized in London in 1846. The Reformed Church had appointed delegates to attend this organizational meeting and was represented again at the 1866 meeting in Amsterdam. In 1870 the General Synod bestowed its blessing on the organization and the purpose of the Evangelical Alliance including an American branch organized in 1867.<sup>81</sup> Its continued existence and widespread efforts exerted an important influence on those seeking closer relations between denominations but who were fearful of organic union.

The now united Northern Presbyterian Church took an important step in 1870 prior to beginning new and wider union talks. It approved the Heidelberg Catechism for use by its congregations. This may have been mainly a reciprocal act, for the Reformed Church in America in 1867 had renewed its endorsement of the Westminster Catechism. The accompanying resolution stated "That this Assembly cordially rejoices at the continued and increasing evidences of agreement and union among those whose symbols maintain in common the faith once delivered to the saints."<sup>82</sup> At its General Assembly

<sup>81</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1870, p. 136. Unlike the short-lived National Council of Evangelical Churches, the ministers and laymen who supported the Evangelical Alliance and attended its Conferences did not officially represent their denominations.

<sup>82</sup>Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1870), p. 120. Hereinafter referred to as Minutes Presbyterian U.S.A., [year].

meeting on May 26, 1873, it appointed a nine man committee to consider the desirability and feasibility of union. Its resolution as forwarded to the Dutch Reformed Church in annual session at New Brunswick on June 4, 1873 was brief and to the point.

Whereas, We have long enjoyed fraternal relations with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America . . . a body holding the same doctrines with ourselves; and,

Whereas, We have reason to believe that an organic relation with said Church would be to the honor of Christ, our one Lord and Head, the extension of His visible kingdom, and to the better establishment of our common Presbyterianism.<sup>83</sup>

Though General Synod created a Committee of Conference to meet with this and other branches of the Presbyterian family, two observations augured ill for the success of the proposed union. The Committee of Correspondence presented its thoughts on the effects of a union with this much larger church. They foresaw the Reformed Church contributing additional wealth and a loyal block of members but losing its name and heritage, and possibly creating a schism in its own ranks. Secondly, the Church considered the reception by the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Third Reformed Church of that city on June 9 an unfriendly act and a violation of the Articles of Correspondence.

The two joint committee meetings of January 15 and May 14, 1874 revealed a desire for a closely working arrangement on comity on the domestic mission fields but also showed that any scheme of union at that time would be premature. It would have to develop from the "deliberate, well-informed, and general choice of the members of the two churches."<sup>84</sup> Their report encompassed the above idea and

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<sup>83</sup>Minutes Presbyterian U.S.A., 1873, p. 547; cf. Minutes R.C.A., 1873, p. 616.

<sup>84</sup>Minutes Presbyterian U.S.A., 1874, p. 65.

called for the continuation of the committees to seek a closer union which would preserve the name and other characteristics of each church. Fraternal delegate Dr. A. G. Vermilye, in an address before the 1874 General Assembly, re-emphasized this point when he concluded his remarks on the subject of union with the statement, "If the term means absorption, Mr. Moderator, it can not be done."<sup>85</sup>

In the hope of forestalling any positive union action at the approaching General Synod, a layman, Dr. James Anderson, wrote and distributed an emotional little pamphlet entitled Church Marriage. In it he invited the restless pro-unionists to leave the Church, for "she is not ready for any such matrimonial annihilation and never will be."<sup>86</sup> Articles in the Christian Intelligencer both before and after the General Synod meeting of June 3-12, 1874 indicated others also felt the need to preserve a separate denominational existence. An article by E. P. Wyckoff interestingly remarked that "in this country there are some good things that are neither Presbyterian nor Anglo-Saxon, and which should hold fast to their individuality, and one of them is the Reformed Church in America."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Christian Intelligencer, June 4, 1874, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> James Anderson, Church Marriage (New York: Press of Rogers and Sherwood, May 1874), p. 4. In 1868, while 112 members of General Synod had approved the Classes' sanctioned name change, Dr. Anderson was one of only seven who opposed dropping the word "Dutch." The last two pages of this pamphlet contain a declaration he claimed had already in July, 1867 been signed by 85 members of the recent General Synod to the effect that the vote in favor of the change in the Church's name should not be construed as a first step toward ending the denomination's separate existence.

<sup>87</sup> "The Question of Union," Christian Intelligencer, July 30, 1874, p. 3.

When the Committee on Conference made its report, the General Synod was still disturbed over the General Assembly's unsatisfactory decision on the Third Reformed Church case. The majority of the Committee called for continued negotiations toward eventual union, but a minority report advocated ending all conferences on union.<sup>88</sup> A strenuous debate broke out in which the major speeches were made by the Chairman H. D. Ganse for the majority's position and the Rev. W. R. Gordon for the opposition.<sup>89</sup> Eventually a compromise amendment was passed by a fifty-eight to fifty-two vote. This ended all conferences with the Northern Presbyterians on union but indicated a willingness to confer on the revision of the Articles of Correspondence to secure better co-operation in areas of similar work.<sup>90</sup> After this action the Northern Presbyterians lost their interest in the union approach. At the next joint committee meeting on March 25, 1875, so few of their committee members attended that nothing could be accomplished. The Reformed Church committee presented a Plan of Co-operation which the Presbyterians, after polling their members by mail, rejected.<sup>91</sup> No real effort was made to call a new meeting in 1875. At their last joint meeting in New York City on April 13,

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<sup>88</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1874, pp. 187-89, records the majority report while the minority report is found on pp. 190-92.

<sup>89</sup>The Christian Intelligencer on July 2, 1874 devoted parts of seven pages to cover twelve of these speeches. An aftermath was a new debate in the paper over the Rev. Ganse's pronouncement that the Board of Domestic Mission's efforts to plant English speaking churches in the West had been a failure despite the great expenditure of money.

<sup>90</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1874, p. 50.

<sup>91</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1875, p. 259.

1876, the Dutch Reformed as per directions would only discuss co-operation while their Presbyterian counterparts felt constrained to discuss only organic union.<sup>92</sup> An impasse had occurred and both committees requested to be discharged when their respective ecclesiastical courts met in 1876. The old tried and tested fraternal correspondence seemed to promise the degree of co-operation sought by the Dutch Church.

Apparently the decisive factor from the standpoint of the Reformed Church in the defeat of this union approach was the feeling that to merge with this larger church meant "to commit ecclesiastical hari-kari."<sup>93</sup> In addition, the continuing, less demanding negotiations with the Southern Presbyterians and the beginning of an international Pan-Presbyterian organization beckoned. Despite the Northern Presbyterian's deep involvement in this latter movement, they had evidenced a patience and a sensitivity to denominational characteristics in negotiations with the smaller Reformed Church. At least this had been the case as long as negotiations had the possibility of ending in union.

Almost singlehanded, the Rev. William Veenschoten continued to work within the Dutch Church to "undo the mistake of 1874" and secure

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<sup>92</sup>According to their instructions, when the committee was continued in 1875, they were authorized to confer on co-operation as well as organic union, but the enthusiasm to continue these negotiations had vanished. They had already proposed organic union with the United Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and were awaiting their replies. Minutes Presbyterian, U.S.A., 1875, p. 480.

<sup>93</sup>P.D.V.C., "Report on Synod's Action," Christian Intelligencer, July 2, 1874, p. 2.

an organic union with the Northern Presbyterians.<sup>94</sup> At one time he sent out letters to one hundred prominent Reformed ministers asking their reasons for continuing the Reformed Church in America as a separate organization. Another time he conducted a poll of twelve Classes in the denomination on a union with the Presbyterian Church. He felt he demolished all the major reasons offered for a separate existence and his later selective poll showed that three-fourths of the churches in these Classes which responded favored union with the Presbyterians.<sup>95</sup> His campaign culminated in 1887 with a proposed eight point plan of union which would have dissolved the Reformed Church within the larger and thoroughly acceptable Presbyterian Church. What "if the Reformed lamb should be eaten by the Presbyterian lion, we will not be lost. Why should we not be content to be part of the brains, body or even the tail of that noble beast?"<sup>96</sup>

By 1870 the Dutch Reformed had developed a two-fold interest in a possible program in the South. One interest centered on the

<sup>94</sup>William Veenschoten, A Plan for Organic Union (n.p., n.n., 1887), p. 8. This is a reprint from the Independent, April 7 & 14, 1887.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 1. An earlier pamphlet in which he expressed his reasons for and assurances about this union was entitled Should the Reformed Church in America Continue a Separate Organization? (Albany: Burdick and Taylor, Printers, 1884). This contained the substance of a paper read before the Hudson River Ministerial Association, Poughkeepsie, New York, March 31, 1884.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 3. He probably gathered encouragement from fraternal delegate E. T. Corwin's letter to the 1886 Presbyterian General Assembly. Corwin wrote of past close relations including federation and union overseas and concluded, "We rejoice in these signs of a growing desire for union . . . ." Minutes Presbyterian U.S.A., 1886, pp. 126-28. No mention of this letter is found in the Minutes R.C.A., 1885 or 1886 indicating this was done on the initiative of the delegate and not of his church.

evangelization of the freedmen and the other was the possible extension of the Church through the incorporation of the German Reformed Classis of North Carolina. In either case, it seemed wise to open a fraternal correspondence with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (South) among whose churches they would be laboring. Though the Church's constitution of 1792 made no distinction between bond and free nor black and white, the major policy of the Church from 1820-62 was to support the American Colonization Society's efforts to establish freed Negroes in Liberia.<sup>97</sup> By 1870, the plight of the freedman, spiritual and material, as well as his unwillingness to emigrate became apparent. The Dutch Reformed Church needed experienced assistance to carry on this work in the South. After the collapse of their negotiations (1872-74), this was not forthcoming from the German Reformed Church.

The Dutch Commissioners, the Revs. John A. Todd and W. J. R. Taylor, received a warm reception at the Southern Presbyterians' 1871 General Assembly and correspondence commenced.<sup>98</sup> In 1872, Dr. Joseph R. Wilson, their Stated Clerk, acted as the delegate from these Presbyterian brethren and indicated a desire for closer relations between the two churches. Both churches thereupon proceeded to appoint committees to explore the nature and desirability of a changed relationship.<sup>99</sup> The Southern Presbyterians cautiously set

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<sup>97</sup>See Article 59 of the Constitution of 1792; Minutes R.P.D.C., 1820, pp. 17-18; Minutes R.P.D.C., 1849, p. 509; Minutes R.P.D.C., 1862, pp. 212-13; Minutes R.C.A., 1868, pp. 500-501.

<sup>98</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1871, p. 221.

<sup>99</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1872, p. 438, and Minutes R.C.A., 1873, p. 613.

the objective of the first joint meeting as solely the procurement of mutual information; the Reformed Church agreed.<sup>100</sup>

The two committees met in New York on February 27, 1874 and got along so well that they drew up a Plan of Co-operation. The close agreement they discovered in doctrinal standards, forms of government and rules of discipline did not blind them to some "considerable obstacles to an organic union." They explained their action as follows:

That we fully recognize it to be the duty of the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ to seek and embrace all proper means of manifesting such degree of unity in the faith of the Gospel as may exist among them; and that this unity may, in our view, be effectually manifested by us in the absence of outward ecclesiastical uniformity, with which it ought never to be confounded, and which ought never to be purchased at the cost of truth.<sup>101</sup>

This initial outline Plan of Co-operation granted the right of deliberation to their respective fraternal delegations at General Assembly or General Synod meetings. It permitted greater liberality in filling pulpit vacancies with ministers from either denomination and also in the training and employment of each other's theological students and graduates. Geographically isolated churches were encouraged to reaffiliate with the nearest Classis or Presbytery. Tentative ideas of co-operation in the areas of Domestic and Foreign

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<sup>100</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1873, pp. 670-71. The Committee on Correspondence questioned whether the two churches could actually strengthen each other with the Northern Presbyterian Church lying between their two churches. Ibid., pp. 675-76. The Synod of Missouri made a bolder proposition for a union conference with these other two churches but there is no evidence this proposal was acted upon.

<sup>101</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1874, pp. 53-57, contains both the report of the R.C.A.'s Committee and the Plan of Co-operation.



Missions as well as Publications were made but were to be enlarged upon and harmonized by the various boards and committees by January 1, 1875. The Southern Presbyterians adopted this Plan at their General Assembly at Columbus, Mississippi on May 30, 1874 and the General Synod concurred and continued their Committee on Conference during their session of June 3-12, 1874 at Poughkeepsie, New York.<sup>102</sup>

Upon receipt of the requested reports, the Committee of Conference met on January 15, 1875 in New York. They agreed that in

1. Publication - each denomination's publishing houses would act as agents for the sale of the other's publications and a children's paper would be jointly published.

2. Home Missions - the main area of co-operative concern was the evangelization of the colored population of the South. The main contribution the Reformed Church could make here would be financial and these monies would be spent by direction of the Presbyterian's Home Missionary Work Committee.

3. Foreign Missions - elaborated on the previous plan's listed goal, the establishment of one united Church in contiguous areas of labor.

And this agreement is made, not only for the sake of expressing, as it does, the confidence which these two American denominations have in each other, but, chiefly, with the view of contributing to the establishment in each missionary country of a native church that shall grow from its own root.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 53 & 62.

<sup>103</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1875, p. 257. The entire report and Plan are reproduced on pp. 255-58. This and other commitments to the establishment of churches as indigenous as the adoption of an imported religion permitted, proved of incalculable importance when the wave of nationalism swept over these areas of the world in the twentieth century.

The recruitment and employment of missionaries for deficient areas could occur in either denomination.

4. Education - deals specifically with the intermixing of theological students, their financial support and the need to conform to the rules of the church from which licensing and ordination were to be sought.

5. Interchange of Annual Reports - while this is provided for, a more important part of this section provided that

Any provision of this scheme of co-operative union may at any time be altered or extended by the joint action of the General Assembly and General Synod; and any provision of it may be omitted or abrogated by either body without impairing the validity of those other provisions on which they shall agree.

Though adopted, this Plan never became a vibrant force uniting these two churches. It led neither to the degree of co-operation envisioned nor to demands for an even closer union. The Synod agreed to welcome agents from the South to solicit funds for their Tuscaloosa Institute and other domestic missionary work among the colored people, but the response in the Reformed Church to such appeals for funds was relatively small. Perhaps the geographical separation proved too great a handicap to real understanding and concern for each other's problems and efforts. In the next quarter of a century, while the Reformed Church delegates attended every one of the Southern Presbyterian General Assemblies, they in return found it possible to attend only fourteen of the twenty-five sessions of the Reformed Church's General Synods.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Edward T. Corwin, A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1906), pp. 543-44.

All during these three attempts for closer co-operation and union, an ecumenical council had been in the process of forming. Agitation for a general organization to include all members of the Reformed faith had been underway for several years by Presbyterians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1870, President James McCosh of Princeton University had formally proposed the idea of a Pan-Presbyterian Council to the Northern Presbyterian General Assembly. This Assembly recognized that a substantial unity existed which it was important to exhibit to the world by a closer union of the scattered Presbyterian family. Therefore, in 1873 it appointed a committee

to correspond with sister churches holding by the Westminster Standards [Heidelberg Catechism added later], with a view of bringing about an ecumenical council of such Churches, to consider subjects of common interest to all, and especially to promote harmony of action in the mission fields at home and abroad.<sup>105</sup>

The General Synod of 1874 approved participation by the Reformed Church in this enterprise. Two meetings, on December 3, 1874 and April 8, 1875, of Canadian and United States churches produced a twenty-two point statement of the nature and goals of the proposed federation. It would seek among its far ranging ends to work out a comity on the foreign mission field, give increased attention to the great urban areas and other destitute parts of the home mission field and "combine the Protestant churches in opposing the errors and inroads of Romanism."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Minutes Presbyterian U.S.A., 1873, p. 558. Dr. William G. Blaikie of Edinburgh had been working equally hard in the British Isles and a similar resolution was adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1873.

<sup>106</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1875, pp. 260-62.

The Reformed Church was represented at London on July 21, 1875 when, with Dr. McCosh presiding, a preliminary meeting of twenty-one churches tied the two movements together. The name, Presbyterian Alliance (actually The Alliance of Reformed Churches Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian System), was adopted. Through acceptance of a proposed constitution, a General Council was provided for which held its first meeting at Edinburgh, Scotland on July 3, 1877. The Reformed Church in America has consistently supported this organization, based on the acceptance of the "supremacy of Holy Scripture, adherence to the Consensus of Reformed Confessions and a general acknowledgement of Presbyterian principles."<sup>107</sup> By the turn of the century, over eighty national and denominational churches from six continents with an estimated twenty-five million members and adherents were represented.<sup>108</sup> The Rev. Talbot W. Chambers of the Reformed Church served as President of the Alliance from 1892 until his death in 1896.

This organization had played an important part in supporting numbers of weaker Reformed Churches in Europe whose previous existence was largely unknown on this side of the ocean. It helped create a new sense of co-operation and tolerance which contributed to the establishment of an 1892 comity arrangement on the domestic mission fields

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<sup>107</sup>Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill (eds.), A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 266.

<sup>108</sup>E. T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1902, 4th ed., p. 283. The size of this organization necessitated the creation in 1884 of a divided Executive Commission. A Western Section represented North America and an Eastern Section represented the other five inhabited continents.

between the Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed Churches.<sup>109</sup>

On the foreign mission field it established closer relations between the workers and led to the affiliation of their parent boards in the Foreign Missions Conference of North America in 1893. Though not primarily an instrument of reunion itself, out of the movements engendered by the Presbyterian Alliance grew the great World Missionary Conference of 1900 and the 1910 Edinburgh meeting.<sup>110</sup>

Actually, many of the Dutch Reformed Church's tendencies on the foreign mission field were evident before the organization of the Presbyterian Alliance. The Amoy Mission in China established in 1842 developed primarily as a joint effort of the American Dutch Reformed Church (1842) and the English Presbyterians (1850). In 1857, the Reformed Church's General Synod had instructed her missionaries there to form a denominational Classis within the Particular Synod of Albany. Under the leadership of the Rev. J. V. N. Talmage, the missionaries ignored this directive and organized the "Great Presbyterian and Classical Council of Amoy." In response to a new prompting in 1863, Dr. Talmage wrote a seventy-four page pamphlet entitled History and Ecclesiastical Relations of the Churches of the Presbyterian Order, at Amoy, China.<sup>111</sup> The General Synod refused to repeal its 1857

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>110</sup>Charles S. Macfarland, International Christian Movements (New York: Revell, 1924), p. 95; cf. Rouse and Neill, op. cit., p. 374. The 1910 Edinburgh meeting is considered a twentieth century ecumenical watershed and the beginning of the movements which culminated in the World Council of Churches.

<sup>111</sup>Cf. Herman Harmelink, "Christian Unity and Church Union: A Study of the Ecumenical Approach of the Reformed Church in America" (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1964), pp. 34-35; and E. T. Corwin, A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America, pp. 30-31.

directive but also refused to coerce these missionaries. In Japan, Reformed Church missionaries seriously handicapped by governmental restrictions labored from 1859-72 before the first Christian church was organized. Along with missionaries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, they organized on October 3, 1877 "The United Church of Christ in Japan."<sup>112</sup> In India, "the Arcot Mission sprang from a union movement,"<sup>113</sup> and readily co-operated with other missions. While participation in formal union did not occur until 1901, "the Reformed Church never tried to establish a branch of its denomination."<sup>114</sup>

The last quarter of the nineteenth century also found the young people fired with a passion for foreign missions. In 1886, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions had its origin at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts. It sponsored a tour of colleges and seminaries from coast to coast to recruit missionaries to accomplish its slogan, "The evangelization of the world in this generation."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>In 1885 the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. and in 1886 the Reformed Church in the United States were brought into the United Church. E. T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 4th ed., pp. 354-55.

<sup>113</sup>Sam Ponniah, "The Contributions of the Reformed Church in America to the Church of South India" (unpublished Master's dissertation, Western Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 42. The Rev. Ponniah is a native of India and believes the Reformed Church to have been very ecumenical in the mission field.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 151. A Reformed Church missionary, Dr. Jacob Chamberlain, became the first Moderator of this Alliance of Presbyterian Churches in South India. Similarly, when the Congregationalists joined with these churches to form the South India United Church in 1908, Dr. J. H. Wyckoff became the first Moderator.

<sup>115</sup>Samuel Zwemer, "The Student Volunteer Movement and the

At Hope College, Emma Kollen, Albertus Pieters and Samuel Zwemer became part of the 2,106 recruits this organization enrolled. Thus not only the young people were motivated; there was increasing lay participation in Christian interdenominational projects.<sup>116</sup> Many Reformed Church members willingly co-operated through the Bible societies, the tract societies, the Young Men's Christian Association, the American Temperance Society and others. The earnestness that blurred denominational distinctions on the foreign mission fields and promoted co-operative Christian endeavors at home continually renewed thoughts of possible denominational unions.

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Reformed Church," Church Herald, February 8, 1946, p. 15.

<sup>116</sup>John A. Hutchison, We Are Not Divided (New York: Round Table Press Inc., 1941), p. 12, calls this increasing lay activity and interdenominationalism a phenomenon of the American religious pattern. Rouse and Neill, op. cit., p. 236, expressed the belief that the national character of many of the interdenominational societies "helped broaden some of the more provincial denominations, those formerly limited to specific geographical areas in the East."

## CHAPTER IV

### UNION CIRCUMVENTED: 1886-1893

After the 1874-75 abortive union attempt, a decade elapsed before another approach to union between the two branches of the Reformed Church was undertaken. In 1886, the Dutch branch again initiated this new union effort, as they had begun every previous attempt except that of the 1840s.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Reformed Classes of Monmouth and Philadelphia overtured their General Synod to take steps toward union. The Committee on Overtures approved an exploration of union possibilities and recommended the appointment of a committee which could meet with a similar group from the German Church. The General Synod responded by appointing a five man committee headed by the Rev. William J.

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<sup>1</sup>Conference on Union Between the Reformed Church in America and the Reformed Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publishing House, 1888), p. iii. (Hereinafter referred to as the 1888 Conference on Union). This official publication on the Conference on Union between the R.C.A. and the R.C.U.S. gives the impression that the 1884 overtures seeking closer relations by the Pittsburgh Synod and several Classes of the R.C.U.S. may have helped create the friendly response of the General Synod of the Dutch Church in 1886. Donald H. Yoder, "Church Union Efforts of the Reformed Church in the United States to 1934" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), p. 84. Dr. Yoder feels the first approach was made in a speech by the Rev. John W. Wagner, fraternal delegate from the R.C.A. to the 1884 General Synod of the R.C.U.S., in which he expressed the hope "that these two churches in this country may be one body." This is such a frequently mentioned, almost cliché expression by delegates that undue stress can not be attached to it.



R. Taylor, D.D., of New York City.<sup>2</sup>

At its triennial meeting late in May of 1887, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States reciprocated by appointing a five man committee. The chairman was the Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Apple, President of Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> The two committees were unable to meet prior to the convening of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America in early June of 1887 and came close to never meeting at all. They did, however, eventually meet three times within the next three years, and decided that a feasible plan for union could be worked out.

The Dutch General Synod of 1887 was confronted with conflicting overtures. Six Classes of the Particular Synod of Chicago, encompassing large numbers of nineteenth century Dutch immigrants, overtured against any step of agitation toward union; two Eastern Classes, Albany and Schenectady, wanted a possible union with the Northern Presbyterians. The 1887 Committee on Overtures now reversed the previous committee's

<sup>2</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the 80th Regular Session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1886), p. 127. (Hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.C.A., [year]). Additional committee members were the Rev. J. Elmendorf, D.D., the Rev. J. A. De Baun, D.D., the Hon. H. W. Bookstaver, and E. J. Miller, Esq.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States for 1887 (Dayton, Ohio: Reformed Publishing Co., 1887), p. 47. (Hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.C.U.S., [year]). Dr. Apple also served the Lancaster Theological Seminary as Professor of Church History from 1871-98. Other members were the Rev. James I. Good, D.D., the Rev. George W. Williard, D.D., the Rev. Herman J. Ruetenik, D.D., and the Rev. J. Spangler Kieffer, D.D.

According to H. M. J. Klein's History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster: The Eastern Synod R.C.U.S., 1943), p. 275, at the October, 1886 meeting of this same Eastern Synod, its Committee on Church Union had recommended it urge the General Synod to make efforts to establish closer relations, especially with other Reformed denominations.

stand and recommended that efforts toward church union were not wise.<sup>4</sup> In a rather contradictory move, the General Synod both adopted the recommendation of its Committee on Overtures and voted to continue the Taylor Committee on Church Union with the German Reformed Church.

The two committees, headed by Drs. Taylor and Apple, held a two day session at the Marble Collegiate Church located at 29th Street and 5th Avenue, New York City, on December 20 and 21, 1887. A round-robin discussion on the general subject of union preceded the appointment of subcommittees to prepare the procedure and terms for union. One group prepared the largest and most important conference for Dutch-German church union ever held. The assignment of papers relating to union was made and the time and place for this 1888 popular convention set. During these two days, and even at the intervening evening reception at Judge Bookstaver's home, a feeling for union seemed prevalent.

The only area of disagreement centered on what type of union should be effected. The first day Dr. J. A. De Baun strongly urged that a federal type of union be the basis for discussion. At the next session, he startled the German delegates by reading a rather detailed draft of a plan for federal union. They, for their part, desired a much more integrated type of organic union. The adopted report seemed to concur with the latter. Dr. J. Spangler Kieffer

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<sup>4</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1887, pp. 368-69. Herman Harmelink, "Christian Unity and Church Union" (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 63, suggests the committee was unduly influenced by the 6-2 margin in overtures against union sentiment and failed to consider the opinion and desires of the Classes which had not expressed themselves by overtures.

described the situation in his diary.

Yesterday, there had been a collision between two different kinds of union, now this report evidently decided in favor of one of them as against the other; but it was instantly claimed that it covered both. There was ambiguity at the very beginning; ambiguity which would cause trouble.<sup>5</sup>

The Philadelphia Union Conference of April 3 and 5, 1888, was large, important and colorful.<sup>6</sup> This site was probably chosen because it represented one of the few geographical areas where the two churches overlapped. It was also easily accessible to the vast majority of the Dutch Reformed churches still concentrated in New York and New Jersey and the large German Reformed concentration in Pennsylvania. Despite the logic of this location, only nineteen of thirty-three Dutch Classes and twenty-two of the fifty-four German Classes were represented. The conference assembled in the First Reformed Church (German) at 10th and Wallace Streets and concluded its session the following day in the Second Reformed Church (Dutch) at 7th and Brown Streets.

One can not help but wonder at the forethought that went into the assignment of the nine papers which covered the six major topics presented at this conference. The committee selected to formulate an expression of the conference and to publish the discourses, commented

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<sup>5</sup>Entry under "My First Visit to New York", [December 1887], MS Diary, March 15, 1887-March 15, 1890. (Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, Fackenthal Library, Franklin and Marshall College). Dr. Kieffer was so upset that he had abstained from voting on this part of the report.

<sup>6</sup>Forty-four ministers and laymen of the R.C.A. plus 104 R.C.U.S. ministers and laymen were in attendance. Each Dutch Church delegate was given an orange ribbon to place in the button hole of his coat, and each German Church delegate was given a red ribbon. It was not only these ribbons but the occasional apostrophe and symbolism of some of the speeches that gave this conference color.

on the "remarkable unanimity exhibited in all the papers."<sup>7</sup> The clarion call was for union and the speakers stressed the lack of insurmountable obstacles between these closely related churches.

The tone of the meeting was set by the opening address of Dr. Thomas G. Apple, the chairman of the Joint Committee on Union of the Reformed Churches. He professed to direct attention to two points, namely, that the present abnormal divided state of the church should be rectified, and that this rectification would require sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> Feeling that denominations had already served their special mission and were no longer justified in their existence, he suggested that the proposed union might be but an initiator of a wider "Unionistic movement." Before he finished, his speech actually anticipated all the areas later expounded.

The historians, Professor E. T. Corwin and Professor J. H. Dubbs, speaking on "The Historical and Doctrinal Relations of the Two Churches", agreed that separation on the basis of language and geography was no longer valid. Differences in church standards and in the articles of church government were also considered inadequate reasons because each had modified them to suit conditions found in America. Both professors played down the significance of the previous failure of the advisory Triennial Convention of 1844 and strongly called for union. Dr. Corwin stressed that this was really a call for reunion and at one point he

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<sup>7</sup>1888 Conference on Union, p. iv. The similarity was also noted in the editorial, "The Philadelphia Conference," Christian Intelligencer, April 11, 1888, p. 3. There may have been a purpose in asking Dr. Drury, the editor of this official R.C.A. paper, to offer the opening prayer of the conference. The Christian Intelligencer consistently supported this union venture.

<sup>8</sup>1888 Conference on Union, p. 7.

stated: "It is UNION which we all want, and for many excellent reasons."<sup>9</sup> This representative of the Dutch Church concluded that it is "now our common privilege, together in initiating measures large, and broad, and catholic that the greatest spiritual results may be obtained." Here he showed his anticipation of a wider unionistic movement also and asked, "Ought we not do this at a very great sacrifice if necessary?"<sup>10</sup> Dr. Dubbs closed, perhaps too significantly for some Dutchmen with their hyper-consciousness of all Romanish influence, by quoting St. Augustine: "Let there be in necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity."<sup>11</sup> This proved a very apt expression of the more liberal approach of the Reformed Church in the United States to all union efforts.

The remaining speeches of the first day were given by Dr. A. P. Van Gieson on "The Canons of Dort", Dr. D. Van Horne on "The Present Conditions of the Two Denominations" and Dr. E. B. Coe on "Church Union for the Evangelization of the World."<sup>12</sup> These speeches revealed no real disharmonious features in standards, geographical distribution or extent of Americanization of the two churches, and asserted that their missionaries were pleading for union.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 18.    <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 34.    <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>12</sup>"The Philadelphia Conference," The Christian Intelligencer, April 11, 1888, p. 3. The editor felt the happiest hit of the conference occurred during a discussion in which Dr. Van Gieson noted that the Germans "had the impression that their Dutch neighbors take particular delight in firing off the canons of Dort. This is a mistake."

Dr. D. Van Horne was eminently qualified for his topic, having been raised and ordained in the Dutch Church and currently serving as a pastor of a German Church in Philadelphia.

<sup>13</sup>In Japan where the foreign mission efforts of the two churches overlapped, their missionaries had already been joined together in the United Church of Christ in Japan. The following day Dr. Mabon expressed

The presentations the second day went to the heart of the union question and dealt with the real and probable obstacles as well as the advantages to be gained by this proposed union. The topic for the morning was "The Obstacles to Union, and Methods of Overcoming Them"; the speakers were Professor W. V. V. Mabon of New Brunswick Seminary and President G. W. Williard of Heidelberg College. In the afternoon, the Rev. Peter Moerdyke of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Rev. Conrad Clever of Baltimore presented "The Advantages of Union."

Unlike Dr. Apple, Dr. Mabon could not accept the idea that denominations were completely outmoded. He felt the "diversities inherent in these two churches must be retained, but reconciled by a higher unity of end to be gained by a unity of administration."<sup>14</sup> This statement apparently renewed Dr. De Baun's earlier call for a federal type of union.

Dealing more specifically with his topic, he found the general hindrances to union to be (1) indifference arising from ignorance and lack of association of the churches with each other, and (2) the departure of the churches from their raison d'etre, the evangelizing of the world. The more particular incumbrances were enumerated as race, language, customs, polity, property, church boards and doctrinal standards. Only language and doctrinal standards appeared as serious barriers to union. Regarding language difficulty, he counselled:

We should have no more fear of being Germanized by such a union than we have of being Hollandized by the increasing immigration from the Netherlands. The English Synods of our

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the opinion that "the union of our missionaries in the manifold service of the kingdom is sure to be followed at home." 1888 Conference on Union, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

sister church had in 1888, 1116 congregations, and the German Synods only 312 . . . . In our own denomination at the same time there were between 90 and 100 Dutch Reformed Churches holding their services in the Hollandish language and from forty to fifty in the German. About four hundred only, about one half of the ministers in the Reformed Church in the United States can use the German language. These facts indicate the proportions of the foreign elements in the two churches."<sup>15</sup>

The solution jointly or separately required more bilingual ministers until the process of Americanization had run its course.

Dr. Mabon appeared more wary of doctrinal standards as a disharmonious factor than had the speakers of the previous day. The fact that the Reformed Church in the United States did not require its ministers and professors of theology to subscribe to the Belgic Confession and the Articles of the Synod of Dort had helped disrupt the talks of 1874-75. On this issue Dr. Mabon at first appeared a dogmatist, stating: "The Reformed Church in America has no reason to abandon, and is not likely to abandon, either of these standards, which make an essential part of her history."<sup>16</sup> Yet he inserted a conciliatory statement when he acknowledged that "as a fair latitude of interpretation is assumed by our own men, the same is due to all who will enter into union with us in labor, life and doctrine."<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Williard's subjective obstacles to union differed from Dr. Mabon's general hindrances only in their stress on "prejudice" which could pervert all the facts about the subject as to make a "right" decision almost impossible. His long rhetorical sentence on particular differences reveals much unfounded prejudice evident among elements in each church against the other.

<sup>15</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1890, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup>1888 Conference on Union, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

As to the extreme and diverse views that are sometimes falsely attributed to us by which our Dutch brethren are represented as Calvinists of the straitest sect making our salvation rest wholly in the divine decree, whilst we are charged with a form of high churchism which resolved the whole idea of religion in a mechanical observance of certain rites and ceremonies; or of entirely opposite views of the sacraments, the one viewing them as mere empty signs without any objective reality, whilst the other attaches a magical force to them, as if all who observe them are sure of the blessing of regeneration and salvation; or of an equally strange divergence of the one into extreme spiritualism, and of the other into dead formalism; or of a strange diversity in the means employed for the salvation of men, the one sanctioning revivals and evangelistic work, creating a chasm between us of such depth and breadth as to make it impossible for us to fraternize and live together in harmony, it is sufficient for us to say that all such and similar statements are misrepresentations and exist more in fancy and imagination than they do in reality, and that when we come to compare views . . . as we are now doing in this conference, there is no sign, whatever, of any such extreme views as we have referred to; but in the place of it the most cordial Christian greeting and delightful harmony.<sup>18</sup>

Actually Dr. Williard suggested that the foremost obstacle should be the impracticability of opening up a subject after the unconsummated attempts of the past. Yet he would not count these as failures if the subject refused to be suppressed and forced a new action such as the 1888 Conference. "The world and Church have both moved with wonderful rapidity during the last forty years, so that we can now approach the subject of union with a boldness and confidence that our fathers would have shrunk from."<sup>19</sup>

The afternoon speeches emphasized previously claimed advantages of greater energy, efficiency, prestige and importance at home and abroad, as well as the restoration of an historic error and the fact it

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91. See, also, his delightful comparison of the relations between the two churches to that of two shy lovers approaching marriage. Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 88.



would honor Christ's prayer for unity found in John 17:21. The Rev. Moerdyke, claiming to represent the Western Synod of Chicago, spoke of their feeling that they were too distant geographically from their Eastern brothers for them to really understand their burning questions. Union would avert the "dangerous symptoms" arising from loneliness and isolation and would result in more compact Classes and Synods with greater weight and power. The German Church would provide a bridge between the Dutch churches of the East and West. Then recalling an advertisement he once saw on the western side of a large Grand Rapids factory, he concluded:

Brethren, the finger of God has advertised in words of holy calling and proffered equipment upon the western side of our broad domain: "Room and power to let." Let us as discerning churches read this sign of the times and go forth consolidated to occupy the land.<sup>20</sup>

Unless one sees a warning sign in the position taken by Dr. Mabon on church standards, the only real disturbing note in this harmonious conference occurred in the discussion period following the Rev. Moerdyke's speech. At this time the Rev. W. H. Phraener, Irving Park, Illinois, calling himself an American pastor of the Reformed Church in America in the West, predicted failure for this union. He claimed many pastors seeking to Americanize their denomination felt closer to the Presbyterian Church than to a body a majority of whose ministers spoke German.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 124. The Rev. Moerdyke, pastor of an American speaking church in Grand Rapids, may have been representative of his Michigan Classis but his views were not representative of the entire Particular Synod of Chicago.

<sup>21</sup>Another disappointed advocate of union in 1887 with the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., the Rev. William Veenschoten ("The Philadelphia Conference," Christian Intelligencer, May 2, 1888, pp. 2-3) supports this view and bitterly comments on how all the

The conference ended with the acceptance of the report of the Committee on Resolutions which approved the calling of the conference, judged its sentiments to be for closer union and recommended the continuance of the two committees toward this goal. It predicted "present obstacles will gradually disappear, and in the end, in some form just and acceptable to both branches, union may without much delay be attained."<sup>22</sup> Hopefully the resolutions were to be forwarded to the two General Synods by the Joint Committee in anticipation of the adoption of the report for union in 1890, when next the General Synod for the Reformed Church in the United States convened. The work of the Committee on Resolutions was not completed until all the lectures and debates had been published in book form and widely distributed in both denominations. The committee, in the introduction of this book, took the opportunity to express the following sentiment on the subject of a more comprehensive union movement:

We pray that this union should it be successfully consummated, may be the harbinger of a still more extensive union of the Reformed Churches of this country, and when the twentieth century dawns upon us, may the time have come when all the Evangelical Churches of America shall be ripe for some form of union that shall best concentrate their energies and activities for the extension and final victory of our blessed Redeemer's Kingdom!<sup>23</sup>

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objections used against a Presbyterian union could be applied to this proposed union with the German Reformed Church also, but at this conference they were blithely disregarded.

See Editor's rebuttal, Ibid., p. 1. Also consult the Rev. J. A. Davis, "What Shall We Do About Church Union?," Christian Intelligencer, May 30, 1888, pp. 4-5. This former advocate of union with the Presbyterians offered a more reasonable attitude toward the proposed new union talks, which he hoped would be a first step to a united Presbyterian and Reformed body.

<sup>22</sup>1888 Conference on Union, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. iv. The members of this committee were the Revs. E. V. Gerhert, D. D. Demarest, J. B. Drury, N. Gehr, and D. Cole.

The Rev. J. Elmendorf of the Committee on Union of the Reformed Churches included a report of the Philadelphia Conference in an overall progress report to the 1888 General Synod of the Dutch Church which met on June 6. He recommended that a Union Committee be continued with any further instructions the General Synod might have for its guidance. Unlike the delegate from the Reformed Church in the United States, Dr. J. S. Kieffer, who spoke later to the Synod, Dr. Elmendorf did not feel immediate and decisive action toward union was presently necessary. Nevertheless, with regard to this union movement, he cautioned: "It is also proper, if not essential, that it shall be kept sacredly free of premature ecclesiastical action and that it shall not be mixed up with any schemes or proposals for union with other Churches."<sup>24</sup> Knowing that two years remained before a real decision on the proposed union would have to be faced, the General Synod readily accepted the committee's report and recommendation.

Dr. J. S. Kieffer, speaking later at the time allotted for fraternal delegates, discussed the current status of the German Church and conveyed the impression of its almost universal sentiment in favor of union with the Reformed Church in America. More important, he gave the Dutch General Synod a clearer insight into the main theological movement of the last half century in his Church, Christology. This Christ centeredness and the Heidelberg Catechism appeared to him to be an adequate base for union, for he stated:

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<sup>24</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1888, p. 619. Already the Committee on Overture had received an overture from the Wisconsin Classis protesting organic union with the German Reformed Church. Ibid., p. 607. It is questionable whether the Rev. Elmendorf knew in advance of this overture, but he did know of the Rev. W. Veenschoten's open call for union with the Northern Presbyterians. Christian Intelligencer, May 2, 1888, pp. 2-3.

It would accord well with the existing spirit of the Church I represent, to enter into a union with a sister church; a union which should be large and free enough to tolerate differences on more than one nonessential point, which should be based upon that common agreement in doctrine which we believe already exists in sufficient measure; whose bond of union, above all else, should be belief in Christ and reverent attachment and devotion to Him.<sup>25</sup>

Later in his report to the 1890 General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, Dr. Kieffer noted skeptically that the Rev. Dr. M. H. Hutton, President of the Dutch Synod, had responded to his call for organic union in a kind and cordial manner but did not seem "to express or indicate the existence of any similar desire for union with us on the part of the Reformed Church in America."<sup>26</sup>

On the surface, the question of this proposed union seemed to lie almost dormant from the General Synod meeting of 1888 until just before the next General Synod meeting on June 5, 1889. In February of 1889, a Christian Intelligencer editorial strongly proposed and endorsed the federative principle for church union in general and for this proposed Reformed union in particular, but even such articles were infrequent.<sup>27</sup> The editor was more likely to be writing on the new immigrant threat to Protestant America's way of life, or the evil of

<sup>25</sup>The editors thought this speech important enough to print in its entirety. Christian Intelligencer, June 13, 1888, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup>Minutes R.C.U.S., 1890, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup>The year 1889 was the centennial year for the adoption of the present United States' Constitution and represented also the success of the first large-scale application of the federative principle. The editor used this example as a justification for the wisdom of his proposal, which he espoused editorially again in February, 1890. This idea also receives support from the influential Dr. Talbot W. Chambers of the New York City Collegiate Church system. Cf. Christian Intelligencer, May 22, 1889, pp. 2-3.

purchasing Sunday papers, while the local congregations were absorbed in updating their membership roles.<sup>28</sup>

The Joint Committee on the Union of the Reformed Churches had not met since the popular convention of April, 1888, but the Special Commission on the Union of the Reformed Church in America had continued to function. Their report to the General Synod on June 7, 1889, disclosed that several open informative meetings had been held and that continued correspondence with the German Reformed Committee led them to expect the completion of their work during the coming year. They felt there was no present prospect for an organic union of the two churches but that a federal union or an alliance for common work was possible. Asking that the question be kept open until the Triennial General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States met in 1890, it noted that union "is not a question of life or death to either body . . . ."<sup>29</sup>

No delegate from the German Reformed Church was present at this General Synod, but the account of this report in the Christian Intelligencer and elsewhere must have had a dampening effect on their enthusiasm for this union. This was particularly so of their leaders who were strong advocates of organic union. J. I. Swander felt he expressed the certainty of the German Church about the consummation of this long desired union when, in a history of his church published in 1889, he stated: "God has ordained that they should be joined together and man

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<sup>28</sup>Membership roles had not been reviewed in many churches for a period of between fifty and one hundred years. The Christian Intelligencer, June 19, 1889, p. 1, quoting statistics from a report to the 1889 General Synod, noted that 8,289 names were added to the Reformed Church in America role of 87,000 but that this only resulted in a net gain of 1,796, due to this updating of church roles.

<sup>29</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1889, p. 844.

can neither put nor keep them asunder. We believe that the millennium of organic union is close at hand."<sup>30</sup> Still the report itself occasioned no discussion among the Dutch Reformed delegates and probably reflected accurately the attitude of the Reformed Church in America on the subject of organic union.

The subject of the proposed union appeared to sleep once again until the spring of the next year. Very few articles appeared in the official organs of the two churches. During the normal spring sessions of the Classes of the Reformed Church in America no apparent action of any kind was taken. Later, in prefacing the report of the Committee on Union to the General Synod, Dr. W. J. A. Taylor remarked in substance that the subject must not be thought to have lost its importance by the silence or neglect of the past year.<sup>31</sup>

The Joint Committee on Union met for the third time on April 22, 1890, in New York City. The difference of opinion over what constituted organic union continued to plague the discussions. For this meeting, Dr. J. A. De Baun of the Dutch Church had drawn up a draft of a proposed constitution. In its preface, the Dutch view was stated as follows:

Organic union of distinct denominations can only come by federation, or by fusion. If the union of the States has made ours an organic Nation, then the federal union of heretofore separate Denominations can make one organic Church. And union by federation, rather than by fusion, has this advantage: it can make a strong and absolute oneness, in fact, spirit, work and fealty, without interfering with the creed, cultus, customs and usages of cognate churches or

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<sup>30</sup>The Reformed Church: A Sketch of Its History, Together with a Statement of Its Doctrines, Government, Cultus and Customs (Dayton, Ohio: Reformed Publishing Company, 1889), p. 66. The underlining has been added.

<sup>31</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1890, p. 1.

subjecting the smaller and weaker to the dominance of the larger and stronger. To touch the creed of a Church (from outside), is to wound its heart; to touch the cultus of a Church is to maim its life; to unite two or more kindred Churches without doing either, is to make one household, in which and for which there shall be but one interest and one organic life.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, for the Dutch Church there was real logic in this line of reasoning. The greater power of the Reformed Church in America's General Synod and the unwillingness of the Dutch to give up any of their Calvinistic standards made the more loose unity of a federative union appear a necessity even to the German Church.<sup>33</sup> Such an arrangement disregarded Dr. T. G. Apple's expressed opinion to the Philadelphia Conference of 1888, that sacrifice would be necessary to restore the unity of these two churches. He is reported to have remarked to J. S. Kieffer that

a union would be valuable just in proportion as it involved sacrifice, and that not much was likely to come of a union devised so as to leave the denominations just as they were before.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Dr. Apple, four of his fellow ministers and four ministers and three laymen of the Reformed Church in America signed

<sup>32</sup>"Articles of Constitution and Federal Union of Denominations Holding the Reformed Faith and the Presbyterian Form of Church Government" (Fonda, New York: by the author, [1890]), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>This was particularly the case as regards property rights and various funds and bequests which were vested in the Dutch General Synod. In the German Church a dualism resulted when the Synods, while merging to form a General Synod in 1863, retained much of their respective property rights. This was the acknowledged reason offered by the German Committee on Union in a separate report accompanying the Report of the Joint Committee to its General Synod on May 30th. Minutes R.C.U.S., 1890, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>Henri L. G. Kieffer (ed.), "Extracts from the Diary of J. Spangler Kieffer Relating to the Reformed Church in the United States," Bulletin, Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, I, No. 3 (1940), 69.

the Joint Committee Report which recommended the formation of a federal union to the General Synods in 1890.

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States met at Lebanon, Pennsylvania, May 28 to June 5, 1890. The second afternoon the fraternal delegates spoke and the Committee on Union made its report. Dr. T. W. Chambers, the Dutch delegate, must have felt inadequately instructed. He reported that he spoke fraternally and in generalities, "having no commission to speak on the subject of denominational union, which was the great theme occupying all minds at that time."<sup>35</sup> Dr. Apple gave the Joint Committee's report which proposed a federal union in the following terms:

After considering the subject in all its bearings the committee finally concluded to recommend what may be designated a Federal Union of our two Reformed Churches in a new judicatory, composed of delegates from each of the churches, and clothed with such powers as might be designated in the act of union. This supreme judicatory would be so constituted as to give due representation, but not undue prominence, to either of the heretofore separate denominations, should have ultimate authority in matters pertaining to the establishment of new Missions, Domestic and Foreign, the establishment of new educational institutions of the superior grades and of the several interests of religious publications, but not to interfere authoritatively with existing Missions, educational institutions or publications, until or unless freely committed to it by those under whose control they now exist.

After explaining the advisory nature of the judicatory in these and all other areas, the conclusion then bears the mark of the predominant German sentiment that

Such a federal union would leave room for, and perhaps invite to membership in it, other Presbyterian Reformed Churches now one with us in faith and order, thus looking

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<sup>35</sup>"General Synod, RCUS," Christian Intelligencer, June 4, 1890, p. 8. Dr. James I. Good, reporting on the same General Synod in the issue of June 11, 1890, p. 3, noted that Dr. Chambers suggested Protestantism may provide obstacles to organic union but never to co-operation and quotes him as saying, "I can and will work with anyone who will work for Christ."



forward to one national, and perhaps international Reformed Church, including all of like faith and order.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. W. J. R. Taylor and Dr. De Baun of the committee each spoke favorably on this recommendation and its significance. The floor was thrown open for debate but there were no volunteers. By a rising vote, the report of the committee and its accompanying resolutions were unanimously accepted. These resolutions provided for an appointive commission of sixteen empowered to produce, together with a similar commission from the Reformed Church in America, a constitution for the proposed union. This commission was further empowered to call a special session of the General Synod for a decision when its work was completed.

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America met at Asbury Park, New Jersey, June 4-11. The Synod began with an unusual third ballot election of a President, the Rev. Dr. J. Romeyn Berry, who had recently completed a seventeen year interim with the Presbyterian Church. The evening sermon of the Vice President, the Rev. C. Van Der Veen, D.D., on "Direct Vision", apparently caused less comment at that time than it would in some areas of the Church today, particularly the statement:

To me there are no greater errorists than those who say that the well of truth was long ago pumped dry into the buckets of creeds and theological systems and that we henceforth can only drink by passing around stale and lukewarm water which certain men have in their charge. Brethren, there is a great deal more water in the spring than was ever

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<sup>36</sup>Minutes R.C.U.S., 1890, pp. 37-38. The accompanying report by the German Committee was a justification of their inability to secure a closer union. Similarly, the Synod's resolution accepting this report begins, "resolved, that whilst this synod would prefer a closer organic union, yet . . . ." Ibid., p. 39.

yet drawn out . . . . It issues from the throne of God.<sup>37</sup>

This call for greater tolerance and understanding of the positions developed by the sister church probably had little influence on the union actions of the 1890 Synod. The Christian Intelligencer felt the General Synod of 1890 was characterized by the independence of its delegates in not hesitating to differ from the opinions and statements of others.<sup>38</sup> This willingness to debate was not evident during that period on the third day devoted to this union. Dr. De Baun confidently proclaimed: "The main question before this Synod is a foregone conclusion."<sup>39</sup>

Chairman W. J. R. Taylor presented the report of the Committee on Union of the Reformed Churches which also contained the previously recorded recommendations of the Joint Committee. In introducing this report he noted the circumstances which were co-operating to make this seem a "providential movement." The committee's report traced the idea of federal union back to John Calvin and stressed that in these "propitious times" it is not only popular but Scriptural. Intimating a need for outside support, it noted that "our growth for the last thirty years has been mostly in the West", because the total number of churches in the East had declined, especially in some of "the great cities and the suburbs where the population is continually changing . . . ." The report warned that should these efforts fail "we fear it may be for a long time hence, if not until the millennial sun shall

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<sup>37</sup>"General Synod," Christian Intelligencer, June 11, 1890, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., June 11, 1890, p. 18.

streak the Eastern sky."<sup>40</sup> In a final statement Dr. Taylor noted that the report "preserves everything that distinctly characterizes us."<sup>41</sup>

The Commissioners of the Reformed Church in the United States, Drs. J. Good and H. Ruetenik, spoke of living in "days of union" and sought to assuage the various fears felt to be held concerning their church. Dr. De Baun spoke and the Synod soon justified his confidence, for by a rising vote, with but five delegates dissenting, it accepted the Committee's report. Appended to the report and likewise adopted were resolutions which created a Special Commission of sixteen members. These members, apportioned between the four Particular Synods as far as practical, were to

cooperate with the Commission already appointed by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, with instructions to prepare and to present to the next General Synod a plan of Federal Union, in which the autonomy, creed, cultus and property of both churches shall be kept intact and this branch of the church shall have its just and proper representation in the government of the United Church.<sup>42</sup>

The two Special Committees wasted little time getting at their assigned task. Together with their respective church boards and benevolent societies, they met at the Catskill Mountain House September 2 to 4, 1890. Drs. W. J. R. Taylor, J. Elmendorf, J. A. De Baun and Elder P. S. Danforth of the original Reformed Church of America Union

<sup>40</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1890, pp. 126-132. The Rev. E. T. Corwin stated in his Digest of Synodical Legislation (New York: Reformed Church in America, 1906), p. 592, "These facts have led some of our ministers to doubt the long continuance of our separate denominational life."

<sup>41</sup>"General Synod," Christian Intelligencer, June 11, 1890, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1890, p. 131.

Committee were present on the new commission to lend continuity to the planning.<sup>43</sup> Also giving continuity to the endeavor was the election of Dr. T. G. Apple of the German Church as the President. The meeting revealed sharp differences but it never descended into the realm of unpleasantness and "in the end every action was by a unanimous vote."<sup>44</sup> The commission agreed upon an outline of principles and general powers of a new Federal Synod of the Reformed Churches. This body, composed of twenty ministers and twenty elders from each church, would have only a few powers until it had secured the confidence of the two churches.<sup>45</sup> This would be a more permanent type organization than that of the earlier 1844 Triennial Convention Convention which could be and was dissolved by a vote of the Convention itself. The new Federal Synod would be voted upon by the Classes and thus become part of the organic law of these two churches.<sup>46</sup> At Hertzog

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 134, lists the other members of this Special Commission. They were appointed so as to permit proportional representation of the Particular Synods (New York 6 members, Albany 5, Chicago and New Brunswick, 3 each).

<sup>44</sup>"The Meeting of the Joint Committee on Federal Union," Christian Intelligencer, September 10, 1890, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>This equality of representation was an unsolicited, generous concession by the German Church. It was not called for by the previous Joint Committee's recommendation nor envisioned by the current Dutch Commission, which had prepared an elaborate proportional voting scheme in seeking "just and proper" representation for their smaller church. Cf. Dr. De Baun's "The Proposed Federal Union", Christian Intelligencer, March 9, 1892, p. 14. Before the meeting ended the size of the proposed Federal Synod was reduced to sixteen ministers and sixteen elders from each church. Cf. also D. H. Yoder, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

<sup>46</sup>T. G. Apple, "The Union of the Two Reformed Churches," Reformed Church Messenger, April 2, 1891, p. 8. The overall tone of this reflective article is one of skepticism. "Let no one argue . . . that we are committed to some sort of union, and for that reason alone should consummate whatever union that is submitted or possible."

Hall, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, June 2, 1891, a committee reviewed these actions and finalized the report for presentation to the two General Synods.

This report, entitled "Proposed Constitution of the Federal Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the Reformed Church in the United States," offered "the first practical, organized effort to form and maintain an actual Federal Union between any of the affiliated evangelical denominations in this country."<sup>47</sup> The convened General Synods of the two churches received the completed Plan, composed of a preamble, thirteen articles and five recommendations, simultaneously on June 5. The Reformed Church in America had gathered in annual session at Asbury Park, New Jersey, from June 3 to 11, under the Presidency of Dr. E. T. Corwin. The Reformed Church in the United States, for the first time in its history, had convened as a Special General Synod in Philadelphia from June 4 to 6.

The proposed Constitution, as approved first at Asbury Park and shortly thereafter at Philadelphia, left no doubt of its federative nature.<sup>48</sup> Article I provided that "each denomination entering into this union shall retain its distinct individuality, as well as every power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by this Constitution expressly delegated to the body hereby constituted." Article VIII

<sup>47</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1891, p. 350. The recommendations on this proposed Constitution are reproduced on pp. 352-56.

<sup>48</sup>The German Church struggled at first, trying to adjust the recommended annual meetings of the Federal Synod with the actions of their triennially meeting General Synod. This caused them to propose a minor change to Article IV, which was approved by the Dutch Church on the following day. J. I. Good, "General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States," Christian Intelligencer, June 10, 1891, p. 3.

even more explicitly stated that "the Federal Synod shall not interfere with the creed, culture, or government of either denomination . . . ." and reserved discipline exclusively as a function of the denomination in which it arises. Article III created the annually convening Federal Synod of the Reformed Churches while the next article described the composition and manner of election or selection of its members whose ordinary term of office would be for four years. Article V, whose punctuation and ambiguity were to cause so much debate later, gave to the Federal Synod all powers relating to home and foreign missions, new educational enterprises common to both denominations, Sunday School work and literature, and other ecclesiastical matters which the united churches might jointly delegate to it. Article VI stressed the Federal Synod's advisory role, but nevertheless worried the proponents of decentralized power, for it also stated, "Whenever anything recommended by the Federal Synod shall have received the assent of each of the General Synods, it shall have the force of law in both denominations." The remaining articles indicated the idea of further union was not abandoned and dealt with such aspects as amendments, disputes, expenses, meetings and officers.

The adoption of the Commissioners' report by the General Synods meant that the proposed Constitution would be sent down to the Classes of the two churches for their approval or rejection. The German Church's Special Synod was somewhat disappointed in the advisory or hypothetical powers of the Federal Synod. Nevertheless, confidently expecting classical approval and not wanting to delay its beginning until the next General Synod in 1893, they appointed their delegates to the first Federal Synod. An overture from the

Northern Presbyterian Church occupied the attention of each church on the last day of their respective General Synod meetings. Of the Dutch Church it asked for participation in a meeting to form a Federation of Christian Churches. The overture to the German Church spoke of the formation of a Consensus Creed. Both churches appointed the requested committees, though the German Church did so with a reservation.

The Synods had gone home but the Classes had yet to decide on what the German delegate to the Dutch General Synod had asserted was "the most important question that had confronted us during the present century."<sup>49</sup> Up to this time there had been articles on this proposed church union but no real debate had ensued on its possible rejection. This changed when some of the Western Classes failed to act at their fall meetings, thus refusing to be carried along in the wake of the General Synod's sweeping endorsement.<sup>50</sup> Encouraged by this hesitancy, an intense debate broke out in the columns of the Christian Intelligencer on December 2, 1891. The Rev. Henry E. Dosker, minister of the Third Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, launched a series of three articles entitled "Anentt hat Federal Union." His main support in these columns came from Dr. N. M.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>50</sup>For example, the first time that the "Minutes" of either the Classis of Holland or the Classis of Michigan mention the negotiations with the German Reformed Church was in September of 1891. Though these two Classes were to vote differently on this proposed union later, they both felt a vote at this time was too hasty an action and postponed its consideration until their Spring sessions.

The editorial, "The Real Issue," Christian Intelligencer, April 6, 1892, p. 1, provides the information that only one third of the Classes, mainly those favoring the proposed union, voted during their fall meetings.

Steffens, one member of the two-man faculty of Western Theological Seminary and columnist for De Hope. An Eastern pastor, Dr. Henry Berg, son of the ex-German Reformed champion of orthodoxy, also provided opposition articles.

While professing to believe in healing the divided body of Christ's church on earth, all found sufficient reason for spurning union with these closest of kinsmen among the American Protestant Churches. These men generally refused to make a distinction between the various forms of union such as the union committees and the Christian Intelligencer editors had consistently done. Dosker reasoned that "union is to be federal, but this innocent-looking patriotic word stands for an exceedingly close relationship. . . . federal in such a way that union in many respects is organic."<sup>51</sup> These opponents claimed the common acceptance of the Heidelberg Catechism was an inadequate basis for union and questioned the doctrinal soundness of the German Church. They claimed this church lacked a confessional and was developing a specific character by turning away from Calvinism in stressing Christology. Dr. Dosker claimed that "PRINCIPLES ARE AT STAKE" and Dr. Steffens maintained that the two churches represented "different types of reformed Christianity. And I, for one, am not prepared to surrender my position to that of the brethren of the German Reformed Church".<sup>52</sup> Instead of union, the possibility of schism was directly and indirectly suggested. Another area attacked was the weaknesses of the current proposed Constitution which made

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., December 2, 1892, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1892, p. 4. Despite the strength of their assertions, both of these Netherlands-born, Holland, Michigan,



ambiguous interpretations of some articles possible and did not specifically keep the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America supreme nor provide a procedure for later withdrawal. On the periphery there were attacks on its constitutionality and the expense involved in an additional body.

The editors of the Christian Intelligencer allowed both sides access to its columns but did not pretend to be neutral on this proposed union question. Periodically it spoke out editorially favoring union and used its position to add explanatory comments at the end of opposing articles; it also selected suitable proponents of union to refute such articles. Dr. John A. De Baun proved the most prolific of the defenders of the proposed union while Dr. J. Elmendorf and the Western pastor, Dr. E. Winters, also lent support. Their defense consisted mainly of refuting the points made by their opponents or questioning the accuracy of their statements and forecasts. They conceded the Plan they were defending was not perfect but they claimed it was practical. They felt their own church, after initiating the movement, could not honorably reject union on the grounds so far suggested. Besides, rejection now would not only end all hope for future union with the German Reformed Church but would hurt the entire union movement of the churches in America. Christ's prayer for unity and the potentialities of the united church were again stressed.

A third type of article appeared in the Christian Intelligencer

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men left the Western Theological Seminary for positions in Presbyterian theological seminaries. Dr. Steffens left temporarily from 1895 to 1903, while Dr. Dosker left in 1903, never to return.

from a group seeking various clarifying amendments to the proposed Constitution. Such men as the Revs. W. B. Hill, A. P. Van Gieson and George Davis, while conditionally for this proposed union, were upset by the necessity of voting simply "yes" or "no" on this particular Constitution. After April 2, 1892, the Christian Intelligencer closed its columns to further discussions for the duration of the period during which the Classes convened to vote on this matter. It took a dim view of the one-sided opposition of the organ of Hope College, De Hope, which observed no truce during the month of April.

The belated vocalness of the opponents of this union was not persuasive enough to prevent classical approval by an additional one-third of the total Classes voting. This sudden alarm and doubt expressed about the proposed union may have been responsible for an apparent element of uncertainty which appeared during the General Synod meeting of June 1 to 9, 1892. Not all of the Classes had been willing to cast a categorical vote as per instructions and seven had failed to notify the Stated Clerk of the results of their vote prior to June the first. On the other hand, the Holland Classis enclosed a printed memorial outlining their opposition to the proposed Constitution and the proposed union.<sup>53</sup> The possibility of secession was real

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<sup>53</sup>The memorial of the Holland Classis was the work of a special committee appointed during the Classis meeting on April 6-7, 1892. This special committee advised Classis to vote "Nay" and to send a memorial to the General Synod stating its reasons. Classis adopted this recommendation 25-0. While unnumbered, there are eleven or twelve inter-related reasons given which, if not penned by Drs. Dosker and Steffens, closely follow their objections as revealed in the Christian Intelligencer and De Hope. It begins by claiming the purpose is not to stop at Federal Union but to seek organic union; it expresses the belief of doctrinal differences which threaten Dutch Calvinism; it questions the constitutionality, the powers to be granted and the length of the terms of the representatives to the Federal

enough, for about this same time the Rev. Enno R. Haan, recently called from the Netherlands

falsely pretending that the Reformed Church in America was no longer true to its standards and using the then agitated Federal Union with the Reformed Church in the United States as a pretext . . . seceded with the Consistory and the larger part of the congregation . . .<sup>54</sup>

of the Holland Reformed Church of Wortendyke, New Jersey.

As a result of the Stated Clerk's inability to readily classify all the votes on the question of the proposed constitution, the General Synod of 1892 appointed a special committee to make this report. This important six-man body headed by Dr. J. A. De Baun was to canvass the votes, examine the suggestions of the Classes and then recommend to the General Synod the appropriate line of action it should follow.<sup>55</sup>

The Committee was able to tally the votes but there was a difference of opinion among the members concerning the recommendation to be made to the General Synod. Finally, on the sixth day of the Synod, there was presented both a majority report, signed by Chairman De Baun and four members of the Committee, and a minority report which was solely the work of the Rev. J. F. Zwemer, of the

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Synod; it implies schism will result and though it believes in union, it asks General Synod to "at least postpone . . . till the risk incurred shall be smaller than it appears today." This printed memorial appears in the "Minutes of the Classis of Holland" (MS), pp. 497-98, located in the Beardslee Library, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.

<sup>54</sup>J. H. Whitehead et al., History of the Classis of Paramus of the Reformed Church in America: 1800-1900 (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), p. 500.

<sup>55</sup>These responsibilities are detailed in the Minutes R.C.A., 1892, p. 577. Additional members were the Rev. A. P. Van Gieson, the Rev. J. F. Zwemer and Elders J. H. Harrington, V. Lansing and W. Harrington.

Classis of Illinois.

The majority report acknowledged the abstention of the Classis of Arcot, India, and the receipt of eighteen affirmative votes, two conditionally affirmative votes, and six negative votes. By addition of the seven classical votes reported to the Christian Intelligencer, it was able to report twenty-four confirmative votes and nine negative votes. After proposing the adoption of certain modifications and understandings to the Federal Constitution Committee, the Committee felt justified in adding the three conditional votes to the affirmative total. In a rather tactless statement, considering the earnestness of the past debate and the sensitivity about classical prerogatives, the majority report went on to state:

Although this proposed Constitution of Federal Union . . . is not in any sense an alteration of the Constitution of our Reformed Church in America, the General Synod, although under no obligation to do so, has chosen to submit it to the vote of the Classes in order that the mind of the Church might be fully known. Having already been approved by the General Synod, and having now received the affirmative votes of a clear majority of the Classes, it only remains for this Synod to utter a final declarative resolution announcing its adoption by our Reformed Church in America.<sup>56</sup>

Besides proposing the adoption of such a declarative resolution, this report proposed amendments and understandings for Articles V, VI, VII and XIII. This was done to remove any ambiguity and to remove the possibility of the Federal Constitution ever being construed as supreme over the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America. As a

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 581. The underlining has been added. Large numbers of Hollanders in the West, already alarmed enough to have voted 4 to 3 in their Classes against the proposed union, now were told this union could have been consummated without a local expression of their desires.

further safeguard, Article XIV was added to permit the General Synods to rescind powers previously granted to the Federal Synod. It concluded by providing for the election by the General Synod of four ministers and four elders from each of the four Particular Synods; and it also proposed that the first Federal Synod be held at the First Reformed (Dutch) Church of Philadelphia on the last Tuesday of October, 1892.

The minority report of the Rev. James Zwemer noted the qualified and conditional nature of many of the Classes' votes. To him, this meant that the Church had not evidenced the "necessary unanimity of feeling and consensus of views so needful as the basis of a permanent Federation, and successful co-operation." Mistakenly believing the General Synod of the German Church did not meet until 1894, he proposed the appointment of a committee to revise the proposed Constitution "for the purpose of obtaining an instrument of Federation, if possible, in which a larger majority of our Church can more unanimously and unqualifiedly concur."<sup>57</sup>

Dr. T. Chambers, reporting on the General Synod meeting for The Presbyterian and Reformed Review, described the debate that followed as being long, earnest and good-natured. The 1929 Report of Fact Finding Commission on Christian Union on the other hand noted that "parliamentary war tactics then broke out on the floor of the Synod and a thwarting resolution was passed."<sup>58</sup> Dr. A. P. Van Gieson,

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<sup>57</sup>Christian Intelligencer, June 15, 1892, p. 5. This is not the report that one finds in the General Synod Minutes over his name, but if this report had been adopted, the final action by the Church would have been postponed until 1894.

<sup>58</sup>Report of Fact-Finding Commission on Christian Union of General Synod of R.C.A. as printed in Minutes R.C.A. 1929, p. 167.

another committee member, proposed this "thwarting resolution" as a substitute for the minority report. In view of the incomplete and qualified character of the classical vote, this substitute report proposed the acceptance but not the adoption of the majority report with its amendments and understandings. It also proposed postponement of action on the proposed Articles of Constitution and Federal Union "to the next General Synod in order that they may be considered in connection with the report of the Committee on the broader plan of Federal Union then to be presented."<sup>59</sup> In the meantime, the Classes were to conduct a new vote on the proposed Constitution as revised in the majority report. After additional debate, this substitute report was adopted on the eighth day by a vote of seventy-eight to forty-eight. The Special Committee, now under the chairmanship of Dr. Van Gieson, was continued in order to count the new classical returns and report to the next General Synod. The high water mark of the Reformed Church in America's union attempts was now past.

This postponement of action was correctly evaluated by most as a victory, though possibly only temporary, for the opponents of this union. A recent evaluation of the seventy-eight votes cast for postponement concluded that they came from three sources: those Westerners who opposed this union, those who favored a possible

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<sup>59</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1892, p. 578. Dr. J. Elmendorf's warning of 1888 had gone unheeded and an additional union proposal was allowed to cloud the picture. In the main, this appeal to wait for a larger federation of the Reformed and Presbyterian bodies was a fraudulent ruse by one group and an expression of over-optimism on the part of a second group. So few of the churches sent representatives to the first meeting in December, 1891, that nothing was actually accomplished. Two meetings were held in March and April of 1893 which produced an incomplete "Plan of Federation" for the consideration of the General Synod and a request that the committee be continued. Minutes R.C.A., 1893, p. 813.

pan-Presbyterian union, and those who favored union with the German Church but were frightened by the West's threat of schism.<sup>60</sup> The editor in the Christian Intelligencer of June 15, 1892 (p. 1), noted that the opposition had come mainly from the "more self-contained" churches of the Hollanders. He excused them, partly because of their lack of experience in prior Christian union efforts and partly because of their lack of intimate association "with Christians of other denominations . . . in philanthropic and educational enterprises." Initially he felt the postponement was wise and right but in general "the year's delay was regarded by those favoring union as simply a necessary annoyance, during which they hoped the West would come around to the union viewpoint."<sup>61</sup> The Rev. Peter Moerdyke, now pastor of Trinity Reformed Church, Chicago, Illinois, and one of the three Western delegates voting against postponement, felt this minority triumph was subversive to the Reformed Church in America's polity and to the principle of majority rule.<sup>62</sup>

By September, the official Minutes of the General Synod were available for study. An editorial on the 14th in the Christian Intelligencer (p. 2) supported the Rev. Moerdyke's view. It claimed that the tardiness of the discussion, the dismissal of about one

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<sup>60</sup>H. Harmelink, op. cit., p. 81. The Western delegate vote of 22 to 3 favoring postponement supports Harmelink's contention, while the compromise nature of Dr. Van Gieson's substitute report and its supporting reason dealing with "a broader Plan of Federal union" upholds the latter two.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Reformed Church Messenger, July 28, 1892, pp. 4-5.

fourth of the delegates, coupled with many "confusing statements, led a majority of the Synod in pure weariness at the long debate to adopt, as the easiest solution the deference of action until another year." This editorial also attacked De Hope for having created much of the opposition by presenting "only one side of the question and a persistent, and we think, unfair appeal to well known prejudices." Because the action of the General Synod was not a rejection, the editor felt confident of the favorable nature of the next vote on this union.

The German periodical, the Reformed Church Messenger, took a different view of the meaning of the postponed vote.

The large vote in favor of postponing the whole question until next year, it would seem, practically commits that Church against the Union proposed, and our Church, having entered into the movement in good faith, and supposing that the brethren of the sister Church were in earnest and likeminded with her, will know just what to do.<sup>63</sup>

It predicted that the opposition would probably not be any better satisfied with the new plan. The Stated Clerk of the German Church delayed publishing the results of the 1892 German classical vote because "meanwhile some adverse views and feeling in the R.C.A. tended to divert the mind from the real merits of the question involved, . . . causing some doubt and fear respecting the ultimate success of the proposed union."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1892, p. 1. Certain leaders of the German Church (e.g. Dr. George B. Russell) felt they had their suspicions of Dutch Church's lack of sincerity confirmed. Cf. George B. Russell, Four Score and More (Philadelphia: author, 1908), pp. 250-251. Dr. Russell also had a phobia about the Dutch Church desiring to swallow up the German Church and that, when this failed, it always broke off the talks.

<sup>64</sup>Minutes R.C.U.S., 1893, p. 43.



The fall classical meetings of the Reformed Church in America again witnessed an unwillingness to come to grips with this proposed union question. With the creation of the basically German speaking Western Classis of Pleasant Prairie, the total number of Classes in the United States increased to thirty-four. At the fall meetings thirty-one of these thirty-four deferred action on the majority report until their spring sessions. The Classis of Schenectady not only voted but it also sent an overture to the General Synod questioning the constitutionality of the 1892 General Synod's action in failing to ratify a decision for union registered by a majority of the Classes.

The lack of a commitment of any kind by the Classis of Arcot, India, is a bit more puzzling. Frequently the need of presenting a unified Christian front to a predominantly non-Christian world had forced earlier and more complete co-operation on the mission fields than at home. Yet the Classis of Arcot, pleading an isolation from the necessary knowledge and contacts with the proposed partner in this union, abstained from voting both in 1892 and 1893. The only visible indication of her feelings on this matter was the vote cast by her delegate, the Rev. J. W. Conklin, against postponing General Synod action on the 1892 majority report favoring union.

The two recognized organs which expressed the opinion of the Reformed Church in America again swung into action. De Hope, especially Dr. N. M. Steffens' column "Wekelijksch Budget," again took up the cause of opposition in September, 1892. The Christian Intelligencer, after some preliminary skirmishing in February, printed an article entitled "Why Should We Vote for Federal Union?"<sup>65</sup> This article instigated a

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<sup>65</sup>March 1, 1893, p. 5.

wholesale exchange of views. Written by Pastor "B", it claimed Federal union should be accepted because: (a) it was the leading of the Holy Spirit, (b) it was a special opportunity, (c) the honor of the Church was pledged, and (d) the real obstacle (threat of schism) had disappeared. The fact that one side claimed a monopoly of the Holy Spirit's leading was questioned, the second contention was largely ignored and the remaining two came under heavy attack. On what side does honor lie when one contends an ecclesiastical wrong is being attempted? The Rev. J. H. Joldersma, Superintendent of Western Missions and a friend of this union, reported that both the Dutch and German element in the Western branch of the Church were almost solid in their opposition to this union. This opposition, which he evaluated as stronger now than a year ago, professed to be content with the Church as it then existed. Federal union could hurt the Church's mission work in the West for there was a real danger of secession by individuals and groups. This type of secession, largely unorganized by pastors and church leaders, could so weaken many churches that they would no longer be self supporting.<sup>66</sup>

This continued insistence that the proponents yield on this union proposal or face sundering the Church finally over-taxed their patience. The Christian Intelligencer editor's "Notes" of March 29, 1893 (p. 3), questioned, "Can the church much longer afford to yield to such tactics? Had not the General Synod better retire into

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<sup>66</sup>R. H. Joldersma, "Federal Union and our Western Work," Christian Intelligencer, March 29, 1893, p. 14.

Cf. Ibid., March 15, 1893, p. 14 and Ibid., March 29, 1893, p. 14. These resolutions from the Reformed Church of Harrison, South Dakota, and the Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan, seem to substantiate the view expressed by the Rev. Joldersma.

'innocuous desuetude', and let the policy of the church be directed by a Committee in Holland, Mich.[sic]?" A follow-up article the next week by Dr. Talbot Chambers of Marble Collegiate Church, who claimed to be a dispassionate observer, also evidenced a willingness to call the West's bluff. He felt federation was so important, it was worth the risk "when the only serious objection is that a portion of our church is so bitterly opposed to the plan it would secede. They must submit to the voice of the majority or go their way." He noted Calvin was "willing to cross 10 oceans if he could heal the division of Protestants. Surely we should be willing to cross a narrow brook if we can heal a single division among the Reformed."<sup>67</sup>

The Rev. A. P. Van Gieson, who had proposed the substitute report at the last General Synod to avoid such a confrontation, felt the possible loss would "outweigh one hundred fold any possible gain in other quarters."<sup>68</sup> The hesitant Classes of the Church were more prone toward the reasoning of Dr. Van Gieson. As the reports of their spring meetings trickled out in the issues of the Christian Intelligencer the trend was so obvious that official action by the General Synod was unnecessary to reveal that this union movement had failed. The editor on May 3, 1893 (p. 3), recognized that the closeness of the vote meant the number of opponents, whether a majority or not, were too numerous to conclude successfully this union with the German Reformed.

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<sup>67</sup>Dr. T. Chambers, "The Proposed Union," Ibid., April 5, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 4. While favoring union and not sharing the West's aversion to this union, the Rev. Van Gieson accepted their opposition as a fact and therefore could not favor the Federal Constitution "because it ultimately means disunion."

This was a surprise and a disappointment to many in both churches. The German Church periodicals, while expressing the opinion that a great opportunity had been lost, were remarkably free from any vindictiveness. Of the Dutch Church periodicals, the Christian Intelligencer, while predicting the disappointment of those seeking a wider federation, expressed a happiness at having participated in promoting a plan of Christian union which it felt would eventually triumph. De Hope rejoicing inwardly, quietly continued Dr. Steffens' series of articles on "The Heidelberg Catechism in the German and Dutch Reformed Churches." The "Committee in Holland" had little need to say more. It had through the medium of the Classis of Holland sent a letter to the General Synod stating its continuing, unflinching opposition to this union and expressing itself on the subject of the majority report.<sup>69</sup>

To the Rev. Joachim Elmendorf, delegate to the 1893 General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, fell the embarrassing task of reporting the failure of his church to approve the proposed union. His task was made even more difficult when the report of the vote of the German Classes revealed such an overwhelming approval

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<sup>69</sup>"Minutes of the Classis of Holland," April 5 & 6, 1893 (MS), pp. 554-55. This letter defended the right of the Classes to vote on federal union, questioned the German Church's orthodoxy (this time because of Dr. C. S. Gerhard's unchallenged and unrebuked statements in the Homeletics Review, January, 1893, p. 9), complained of sharing equal representation with such a decentralized church, expressed its fear of schism if the "tender conscientious scruples" of the opposition were over-ridden, and concluded with a very revealing but unidentified quote, "In our isolation lies our strength." Though unidentified, this apparently was a well-known remark of Groen Van Prinsterer, Historian of the House of Orange. This lay leader in the Seceder Church movement of the 1830's in the Netherlands had made this statement in a political context in 1871.

of this union (49 approved, 2 conditionally approved, 2 rejected and 2 abstained).<sup>70</sup> That he accomplished his task adroitly is evident from Dr. J. I. Good's report of this General Synod, which noted that while there was a general regret over this one-sided failure, there was no revulsion.<sup>71</sup> Dr. T. G. Apple, in his response to delegate Elmendorf's speech, though pained at the rejection of the plan, expressed the hope for continued good feelings between the two churches by stating:

Let us be united in heart and give each other the right hand of fellowship and love[at the same time shaking Elmendorf's hand], and evermore strive for the welfare of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth; and may the blessing of God rest abundantly upon our two churches.<sup>72</sup>

The General Synod of the German Church had met the last week in May and so it remained for the June 7-15 meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to deliver the official coup de grâce. This it did on June 8, 1893, though not as decisively as the situation demanded. Chairman A. P. Van Gieson of the General Synod's Special Committee to tabulate the new vote reported sixteen Classes voted approval of the Majority Report of 1892, eighteen Classes voted against its acceptance and the Classis of Arcot abstained. The Committee in answer to the Classis of Schenectady's overture

<sup>70</sup>Minutes R.C.U.S., 1893, pp. 42-43. This greatly surpassed their constitutional two-thirds voting rule. The greatest opposition occurred in the western areas of missionary competition, with the R.C.A.; the Classis of Sheboygen rejected this union and the Classis of South Dakota took no action on the matter.

<sup>71</sup>"General Synod of R.C.U.S.," The Presbyterian and Reformed Review, June, 1893, p. 674. Cf. "General Synod, R.C.U.S.," Christian Intelligencer, June 7, 1893, p. 5. Neither General Synod prints in full the speeches of the fraternal delegates.

<sup>72</sup>Christian Intelligencer, June 7, 1893, p. 5.

declared:

The action of the last Synod was of the nature of ordinary legislation, and was constitutional by virtue of the clauses of the constitution which commit to the General Synod power to exercise a general superintendence over the spiritual interests and concerns of the whole church, "and to regulate" correspondence with the highest judicatories or assemblies [sic] of other religious denominations.<sup>73</sup>

Faced with an adverse majority vote on the proposed Articles of Constitution and Federal Union, the Committee recommended "that further consideration of the said Articles be indefinitely postponed."<sup>74</sup> The Committee refused to make a recommendation on the question of whether it was currently advisable to attempt to draw up some new, more acceptable plan of union. The General Synod accepted this report, thus ending the most nearly successful effort for union ever undertaken by the Reformed Church in America.

The proponents of a wider union fared a little better. Chairman Elmendorf reported on two committee meetings and produced an incomplete Plan of Federation for a Federal Union between the Reformed Churches in the United States holding to the Presbyterian System. This Plan proposed a Federal Council composed of four ministers and four elders from each denomination and contained many points of similarity to the defeated Plan. The Committee continued until the following year when it presented the now completed Plan of Federation which eight denominations, including the German Reformed, had helped formulate. The General Synod submitted the twelve point Plan to the Classes for a vote. Despite some expressed doubts about this proposed

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<sup>73</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1893, p. 818.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

federation on the part of the Western Section of the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System, the Classes approved the proposed Plan twenty-three to ten. This was a hollow victory, for the General Synod failed to elect delegates for a first Council meeting. No further reference is made in the Minutes of General Synod until 1903-06 when a new attempt occurred to reorganize and activate the Council.

Why did this union movement fail after seven years of un-hurried negotiations? The reason must be sought solely within the Reformed Church in America. This is true unless the unwillingness of the Reformed Church in the United States to remold itself in the image of the Dutch Church can be construed to be a reason.

The immediate cause for failure obviously was the adverse vote in 1893 of the Classes of the Reformed Church in America. A scholar of the union effort of the German Reformed Church generalized that "again it had been misgivings within the Dutch Church which caused the collapse of the movement."<sup>75</sup> Beyond this general summarization loom the following five reasons for failure, namely:

1. The over-reliance upon the federal union idea.
2. The unappeasable opposition of the Western branch of the Church.
3. The vigorous threat of schism.
4. The tactical mistakes of the leadership favoring union.
5. The diversion and complication created by the proposal for a Pan-Presbyterian federation.

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<sup>75</sup>Donald H. Yoder, op. cit., pp. 99-100. Dr. Yoder was formerly a Professor of Religion at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and is currently a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Early discussions revealed the rigid quality of the Dutch Church's Calvinism and its unwillingness to sacrifice anything to achieve this union. The concern of a large part of the Church for its doctrinal purity and denominational autonomy led almost immediately to the rejection of the idea of an organic union with the larger German Church. The solution to achieve this union, while maintaining areas of denominational control, seemed to reside in the idea of a federal union. The larger part of the Church felt quite secure in this restricted union idea, especially when the German Church offered equality of representation in the new Federal Synod. Yet, perhaps influenced by the Church's original example of intractability, the Dutch and German Classes of the West and even some of the Hollanders of the East remained unsatisfied.<sup>76</sup>

The West feared federal union would eventually result in organic union with a church whose orthodoxy they already suspected and would be but the first step to merger with additional questionable denominations. The West also feared the Eastern branch of its own Church. This was partly due to the fact that it constituted about three-fourths of the membership of the Church and threatened to drag the West into this union. It was also suspect because it had not undergone the religious troubles of the 1830's and 1840's in the Netherlands and had not been as concerned about the Freemasonry controversy of the 1870's and early 1880's, the aftermath of which still confronted the

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<sup>76</sup>Six of the eight Classes in the West voted against this union in 1893. Illinois and Michigan, which had voted favorably, both had their beginnings prior to the influx of Dutch immigration in 1847 and were predominately English speaking.



West. Their adamant opposition remained unchanged despite the precautions and concessions evident in the amendments and understandings added to the proposed Plan of Union in 1892.

This union failed because hand-in-hand with the opposition of the West went the threat of schism. While it is impossible to point out its effect in terms of classical votes, it is difficult to over-stress the importance of the threat of secession. The West had not participated in the long period of friendship and co-operation with the German Reformed, which had its beginnings in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>77</sup> The splits of 1822, 1857 and 1882 within the Reformed Church in America were readily recalled as were the movements of 1834 and 1886 in the Netherlands. Many of the immigrants had participated in one of these movements or had been members of Seceder churches in the Netherlands. Thus they lacked the stability of long established church loyalties. The Rev. Christian Van Der Veen, writing in the Christian Intelligencer, noted that the American Hollanders not only had some of the admirable virtues of the Netherlands but some of their failings, too, namely, "a conservatism which often sacrifices the future to the worship of the past, and an obstinacy which demands either rule or ruin."<sup>78</sup> Dr. Van Gieson, the Rev. Joldersma and many others felt it was unwise to risk a split from the Church of its most rapidly growing Classes.

The union movement also suffered from a lack of thorough leadership. The form and wording of the proposed Constitution

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<sup>77</sup>Cf. Eugene Heideman, "Reformed Ecumenicity, 1888-1893," Reformed Review, XVIII, No. 1 (September, 1964), 17-24.

<sup>78</sup>May 3, 1893, p. 6.

submitted in 1891 was not as thoroughly worked out as it might have been. The Majority Report's amendments and understandings came a year too late. It was unwise, if technically accurate for the Majority Report to mention that the classical vote was a concession and not necessary, because the Federal Union left the Reformed Church in America's Constitution untouched. If the leadership favoring the movement had been persuasive enough in 1892 to have avoided a Minority Report or unified enough to have avoided the Substitute Report, they might have prevented many new channels of debate. The agenda's late presentation of such an important matter to the General Synod should have been challenged. The fact that thirty-three ministers and elders were excused the same day that postponement was voted seventy-eight to forty-eight, shows both apathy and poor management.<sup>79</sup> The union courtship lasted seven years but it slumbered for much of that period of time. Despite the publication and supposedly wide distribution of the 1888 Conference on Union and the various Minutes of the General Synod, the movement failed to elicit a widespread reaction or awareness. Even the opposition was unresponsive until the latter part of 1891.

Finally, the Rev. Elmendorf's warning of 1888 not to complicate negotiations with additional proposals from other churches was ignored when the Committee on Wider Union was set up in 1891 and the Substitute Report adopted in 1892. A determined stand in 1891 might have defeated the creation of this committee of which, ironically, the Rev. Elmendorf

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<sup>79</sup>At the time of this crucial vote only 3 of 28 Western delegates failed to vote while 45 of 142 Eastern delegates did not do so. Western opposition leadership was not only vocal but persuasive for of the 25 votes the West cast, 22 were for postponement.

was appointed chairman. This created a diversion, for many of the more Americanized Classes felt a closer kinship to the Presbyterian Church, which sponsored this proposal, than to a reputedly German church. The inability to vote simply on the merits of union with the Reformed Church in the United States without this diversion or the threat of secession insured its defeat.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INCREASING ECUMENICAL IMPETUS: 1893-1944

The failure of the attempt at federal union with the German Reformed Church and the lack of positive results from the 1895 Pan-Presbyterian Federal Council did not disrupt the Reformed Church in America's faith in inter-church co-operation. The historical events of the next fifty years had a tendency to further the sense of need for even larger ecclesiastical as well as secular organizations. Big business, big government and big unions all evidenced the belief that size was the prerequisite for success in influencing and controlling men.

Even the wars of this period exerted an influence toward inter-church organization and co-operation. One result of what Secretary of State John Hay called our "splendid little war" of 1898 had been to create anew within the American churches a sense of mission in the Orient.<sup>1</sup> A new surge of European imperialism in the 1880s and 1890s had had a similar effect in Africa and Asia. In 1900 at Carnegie Hall in New York City, a great Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions

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<sup>1</sup>This new sense of responsibility also caused the R.C.A. to seek a more adequate system for involving congregations in the denomination's work throughout the world. See Charles E. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1922 (5th ed.; New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work of the Reformed Church in America, 1922), p. 230.

took place. Ten years later a World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland continued the discussion of the common problems of the mission field and collective methods to cope with them. World Wars I and II fostered interdenominational co-operation both within the armed services and on the home front. The common hope for preserving the peace after each of these wars brought many of the churches, not only in America but throughout the world, closer together. The increasing urbanization and literacy of the people of the United States, including the membership of the Reformed Church, also evidenced a need for co-operation and greater tolerance.<sup>2</sup>

The Reformed Church at the start of the century clearly expressed its position on the subject and form of such co-operation.

Federation of the churches for practical Christian work has begun in our foreign fields, and to some extent in our cities at home. This movement is more promising, and it ought to be encouraged, both for an exhibition of Christian unity, and for greater practical results than can otherwise be obtained.<sup>3</sup>

Both as a denomination and through the activities of its ministers and laymen, the Church, as previously noted, was represented in large numbers of projects and associations of an interdenominational character. Yet the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System which sought to accomplish its

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies: 1936 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), II, Part 2, 1496, records that 54% of the R.C.A. churches were considered rural, yet over 60% of its membership was considered urban. By 1920 the census figure already showed 51% of the United States' population was living in urban areas.

<sup>3</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for 1900 (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1900), p. 824. Hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.C.A., [year].

purposes by "co-operation without incorporation,"<sup>4</sup> received the most loyal and consistent support from the Reformed Church's General Synod. This world body, officially organized in 1877, and its Western Section (North America) organized in 1884, was the chief source of ecumenical motivation for the Church around the turn of the century.

Though a tendency for missionary co-operation and even union existed earlier on the foreign mission field, it received greater direction after 1893. At the suggestion of this Presbyterian Alliance, a conference of officers and members of Foreign Mission Boards of the Presbyterian bodies in the United States and Canada met in New York on January 11, 1893. The resultant Foreign Missions Conference of North America grew to include eighty missionary bodies before becoming a department of the National Council of Churches in 1950. It set a pattern for similar interdenominational conferences of Home Missions Boards, Education Boards and their various Women's auxiliary organizations. Because of such associations, in 1896 the Reformed Church, and four other members of the Western Section, adopted a five point Plan of Co-operation for Home Missions.<sup>5</sup>

To secure even closer unity among the churches of the Presbyterian family, the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church initiated a movement which culminated five years later in the creation of the Council of the Reformed Churches in the United States of

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<sup>4</sup>Edward T. Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-1902 (4th ed.; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), p. 283.

<sup>5</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1896, pp. 417-19. This was basically a comity agreement with the Northern and Southern Presbyterians, the Cumberland Presbyterians, the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the German Reformed Church.

America holding the Presbyterian System. This turned out to be almost an exact reincarnation of the 1895 Plan for a federal council of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. In 1902, the Reformed Presbyterians created a five man committee to confer with any of the churches represented in the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian system. Apparently this invitation failed to reach most of these bodies at their annual meetings of 1902. The Reformed Church in America alone appointed the requested committee for closer co-operation or unity.<sup>6</sup>

On April 24, 1903, at the Marble Collegiate Church, the Rev. Dr. J. Preston Searle presided over this first meeting of these two churches. He also presided at the next three meetings during which time the number of participating churches grew to seven. By 1905, it had already been decided "that some form of union closer and more tangible than any at present existing between the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian order, is desirable for the work intrusted to them by the head of the Church."<sup>7</sup> The Reformed Church Committee on Unity, true to the mood of the church, had suggested that this form should be a "federal union as will maintain unimpaired the identity of the various bodies entering into it while providing for efficient administrative co-operation."<sup>8</sup>

These features had been incorporated in a Plan of Federation drawn up at a three day meeting at Pittsburgh in December, 1904.

<sup>6</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1902, pp. 127-28.

<sup>7</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1904, p. 748.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 750.

This took little effort or originality, for it included many of the ideas and even reproduced verbatim articles from the Plan of 1895 in which many of these same churches had participated. There were a few changes. Representation would be based upon a proportional scheme, although voting could be demanded upon a unit system of one vote per church. The new Plan also contained a withdrawal procedure. Article five explained the reason for this additional organization's existence.

The Federal Council shall promote the co-operation of the Federated Churches in their Foreign Missionary work, and also in their general work in the United States of America, in connection with home missions, work among the colored people, church erection, Sabbath-schools, publication and education, and may initiate movements having this co-operation in view subject to the approval of the Churches concerned. The Council may also advise and recommend in other matters pertaining to the general welfare of the Kingdom of Christ.

Articles one and four illustrate the limited nature of this federation.

Every Church entering into this Federation retains its distinct individuality, its own creeds, government and worship, as well as every power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by these articles expressly and exclusively delegated to the body whereby constituted . . . . It shall not interfere with the creed, worship or government of the churches and, in particular, all matters of discipline shall be left to the exclusive and final judgement of ecclesiastical authorities of the Churches concerned.<sup>9</sup>

The attending churches - the Northern and Southern Presbyterians, the United Presbyterians, the Cumberland Presbyterians, the German Reformed (informally) and the two initiators - were asked to present the Plan to their judicatories for adoption in principle and further study.

In November, 1905, a broader spectrum of Protestant churches

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<sup>9</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1905, pp. 152-54. Dr. J. Preston Searle, who presided at this meeting, continued to be at the center of all the R.C.A.'s Pan-Presbyterian affiliations for the next decade and a half.



had gathered at Carnegie Hall in New York City and also produced a Plan of Federation creating a Federal Council of Churches. Perhaps to avoid confusion, the Pan-Presbyterian group retitled its Plan and its Council. At a meeting at Charlotte, North Carolina, March 14-16, 1906, the six committees present approved the renamed Articles of Agreement and dropped the name "Federal" as a description of its Council.<sup>10</sup> The Plan actuated by the approval of any two of the sponsoring churches created a body which operated from 1907-1926.

A confusing proliferation of federal union plans and councils dot the period from 1905-1925. Fraternal Christian contacts with other kindred bodies, especially in doctrine, never remain static relationships. Whether through Articles of Correspondence or Articles of Federation, sooner or later the impulse manifests itself to seek an even closer relationship. In 1903, the Southern Presbyterians had proposed closer relations and possible organic union.<sup>11</sup> Though both churches agreed to appoint committees the movement got lost in the founding of the Council of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System. The General Synod considered a 1911 suggestion of union with Northern Presbyterians premature but proved more receptive two years

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<sup>10</sup> Minutes R.C.A., 1906, p. 500. The Associate Reformed Church joined the discussion at this time while the Cumberland Presbyterians merged with the Northern Presbyterians.

The German Reformed Church did not join until its triennially convening General Synod met in 1908. It had used the last two meetings of this group to develop a union approach with the Northern Presbyterians. Despite difficulties, a Plan of Union was reached in 1911 but the German Church decisively rejected this union in 1914 when 42 of its 59 Classes voted against the Plan. See Donald H. Yoder, "Church Union Efforts of the Reformed Church in the United States to 1934" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes R.C.A., 1903, p. 394.

later to an overture for closer relations with the German Reformed Church.<sup>12</sup> The Church's delegates to the Council of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System began the negotiations and met with a favorable response. It was difficult to understand why the German Church would encourage a new two church negotiation even if they "would see in it a promise of possible organic union."<sup>13</sup> The German Reformed had just voted down a union plan with the Northern Presbyterians and had appealed to that church to help promote a large Pan-Presbyterian union. The Rev. George W. Richards of the Reformed Church in the United States, chairman of their Permanent Committee of Closer Relations and Church Union, had reached the conclusion that six churches could more readily unite than could just two.<sup>14</sup> By 1917 they were completely committed to this idea and despite a few feeble gestures the separate union approach between the two churches was permitted to die.

The next few years did not lack for multi-union plans or ideas. In 1918, the Council of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System submitted a plan to reorganize itself as a federal union instead of a federation to achieve a greater effectiveness. This would be accomplished by organizing a General Council of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in America which could appoint

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<sup>12</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1913, p. 775. This overture had been presented by the Classis of New Brunswick.

<sup>13</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1914, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 142. Dr. Richards was a strong ecumenist and a very influential person in the German Reformed. He remained the head of their permanent committee until union had been realized with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1934. Yoder, op. cit., p. 132, noted he desired a federal or if possible an organic union of all the members of the Council of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System.

administrative agencies to maintain and conduct efforts in Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Education and Publication.<sup>15</sup> The following year the Reformed Church in America accepted fifteen of the eighteen articles of reorganization but the missing three would have greatly hindered the actions of the proposed General Council.<sup>16</sup>

During this period the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America had been particularly active in seeking unions. In 1918 she had requested the appointment of delegates to meet and form an organic union of all evangelical churches. The Overture Committee advised the rejection of such an inclusive union and the General Synod concurred.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the Committee on Closer Relations and Church Unity, which had received a similar invitation, had sent an unofficial observer to the meeting held December 4-6, 1918 at Philadelphia. When it appeared likely that organic union could not be secured and that federal union would be the main topic of the next meeting, the Committee recommended to the 1919 General Synod that the Reformed Church

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<sup>15</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1918, pp. 484-88. This Plan contained the Reason for promulgating the plan; a Preamble professing the essential agreements of church standards; a Basis of Union incorporating member churches, but not changing the Forms of Government, Constitutions and Directories of Worship; and eighteen Articles of Agreement.

<sup>16</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1919, p. 813. Article 5, the crucial article which dealt with the General Council's creation of these administrative agencies, was referred back to the originating Council.

<sup>17</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1918, p. 488. An interesting ecumenical experiment on the local level had taken place among several of the churches in New Brunswick, New Jersey but an overture to enlarge upon the relationship was denied. Cf., Charles Wissink, "Unitive and Divisive Movements Within the Reformed Church in America" (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 74-75.

enter the discussion but such permission was not given.<sup>18</sup> At a second general meeting held in Philadelphia, February 3-6, 1920, the delegates of seventeen church bodies representing a wide spectrum of church doctrine and polity adopted a plan of federative union. This plan to create "The United Churches of Christ in America" failed. Despite its acceptance by the Reformed Church in the United States, the plan did not receive the approval of the additional five bodies required to put it into operation.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the Joint Committee of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches had adopted an Outline of Federal Union which it felt might well be incorporated by the Council of the Reformed Churches. The Northern Presbyterian's General Assembly accepted this plan on May 27, 1920 and encouraged the Reformed Church to do likewise. It provided for more administrative and judicial powers than had the Plan of 1918. The Council, to be renamed the "United Assembly of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in the United States of America," was to have the power to settle all comity questions and seek the consolidation of common work in overlapping Classes, Presbyteries and Synods.<sup>20</sup> The General Synod approved a committee to help draft a constitution. After meetings at Atlantic City (September 29-30, 1920), Washington, D.C. (November 16-17, 1920) and Philadelphia (February 8-9, 1921), a

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 815.

<sup>19</sup>Even the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. which initiated these conferences rejected this plan. Actually only three members of the Pan-Presbyterian Council of Reformed Churches had participated in this movement. Yoder, op. cit., pp. 135 & 137.

<sup>20</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1920, pp. 144-49, reproduce the Preamble, Basis of Union and the Articles of Agreement.

Constitution of the Presbyterian Reformed Churches in America emerged. Once again the enthusiasm for additional federal union plans was more apparent than real. Before the Reformed Committee could even recommend that the constitution be submitted to the Classes for a vote, several of the sister judicatories had rejected the plan. The 1921 General Synod approved a supplementary report which proposed the tabling of the matter indefinitely and the discharge of the committee.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps influential in this rejection had been a new plan for fuller and greater co-operation proposed by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ.<sup>22</sup> Yet separate organizations to meet each new world situation or to merely improve upon the degree of co-operation found in existing bodies encountered some reaction. Most of the war-time organizations had ceased to exist and the debate over United States participation in the League of Nations had largely ended. In 1921 the Reformed Church committee to co-operate in the work of the American Council of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship acknowledged it had never performed any useful duties since

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<sup>21</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1921, p. 514. Despite the failure of this plan, the Rev. G. H. Hospers and the Classis of Rochester asked General Synod to pass on the constitutionality of its past action in even agreeing in principle to the transfer of power to the new courts proposed for the Council of Reformed Churches in 1918 and 1920. They were fighting for what they felt was the prerogative of the Classes to accept or reject all proposed constitutional changes. See reasons for rejection of this overture; Minutes R.C.A., 1923, p. 173.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 408. This child of the Carnegie Hall meeting in 1905 had not been stillborn and gained much prestige during the late war.

Yoder, op. cit., pp. 139-40, suggested that a large contributing factor was the fact that the Northern Presbyterian Church was being shaken by a controversy over Fundamentalism.

its creation in 1917 and asked to be discharged.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the 1922 State of Religion message delivered by the Rev. T. H. Mackenzie (New York) devoted mainly to the growth of a denominational consciousness evidences some type of a reaction as well.

We are getting we believe a deepened conviction that the Reformed Church in America is a distinct entity. Our thoughts are not being distracted by the prospects of speedy amalgamation with some larger religious organization, from giving our attention to the problem of how as a religious denomination which so far as we can see and read the will of God is destined for the present and for a considerable period of time in the future to have a work of its own to do and a place of its own to fill in the great family of Christian Churches. The different parts of which our Church is composed has been getting a fuller knowledge of, and taking a deeper interest in one another. There has been a broadening of sympathy and the strengthening of a common purpose.<sup>24</sup>

Even the Council of Reformed Churches in America holding the Presbyterian System failed to maintain its separate existence. On March 2-3, 1926 at Atlantic City, it merged into the Western Section of the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System. The 1926 General Synod ratified this merger to which the Council of Reformed Churches brought additional strengthening agreements of co-operation in missions, education and publication.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 507.

<sup>24</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1922, p. XX. The General Synod met at Pella, Iowa for its first session beyond the Mississippi River. This was a further recognition of the Western branch of the Church whose growth had necessitated the formation of the Particular Synod of Iowa in 1919.

<sup>25</sup>Report of Fact-Finding Commission on Christian Union of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (n.p., n.n., 1929) p. 50.

The Presbyterian Alliance, despite this incorporation, had been primarily a fraternal gathering of churches seeking to promote co-operation rather than union. "Indeed, between 1884 and 1925 the subject of organic union entered little into its discussion." Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. 266.

The Reformed Church had also participated in the formation of the greatest ecumenical organization in the United States during this half century, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. Perhaps such participation was a logical outgrowth of the Church's membership in organizations like the Presbyterian Alliance and the Evangelical Alliance, but it was also in keeping with the mood of many American Protestant churches around the beginning of the twentieth century. The problems created by an increasingly industrialized nation with its urbanized and mobile population seemed to call for new solutions applied through a better organized interdenominational effort. Previous co-operation of this nature tended to make the activists impatient with any hindrance from denominationalism and to stress practical co-operation while mitigating differences in doctrine, polity or heritage.<sup>26</sup> Together with the use of common Christian educational materials, "there was, in consequence a trend toward a common type of Christianity."<sup>27</sup>

The Federal Council of Churches of Christ proved to be the product of this period and according to Professor John A. Hutchison, "born of this marriage between the idea of social service and the idea

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<sup>26</sup> John A. Hutchison, We Are Not Divided: a Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1941), p. 28, speaks of the "anti-theological trend of the times."

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Vol. IV: The Great Century in Europe and the United States of America: A.D. 1800-A.D. 1914 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 439. Latourette lays great stress on the importance of environment as the major factor in this line of development; cf. S. Mathews, "Protestantism, Democracy and Unity," Journal of Religion IX (April, 1929), 183.

of interdenominational co-operation."<sup>28</sup> Such an organization had been predicted by Dr. Philip Schaff, former expounder of the Mercersburg Theology, in an 1893 speech before a gathering of the Evangelical Alliance entitled "The Reunion of Christendom."<sup>29</sup> Though there were additional intermediary and auxiliary organizations, it was a letter by the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers which brought about the formation of the Federal Council of Churches. At its 1902 meeting at Washington, D.C., this organization composed of individuals and a few congregations decided to try to achieve an official federation of American Protestant churches. It sent out letters asking the various church bodies to send delegates to a meeting in November, 1905 to seek a federation solely of co-operative effort in dealing with various problems mainly of a social nature.<sup>30</sup>

The Reformed Church of America received such a letter and made a favorable response along with twenty-seven other denominations. The General Synod of 1904 appointed Dr. Joachim Elmendorf, a veteran of previous federal union negotiations, to head its delegation.<sup>31</sup> The inter-church Conference on Federation met at Carnegie Hall in New York City from November 15-21, 1905. The five hundred delegates representing the thirty denominations that attended this well organized meeting soon agreed upon a Plan of Federation. After some discussion, a few

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<sup>28</sup>Hutchison, op. cit., p. 25. In the area of social service, Professor Hutchison includes the attempt of the churches to win back the working classes through means of the Social Gospel (p. 39).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>31</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1904, p. 747.



changes had been made such as the unanimously accepted suggestion that the word "divine" be added to the Preamble, so that it read:

Whereas, in the providence of God, the time has come when it seems fitting more fully to manifest the essential oneness of the Christian churches of America in Jesus Christ as their Divine Lord and Saviour, and to promote the spirit of fellowship, service and co-operation among them . . . do hereby recommend the following plan of federation to the Christian bodies represented in this conference for their approval:<sup>32</sup>

This slight change not only committed the proposed Federal Council to a more evangelical attitude but later proved to be a decisive factor in keeping the Unitarians and similar groups out of the Council. It was also one of the factors which enabled the Reformed Church to continue its membership when opposition arose within its own ranks. The objects of the organization had been expressed in rather vague terminology which later permitted a large degree of latitude in the activities of its Commissions. One objective was

to secure a larger combined influence for the Churches of Christ in all matters affecting the moral and social condition of the people, so as to promote the application of the law of Christ in every relation of human life.

Yet the former Dutch Reformed Church and others, still careful of their denominational distinction, had not felt threatened by a Council restricted to counseling and recommending courses of action. It had "no authority to draw up a common creed, or form of government or worship, or in any way to limit the full autonomy of the Christian bodies adhering to it."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Hutchison, op. cit., p. 37; Edward T. Corwin, A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1906), pp. 410-12, reproduces the Preamble and the Plan.

<sup>33</sup>E. T. Corwin, A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America, p. 411.

The General Synod of 1906 without serious debate approved this Plan of Federation and appointed ten members to attend the first meeting of the Federal Council.<sup>34</sup> The Plan, activated when approved by twenty of the thirty churches which had participated in 1905, secured the approval of all but the Protestant Episcopal Church before convening December 2-8, 1908 at Philadelphia. This meeting gave birth to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ and an indication of the direction of its future actions. At the suggestion of Dr. Frank Mason North, a fourteen point "Social Creed of the Churches" devoted to the protection and betterment of the working class was unanimously passed.<sup>35</sup>

This acceptance may provide an additional insight into the reasons why the Reformed Church in America played such a minor and uninfluential role in this new organization.<sup>36</sup> Generally in the past the Church had provided leadership and exerted an influence all out of proportion to its size. At this time it had not yet accepted the idea of church bodies participating widely in social action. The 1910 General Synod had encouraged the local churches to help form inter-church federations in their communities. The goals it proposed for these federations reveal the extent of the denomination's interest in

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<sup>34</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1906, p. 489.

<sup>35</sup>Hutchison, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

<sup>36</sup>The Rev. J. A. Ingham, "A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America: 1906-1936" (n.p., typewritten, [1936]) and the Rev. James Hoffman, "A Digest of Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America: 1938-1957" (n.p., typewritten, [1957]). A perusal of the Digests gathered by these two former Stated Clerks reveals not only the Church's lack of influence within the Federal Council of Churches but indicates also the apparently limited effect that the Council had on the life of the Church.

social action. These expressions of Christian fellowship should carry on evangelical work "advancing the cause of charity, protecting the interests of the Sabbath, temperance, law and order, and social purity, of building up public opinion in support of civic-righteousness."<sup>37</sup>

The ecumenically inclined Charles Corwin, in updating the Manual of the Reformed Church in America in 1922, could only note that the Federal Council of Churches "has been very useful in preventing overlooking and overlapping in denominational activity."<sup>38</sup>

While the federal union impulse seemed to have suppressed much of the desire for organic union within the Church in the first quarter of the twentieth century, this proved to be a temporary phenomenon. The first expressed desire for union was directed toward the sister Reformed Church in the United States. Despite the failures of the union movements of 1844-47, 1866-75, 1886-93 and the recent 1913-17 approach between these two churches, continued evidence of co-operation remained.<sup>39</sup> In 1899 a contract made by the Board of Education of the

<sup>37</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1910, p. IX. A committee appointed in 1917 to consider the social task of the Church is never mentioned again. A 1931 created Committee on Social Service and Industrial Relations was replaced the next year by a Permanent Committee on Social Welfare. A Social Action Committee suggested in 1939 was rejected because "we do not believe that our ministers and churches are prepared to take such action at this time." Minutes R.C.A., 1941, p. 194.

<sup>38</sup>A Manual of the Reformed Church in America: 1628-1922, 5th ed., p. 103.

<sup>39</sup>Yoder, op. cit., p. 103, likewise cites four German-Dutch union movements but lists the last one as 1904-05 when the German Synod of the Interior petitioned for organic union only to find its General Synod had not yet gotten over the 1886-93 failure and refused to act. The movement of 1913-17 was more advanced for both churches appointed committees to confer, though there was no fruition. In 1917 the German Reformed felt it no longer imperative to continue the exchange of delegates with churches she met with regularly in the

Dutch Reformed Church became effective for Sunday School lesson helps and teachers' guides prepared by the German Reformed Church. The Rev. I. W. Gowan acted as the Reformed Church in America's editor and contributor to The Teacher and other materials which were imprinted as Dutch Reformed publications. After beginning the work on a new hymnal in 1911 the German Church invited the Dutch to join in. Dr. James I. Good acted as chairman and Dr. E. P. Johnson of New Brunswick Theological Seminary acted as the secretary of the joint committee which prepared The Hymnal of the Reformed Church, published in 1920. This hymnal was available in two editions depending upon whether one desired the inclusion of the Dutch Reformed or the German Reformed liturgy. A third co-operative effort which also culminated in 1920 was the voluntary transfer of the Iwate-Aomori Mission Field in northern Japan by the Reformed Church in America to the German Reformed. The latter church insisted on making at least a partial reimbursement for the buildings.<sup>40</sup> This transfer occurred mainly for administrative reasons for the Dutch conducted their major mission efforts farther south.

The initial overtures from the Classes of New York and North Long Island in 1925 asked that the Committee on Closer Relations be instructed to seek a conference with the Reformed Church in the United

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Pan-Presbyterian organizations. See Minutes R.C.A., 1914, pp. 138-39, and Minutes R.C.A., 1917, p. 145.

<sup>40</sup>Yoder, op. cit., pp. 101-102. The northern mission efforts of these two churches were both within the Classis of Miyagi affiliated with the Church of Christ in Japan. Dr. Yoder indicated the amount of remuneration was between \$10-12,000 in his discussion of these co-operative ventures. The initiation of this transfer began in 1912. The R.C.A. also turned over the Shinshu Field in the North to the Church of Christ in Japan. "Eighty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America," pp. 102-05, as cited in Minutes R.C.A., 1918.

States to ascertain the "advisability of Federal or Organic union between these two denominations."<sup>41</sup> The General Synod made a vague motion to the effect that present day conditions demand closer co-operation of all organized bodies of Protestantism. A misunderstanding arose among the Committee as to just what instructions had been issued, and it failed to act.<sup>42</sup> The following year the Reformed Church's Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Alliance replaced the old Committee on Closer Relations as the chief negotiator with other denominations. The new committee received the Classis of Saratoga's overture for closer relations with the German Reformed Church and those from the Classes of Palisades, Philadelphia and Westchester for talks with all the churches holding the Presbyterian system.<sup>43</sup>

The desired contacts were made at the next meeting of the Western Section of the Presbyterian Alliance in March of 1927. Chairman T. H. Mackenzie, who had gloried in the Church's separate organization in his State of Religion message in 1922, reported the German Church would only consider an organic union. On this matter his report concluded:

It would be neither courteous to other Churches nor dignified for our own body to negotiate on the question of an organic

<sup>41</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1925, p. 880.

<sup>42</sup>Dr. George W. Richards reported to the 1926 German Reformed General Synod that no approaches had been received the past three years. Carolina and Philadelphia desiring union with the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Philadelphia: The Reformed Church and Sunday-School Board, 1926), p. 81.

<sup>43</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1926, p. 131. The Particular Synod of New Brunswick supported this wider approach and repeated this support the following year when the Classis of Palisades again presented a similar overture.

Union so long as we have no reasonable assurance that such Organic Union is desired by our Church.<sup>44</sup>

Renewed agitation broke out in the tercentenary year of 1928 when six Eastern Classes and the Particular Synod of New Brunswick overtured for union primarily with the German Reformed. Once again a conservative chairman was ready to disapprove action toward union.

This is an old question . . . discussed and debated, and we are no nearer than we were thirty years ago. We have gained considerable in the way of co-operation and but little in the way of organic union . . . Constant agitation along the lines of organic union is not helpful to either of these denominations.<sup>45</sup>

The General Synod, however, felt this persistent union agitation deserved a close study and authorized its President to appoint a Special Fact-Finding Commission.<sup>46</sup>

The Rev. Malcolm J. MacLeod appointed a committee composed of fourteen clergymen and one lay member which compiled an admirable

<sup>44</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1927, p. 448. While one may suspect a bias in the Rev. Mackenzie's approach to union his appraisal of the situation was probably accurate. Dr. G. W. Richards, an ardent ecumenist, had little feeling for any additional negotiations with the Dutch unless organic union could be practically assured. A poem found in the German Church's periodical Christian World, May 26, 1928, p. 5, quoted in Yoder, op. cit., p. 100, gives evidence that such a union was still attractive to other elements in the church. It begins

"Let Dutch and German join their hands  
For one united Brotherhood,  
Bound by indissolable bands,  
Co-workers for a common good  
In fundamentals we are one,  
In non-essentials we are free:  
And in the way our work is done  
The difference is hard to see."

<sup>45</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1928, p. 784; cf. Herman Harmelink, "Christian Unity and Church Union: a Study of the Ecumenical Approach of the Reformed Church in America" (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1964), p. 100.

<sup>46</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1928, p. 785.

report on the possibilities of Christian union.<sup>47</sup> The subcommittees did their homework well. They outlined their church's relation with the Reformed Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from the eighteenth century to May of 1929. They presented brief histories of these churches and of the German Reformed Church's prospective partners, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Synod of North America. Reproduced were statements made about union from the time of John Calvin up through those made by the late Dr. David Burrell of the Collegiate Church of New York. Also included was a survey of the five unions consummated since 1900 and the eight others that had been proposed. In the process they all came to favor organic union, if it could be achieved with substantial unanimity in all sections of the Church, for "nothing short of Organic Union will meet the schisms of our time."<sup>48</sup> They supported by personal testimony and research the following professed positive reasons for such union.

1. Foreign Missions would gain from a more unified presentation of the claim of Christ.
2. Many problems of over-churched communities would be solved.
3. Economy in overhead expenses would result.

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<sup>47</sup>The members who composed this report were the Revs. H. W. Noble (chairman), F. R. Clee (secretary), C.E. Bloodgood, H. E. Cobb, J. A. Dykstra, M. E. Flipse, J. E. Hoffman, A. I. Mann, J. M. Martin, D. A. Poling, G. Schnucker, R. W. Searle, F. B. Seeley, J. Wesselink and Mr. H. Vanderwart. Report of Fact-Finding Commission on Christian Union of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, p. 59.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

4. "A New Name would challenge the Community."<sup>49</sup>
5. It is the Will of God.

The Commission had attempted an approach to the German Reformed Church via Dr. Paul S. Leinbach, a former Dutch Reformed pastor. At a meeting in New York City on October 22, 1928 he gave the first official knowledge of his church's union negotiations with the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Synod of North America. He was not very encouraging and advised that if the Reformed Church in America wished to pursue the matter further, it go through the proper channel, namely, Chairman George W. Richards of the Committee on Closer Relations.<sup>50</sup> Dr. Edgar F. Romig favored pursuing the matter and contact was made with Dr. Richards. Because of the professed advanced stage of the negotiations already entered into by his church, he suggested an informal conference of two commissioners from each church. At a meeting in Philadelphia on January 10, 1929, Dr. Richards produced a Basis of Union as evidence of the advanced stage of negotiations, but he did invite this sister church to join the proposed union.<sup>51</sup> The Dutch Reformed were not ready in 1929 to consider a proposal which brought together Calvinists, Lutherans and Arminians. The commissioners declined the invitation and the talks ceased.<sup>52</sup> This prior involvement

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 18. These reasons and their supporting points are found on pages 14-23. Reason number four was explained by showing the low percentage of members in Eastern churches of the R.C.A. who were raised within the denomination. The conclusion was that lacking a "common religious denominational background . . . the laity is concerned first of all with loyalty to a Person rather than an Institution." Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>52</sup>Both sides had long memories. Dr. Leinbach "spoke of the inability of the rank and file in the Reformed Church in the U.S. to



of the German Reformed Church was the official reason offered by the Commission for taking no further action at that time.<sup>53</sup>

Even before their final evaluation of union possibilities with the Reformed Church in the United States had been made, the Commission had contacted the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. At their invitation, Dr. J. Ross Stevenson, President of Princeton Seminary and Chairman of their Department on Church Co-operation and Union, appeared before the Commission and interested Reformed ministers of the New York City area on November 5, 1928. In an encouraging speech he not only welcomed the idea of closer co-operation but concluded:

I feel that we need to get it on our minds and hearts that we are not catching up with the work the Lord has instituted, and while to some union may seem incidental, to those who

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understand our feeling toward them." The Report noted, "all points of difference that so narrowly prevented union with us in 1892 still exist and are in no way ameliorated by this new development." Ibid.

Dr. Richard's report gives a hesitant tardy quality to the R.C.A.'s negotiations since 1926. It fails to acknowledge the Leinbach approach, erroneously reports the month of this meeting and claims that it was the Fact-Finding Commission that asked for an informal session. Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States for 1929, pp. 32-33.

<sup>53</sup>Others felt this approach failed because of a preconceived attitude on the part of Dr. George W. Richards towards the Dutch Reformed Church. Two emeritus professors of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Dr. Milton Hoffman and Dr. M. Stephen James, expressed the belief that Dr. Richards had deliberately "torpedoed" this approach. They disagree on whether it was contempt for the Dutch Reformed more than theological differences that caused the premature ending of union talks. Interview with Dr. Milton Hoffman, April 2, 1964; interview with Dr. M. Stephen James, June 18, 1964. Yoder, op. cit., p. 141, indirectly lent some support to this belief when he noted that in 1931 the German Reformed held off union with the Evangelical Synod for one more Pan-Presbyterian union attempt.

have it on their minds and hearts to get the work of the Lord done, union is necessary.<sup>54</sup>

In the exchange of letters to set up a meeting of the committees of both churches, Dr. Stevenson proved tactful and encouraging. He wrote:

I understand the scope of your mission. You are at liberty to report all the facts you were able to find and the possibility of union is certainly a fact so far as we are concerned. Our chief interest is in the union of our Reformed Churches rather than with a broader union which has to do with outside bodies.<sup>55</sup>

The joint meeting of February 7, 1929 at the Presbyterian Building, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, gave further evidence of the Presbyterian's desire for union. Knowing the Reformed Church Commission had not been authorized to propose union, the Presbyterians revealed that they would seek to have their General Assembly overture the 1929 General Synod of the Reformed Church "looking toward Organic Union."<sup>56</sup>

On the basis of this information and their research, the Commission at a final meeting on February 20, 1929 unanimously approved the report and the conclusions to be presented to the General Synod session at Holland, Michigan on June 6th. Their conclusions claimed that 23 per cent of American Protestants were members of churches which had already united since 1900 or were definitely thinking about merger.

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<sup>54</sup>Report of Fact-Finding Commission on Christian Union of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 52, contains this quote but the date of the letter, though probably December of 1928, is not given. This latter statement had been one of the initial instructions to the Department of Church Co-operation and Union in 1904. It had been complied with in the 1906 union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the 1920 union with the very small Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

The Commission itself favored joining this trend through union with the Northern Presbyterians, provided substantial unanimity was found in all sections of the Church. They ended their conclusions with a quote from Dr. Daniel Poling, one of their members. "We believe in Church Union because God wills it, Christ prayed for it, and world redemption waits on its consummation."<sup>57</sup>

One of the highlights of the denomination's 1929 annual meeting was the address of Dr. Robert E. Speer, Secretary of Foreign Missions and delegate from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field described this speech "as one of the wonderful efforts of eloquence that comes very rarely to the experience of most men, and will always be remembered by those who listened to it."<sup>58</sup> Though he bore an overture unanimously adopted by his church's General Assembly calling for closer co-operation or even organic union, touchy subjects in the Reformed Church, yet the General Synod rose to its feet in appreciation of his manner of presentation. He stressed the past close relations of the two churches. "People have always acted as if the two churches were one freely passing back and forth in the

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 59. This report was later included in the Minutes R.C.A., 1929, pp. 142-196.

<sup>58</sup>June 19, 1929, p. 387; cf. Studens, "The Point of View," Ibid., July 10, 1929, p. 440. This article too is laudatory of this speech but cautions it cannot insure a fruitful result. The address had such a powerful effect that a pamphlet of anti-union articles was published as late as February 1, 1930 with the avowed intention of offsetting Dr. Speer's address. See W. L. B., Some Thoughts on Organic Union (New York: n.n., 1930).

pulpits and seminaries and missions."<sup>59</sup> He recognized a conservative inclination on the part of both denominations and agreed union required a basis of unity in faith which he felt existed.<sup>60</sup> In the past, proposed union movements had been blocked by the hope of even larger mergers. Dr. Speer warned "let us not make the same mistake now."<sup>61</sup>

In the wake of this speech, the General Synod adopted the Report of the Fact-Finding Commission. A new thirty-two member Permanent Committee on Closer Relations with Other Denominations, headed by Dr. Malcolm J. MacLeod, was created to conduct these negotiations.<sup>62</sup> To sample the attitude of all sections of the Church, the Committee was instructed to conduct at least one conference in each of the five Particular Synods. The vote had not been unanimous; not everyone had been caught up in the wave of eloquence. Senior Elder William L. Brower of the New York Collegiate Church Consistory had published a

<sup>59</sup>Address of Mr. Robert E. Speer, delegate from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Holland, Mich., June 7, 1929, pp. 17-18 (in the Church Union file, N.B.T.S.).

<sup>60</sup>Though a spectrum of views existed in the Presbyterian Church, he could also claim a noticeable conservative inclination. A strong fundamentalist element had caused the withdrawal of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "the most influential modernist in the country," as Stated Supply of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City in 1924. The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, centers of fundamentalism, both were "largely under Presbyterian influence and control." William W. Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1930), pp. 513-14. Moodyism also had a visible effect on many Midwest members of the Reformed Church in America.

<sup>61</sup>Address of Mr. Robert E. Speer, op. cit., p. 20. Though the Northern Presbyterians had been approached by the Methodist Episcopal Church the year before, he assured the General Synod that union with the Reformed Church was more important.

<sup>62</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1929, p. 198.

pre-Synod pamphlet, Organic Union Not Favored, in May of 1929.<sup>63</sup> Its avowed purpose had been to prevent the General Synod from considering a proposal for union with the Northern Presbyterians, or, if presented, to defeat the motion by a large majority. Mr. Brower had even been granted the privilege of reading a paper from the floor opposing the adoption of the Fact-Finding Commission's Report, but to no avail.

No sooner had the Synod members returned home than W. L. Brower renewed his pamphleteering. He contended the Fact-Finding Commission had deviated from their instructions and he felt he spoke for the membership in contesting their conclusions. "Paid secretaries and officials are necessary in some branches of the work of the Church but often times they do not reflect the feelings and opinions of the people and mischievous results ensue."<sup>64</sup> His emotionalism on the entire subject of church union, especially as it might affect his beloved Collegiate Church Corporation, at times interfered with his logic.

From November, 1929 through May, 1930 a rather sustained discussion, and at times a denunciation of union, took place in the

<sup>63</sup>Elder Brower had written this pamphlet under the pen name, "A Veteran Observer," Long an Office-bearer in the Reformed Church in America. Now 83 years old, he had served on the Board of Direction since 1908. His great fear was the obliteration of the Dutch Reformed Church as a denomination. Harmelink, op. cit., p. 103, fills in much additional detail on Elder Brower who was "president of the denomination's Board of Direction, leader in the Holland Society of New York, an executive of a New York liquor-importing firm, and an eccentric bachelor."

<sup>64</sup>"A Veteran Observer," Long an Office-Bearer in the Reformed Church of America, Some Thoughts on the Report of the Fact-Finding Committee at the Meeting of the General Synod of R.C.A., June 1929 (n.p., n.n., n.d.), p. [1]. (This and two other pamphlets by W. L. Brower can be found in the Church Union file N.B.T.S.)

papers devoted to the Church.<sup>65</sup> The Rev. Walter A. Scholten used the "Letter to Editor" column of the Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field to request that a conference on union be held in the Westchester Classis. He wanted the Committee on Closer Relations with Other Denominations to understand the importance the churches of that area attached to this union approach because of the increasing disintegration of denominational relationships.

Indeed, the time is not far distant when these churches will want to know why they should not affiliate with more powerful denominations with more challenging programs than the Reformed Church can ever present. The alternative to Church union may well be the secession of some of the most important congregations of our faith.<sup>66</sup>

The chief literary support for consummation of this union came from the pens of the Easterners, the Revs. Malcolm J. MacLeod and Theodore Brinckerhoff. The main reasons for supporting this union movement seemed to lie in its relevance for the churches of the East, faced with a mobile and cosmopolitan membership. In a denominationalism which had become almost meaningless to their average layman and an "outrage to God," they found weakness, economic waste, and an obstacle to missionary endeavors. This made even less sense to them when all the denominations faced the same world-wide enemy in the

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<sup>65</sup>While the Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field was the only strictly denominational paper, De Hope and its English-language counterpart, The Leader, were the recognized voices of the Western branch of the Church.

<sup>66</sup>November 6, 1929, p. 711. The editor after double-checking felt the Rev. Scholten was correct that churches actually existed that were Reformed in name only. Theodore Brinckerhoff, "Six Reasons for Church Union," Ibid., May 7, 1930, p. 302, claimed in the New York City area the name "Reformed" had to be suppressed to gain a foothold in a community.

"secular spirit of materialism."<sup>67</sup> When Dr. MacLeod's two part article entitled "Church Union, a Burning Question" appeared in April, 1930, the union question had already been reduced to a smoldering ember. He observed that mankind had moved from the historical stages of individualism to federation and now to organic union. To this pastor of the St. Nicholas Collegiate Church, the old order must give way to the new.

The inevitability of this transition made no impression upon many of his religious cohorts. They feared that union meant not a genuine merger but a "swallowing up" of the much smaller Reformed Church in America. Though he professed to be neither eager to join nor prone to prevent, Dr. Albertus Pieters of Western Theological Seminary, probably did more to encourage this belief than any other individual. His six articles on "The Question of Church Union" had the widest coverage of any material on the proposed union. For six consecutive weeks, beginning in November, 1929, both the Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field and The Leader carried his articles. Later in February, 1930, because they served his anti-union purposes, William L. Brower reproduced them in a pamphlet and sent them to the ministers and elders of the Church.<sup>68</sup>

Actually, Dr. Pieter's opposition is hard to categorize.

<sup>67</sup>M. J. MacLeod, "Church Union, a Burning Question," Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field, April 16, pp. 250-51, and April 23, 1930, p. 266.

<sup>68</sup>W. L. B., op. cit. By this time the opposition to union as apparent from the newspaper medium and reports of area meetings enabled Mr. Brower to state (p. 1) "the 'Veteran Observer' happily entertains the view that such substantial unanimity [the prerequisite for union] will not be secured."

Unlike Elder Brower, he claimed to be unmoved by sentimental considerations.

I am unwilling to be in bondage to the past. If any one can convince me that substantial spiritual gains will result from a merger of the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church, I should not be a worthy son of the noble men who now rest from their labors if I allow myself to hesitate.<sup>69</sup>

Unlike the Revs. G. H. Hospers and Winfield Burggraaff, he did not fear for the Church's orthodoxy for "those who yell Modernism generally have not made a real study of its strength in the Presbyterian Church."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, he agreed with two of the editorial columnists of The Leader, Drs. W. Burggraaff and J. E. Kuizenga, that regardless of the correctness of the basis for their opposition, Western opposition to this union was a fact. The Westerners were against pushing the discussion of merger further "lest in striving for added unity in the church, we precipitate added division and secession."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., Article I, "The Proposed Union With the Presbyterians," p. 5. Part of Pieters' dilemma was whether the Church should do as a body what so many, including three from his own family, had done as individuals - enter the Presbyterian Church. Yet he was convinced denominationalism was no sin and organic union would pose a threat to either doctrinal purity or religious freedom.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., Article V, "Why Not Join the Presbyterians?", p. 16.

<sup>71</sup>J. E. Kuizenga, "Editorial Comments," The Leader, May 28, 1930, p. 8. This professor at Western Theological Seminary had already indicated in his column of January 22, 1930, p. 8, that this union did not have the slightest chance to be consummated in the next 25 years. He relegated it to the status of a "remote academic question."

It did not take twenty-five years to accomplish a personal merger. In May, 1930, Dr. Kuizenga accepted an invitation to join Dr. Samuel M. Zwemer and Dr. John H. Raven, both former R.C.A. men, on the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary. His transfer to the Presbyterian Church followed shortly.



Despite their differing reasons for opposing this union, both columnists editorially expressed displeasure at the closed minds they found in the West regarding this subject. Dr. Kuizenga noted their intolerance was such that for even seeming to favor any form of union "one can find himself in disfavor."<sup>72</sup> Perhaps Dr. Speer had not understood this characteristic of self-devotion when a year earlier, stressing the advantages of a three-way union that included the United Presbyterian Church, he claimed "it would make available for our common effort the devoted life of the western churches of the Reformed Churches in America."<sup>73</sup> The Rev. Dr. Winfield Burggraaff (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), defended denominationalism and influenced by the Christian Reformed Church's attitude, opposed the union on the grounds of orthodoxy and future unions.

It will be well to remember, when thinking about union, that it is an expression of the times in which we live, and that if we start to move with the spirit of the age, we shall have to keep moving with it.<sup>74</sup>

He remained convinced the leaders of the Presbyterian Church planned additional unions beyond the Reformed-Presbyterian family, and alleged that after union the former Reformed Church members, outnumbered by at least thirteen to one, would be unable to prevent further mergers.

This is most certainly a time when Groen van Prinsterer's watchword [1871]: In our isolation lies our strength, needs to be thought through again, and the truth of it admitted

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1930, p. 8. See also his column in the April 23, 1930 issues.

<sup>73</sup>United Presbyterian, April 4, 1929, as quoted in the Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field, April 24, 1929, p. 259.

<sup>74</sup>"Editorial Notes," The Leader, May 14, 1930, p. 9.

even for our day and age. Isolation often results in preservation.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, the Committee on Closer Relations With Other Denominations had met in the fall of 1929. The Committee divided into seven subcommittees, both to continue and to enlarge upon the activities and research of the 1929 Special Fact-Finding Commission.<sup>76</sup> For the sake of economy, the Committee organized itself into Eastern and Western sections to meet separately until the full committee next met in the St. Nicholas Collegiate Church on January 22-23, 1930. The reports presented at this meeting caused the thirty-one members present to unanimously favor continuation to union if the prerequisite of substantial unanimity of all sections could be achieved.<sup>77</sup> None of these reports discouraged union, while the subcommittee on Foreign Missions said that experience in missions showed union to be more effective than co-operation. Statistics revealed the greater self-perpetuation of the denomination in the West than in the East. In the Eastern branch, it was estimated that 29 per cent of the Church's ministers had formerly been Presbyterians; while 30 per cent of their members received by letter of transfer came from within the denomination, 22 per cent came from Presbyterian churches; with regard to dismissals,

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1930, p. 571. These subcommittees were the following: Other Union Movements, Domestic Missions, Foreign Missions, Historical Contacts, Church Origin of Ministers and Members, Community Analysis, and Presbyterian Confessions. See pages 571-87 for the text of the entire report by The Committee on Closer Relations With Other Denominations.

<sup>77</sup>Editorial, Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field, January 29, 1930, p. 65.

the figures were 31 and 28 per cent respectively.<sup>78</sup>

This impetus for union soon received a check when the reports on the area conferences began to be known. To prevent a prejudgement before the General Synod had a chance to evaluate all the facts, the Committee had requested the papers not to print the discussions or decisions of the various area conferences. The only violation of this request appeared to be a reference by Dr. Kuizenga in his column in The Leader of February 12, 1930 where he remarked that of the first four sections of the Church reporting, two in the West and one in the East had strongly opposed union. The consensus of substantial unanimity had already been lost. The final report to the General Synod of 1930 showed the three Eastern Synods generally favored continuing the approach, but in the West some areas refused to allow meetings to be conducted, others went on record as being opposed.<sup>79</sup> The meeting at Holland, Michigan alone declared it was not opposed but it desired more information and discussion.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike the January meeting, not all the Committee members

<sup>78</sup>By comparison, in the West 8% of the ministers and 7% of the membership that came by letter of transfer had been Presbyterians; In this area only 9% of dismissals went to Presbyterian Churches. These figures were based on the replies of 384 of 583 ministers contacted. Minutes R.C.A., 1930, p. 577.

The disparity in these statistics provides at least one clue to the greater affinity of the East for this union.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 581-85. In the East the meeting at Patterson, New Jersey and the Classes of Passaic and South Long Island had registered disapproval. In the West the Classis of East Souix overtured General Synod opposing any invitation for organic union with the Northern Presbyterians.

<sup>80</sup>"Minutes of the Classis of Holland," April 1, 1930, p. 739 (in W.T.S.).

would sign the final recommendations to the Synod. It requested authorization, not only to continue its work of study and conference with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and other members of the Presbyterian families, but to "sit in on any conference on a wider Presbyterian Unity."<sup>81</sup> Once again as in 1874 the Presbyterians had proven to be considerate negotiators. They had evidenced a will to unite and believed all obstacles in the way could be overcome. As an evidence of their earnestness, they suggested the name for any new resulting church be the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in the United States of America so as "to preserve the historical background of the Dutch Church and the word 'Reformed.'"<sup>82</sup> Though the General Synod voted to continue the Committee, the interest now had shifted from a predominantly two-church approach to a new Pan-Presbyterian effort.

This movement was already in progress. The United Presbyterian General Assembly had instructed its Committee on Unity to invite the other members of the Presbyterian family to consider uniting to create a singular Presbyterian Church.<sup>83</sup> As a result of this invitation, a new Pan-Presbyterian movement was launched at the William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, January 28-29, 1930. The Reformed Church in

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<sup>81</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1930, pp. 586-87. Only twenty-two members would sign this report.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 580.

<sup>83</sup>Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1929), p. 361. This movement was an alternative to continuing serious union talks with the Southern Presbyterian Church, a church three times its size. In 1929 this General Assembly had refused to send a proposed Basis of Union down to its Presbyteries for a vote. See Wayne Christy, "The United

America's Committee on Closer Relations With Other Denominations had decided to send an Ad Interim Committee to this meeting.<sup>84</sup> Besides the United Presbyterians, the Northern and Southern Presbyterians were officially represented while the German Reformed had an unofficial representative present. The representatives of the Reformed Church (Dutch) approved the idea of organic union of these churches at the earliest possible moment on the basis of their existing standards. It refused, however, the invitation to make a Plan of Organic Union until it received the permission of its parent body.

This permission had not been received in 1930 but the Committee participated actively in the inter-committee meetings of June 24, November 12-13 of 1930 and at the meeting of a Special Committee on April 8, 1931. Probably because the Presbyterian Church (South) was not authorized to commit its church to union either, these meetings failed to produce even an outline plan for union. On June 9, 1931, the Committee recommended to the General Synod that it be permitted to draft a basis for organic union.<sup>85</sup> By a large majority, the delegates not only refused the request but dismissed the Committee and proceeded to the election of a new Permanent Committee on Closer Relations With Other Denominations. The Southern Presbyterians voted the same year to stop all negotiations toward organic union. The remaining two

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Presbyterian Church and Church Union" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1947), p. 197.

<sup>84</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1930, p. 572. The Church was represented by Drs. MacLeod, Noble and R. Raymond Clee. The latter, along with Robert E. Speer and James I. Vance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.), were the main speakers.

<sup>85</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1931, p. 970. Twenty-two of the twenty-eight remaining members of the Committee had agreed with this report.

Presbyterian Churches continued negotiations until June 24, 1934 when the United Presbyterian General Assembly by a vote of 113-123 once again defeated a motion to send a plan of union to its Presbyteries for a vote.<sup>86</sup> Two days later at Cleveland, Ohio, the Reformed Church in the United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America completed their union "at the top" and formed the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This ended the last definite attempt at union within the Presbyterian family for almost a decade.

Within the Reformed Church in America this relatively brief and abortive attempt at union failed because of a sentimental attachment for the past which helped magnify the large-scale apathy for union particularly prevalent in the Western branch of the Church. Reinforcing this attitude had been the fear of absorption by a much larger church body and the concern that this would be the first of a series of mergers. When even the orthodoxy of the first proposed partner, the Presbyterian Church (North), caused speculation and rumor, additional possible mergers outside the Reformed-Presbyterian family were an abomination to the conservative element.<sup>87</sup>

Some historians and theologians had felt that the Scopes trial of 1925 had damaged the fundamentalist religious conceptions beyond

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<sup>86</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1936, pp. 414-16, contains a brief résumé of these actions since 1929.

<sup>87</sup>The principle of substantial unanimity in all parts of the Church did not itself defeat this movement, but it did insure the impossibility of any consummation of a union. The Western branch of the Church, so adamantly against union, was an increasingly important factor in the life of the Church. Prior to the 1929-31 approaches, it already numbered over 260 congregations in 14 Classes containing 31% of the total membership and contributing 44% of the total denominational benevolences. Willard D. Brown, History of the Reformed Church

repair. Actually a by-product of this trial was a reawakened interest in church orthodoxy among members of the Baptist and Presbyterian groups. One result was that the actions and publications of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America came under closer scrutiny. One of the first targets of dissatisfaction was the Federal Council's copyrighted Lenten devotional, "Fellowship of Prayer." The pamphlets of 1930 and 1931 led to the first major attacks by elements within the Reformed Church on the Federal Council of Churches.<sup>88</sup> A professed variance from the standards of the Church and a lack of evangelical content made this publication a source of complaint even as late as 1947.<sup>89</sup> The attack broadened in 1931 to include the charge that non-evangelical leaders exercised a disproportionate amount of influence over Council actions. As a result, at various times the Reformed Church's representatives were instructed to try to secure more evangelical actions and expressions on the part of Federal Council.<sup>90</sup> The Council itself has been appraised of this desire both directly and indirectly through the various debates and votes which ensued in the Church over continued membership.<sup>91</sup>

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in America (New York: Board of Publication and Bible School Work, 1928), p. 102. The Rev. Brown was the Secretary of the Board of Education of the R.C.A.

<sup>88</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1930, p. 556, showed the initial protests came from the Particular Synod of Iowa, the Western Classes of Chicago, Pella, Pleasant Prairie, East Souix, West Souix, and Wisconsin, and the Eastern Classes of Greene and Rochester.

<sup>89</sup>Editorial, Church Herald, March 14, 1947.

<sup>90</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1931, pp. 952-53; Minutes R.C.A., 1945, pp. 112-13.

<sup>91</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1931, pp. 946, 952-53. Such overtures and votes also occurred in 1934, 1936, 1947, 1948 and 1950. The Southern

Not all aspects of this ecumenical body's activities came under attack nor did it lack for defenders within the Reformed Church. In an interesting comment on the times, the Classis of Holland in 1930 commended both the National Broadcasting Company and the Federal Council of Churches for sponsoring a series of hour long broadcasts called "Sabbath Reveries" by the Rev. Charles L. Goodell. Their resolution claimed this series was more acceptable to the vast number of Christian people than the liberal ministry of Dr. H. E. Fosdick or the extreme fundamentalism of Dr. D. G. Barnhouse over the Columbia Broadcasting Company.<sup>92</sup> Elaborate reports by the Overture Committee in 1931 and the Permanent Committee on the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1940 endorsed continued membership in an organization that carried out activities co-operatively which no single denomination could do as well alone.<sup>93</sup> The General Synod of 1940 reaffirmed its faith in the ideals for which the Federal Council stood and pledged its loyalty, prayers and help. A 1944 proposal to merge this body and seven other interdenominational agencies into a National Council of Churches of Christ gained approval, though its actual organization did not take place until 1950.<sup>94</sup> World War II had brought a lull in these

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Presbyterian Church actually withdrew for the second time from the Federal Council of Churches in 1931. See Hutchison, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>92</sup>"Minutes of the Classis of Holland," September 9, 1930, p. 756.

<sup>93</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1931, pp. 947-53; Minutes R.C.A., 1940, pp. 553-54. Its chief defense in 1931 was that most of the protests were against the activities of only one of several commissions and not against the Council as a whole. In 1940 the report stressed its function as a denominational clearing house for the appointment and supervision of chaplains in Federal prisons, C.C.C. camps and the Armed Forces.

<sup>94</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1944, p. 149. These proposed partners



attacks but serious challenges to continued membership on the grounds of alleged modernistic penetration remained to be faced. While the Reformed Church did not encounter the disruptions found in the Presbyterian Church in the United States in America, its institutions and individuals, too, were caught up in the controversy.<sup>95</sup>

As early as 1923, the nomination of Dr. E. S. Worcester to the faculty at New Brunswick Theological Seminary as Professor of Systematic Theology provoked a debate in the General Synod. Certain Western educated ministers on the Board of Superintendents for the seminary condemned his reservations about Adam's federal responsibility for human sin. The nomination was sustained though only after eight ballots and much to the disappointment of the Rev. G. H. Hospers, one of the Board members. The Rev. Hospers felt this was the planting of the seeds of modernism at the Eastern seminary and "indicated he would never urge another person to attend New Brunswick Seminary."<sup>96</sup> To many in the West it became an object of suspicion and its graduates theological question marks.

included the Council of Church Boards of Education, Foreign Missions Conference of North America, Home Missions Council of North America, International Council of Religious Education, Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, United Council of Church Women, and United Stewardship Council.

<sup>95</sup>About 1936, two small splinters, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Bible Presbyterian Church, broke away from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The R.C.A. experienced a minor schism when the Rev. Martin R. De Haan and all but 45 families left Calvary Reformed Church of Grand Rapids in 1929. The group formed an undenominational congregation and its pastor became a fairly well-known radio minister. Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field, April 17, 1929, p. 249, reveals the Classis of Grand Rapids deposed the Rev. De Haan at its spring meeting.

<sup>96</sup>Harmelink, op. cit., p. 113. The Minutes R.C.A., 1923, pp. 92-93, substantiate the balloting.

The Trustees of Hope College also came under pressure because of persistent rumors about some unsoundness in the teaching at the college and the poor example set by some of the instructors. More specifically, the complaints were that evolution and a biological interpretation of life were being taught without a sufficient "anti-dotal explanation," and that some instructors, besides being irregular in church attendance, tolerated and even took part in card playing, dancing and movie going. A special committee of the Classis of Holland had met with the Trustees and asked that all teaching applicants be screened for religious orthodoxy.<sup>97</sup> A less restrictive social policy slowly evolved at the college for faculty and student alike. Eleven years later Dr. Norman Vincent Peale of the Marble Collegiate Church was criticized for acting as a technical advisor for the Hollywood movie "One Foot in Heaven."<sup>98</sup>

The same year Dr. Edgar F. Romig in his State of Religion message to the General Synod helped rekindle sectional feeling. He expressed the belief that parents should not confess their children sinful and guilty before God at the time of baptism.<sup>99</sup> A letter from the Classis of West Souix asked that sufficient protest be registered by the other Classes against this "heretical statement" that the Classis of New York would be forced to discipline this minister who was under their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Eastern Classes resented this

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<sup>97</sup>"Minutes of the Classis of Holland," April 1, 1930 and May 16, 1930, pp. 739-44.

<sup>98</sup>Harmelink, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>99</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1941, p. 260.

interference and no trial ever took place.<sup>100</sup> The Church ended by merely reaffirming its belief in its doctrinal standards.

With the coming of the United States involvement in World War II, controversy remained latent. Also postponed but not inactive was the organization and creation of the largest ecumenical body yet attempted, the World Council of Churches. The 1939 General Synod, during a lull in the attacks on the Federal Council of Churches, accepted an invitation to join this newly proposed world organization.<sup>101</sup> A somewhat logical outgrowth of past support of the Evangelical Alliance and membership in organizations, i.e., the Presbyterian Alliance and the Federal Council of Churches, this action had its origin as early as 1910.

The motivating forces behind the development of the World Council of Churches came from the foreign missionary movement and its attempts at co-operation. In 1910 a World Missionary Conference took place at Edinburgh out of which developed three movements whose activities and leadership resulted in the creation of the World Council; these were the International Missionary Council, Faith and Order, and

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<sup>100</sup>"Minutes of the Classis of New York," October 21, 1941, pp. 10-14 (in Church Archives, N.B.T.S.), revealed the Classis was offended by the West Souix letter which is reproduced along with an answering letter by Dr. Romig. The action of the Classis of West Souix was condemned as a hasty judgement without benefit of trial and unconstitutional. Dr. Romig professed he would have omitted the statement if he had known it was going to offend for it was only incidental in pressing for liturgical revision. A special committee of four was appointed to further study the matter but at the spring Classis meeting of April 21, 1942 (p. 14), it reported no action need be taken.

<sup>101</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1939, pp. 148-151.

Life and Work.<sup>102</sup> While there had been some talk of church unity, this conference felt it should start with unity on the mission field. In each non-Christian nation they wanted to create one undivided Church of Christ.<sup>103</sup> One decisive step occurred which differed from the happenings of previous major missionary conferences and that was the creation of a Continuation Committee to function between conferences. In 1921 this committee assumed the name of the International Missionary Council as the representative of a world-wide federation of seventeen National Councils of Missionary Societies and National Christian Councils. "The success of the Council was assured by the choice as its first officers of John R. Mott as Chairman and J. H. Oldham and A. L. Warnshuis as Secretaries."<sup>104</sup> The Reformed Church, early an energetic participator in foreign mission, took pride in this selection of Warnshuis, one of her sons, to a post whose importance grew as war descended upon Europe. From his New York office he helped direct the support of missions cut off from their parent boards and continued the fostering of indigenous churches. While this organization, through its contributions to extended co-operation, helped prepare the way for the coming of the World Council of Churches, it did

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<sup>102</sup>Despite the urging as early as 1908 of the R.C.A.'s Board of Foreign Missions, the Church apparently failed to appoint delegates for the 1910 Conference. Minutes R.C.A., 1908, pp. 106-07.

<sup>103</sup>Norman Goodall, The Ecumenical Movement: What It Is and What It Does (2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 45-46.

<sup>104</sup>Rouse and Neill, op. cit., p. 367. The main headquarters was located in London but Warnshuis, former R.C.A. missionary to China, served as the American Secretary until his retirement in 1942. Part of this time Warnshuis also served as treasurer of the denomination.

not participate directly in the first merger which produced the World Council.

Not everyone left Edinburgh in 1910 satisfied with the emphasis and direction its succeeding conferences could be expected to take. The Swedish Lutheran Archbishop, Nathan Söderblom, left feeling a world conference should be called to make the churches face up to their social responsibility and international relations. The Reformed Church in America did not evidence a great deal of enthusiasm for this movement which culminated in 1925 at Stockholm in the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Bishop Charles H. Brent of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States also felt a necessity for calling a world conference of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants on faith and order.<sup>106</sup> Through the intermediary of his denomination, invitations were sent out for a conference which would study and discuss differences in the hopes of a better understanding and possible desire for reunion. Both geography and actual interest played a part in the more active participation of the Reformed Church in America in this movement. In 1911 the requested committee on a World Conference of Faith and Order was appointed which participated in a preliminary joint conference in New York City on May 8, 1913.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1921, p. 505. Delegates had been appointed to this proposed conference but there is no report or other evidence that they attended the Stockholm meeting.

<sup>106</sup>Rouse and Neill, op. cit., p. 407; Goodall, op. cit., p. 43, mentioned that faith and order, "the questions on which the unity of the churches turn," had been omitted from the agenda as a condition for securing participation by the Anglican Church.

<sup>107</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1913, p. 778, contains the Committee's report of progress.

Like the other preceding movements, World War I disrupted the early organizational plans. When the long awaited conference finally took place at Lausanne, Switzerland in August, 1927, the Church participated. Both the Rev. Harold Schenck and Dr. Samuel Zwemer took part in the floor discussions during this eighteen day conference of some 385 delegates from 108 Churches.<sup>108</sup> One of the outstanding impressions of the conference had been the tremendous pressure exerted by the native churches of the mission fields in support of church unity. Ten years later the continued interest in the movement by the churches culminated in a Second World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh. The Reformed Church found itself basically in agreement with the Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity which acknowledged "our unity is of the heart and the spirit," though it hoped the outward divisions could be overcome.<sup>109</sup>

Before long the Life and Work and the Faith and Order movements began to feel they were overlapping in their functions and headed in the same direction. Dr. A. L. Warnshuis reported on a meeting of these two groups at Utrecht in May, 1938 and explained the resultant constitution proposed for their merger.<sup>110</sup> Once again from the Eastern

<sup>108</sup>H. N. Bate (ed.), Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference: Lausanne, August 3-12, 1927 (London: Student Christian Movement, 1927), pp. 400-402, and 104 & 229 contain the utterances of these two R.C.A. men respectively.

Minutes R.C.A., 1928, p. 783. An overture from the Classis of Newark unsuccessfully sought an appointment of a committee to confer and co-operate with the Faith and Order Continuation Committee but the Overture Committee preferred to wait until the results of the Lausanne conference could be more clearly understood.

<sup>109</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1938, p. 456, while p. 479 records that Dr. John W. Beardslee, Jr., reported on this conference though the report is not reproduced. This concluding Affirmation of Unity is reproduced in Rouse and Neill, op. cit., pp. 434-35.

<sup>110</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1938, p. 480.

branch of the Church came overtures supporting this larger ecumenical undertaking. The Classes of North Long Island and Rochester urged participation in the movement toward a designated world organization. The following year three additional Eastern Classes and the Particular Synod of New Brunswick strongly urged acceptance of an invitation extended by Dr. Willem Visser 't Hooft, Secretary General of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches.<sup>111</sup> Reassured by the proposed constitution that this would never be a "Super Church," for it lacked any legislative power over its members, the Reformed Church in America committed itself to membership.

In 1940 the General Synod changed the name of the two year old Permanent Committee on Ecumenical Movement to the Permanent Committee on the World Council of Churches. The outbreak of World War II caused the postponement of the formal organization of this ecumenical body. Meanwhile the new committee represented the Church at all intervening meetings though it was powerless to make any commitments to policy or course of action.<sup>112</sup> What leadership and contribution the Reformed Church made to this evolving World Council (in process of formation) came mainly through the efforts of Dr. A. L. Warnshuis. His visit to Europe in 1944 helped prepare the way for the creation of a Department of Reconstruction and Interchurch Aid within the World Council of Churches. By 1947 he was helping to administer much of the aid from the United States as executive vice-president of Church World

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<sup>111</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1939, pp. 148-50. The Classes of Montgomery, New York and Schenectady were the additional Classes influencing the Church's decision to participate.

<sup>112</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1940, p. 540.

Service.<sup>113</sup> The following year the Rev. Betram Atwood and Mr. Clarence Luiden acted as delegates to the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, the Netherlands which met from August 22 to September 4. Thus the Reformed Church in America associated itself with 146 other churches from 44 countries as charter members of the most important ecumenical organization of the present day.

The tempo of ecumenical activity increased noticeably during the half century from 1893-1943. Unlike the preceding half century, its thrust was not mainly a co-operation of laymen and clergy as interested individuals in organizations interdenominational or even undenominational in character. This period witnessed the official co-operation of denominational bodies in numerous councils and conferences normally of a federative nature. The Reformed Church, true to a policy enunciated in 1900 which approved the principle of federation of churches for practical Christian work, had been a ready participant in many of these councils and conferences. The culmination was the commitment in 1939 to join the World Council of Churches. This developed out of a special interest in foreign missions and it was in the various mission societies and organizations that the greatest energy was expended and the greatest amount of leadership offered.

While normally a ready participant in movements for closer co-operation and even union on the mission fields, the Church had not seen its way clear to fully participate in the trend toward church union in the United States.<sup>114</sup> However, the various and persistent

<sup>113</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1947, p. 139. Church World Service is currently a unit of the National Council of Churches.

<sup>114</sup>Wayne H. Christy, The United Presbyterian Church and



overtures from the Classes and Particular Synods made manifest the idea that Christ's earthly church and even the Reformed Church might benefit from a new union. Dr. Edgar Romig in his 1941 State of Religion message asked why his Church "for all its notable ecumenicity in some directions is the most steadfast in resisting efforts at organic union with denominations of like faith and polity,"<sup>115</sup>

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Church Union (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1947). Appendix A lists 27 denominations which merged into 9 between 1900-1940.

<sup>115</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1941, p. 263. He singled out the Reformed Church in the United States and the Christian Reformed Church as two churches that should have been approached seriously.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN APPROACH: 1944-1950<sup>1</sup>

In the latter stages of World War II the Reformed Church in America again became receptive to a union approach. This receptiveness was partly due to the continuing ecumenical impetus and the broadening effect of the war on the Church. The Armed Services and war plants removed thousands of church members from their normal environment and exposed them to a wider cross section of the population of the United States and the world at large. The full consequence of this exposure would not be felt until the service men and women, including chaplains (of whom there had been over sixty), returned home. Those at home could not remain unaffected either. The normally conservative and denominationally-contained Particular Synod of Chicago issued a communication which read in part:

The Reformed Church in America, through accredited representative bodies, should join in the ecumenical movements which aim to bring to bear the power and conviction of the Christian Church on plans for a postwar world, in order to escape, in the Providence of God, future catastrophes of the type in which the world of man finds itself today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The church involved in this approach is the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1858-1958). The current United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America is a result of the merger of this church with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (Northern Presbyterians) in 1958.

<sup>2</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for 1943 (New York: Board of Publications of the

Although the Permanent Committee on Fraternal Relations with Other Denominations also reported a rising tide of ecumenical interest, this new readiness for ecumenicity did not include church union and was not apparent to everyone. The Rev. Joseph R. Sizoo, retiring General Synod President, had found "no great ecumenical consciousness among us" but rather a desire to "keep our own identity and live our own life."<sup>3</sup> This attitude he did not condone and blamed in part those older ministers who had lost their perspective through failure to read, study and reflect. The next President, the Rev. Jacob Prins, similarly said, "Too many of our brethren . . . are congregational and local in practice and outlook."<sup>4</sup>

The D-Day invasion of Normandy was launched on June 6, 1944; almost simultaneously, the most serious union effort involving the Reformed Church in America during the first half of the twentieth century was launched. On June 5, the retiring United Presbyterian Moderator, W. Bruce Wilson, suggested to the Eighty-Sixth General Assembly that they again consider church union.

Church Union! Yes we believe in it, when it comes as the evident moving of the Spirit of God upon the church; but we retain our sovereign right of determining how and when the Spirit must move . . . . Is the time not ripe for a full consideration of a definite basis of union of our church with the Southern Presbyterian Church, and the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church of the South, . . . and possibly the Dutch Reformed Church? . . . It is for us as United Presbyterians to take the initiative in this matter.<sup>5</sup>

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Reformed Church in America, p. 120. (Hereinafter referred to as Minutes R.C.A., [year]).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1944, p. 224.

<sup>5</sup>"General Assembly," United Presbyterian, June 5, 1944, p. 9. This is in agreement with the recommendation made to this General

With the exception of the last sentence, this might have been a statement issued by a large majority of the Reformed Church ministers.

The United Presbyterian Assembly created a committee to act on this matter. Notification of this action was sent by telegram to Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, where the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was concluding action on the recommendations of the Committee on Fraternal Relations with Other Denominations.<sup>6</sup> The South Classis of Long Island had overtured for a study of the possibilities of achieving organic union with other Reformed Church bodies. With the additional impetus of the United Presbyterian proposal, the Reformed Church requested a study be made by its Fraternal Relations Committee.

The Rev. O. H. Milligan, Principal Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, forwarded the official invitation in a letter of July 28, 1944. In negotiating with the United Presbyterians, the Reformed Church was meeting with a church which came into being as a result of a union merger and was a veteran of numerous negotiations.<sup>7</sup> Though

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Assembly by the Committee of Seven on Church Relationship which, created in 1943, had reviewed the whole subject of relationship to other churches. Cf. Minutes of the Eighty-Sixth General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publications and Bible School Work, 1945), pp. 55-57. (Hereinafter referred to as Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., [year]).

<sup>6</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1944, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup>Wayne H. Christy, The United Presbyterian Church and Church Union (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1947), Chapters II-V. It took twenty years and six plans of union before the Associate Church and the Associate Reformed Church united in 1858 to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America. From 1858-1907 there were ten serious possibilities for further union. The United Presbyterians favored union each of the nine times the denomination courted was smaller than itself, but voted unfavorably on union with the much larger Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (Northern Presbyterians). From 1907-1934 they voted down five more approaches, mainly with this same Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

initially a multipronged proposal of exploration of union possibilities, the United Presbyterians very shortly concentrated solely on an approach to the Reformed Church. The Southern Presbyterians were already holding talks with the Northern Presbyterians and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was too diverted by an internal discussion to contemplate an external union in 1944.

Less than four months later, on November 6, 1944, the first exploratory meeting was held in Philadelphia. Besides Dr. Robert W. Gibson, who chaired the meeting, the United Presbyterians were represented by their Stated Clerk, two college presidents and a seminary professor.<sup>8</sup> The Reformed Church's Fraternal Relations Committee was represented by its chairman, the Rev. Anthony Van Westenberg and Dr. Edgar F. Romig; also present was the Vice President of the General Synod, Dr. Thomas P. Haig, and its Stated Clerk, the Rev. James Hoffman.<sup>9</sup> This efficient four and one-half hour meeting revealed much similarity in size, missionary zeal, giving, and doctrinal beliefs. The geographical distribution of the activities of the two churches supplemented each other so well it became a standard point of reference in almost every

<sup>8</sup>The Board of Education of the United Presbyterian Church sponsored five colleges spreading from Western Pennsylvania to mid-Kansas, namely Westminster, Muskingum, Monmouth, Tarkio and Sterling; their sole seminary was the Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary.

<sup>9</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting, November 6, 1944, U.P.C.-R.C.A., Robert Morris Hotel, Philadelphia (in Dr. Theophilus Mills Taylor's file, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Library); cf. Minutes R.C.A., 1945, p. 143. The report of the Fraternal Relations Committee revealed that the lack of an expense appropriation precluded the attendance of the Western Committee members, the Rev. John A. Klaaren and the Rev. William Everts. These members were informed by letter of the proceedings.

discussion of the proposed union. The recommendations made for becoming better acquainted included the examination of common points of theology by the three seminaries, thorough discussion of union at joint area conferences of ministers and laity in Chicago, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, articles stressing common beliefs and aims in the churches' periodicals, and addresses by the respective fraternal delegates to the General Synod and the General Assembly. Dr. Romig closed the meeting by expressing what was to become another theme of this negotiation when he stated, "it is no exaggeration to say that there were evident tokens of the presence of the Spirit as we communed and counseled together."<sup>10</sup>

Professor Theophilus M. Taylor soon expressed this feeling publicly and widely in his article, "Significant Facts and Figures: Discovered at the First Exploratory Meeting of Committee of the Reformed Church in America and of the United Presbyterian Church."<sup>11</sup> Dr. Taylor felt two impressions from the November 6 meeting were of primary significance, namely:

that in the present case there is a marked poverty of those negative factors which frequently arise to hinder the consummation of proposed denominational mergers; and, second, that . . . there are several very positive factors pointing

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<sup>10</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting, November 6, 1944, op. cit. Underlining added.

<sup>11</sup>Church Herald, March 9, 1945, pp. 19-21 & 29. This first major article on R.C.A.-U.P.C. union was later reproduced in the Reformed Church's 1945 General Synod Minutes and also in the July 21st issue of the Christian Union Herald, a United Presbyterian Church periodical.

The Church Herald, published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the unified successor to the Christian Intelligencer after it combined first with The Mission Field (1922) and then with the Western periodical, The Leader (1940).

toward definite advantages which may be expected to accrue from such a merger.<sup>12</sup>

Here he showed a realistic awareness of previous stumbling blocks to union by his selection and discussion of seven "negative factors." In parallel columns he compared the doctrinal standards of the two churches and their church polity, finding differences but no insuperable difficulties. He discussed what had been an obstacle in 1893, the differing degrees of "Fundamentalism" or "Orthodoxy," but pointed out

as Churches we have both held to the conservative position in our Calvinism. We both have a firm belief in the world mission of the Church and have demonstrated it nobly abroad. The Christian stewardship of our two Churches, which is always an index of spiritual vigor, is at a high plane in relation to that of other denominations.<sup>13</sup>

He further noted there could be no real fear of the smaller body being swallowed up by the larger body when the communicant membership of one church was 169,390 and that of the other 193,637. Also, since there was no extensive overlapping in "Churched Areas," "Mission Projects, Domestic and Foreign," or of "Church-Related Educational Institutions," "our conclusion is that were we to unite organically we would fit together like the two halves of a peach."

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 20. The report for 1944 showed the Reformed Church had a per capita gift average of \$31.50 while that of the United Presbyterian Church was \$29.10. This difference in per capita giving narrowed when the report for 1945 showed per capita giving of the two churches stood at \$35.36 and \$34.10 respectively, (against the United Stewardship Council's reported average of \$19.34). The Church Herald's editor, Dr. Louis Benes, commenting on these latter statistics (July 19, 1946, p. 5), noted "we spend more on ourselves but they give more to the world-wide mission of the Gospel." Significantly, he also pointed out that "the highest per capita giving is not found in the larger denominations, or in the recently-merged bodies."

Dr. Taylor cited five definite advantages he expected to accrue. These included

1. A stronger, conservative, evangelical, Calvinistic church with greater influence in interdenominational councils and before the public.

2. Wider missionary horizons.

3. Further demonstration to the world of the church's essential love and unity.

4. An enlarged congenial denominational atmosphere.

5. New physical and spiritual vitality through the infusion of these Dutch and Scottish heritages.

So the matter rested until it was time for the members of the Committee to report back to their respective judicatories.

The United Presbyterian General Assembly met at Monmouth College (Illinois) from May 30 - June 4, 1945. The General Synod of the Reformed Church convened at Buck Hill Falls (Pennsylvania) from June 1-12. There were no memorials concerning union reported at this Eighty-Seventh General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church. The Committee on Church Relations reported in terms already familiar concerning their November meeting with the Reformed Church in America, but they also reported on an October 26 meeting with the Southern Presbyterians. This church had invited them to join in its continuing negotiations with the Northern Presbyterians. This exceeded the current instructions of the United Presbyterian committee and the discussion ended. Still the attractiveness of union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States persisted.

The committee's recommendations called for the appointment of



fraternal delegates and a series of informative articles in their Church's papers on the faith, policies, organization and activities of both the Reformed Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church. The most important recommendation requested authorization for continued discussion by an enlarged committee to develop a definite program aimed at union.<sup>14</sup> Union seemed a distinct possibility for churches which thought and spoke so much alike. Dr. Scott Withrow's State of Religion Report, which attacked humanism and insisted on the continued relevancy of a God-centered life, illustrated a concern also prevalent in the Reformed Church.<sup>15</sup>

The Reformed Church General Synod was greeted by four overtures from Classes which both favored and opposed the proposed union.<sup>16</sup> These overtures were referred to a Committee on Fraternal Relations eager to begin a union approach. Stirred by the emotional appeal of the creation of the United Nations at San Francisco, an organization this Church supported, they stated, "In the light of the world movement toward world unity, economically, politically, and ecclesiastically, the subject deserves a fresh approach and new treatment."<sup>17</sup> The Committee had met twice - at least its Eastern members had - and arrived at

<sup>14</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1945, pp. 413-14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 393-94.

<sup>16</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1945, p. 108. The Eastern Classis of Paramus and surprisingly the Western Classes of Grand Rapids and Wisconsin overtured for union while the Classis of Chicago opposed it. The Overture Committee in additional action of interest refused to consider a request for the ordination of women as elders and deacons but did approve in the interest of continued separation of Church and State a resolution calling for the recall of the President's personal representative to the Vatican.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

several union possibilities.<sup>18</sup> Dr. William B. Pugh, Stated Clerk of the Northern Presbyterian Church, neglecting to mention current negotiations with the Southern Presbyterians, acknowledged that the Reformed Church was free at any time to begin organic union negotiations with the church he represented. Such a union could give impetus to a national Calvinistic church movement and eliminate some intermediate steps of organic church union, but the larger size of this Presbyterian Church constituted a major obstacle. This was magnified by the opportunity to court a denomination of similar size, doctrinal standards, and one which had already invited union talks. Thus the Committee felt an approach to the United Presbyterian Church currently offered the most promise and asked the appointment of a Special Commission to continue negotiations. A Special Committee of twelve official members was approved, appointed and placed under the leadership of the busy Dr. Luman J. Shafer of the Board of Foreign Missions.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to the joint meeting of the special committees on September 27, 1945, R. W. Graves, editor of the Christian Union Herald, issued a challenge. He accused his United Presbyterian Church of a double-

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<sup>18</sup>This dominance of committee action and the Church boards by the Eastern branch of the Church, especially the segment in and around New York City, was a disturbing factor to some Western pastors. Cf. the pamphlet by Henry Bast, An Appeal to the Ministers and Laymen of the Chicago and Iowa Synods (Grand Rapids: Don Van Osterberg, [1947]), p. 7. The pamphlet also suggested that some of the boards be transferred to the Midwest, the area which contributed 715 of the Church's benevolence giving.

<sup>19</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1945, p. 152. Other members of this original committee were the Revs. M. Stephen James, John A. Dykstra, Lester Kuyper, John W. Beardslee, Jr., Joseph R. Sizoo, Richard Vandenberg, Raymond Beckering, A. L. Warnshuis, Clarence P. Dame, Raymond Meengs, A. VanWesterburg and ex-officio members Dr. T. P. Haig, President of the General Synod, and James Hoffman, the Stated Clerk.

mindfulness in recognizing that previous distinctions (i.e., psalmody, closed communion, etc.) had disappeared and yet of being reluctant "to yield up our particularity." Instead of "backing and filling" as in previous union efforts, he challenged his church to "face up to this union."<sup>20</sup> For half a century now the Reformed Church had not "faced up" to union either, but the Rev. C. P. Dame of Kalamazoo, Michigan, posed a question for his Church. "Can a Separatist Be a Calvinist?" was the questioning title of his article in the Church Herald to which he gave a negative answer, for a Calvinist "stands for unity and cooperation."<sup>21</sup>

This first Joint Committee meeting took place at the Fort Pitt Hotel in Pittsburgh and was largely organizational in nature. The chairmen of the Special Committees were made co-chairmen of the Joint Committee and the two Stated Clerks acted as the secretaries. To carry out with rapidity the task assigned by their respective judicatories, five subcommittees also headed by co-chairmen were created, namely, Doctrinal Standards, Information and Education, Polity and Practice, Plan of Union and Legal Procedures, and Survey of Relations of Churches at Home and Abroad. The meeting also explored the nature of the two churches' educational institutions, doctrinal standards and their views on race antagonisms and labor relations. Probably the most lengthy discussion was on the matter of social customs such as dancing,

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<sup>20</sup>Christian Union Herald, July 21, 1945, p. 3. He also listed "fear of being swallowed up" and "modernism" as other reasons for hesitation but felt God had removed these obstacles and was now testing the sincerity of the United Presbyterian's desire for union.

<sup>21</sup>June 29, 1945, p. 7.

movies and card playing. This discussion finally ended when no one on the Committee knew of either church having ever made a definite pronouncement on these matters.<sup>22</sup> The logic of this position did not prevent the subject from becoming a serious matter of contention later.

The number of professed advantages of union increased after the consideration of the following:

A larger place in the nation's life,

A tendency to smaller loss in church families due to a wider distribution of churches,

Increased national appeal,

Sales large enough to justify denominational literature,

Increased administrative efficiency,

A tendency to break down parochial lines.<sup>23</sup>

Some disadvantages could be seen also, if time consuming negotiations caused current church work to suffer or if a schism developed owing to lack of sufficient unanimity within either church.

The students at the United Presbyterian's Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary had had an opportunity to meet some Reformed brethren at the first Joint Committee meeting. At its second meeting

<sup>22</sup>Minutes of Joint Meeting, September 27-28, 1945, R.C.A.-U.P.C. Committee to Explore the Possibilities of Union, Pittsburgh, p. 1. This meeting was attended by 13 representatives of the R.C.A. and 10 representatives of the U.P.C., including two women. With the large amount of interest and work evidenced by the women in both churches, this was a logical inclusion and one the Reformed Church soon emulated.

These Minutes and all succeeding Joint Committee Minutes can be found in Dr. Lester Kuyper's Papers, Beardslee Library, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan. (Hereinafter referred to as Kuyper Papers, W.T.S.)

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

in Holland, Michigan, the students of the Reformed Church's Western Theological Seminary had a similar opportunity to meet some United Presbyterian representatives. The Reformed Church Committee, having co-opted two women and two men, had grown to eighteen members.<sup>24</sup> The sub-committees, through previous correspondence and meetings, had all completed preliminary reports for this February 26-27, 1946, gathering at the Warm Friend Tavern (Hotel).

Early in the meeting, the Rev. J. Hoffman produced a large United States wall map as part of the Committee on Survey's report. This map located all the churches of the two denominations, and represented them as red or black squares. The State of New York was quite well blackened, containing 288 of the Reformed Church's 742 congregations. The State of Pennsylvania was covered by numerous splotches of red, indicating 311 of the United Presbyterian's 844 churches. The two denominations reached from ocean to ocean, though sparsely in some states, and in twelve states neither had established a single church. The lack of any serious geographic overlap was vividly evident.

The remaining reports were less colorful but equally well prepared and quite detailed considering the brevity of the period for preparation. As an example, the six page mimeographed report of the sub-committee on Doctrinal Standards contained parallel column comparisons of the confessions, additional standards and interpretations. The sub-committee declared all the variations to be within the bounds

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<sup>24</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee on Church Union, February 26-27, 1946, U.P.C.-R.C.A., p. 6. These additional lay members were Mrs. Harold Brinig of Marble Collegiate Church; Mrs. Edith Walvoord, former missionary to Japan; President Irwin J. Lubbers of Hope College; and Mr. Allan Redeker from Denver.

of historic Calvinism and endorsed the existing standards. This report concluded with the recommendation that the united church prepare a new confessional statement in the "language of our times."<sup>25</sup> The subcommittee on Polity and Practice pointed to the United Presbyterian's employment of women in the office of deacon, their separate office of Trustee and their lack of obligatory written forms for Baptism and Communion as examples of numerous differences still to be resolved.

Yet, in summary the Joint Committee reported:

all that is lacking to bring about an early union is the acquaintance of our two churches to each other. The Providential nature of every phase of the proposed union as it relates to the two churches is such that no conceivable reason for failure to unite seems possible.<sup>26</sup>

If lack of acquaintance was the major obstacle, the subcommittee on Education and Information had numerous suggestions for making the churches better acquainted. One major effort involved the assignment of dual authors for twelve informational articles covering all phases of the two churches' history, beliefs, organization and activities. These were to be published simultaneously on facing pages of both churches' papers at the rate of one per month beginning in April, 1946. The year 1946-47, designated a year of fraternal fellowship, called for the exchange of pulpits by ministers of the two denominations, of lectureships in the colleges and seminaries, and of speakers at youth

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>26</sup>"Spirit of God Pervades HOLLAND SESSION ON UNION," Church Herald, March 15, 1945, p. 4. While not appearing anywhere in the Minutes of this Joint Committee meeting as mimeographed by the Rev. Hoffman, on page nine he does have a notice that these Minutes would be reviewed by the co-Secretary and any errors or admissions noted would be sent along with the recommendations that had been referred for editing.



fellowships and summer camps. To facilitate and encourage a grassroots acquaintance the church papers were to carry the location of the sister denomination's city and resort congregations during the summer months.

Many of the recommendations and conclusions of these four reports found expression in the recommendations of the subcommittee on the Plan for Union and Procedure. This committee recommended that the Joint Committee seek the authority to draw up a specific plan of union to be drafted and submitted to the Classes and Presbyteries by September 1, 1946. After a half year's study, and in the light of resulting suggestions for change and improvement, a revised plan of union would be drawn up and presented to the 1947 General Assembly and General Synod meetings. The Joint Committee was so encouraged by the report of its subcommittees that it approved this recommendation.

In anticipation of its continued existence and the approval of its recommendations, the Committee reorganized. Drs. R. Gibson and L. Shafer continued as co-chairmen of the Joint Committee but newly created was an Executive Committee under Dr. L. Shafer (R.C.A.), a Committee on Doctrinal Basis under Dr. J. Beardslee, Jr. (R.C.A.), a Committee on Structural Plan of Union under Dr. M. S. James (R.C.A.), and a Committee on Education under Dr. T. M. Taylor (U.P.C.). Before closing the exceptionally friendly session, the Committee dealt with a possible derailment of this union movement. It declined an invitation for these two churches to attend informal discussions with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) concerning a further union.

Between this February committee meeting and the May meeting of the General Synod, the church papers evidenced a new awareness of this union approach. The editor of the Church Herald in March laid



down the ground rules for a new "Letters to the Editor" column which soon became a popular and expressive outlet of opinion. On April 26 he published a challenging editorial on church union. Posing a question reminiscent of Editor Graves "sincerity" editorial of the previous September, he asked "Are we of the Reformed Church in earnest about union with the United Presbyterians, or only toying with the idea?"<sup>27</sup> He felt the Reformed Church needed to develop a policy to "know where it is going." Three possibilities offered themselves: (1) for the sake of a united witness, it could quickly join with any available denomination; (2) it could remain a relatively isolated and uninfluential church with a singular nationality background; or (3) it could understand its obligation to promote the Evangelical Protestant faith in America by seeking out and uniting with spiritual kin, regardless of nationality background. The editor rejected the first two possibilities and as for the third, he reflected "it appears to us that there is no denomination in America with whom we have so much in common and with whom we could find such intimate fellowship, as the United Presbyterian Church of North America."<sup>28</sup>

The Church Union Committee's informative series of articles

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<sup>27</sup>"Church Union," p. 5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. What sounds like a ringing endorsement of this proposed union by Dr. Louis Benes actually is not the same type of bold, ardent union support that Editor Drury of the Christian Intelligencer gave during the 1886-1893 negotiations. Dr. Benes' environment, position, and the location of the bulk of his periodical's subscribers differed from those of Dr. Drury's. Familiarization via committee reports and Church Herald articles was not enough; he wanted wide-spread meetings with "flesh and blood" United Presbyterians to discover if a real spiritual kinship existed. If proven spiritual kin, then there was no right to remain apart. Cf. Editorial, "A Strategy for the Reformed Church," Church Herald, May 24, 1946, p. 5.

also had begun on April 26 in the Church Herald with a summarized history of the two churches. The history of the Reformed Church in America was presented by Professor Milton Hoffman while Professor C. J. Williamson covered the Scottish antecedents as well as the rather brief eighty-eight year history of the United Presbyterian Church of North America.<sup>29</sup> Dr. Hoffman's article concentrated mainly on the early history of the Reformed Church whose basis for its current structure and attitudes were all laid before the creation of the United Presbyterian Church in 1858. He placed great stress on the effect of the 1850 union with the recent Dutch immigrants for "this union . . . largely made the Reformed Church in America what she is today, a small but very significant religious influence in the nation's and the world's life."<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, a noteworthy feature of the younger, more populous United Presbyterian Church had been its rapid growth, especially in the larger cities west of the Allegheny Mountains. Despite its greater urban inclinations, Dr. Williamson concluded the summary of his Church with an observation aptly descriptive of both of these churches.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1946, pp. 8 & 9. Michigan-born Dr. M. Hoffman was Professor of Church History at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the brother of the Stated Clerk of the R.C.A. Dr. C. J. Williamson was the Professor of Church History at the Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary. These articles appeared also in the United Presbyterian on April 15, 1946, and in the Christian Union Herald, a young people's paper of the U.P.C.

<sup>30</sup>Church Herald, April 26, 1946, p. 9. The Rev. J. H. Muller in the May 24, 1946, issue (p. 9), revealed just how small the R.C.A. was when he stated, "After 318 years we do not have .2% of the country's population in our fold."

Conservative in attitude, happy in the fellowships possible in a smaller body, somewhat proud of the church's accomplishments as a separate body, a trifle clannish . . . it feels somewhat shy about being 'swallowed up' by another denomination. However, it maintains a spirit of goodwill toward sister denominations and attempts to live up to its motto, The Truth of God; forbearance in love.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the "looking-glass" aspects of this observation, cautious elements in the Reformed Church soon were speculating on the possible latitude to which "forbearance in love" might be evoked doctrinally.

With the exception of the Classis of Chicago's adverse 1945 overture, the first anti-union sentiment was publicly expressed in a "Letter to the Editor" by the Rev. Gerrit H. Hospers of East Williamson, New York.<sup>32</sup> This was to be the first of an intermittent series of "leave well enough alone" suggestions which were normally coupled with a fear, voiced or implied, that union would mean splitting up the Church. There was so little debate over this proposed union, even after this opening attack, that the Editor felt compelled early in September, 1946, to urge the readers to make the Church Herald a forum on church union. Opposition within the United Presbyterian Church also was slow to express itself during much of 1946.

Meanwhile, the process of familiarization had continued. On March 29, 1946, in Los Angeles, ten United Presbyterian and nine Reformed Church ministers held the first of several inter-church dinners. The Education Committee had compiled and published for distribution to all the congregations, ministers and interested individuals, 15,000 copies of a data booklet entitled Preliminary Findings of the Joint

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1946, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1946, p. 11.

Committee on Union. The second of the matching informative articles appeared in the churches' papers under the heading "Emeritus Seminary Professors Review the Doctrinal Standards of Two Denominations Contemplating Union."<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Pieters, in his article of May 24, 1946, gave no indication of his later opposition to this proposed union. He called attention to the Reformed Church's major doctrinal differences with the Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists but noted it differed "from the Presbyterians not at all."<sup>34</sup> In fact, he claimed the Reformed Church preached and taught more in line with the Westminster Confession than its own creeds in several areas. Much of Dr. McNaugher's attention was devoted to the eighteen article Testimony of 1858 and to its successor, the forty-four article Confessional Statement adopted in 1926. These two statements were meant to justify the separate existence of the United Presbyterians as a denomination and to soften and modernize the creedal statements of Calvinism. Dr. McNaugher stressed the oneness of the churches because of their belief in a fully-inspired Bible and in the main truths of the Reformation.<sup>35</sup> A younger colleague, the Rev. John H. Gerstner, was even more emphatic when he wrote, "The homogeneity of these creeds is so great and convincing that, from that standpoint, the union of these churches is a fait accompli, requiring

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<sup>33</sup>The Rev. Dr. Albertus Pieters was emeritus professor of Bible and Mission at the Western Theological Seminary; the Rev. Dr. John McNaugher was President-Emeritus of Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary.

<sup>34</sup>Church Herald, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup>United Presbyterian, May 20, 1946, p. 18.

only formal ratification and acknowledgement."<sup>36</sup>

To their respective judicatories, as they convened in May, the two union committees also expressed this belief that "on the spiritual side we are confident that we are already essentially one . . . ."<sup>37</sup> The General Synod gathered at Buck Hill Falls from May 23-28, 1946. Awaiting were various overtures expressing disapproval of peacetime conscription, continued opposition to Myron Taylor's position at the Vatican, continued approval of the United Nations and a request to change the name of the Particular Synod of New Brunswick to that of New Jersey. A singular overture on union from the Classis of Rochester asked to be placed on record as favoring the proposed union with the United Presbyterians. The Church Union Committee chairman, Dr. Luman Shafer, reviewed the history of the proposed union movement and the two Joint Committee meetings. These meetings had convinced the Committee that the two churches were so nearly alike as to insure their "quick cementing . . . into one strong united church" which they believed "would be of God."<sup>38</sup> In addition the recommendations made at the February meeting for an authorized union time schedule, for a \$5000 appropriation, and the right to hire competent legal counsel all won approval. Dr. Thomas Haig, a member of the Committee, made but brief mention of the union "conversations" in his State of Religion address. His two main concerns seemed to be the position of religion among the forces of the post-war world and the recruitment of theological

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., May 27, 1946, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1946, p. 160.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



students.<sup>39</sup>

The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church met the following week on the campus of Tarkio College in Missouri. No memorials directly regarding this union awaited action, but there was one from the Beaver Valley Presbytery regarding a union of seminaries. The Pittsburgh-Xenia Seminary faced the necessity of modernizing and expanding and this memorial sought the exploration of a merger with the Northern Presbyterian's Western Theological Seminary, also located in Pittsburgh, before buying any additional land. The memorial was rejected, partly because of the union talks underway with the Reformed Church. The Committee on Church Relationships presented a report and recommendations concerning these union talks almost identical to that already presented to the Reformed Church. Communications had also continued with the two Presbyterian Churches (in the U.S.A. and the U.S.), each of which wanted the door kept open for a possible future union.<sup>40</sup>

The early exploratory meetings had already borne results, having led to an agreement by the two Boards of Foreign Missions for the Reformed Church to co-operate in the evangelization of the South Sudan.<sup>41</sup> Only three days after the conclusion of the General Assembly

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 234. As regards the latter, the number of ministers had declined by 130 during the past year while "the number of students for the ministry is ominously low. We have reached a serious crisis in Christian leadership." The Committee on Education's report showed the two seminaries expected a total of 58 students while the three colleges listed only 102 pre-theological students. Ibid., pp. 93-94.

<sup>40</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1946, p. 753.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 881. This may also have been the beginnings of the opposition of some R.C.A. missionaries to this proposed union. Interview with Dr. John H. Piet, Dosker-Hulswit Professor of English Bible and Missions at Western Theological Seminary, Holland,

session, the third Joint Committee meeting took place in Pittsburgh. This meeting of June 6th and 7th at the William Penn Hotel offered the opportunity for a full discussion of the reports of the Committees on Education and Plan of Union.

In its report, the Committee on Education recounted its accomplishments since the last meeting in February, and singled out for praise the unsolicited editorials on church union by Dr. Benes and Dr. Graves. Encouraged by the attitude evidenced in the recent General Synod and General Assembly meetings, it recommended plans for increased contact at various local levels of the two denominations. Its most developed recommendation presented a tentative schedule of joint Classis-Presbytery meetings and even suggested whether the Classis or the Presbytery should tender the invitation.

In the course of deliberations on this report, the subject of social customs arose again. A special committee was appointed which made the following brief report.

Our denominations are alike in that congregations and individuals differ in certain social practices and customs. In the past we have respected one another's Christian conscience in these matters and have defended one another's right to follow the dictates of his conscience as he believes the Spirit of Christ directs him, in the true Calvinistic tradition. We hesitate to set up for the United Church standards which are unauthorized in either of our present churches.<sup>42</sup>

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Michigan, July 7, 1965. Dr. Piet, a R.C.A. missionary in India during this period, remarked that the fields in India and China showed so much promise that the missionaries working there did not want to see badly needed funds siphoned off to start additional fields. Cf. Dr. John Van Ess, "Reflections on Church Union," Church Herald, December 13, 1946, pp. 10-11, a missionary at Basrah, Iraq, who evidenced the same fear.

<sup>42</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee on Church Union, June 6-7, 1946, U.P.C.-R.C.A., Pittsburgh, p. 6.



Dr. Harry Hager, 1946-47 President of the General Synod and ex-officio member of the Joint Committee, protested vigorously against this non-committal statement.<sup>43</sup> His rough draft of a substitute resolution was voted down but an inability to harmonize these two statements caused the Committee to defer pronouncements at this time. The main difference centered on dancing, movies and smoking. Most United Presbyterians had no scruples against dancing and movies but in certain areas many Reformed Church members considered this wrong. On the other hand, many Reformed Church ministers smoke while "United Presbyterian custom is opposed to that."<sup>44</sup>

The Committee on Plan of Union presented a draft of the "Plan for Establishing The Union of The Reformed Church in America and The United Presbyterian Church of North America." This brief three-article plan was considered point by point. The differences of opinion that rose seldom followed denominational lines "but invariably crossed and recrossed those lines." Yet in a spirit of brotherhood the decision of the majority was reputedly accepted as "always the wisest course."<sup>45</sup> The Committee began what proved to be a lengthy search for an acceptable name for the merging churches; it proposed "The United Presbyterian Reformed Church." The Proposed Plan of Union intended to unite the two

<sup>43</sup>Dr. Hager, Reformed minister and radio pastor from Chicago, at first doubted some aspects of this union but later found the entire union plan of 1949 unacceptable.

<sup>44</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 245. Cf. An Iowa Reader, "Readers' Rendezvous," United Presbyterian, November 11, 1946, p. 2. This writer claimed a United Presbyterian congregation would not call a pipe smoking minister.

<sup>45</sup>Committee on Education release, "Joint Committee on Union Drafts for Church Merger," United Presbyterian, June 17, 1946, p. 11.

churches by replacing the General Assembly and General Synod with a single high court known as The Assembly. The major part of the two churches' organizational and worship life was to remain untouched until superseded by action of the United Church.<sup>46</sup> The Joint Committee recognized "it would make for confusion to leave such matters to the hazards of improvisation . . . from the 'floor' at the constituting session of The Assembly of the United Church."<sup>47</sup> Thus, besides preparing the Rules of Order and the Program of Procedure for the projected constituting session of mid-1948, this Committee expected to recommend "plans and proposals for the further implementing and consolidating of the union of the Reformed and United Presbyterian Churches."<sup>48</sup>

The time-table set for arriving at a union vote caused opposition, especially within the Reformed Church. The mailing of the Proposed Plan of Union on the September 1st deadline left inadequate time for study prior to the fall meetings of the Classes and Presbyteries. Many of these lower courts met on the second Tuesday of September and would not convene again until their spring session in March or April. Yet any proposals for change or other suggestions were to be sent to the Rev. M. Stephen James at New Brunswick by March 1, 1947. Professor Thomas E. Welmers of Hope College publicly protested a time-table which necessitated the calling of special sessions by the

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<sup>46</sup>The Committee considered the revised Plan of Union of 1947 a provisional Constitution; a more comprehensive and permanent Constitution would replace it shortly. This had been the method by which the U.P.C. had been created in 1858.

<sup>47</sup>Joint Committee on Union, Proposed Plan of Union (n.p., Reformed Church in America-United Presbyterian Church of North America, [1946]), p. 7. This quote is not actually part of the Proposed Plan but is contained in a "Note" following Article II.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Article II, Section 2g, p. 6.

Classes.<sup>49</sup> Pressure continued to build up well into 1947 for a change in the union time-schedule and not only from the professed opponents of this union. Dr. Benes editorially claimed he favored this union but criticized the insufficient time to consider the proposed plan thoroughly and for the churches' membership to become not only informed but acquainted.<sup>50</sup>

The "Letter to the Editor" of the Rev. G. H. Hospers touched off a debate on union which lasted until the General Synod of 1947. The Rev. Hospers, strongly opposed to union, protested that "the whole thing has begun and continues so smoothly that well nigh all opposition has been carried off its feet."<sup>51</sup> He felt the church leaders had made no effort to develop both sides of the union question; he protested that the Committee's series of informative articles on the two churches and the reports on its joint meetings gave an advantage to those who favored union. This charge may be valid, because a denomination with but a single church paper is in danger of transmitting such impressions. The editor denied the charge of Committee

<sup>49</sup>"Letter to the Editor," Church Herald, November 22, 1946, p. 8. Prof. Welmers also claimed that the Preamble of the United Presbyterian Confessional Statement made their Westminster Confession null and void. This is a bit extreme, but the Preamble does claim that where the two differ the Confessional Statement should be considered authoritative.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., November 29, 1946, p. 5. Editor Benes also advocated a more complete plan before the deciding vote for union, especially in areas of liturgical forms and consolidation of church standards.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., November 8, 1946, p. 6. His presentation and purpose is very reminiscent of Dr. H. E. Dosker's article of December 2, 1891, in the Christian Intelligencer which sought to avert union with the R.C.U.S. The Rev. Hospers felt union with the U.P.C. would be advantageous to the spread of modernism.

partiality and shortly thereafter announced that the Church Herald would accept 1200 word, one page articles as well as 600 word "Letters to the Editor." Despite this greater opportunity to make known their opposition, the opponents of union turned also to the use of privately printed pamphlets.

Opposition was not confined to the Reformed Church. In September, 1946, Alexander Frazer in The Church News-Letter, a publication he sent to all United Presbyterian ministers and elders, wrote an opposition article entitled "The Fever to Unite." He claimed every merger had a deadening effect on the parties involved and that this one would be but a preliminary step to other unions with churches of probably more liberal theological views. He stated, "Union fever rises from the mistaken belief that the kingdom of God can be ushered in by the efforts of men."<sup>52</sup> The first lengthy anti-union article to appear in an authorized church paper was by the Rev. Paul L. Reynolds.<sup>53</sup> Like the Rev. Hospers, he is appalled at the lack of opposition articles and an inferred unanimity for this union, particularly when he felt so many questions had not been answered.

"R.C.A.-U.P. Fellowship Widens and Deepens," a progress report by the Committee on Education, claimed the only negative argument

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<sup>52</sup>September 22, 1946, p. 12, quoted in Christy, op. cit., p. 247. Dr. R. W. Gibson described this publication as one which catered to all the discontents in his United Presbyterian Church who wished to point out its alleged shortcomings. As a group, they had little influence in the General Assembly or lower courts. Letter from Robert W. Gibson, Pittsburgh, January 10, 1947, to Lester J. Kuyper, Holland, Michigan (Kuyper Papers, W.T.S.).

<sup>53</sup>"Joint Committee Proposed Plan of Union Not Satisfactory," United Presbyterian, November 25, 1946, p. 9.



heard so far on either side had been "the fear expressed that each church would be in danger of losing its peculiar heritage."<sup>54</sup> This they apparently considered an invalid reason, for in the language of the marriage ceremony, they asked if legitimate reasons for not joining together existed, they should be voiced now or forever held in silence. Long Island pastor, Dr. Winfield Burggraaff, predicted that "actually the reasons which will be given for voting against union will be small personal reasons," and the main one of these will be that "we feel at home in our little Reformed Church."<sup>55</sup>

In the first half of 1947, the Church Herald actually became the forum on church union the editor envisioned. The informative articles continued until the May 2nd issue but there were also numerous one page articles and "Letters to the Editor" submitted for publication. In a rather eclectic article, the Rev. Bert Van Malsen, Illinois, voiced what the more conservative Reformed Church member feared from the proposed union.<sup>56</sup> They feared union would mean not only loss of denominational distinctiveness but that the Reformed Church would cease to exist through further mergers, a needless sacrifice when co-operation could achieve the same spiritual impetus sought through organic union. The United Presbyterian Church was not accused of being wholly unorthodox or modernistic, but because a signer of the Auburn Affirmation had been given a responsible position, it was suspect. While possibly one

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<sup>54</sup>Church Herald, December 6, 1946, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>"Thoughts on Union," Church Herald, December 20, 1946, p. 8. Dr. Burggraaff also played down the sacrifice of R.C.A. tradition. He questioned its uniqueness and claimed it was a word, not a fact, "something to play with, not to live by."

<sup>56</sup>"Speak Now," Church Herald, January 3, 1947, p. 17.

confessionally, they felt the churches differed in practice. The United Presbyterians allowed the individual conscience to decide membership in secret societies while in the Reformed Church the local Consistories ruled on the matter; dancing was not permitted on the campuses of Reformed Church colleges while at four of the five United Presbyterian colleges it was a standard form of recreation; a semi-liturgical church, they were uneasy over the fact that the United Presbyterians were non-liturgical. Again, the standard retort or suggestion was heard that if these fears are not overcome, many, "because they have a warm heart for the truth as they see it, will fail to go along with union."<sup>57</sup>

A fellow Westerner, the Rev. Dame, indirectly cast some light on this attitude the following week in an article entitled "Undoing the Blunders of the Fathers."<sup>58</sup> He noted that their forefathers had made mistakes because some were suspicious of anything American and some possessed a schismatic spirit which should not be perpetuated. He commented, "Why justify the blunders of the fathers and defend their lovelessness and short-sightedness?" The Rev. Millard M. Gifford's letter, a direct reply to the conservative Western attitude, indicated the temper of many in the Eastern churches.<sup>59</sup> Two areas of agreement were readily admitted, namely, the need for a written liturgy and the fact that the Reformed Church would lose its denominational distinc-

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>C. P. Dame, Church Herald, January 10, 1947, p. 7. The Rev. Dame was a member of the Joint Committee on Union at that time. During the current union negotiations between the R.C.A.-Presbyterian, U.S., he is opposed to the proposed union.

<sup>59</sup>"Letters to the Editor," Church Herald, February 21, 1947, p. 14.

tiveness. The latter point, with its implications of tradition and pride, did not bother him. In the East the Reformed Church that did not receive members from other denominations "would soon shrivel and die." He classified the attack of an entire denomination for the signing of the Auburn Affirmation by a single man as "unChristian sentiment, political maneuvering and lack of love."<sup>60</sup> The matters of dancing and secret societies were dismissed as periphery subjects upon which the Reformed Church also has a spectrum of attitudes.

The debate raged on, sometimes complete with unsupported generalizations, sometimes stooping to the picayune by questioning the meaning of such articles as "an" and "the" in the church standards. Liberalism was portrayed as a well-organized and directed conspiracy with a single uniform goal.<sup>61</sup> During this period, Dr. Lester Kuyper became very concerned about the dangerous tendency to reach conclusions by implication. A member of the Joint Committee on Union, he had heard many of the controversial areas discussed in committee. In an article "The Bible and the Confessional Standard of the United Presbyterian Church" he tried to go beyond mere implication to set the record straight.<sup>62</sup> He was particularly concerned about the attitude of the Rev. Henry Fikse, also from Michigan, whom he felt was asking people to believe not the best but the worst interpretations possible.

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid. The Eastern part of the Church is not as uniform a section as the West, as evidenced by his questioning of the behavior of the Collegiate Churches of New York City.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Herman Harmelink, Christian Unity and Church Union (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1964), p. 136. The Rev. Harmelink received a somewhat similar impression but explains the nature of "liberalism" as "a point of view contending for truth along with other points of view."

<sup>62</sup>Church Herald, April 18, 1947, pp. 10, 14, & 18.



The discussion in the Church Herald and the suggestions forwarded from both the regular fall sessions and the special meetings of the Classes and Presbyteries affected the thinking of the Union Committee members. Dr. Luman Shafer, Chairman of its Executive Committee, agreed that a delay in the time-table to provide a longer study period was a legitimate request and in line with his original thinking. In a conciliatory manner he wrote:

We are not for union per se, and for my part, while I am convinced that the union is a desirable one, I am ready to consider all legitimate suggestions or objections.<sup>63</sup>

Dr. M. Stephen James, the addressee for suggested changes to the 1946 Proposed Plan of Union, arranged the few replies into a digest and mailed it to all committee members.<sup>64</sup> The digest forewarned the union committees that not only the schedule of action but the suggested name for the united church was unpopular. It revealed a consistent demand for a more comprehensive plan which would include complete sections on doctrine, liturgy and a constitution.

The Joint Committee meeting of March 6-7, 1947, in Chicago, acted upon these suggestions. By noon of the second day special study groups had formulated and won approval of outline statements on doctrine, forms of worship, and polity. Since the fulfillment of these statements required additional time, the Committee recommended a two

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1947, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup>Of a total of 101 Classes and Presbyteries, only 16 replied, 8 from each church. Despite this apparent apathy, it also showed that some churches and Classes had now discussed the question for the first time. Cf. "Minutes of the Classis of Holland," Special Session, January 20, 1947, p. 1099. This is the first time their "Minutes" mentioned this union; the suggestions they contained were representative of the responses received. Neither this one or any of the other replies attacked the general principle upon which the Committee had worked or opposed union per se.

year postponement in any decisive action on union. The meeting concluded, having failed to recommend a different name for the proposed new church but having recommended the inclusion of a constitution as part of the basis of union. It also released to the denominational papers a list of seventeen impelling reasons for the consummation of the proposed union. This was an attempt to explain why two churches of differing cultural and national heritages, possessing vitality and having seemingly gotten along very well by themselves, should unite. The reasons were merely detailed elaborations and subdivisions of those previously offered, except for the last one. It voiced the committee's right to exert leadership and a conviction of the power of fraternal brotherhood.

Bearing in mind the fact that we, the members of the Joint Committee, were chosen by our Churches as representative of their total constituencies, and that many of us came to the union proposition with considerable misgivings as to the benefits to be gained through organic union with another denomination, we now find ourselves, after three years of negotiations, all favorably disposed toward this proposed union. Furthermore it is our opinion that any committee of 36 so chosen, and given the same opportunities and experiences with one another, would arrive at the same unanimity of opinion. This we feel, is unmistakeable evidence of the basic spiritual unity already existing in our two churches.<sup>65</sup>

The Joint Committee was so imbued with their experiences in fellowship they abandoned their role of impartiality. While the editor captioned in large type the news "Joint Committee Asks for Time Extension to Study Union Plan," the article noted the members felt they

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<sup>65</sup>Minutes of the Joint Committee on Church Union, March 6-7, 1947, U.P.C.-R.C.A., Hotel Sherman, Chicago, Ill., C.U. 6, p. 3. Dr. Thomas P. Haig, Stated Supply, Lebanon Reformed Church, Lebanon, New Jersey, personal interview with the author at his church, April 3, 1964. One of the outstanding remembrances this 76 year old minister retained of these negotiations was "the wonderful fellowship of the Joint Committee."

could no longer be neutral. Claiming a "Divine compulsion and urgency in the matter which we dare not ignore" they felt they should express their conviction that "this union should be consummated."<sup>66</sup> The next week their "Impelling Reasons for Consummation of Proposed Union" appeared in the church paper. To keep the information gathered in the twelve dual page articles available for reference, they were reprinted in a little booklet titled Digest of Facts.<sup>67</sup> Their new policy was obvious in the subtitle "Demonstrating Overwhelming Similarities in Life, Faith, and Work . . . [of the two churches]: An Evidence of Their Essential Spiritual Unity." With good reason the opponents of union called this a propaganda publication for even the back cover contained the seventeen impelling reasons for union in a capsulized form.

This was an unusual period of agitation within the Reformed Church. The union contention was caught up in a movement, extending beyond denominational bounds, to reaffirm a belief in a more evangelical Christianity. This meant an abandonment of neutrality and tolerance in combatting modernism and the spreading worldliness and doctrinal indifference on the part of church leaders and members. The Rev. Dr. Henry Bast of Grand Rapids, Michigan, acted as one of the main catalysts within the Church. In December of 1946, he had resigned his board and committee positions and attacked the growing control of the Church by its boards. In a pamphlet published early in 1947, he assailed continued membership in the Federal Council of Churches and in the International Council of Religious Education.

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<sup>66</sup>Church Herald, March 28, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup>Digest of Facts (n.p., The Joint Committee on Union, May, 1947).

He disapproved of the criteria for selecting faculty members at Hope College and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. His suggestion to "overture Synod to move the Boards from New York to some area in the Middle West,"<sup>68</sup> was a renewed attack on "boardism" with its Eastern domination. This appeal found support. The Rev. Bastian Kruithof wrote in a weekly church paper published in Holland, Michigan,

The timely protest is gathering momentum. It is also growing in size. Dare to be a contemporary Daniel. You will not even have to stand alone. There are enough people, seriously concerned, who are eager to form the spearhead against the citadel of neutrality.<sup>69</sup>

Earlier in this editorial he contended "what the Reformed Church in America needs is wholesome controversy and a positive Christian apologetics . . . to preserve and to develop our interpretation and application of the Christian heritage." The desired controversy materialized and continued throughout the period of these union negotiations. In the main, the editorials of the Church Herald supported the positions outlined by the Rev. Bast.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup>An Appeal to the Ministers and Laymen of the Chicago and Iowa Synods (Grand Rapids: Don Van Osterberg, [1947]), p. 14. While requested on the grounds of securing a more centralized location and one closer to the source of 71% of the boards' financial support, it obviously was meant to relocate them also in a more conservative environment.

<sup>69</sup>Editorial by Klaus, "Timely Protest," The Sunday School Guide, February 23, 1947, p. 5. This paper is privately published by a Reformed Church family, mainly as a supplement to the International Council of Religious Education's International Sunday School Lessons.

<sup>70</sup>This provoked overtures from two Eastern Classes. The Classis of South Bergen questioned the advisability of the Rev. Bast's remaining on the Editorial Council of the Church Herald and continuing as its writer of the Sunday School lesson. The Classis of Ulster asked that he be made to prove his assertions or retract them. Minutes R.C.A., 1947, p. 123.

The editor differed on the removal of the Church boards

Some of the overtures presented to the General Synod at its meeting in Holland, Michigan, June 5-11, 1947, gave an idea of the interest in the debate. On the subjects raised by the Rev. Bast's pamphlet, the box score read as follows: on membership in the Federal Council of Churches, overtures were received from 19 Classes and Particular Synods; on relocating the Church headquarters, 11; on the composition of the membership of the Church boards, 5; and on membership in the International Council of Religious Education, 3. These exceed the number of overtures concerned with union with the United Presbyterians. In that regard, the Classis of Monmouth overtured for union, that of Cascade, against, and Dakota for abandoning the idea entirely, while seven additional overtures asked for more study time.<sup>71</sup>

Dr. Harry Hager's "State of Religion" message noted the controversy and offered suggestions.

There is . . . among us the increasingly disturbing open charge of modernism in both the Reformed and United Presbyterian Churches; also inferences regarding the complete dependability of our Boards and educational institutions . . . We need a larger sense of denominational solidarity.<sup>72</sup>

His recommendation to create a representative committee on Life and Work to iron out the differences between the East and West went unheeded. The stress on "denominational solidarity" did not automatically

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to the West. The editorial of May 30, 1947, asked that only part of the boards be moved so as to avoid merely relocating the problem of centralization and noted the U.P.C. boards were divided between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Figures presented compared the overwhelming membership on the boards' Executive Committees from the two Particular Synods of New York and New Jersey with that of the remaining three (i.e., Board of Foreign Missions 18-2).

<sup>71</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1947, pp. 122-125.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

preclude the possibility of union with the United Presbyterians, though Dr. Hager inferred it precluded continued membership in the Federal Council of Churches. Yet the message stated, "If Synod should continue its committee on church union"<sup>73</sup> he would like all the issues discussed at open forum type consistorial meetings.

The small increase in both the number of Reformed churches and church members in the past twenty years perturbed Dr. Hager. He questioned the Church's faithfulness and direction by inquiring, "Has the church supper room crowded out the upper room?" and "Have the relaxation of sports and recreational programs in the Church brought us to the point where we are majoring in minors and dawdling with our Lord's great commission?"<sup>74</sup> His solution called for the creation of a layman's organization and a Board of Evangelism, both of which have since become integral parts of the Reformed Church. It was largely due to his influence that a delegate was again sent to the closely related Christian Reformed Synod and a committee appointed to study the possibility of creating a college on the West Coast.

The contents of the report of the Committee on Church Union occasioned little discussion. The Committee reported on its two joint meetings and the continuing efforts to get acquainted. Its proposal to present a more comprehensive and revised plan of union to the 1949 General Synod met with approval. It assured the delegates that the union of the two churches could be "consummated without loss of any

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 235. The underlining has been added. This committee did continue and consistorial union meetings were held, especially during 1949 and early 1950.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 231 and p. 232, respectively.

essential element in our respective doctrinal, liturgical or organizational heritages."<sup>75</sup> With the understanding that the new sections of the plan would be presented to the Classes for study and suggested changes, the Committee was continued and enlarged to twenty-one members.<sup>76</sup>

The report made earlier to the United Presbyterian General Assembly Meeting at Sterling College had been almost identical. The United Presbyterian Union Committee in requesting continuance and enlargement had remarked:

While our churches are not yet prepared to come to any decision for or against union, there is a body of opinion in both churches favorable to union sufficient to warrant the continuation of the process of study. There is ground for fear that were we to discontinue discussion at this point we might be going contrary to the Will of God.<sup>77</sup>

The General Assembly accepted the new time schedule, but decided to overture their Presbyteries to vote as originally planned in the spring of 1948. This would be merely an informative vote as permitted by their Book of Government and Worship (p. 64). They invited the Reformed Church to take a similar vote, but its Constitution did not contain such a permissive clause.

The question of continued membership in the Federal Council of Churches also absorbed the attention of both churches. Memorials or

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>76</sup>The Joint Committee asked that each Classis and Presbytery appoint special committees in the fall to insure proper consideration of the revised plan. Possibly influenced by the agitation for greater Western representation on the Church's boards, the Committee on Union filled its expansion openings exclusively with Westerners.

<sup>77</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1947, p. 1118.





overtures faced each judicatory calling for withdrawal from what they labelled a liberal-dominated interdenominational agency. The matter had intensified, for the creation and growth of the rival National Association of Evangelicals seemed to offer a possible alternative. The Reformed Church's Committee on the Federal Council, despite pre-Synod opposition pamphleteering, church paper articles, and now official overtures, recommended continued membership.<sup>78</sup> After a lengthy debate, a substitute recommendation of the Committee on Overtures won approval instead. This provided for retaining membership in the Federal Council for another year while trying to get it "to take positions doctrinally more consonant with Biblical Christianity."<sup>79</sup>

As in the case of union, a showdown was merely postponed. During the year a special committee would study both the pros and cons of the Federal Council and the National Association of Evangelicals, and make a recommendation to the next General Synod. The United Presbyterians acted. They continued their membership and threatened to withhold delegate travel expenses to Synod and General Assembly meetings from any congregation which did not pay its Federal Council assessment.

The postponement decision of the Joint Committee on Union had quieted the clamor in the church paper and made the General Synod's action almost anti-climactic. Only a few voices disturbed

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<sup>78</sup>The Committee found encouragement in the minority of overtures from six Classes and one Particular Synod for continued membership.

<sup>79</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1947, p. 124.

the union moratorium. A Reformed Church missionary to China, the Rev. Joseph Esther, proved to be one such disturbing voice. Touched by the humility of a United Presbyterian minister's published comments on the shortcomings of his denomination, the Rev. Esther sought to promote a similar feeling of humility within the Reformed Church when he questioned:

If our Churches are united, should we not first seek cleansing from our Father for being the oldest denomination in the United States and yet so small; for being so smug in our Dutch clannishness; so satisfied to minister to "our covenant children" only; so concerned about the salvation of foreigners . . . and so unconcerned about "Americans" . . . who live within three minutes walking distance of us; so proudly set in our ways as to maintain two inadequately established seminaries when one only could do much more thoroughly the all-important job of training for leadership; so sectionally-minded that to a Westerner the Easterner is always suspect and the Easterner likely to disdain all things of the West; so orthodox in some sections as to glorify our doctrines more than our Savior; so traditional in other sections as to value mossy 17th century records above serving the living age . . . so sluggish in certain sections that we hardly respond even to such a noble call as the United Advance, which should be oversubscribed everywhere . . . .

Let our eyes turn inward before we are united in marriage to another spiritual family . . . .<sup>80</sup>

These observations occasioned no public response. The editorial direction of the Church Herald remained primarily concerned with defending the Bible as the infallible Word of God and challenging other tenets ascribed to "modernism."

The crusade for a United Church of America, launched in the fall of 1947 by the noted Methodist missionary and lecturer, Dr. E. Stanley Jones, accentuated a collateral fear. Dr. Jones desired to unite the 256 Protestant denominations through the device of a

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<sup>80</sup> Joseph R. Esther, "Letters to the Editor," Church Herald, September 12, 1947, p. 12.



federal union. This could only be done through acceptance of a simple creedal statement permitting great latitude of doctrinal beliefs. A new movement for closer union within the Federal Council of Churches and the proposed National Council of Churches all evidenced a tendency in this direction. A church which prided itself on its doctrinal purity and found in it a raison d'etre could not help but be concerned. An editorial revealed that the Reformed Church's proposed partner had been one of the few to accept the Federal Council's invitation to negotiate a closer union of twenty five churches. This was

disturbing to many. Especially since one definite factor in the consideration of our present church union proposal . . . is as to whether this union will lead us eventually into further and quite different unions.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the Joint Committee and its various subgroupings had continued quietly at their work. Members engaged actively in the tasks of letter writing and speaking. The letters sought to make sure that there were people in each Classis and Presbytery who would disseminate their information on union; they also sought additional assistance in arranging for pulpit exchanges and group meetings.

These practices had been suggested by the Executive Committee at its June 12th meeting at the Hotel Sherman, Chicago, Illinois.<sup>82</sup> To carry out the instructions of the General Synod and General Assembly, tentative subcommittees were selected to prepare a Summary Statement

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<sup>81</sup>"A Protestant Super-Church," Church Herald, January 23, 1948, p. 6. The underlining has been added. This fear increases in intensity in the course of negotiations.

<sup>82</sup>Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Joint Committee on Church Union, June 12, 1947. The Reformed Church was represented by Drs. Luman Shafer, John Beardslee, Jr. (newly elected president of the General Synod), M. Stephen James, Thomas Haig and Harry Hager.



of Doctrine, a Constitution, and the Forms of Worship. Once approved by the Joint Committee, these subcommittees had to have completed drafts composed and distributed prior to a proposed December 29th gathering. A proposal to have the two highest judicatories meet at the same time and the same place in 1949 won approval.

The Executive Committee and the co-opted subcommittee chairmen next met in Pittsburgh on December 1, 1947. For three days they laboriously worked through each of the three reports, preparing them for presentation to the Joint Committee, now rescheduled to meet January 20th. The name proposed for the united church again plagued them. After considerable discussion, they decided to pass the problem on to their parent body with the notation that they "had voted 9 to 2 to drop the word 'united' from the present suggested name."<sup>83</sup> After additional editing, all reports were to be mimeographed and in the hands of the membership of the Joint Committee one week before its scheduled meeting.

This gathering took place in Pittsburgh, January 20-22, 1948. The First United Presbyterian Church hosted the seven sessions. The three reports received extensive study and some revision, particularly the Summary of Doctrines. An additional report on the merging of the boards was received and again the proposed name for the united church troubled the members. The Joint Committee, like its Executive Committee, found itself in disagreement and sought the opinion of the members of the two churches on the proposed name, The United Presbyterian Reformed Church. The Stated Clerks of the two denominations

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<sup>83</sup>Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Joint Committee on Church Union, December 1-3, 1947, p. 1.

had been asked to draft the final form in which the question of union would be submitted to the two churches but never found time to present it at this meeting. Dr. James received the appointment to head a committee to integrate the four reports into the previous Proposed Plan of Union. He hoped to have five thousand copies of the revised plan printed by March 1st and distributed within the Classes and Presbyteries prior to their spring sessions.

The reports on this meeting, which appeared in the Church papers, stressed that the Committee wanted this plan studied thoroughly and would be willing to make additional changes. Dr. L. Shafer again stressed the necessity for achieving substantial unanimity to attempt union.<sup>84</sup> A professed feature of these joint meetings had always been the inspiring spirit that prevailed. The Rev. J. C. Van Wyk (Wisconsin), who described himself as cold to this union before attending his first Joint Committee gathering in Pittsburgh, became a supporter because of a consciousness that "God was in our midst."<sup>85</sup> The case for union went almost unchallenged during 1948 in the church papers. A letter in March evidenced distress at this very lack of discussion.<sup>86</sup> The writer reminded the readers that

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<sup>84</sup>"Meeting of Joint Committee on Plan of Union," Church Herald, February 20, 1947, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup>"Letters to the Editor," Church Herald, April 23, 1948, p. 14. Cf. Dr. Shafer, supra; Dr. T. M. Taylor, "Revised Plan for Church Union to be Circulated," United Presbyterian, February 2, 1948, p. 11; letter from Dr. J. E. Hoffman, n.d., to the Members of the Joint Committee on Church Union accompanying copies of the Minutes of the Pittsburgh meeting. Each of these sources gives testimony to a similar conviction. The meeting had closed with a reading of the 17th chapter of St. John and an open session of prayer which had deeply moved Dr. Taylor.

<sup>86</sup>Church Herald, March 5, 1948, p. 14. In this letter from

not all of the Church was unanimous on uniting and asked for some clear statement on the current and future ownership of local church property.

Though Dr. L. Shafer tried to offer assurance that the property rights of the few congregations that might not enter the united church would be carefully safeguarded, the newly published Revised Plan of Union: 1948 made no mention of this matter.<sup>87</sup> Instead, it enlarged a provisional basis of union covering five pages into a permanent plan and basis of union, requiring one hundred and six pages. This was the end product of a committee that sought a basis of union which would necessitate the least change in current procedures and usages of the two churches and would harmonize differences "but never at the expense of opportunistic compromise."<sup>88</sup> The cause of organic union received little support from the article defining the foundation principles of the church; it did nothing to destroy the contention of those who believed spiritual unity existed and further organic unity was unnecessary.<sup>89</sup> Yet changes were not only possible but solicited for incorporation in the projected final Plan of 1949.

Church union did not dominate the General Synod which met from

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Iowa, Mr. Bovenkerk also deplored the absence of discussion on the Federal Council of Churches. The later debates in 1948 on this subject must have proven more satisfying.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1948, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup>Revised Plan of Union: 1948 (n.p., Joint Committee on Union of the Reformed Church in America and The United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1948), p. 5.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., Art. 1, No. 5, pp. 5-6, which begins "The visible unity of the Christian church is not destroyed by its division into different bodies or denominations."





May 20-25, at Buck Hill Falls. Not a single overture was presented concerning union, although the Christian Reformed Church offered to resume fraternal relations if each church were permitted to help the other "remain true to the glorious Reformed faith."<sup>90</sup> Dr. John Beardslee's State of Religion message, despite his position on the Joint Committee, failed to mention the question of union. His emphasis rested on the insufficiency of minister's pay and the inefficiency of underpaid ministers. He also called on the laymen to evangelize.

The formal report of the Committee on Union reviewed the instructions of the 1947 General Synod and the various meetings that were necessary to carry them out. After commenting on the new sections of the Revised Plan of Union, the report made several recommendations. The General Synod agreed to its recommendation to invite the United Presbyterians to Buck Hill Falls for concurrent meetings of the General Assembly and the General Synod in 1949. This was meant to be the last major effort to bring about a closer acquaintance between the ministers and the laymen of the two churches. A further suggestion that one-third of the Reformed Church Committee members be replaced so that additional members of the Church could share the rich spiritual fellowship experienced at the Joint Committee meetings was not acted upon. The Committee forwarded a communication from Dr. Douglas Horton of the Congregational Christian churches seeking a general planning conference in the fall to achieve greater unity and

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<sup>90</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1948, p. 123. This conditioned offer was accompanied by a list containing six points interpreting how this was to be done. Distrustful of a relationship which granted the right to interfere internally in the affairs of the R.C.A., an unfavorable reply was delayed for a year until the Committee on Fraternal Relations could present a report. The United Presbyterians however approved a similar invitation.



promote church union, but advised the rejection of such a diversionary alternative.

It is the judgement of our Committee that our Church cannot participate in this conference since we are engaged in conversations with the United Presbyterian Church and do not regard these negotiations in any sense a part of any larger plan of union.<sup>91</sup>

Probably of greater interest to the Church than the General Synod's acceptance of this recommendation was its acceptance by a 151-65 vote of the majority report recommending continuance of membership in the Federal Council of Churches.<sup>92</sup>

The United Presbyterians met on the campus of Westminster College, June 9-14, 1948. They had a single memorial on Church union but like the Reformed Church they had received several memorials concerning membership in the Federal Council of Churches. The Presbytery of Oregon's memorial for immediate negotiations toward organic union with other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies was denied, because it was felt the Committee on Church Relations was already exploring all hopeful avenues.<sup>93</sup> The General Assembly also turned down Dr. Horton's invitation because the United Presbyterian Church was not ready for such an advanced step as a general church union movement now. Yet the State of Religion report by the Moderator, Dr. Thomas

<sup>91</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1948, p. 186. The underlining has been added. The Reformed Church Union Committee was aware, perhaps more so than their United Presbyterian brethren, of the dangers of looking beyond a single select union effort.

<sup>92</sup>The faculties of the two seminaries had contributed to this result by sending to all the ministers of the denomination an atypical jointly endorsed letter recommending continued membership. The Rev. William Goulouze at Western had been the sole abstainer.

<sup>93</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1948, p. 55.



H. Newcomb definitely showed an interest in the healing of Protestantism's weakness through denominational unions. The mind of the entire church seemed inclined toward some expression of union. The Presbyteries had voted 926-103 in the spring on the principle of union with the Reformed Church.<sup>94</sup>

Both churches voted the necessary funds to continue their union committees' activities. They also asked for earnest and prayerful consideration of the revised Plan by the congregations and lower courts so that suggested changes could be in the hands of the Joint Committee by December 31, 1948. Most of the Classes had special union committees to guide their thinking, though some belatedly created them at the semi-annual fall session. Some consistories felt so adamantly against union that they considered the Plan unworthy of their study. Yet the co-chairmen of the Joint Committee on Church Union received a larger number of responses than in 1946, not only from the regular and special sessions of the Classes and Presbyteries but also from individuals. The co-chairmen compiled separate lists of comments that affected each of their five responsible committees.<sup>95</sup> The comments ranged from grammatical corrections, to preferences for previous manners of expression or practice, to rejection of entire

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>95</sup>As an example, the Committee on Doctrine received twelve pages of comments taken from the letters and communication of seven individuals and five Classes and Presbyteries. One from Dean Edwards of the Federal Council of Churches, a former R.C.A. pastor, objected to a new church expressing statements on "The Fall of Man" and "Election" which did not commend themselves "to the intelligent people of our day." (Kuyper Papers, W.T.S.) Apparently neither the opponents of the Federal Council nor the opponents of this union, who were generally one and the same, ever saw this letter.

statements or portions of the Plan. Dissatisfaction over the proposed name and the lack of a property clause received frequent mention.

An exceptionally important report was made by the Classical Committee on Church Union to a special session of the Classis of Grand Rapids on November 15, 1948. The report questioned eleven points of major or minor doctrinal significance and listed two considerations in procedure for adopting this Plan of Union. The latter dealt with voting procedure and property holding for dissenting congregations. It suggested that the General Synod make its decision on the basis of whether or not this union received the support of a 75 per cent majority, both of a popular communicant vote and of the total classical delegate vote. This meant an abandonment of the Presbyterian system and the current Reformed Church constitutional requirements. Despite the omission of the contention that union might be the "will of God," this report's presentation of nine "thoughts suggesting that union is advantageous" was one of the best presentations for union yet made.<sup>96</sup> Its seven "thoughts that advance doubts on the feasibility of Church union" were of a nature and presentation to strike a response, especially in the Western branch of the Church. The report noted the original United Presbyterian union offer had been extended to three churches, not merely the Reformed Church, and quoted the action on the Presbytery of Oregon's 1948 memorial to prove that the United Presbyterian Church was intent on further union. It likewise elaborated upon:

The apparent lack of interest on the part of the Reformed

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<sup>96</sup>"Report of the Committee on Church Union" to the Classis of Grand Rapids - Special Session, November 15, 1948 (unpublished, Church Union file, N.B.T.S.), p. 4.

Church's constituency,

The schism and weakness of the divisions that might result,

The inability to really show that either the two churches or Christ's Kingdom would benefit,

A denominational co-operation that singly or collectively can capitalize on existing spiritual union,

The inability of organic union to enhance or thwart this spiritual unity,

The danger of "boardism."

The concluding resolutions approved the suggested revisions and procedural considerations and registered the Classis' "coolness and very unenthusiastic attitude toward the proposed union with the United Presbyterian Church."<sup>97</sup>

The editorial published in the Church Herald on the same day and in the same city where this meeting had been held, indicated that the editor shared many of the doubts about the feasibility of this union. He particularly denied any suggestion or contention that the

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 6. This report was submitted by the Committee on Church Union, comprised of the Rev. Henry J. Ten Clay, chairman, the Rev. Harri Zegarius and Elder R. De Briune. The discussions attendant upon this report and this meeting were important to the later adoption, first by the Joint Committee and then by the two Churches, of the principle of a 75% majority to consummate the union. The Rev. Jacob Blaauw, then pastor of Bethel Church, was a member of this Classis. Letter from the Rev. J. Blaauw, Grandville, Michigan, September 8, 1965, to the author, states,

"As to who proposed the three-fourths voting change from the usual two-thirds, I must state this was my proposal. In talking with my colleagues of the ministry as a member of the denominational Committee on Church Union, I learned that there was a strong opposition to the usual two-third vote, and I felt that a matter of such high implications demanded a smaller minority and a larger majority than is usually practiced."





people in the Churches were eager for union. He averred that a true church union can only come from a natural, almost inevitable grass-roots desire and "not as something promoted by and sponsored from the top down . . . ." <sup>98</sup>

The negotiations between the two churches had by 1948 produced new areas of co-operation. The Board of Education's Curriculum Committee in co-operation with the United Presbyterians and the Southern Presbyterians had begun on January 1st the joint publication of Sunday School literature. The 1948 General Synod ordered the expansion of this project to which Dr. Winfield Burggraaff was a major contributor. It also announced that the Reformed Church would join the United Presbyterians in the publication of two new hymnals, and would study the possibility of jointly establishing a college in Los Angeles. <sup>99</sup> By this time the promised Reformed Church assistance to the South Sudan mission field had materialized. In January, students from the two churches, attending the North American Student Conferences on Christian Frontiers, had held a joint meeting. In July, the first of three consecutive summers of joint caravanning by groups of students had begun.

The creation of the World Council of Churches may have contributed to a union aura, but the Berlin Blockade, the fighting in China and Greece and the Presidential election of 1948 effectively countered this impression. The Church began to concern itself over the new wave of Dutch emigrants entering Canada and initiated a new

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<sup>98</sup> November 15, 1948, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Minutes R.C.A., 1948, pp. 90-91.

theological controversy. The controversy began when the Rev. Bert Van Malsen protested Dr. Hugh B. MacLean's Church Herald article, "The Relevance of the Old Testament."<sup>100</sup> He charged this New Brunswick professor had imputed the Jews might have rewritten part of the history of Israel (the Book of Deuteronomy) to justify their slaughter of the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. This called into question "the Bible as the Word of God in its entirety." The debate spilled out of the "Letters to the Editor" column into the spring meetings of the Classes and Particular Synods. The tremendous number of overtures (thirty) revealed that this had been accepted, not as a mere debate over liberalism, but as a Western challenge to the Eastern branch of the church.<sup>101</sup> Dr. MacLean found it necessary to state his acceptance of the Church's standards and explain various points of his article to the General Synod. His explanation satisfied a majority of those attending and the matter was permitted to rest. As with the sharp debate over continued Federal Council membership which aroused such strong feelings in the participants, this controversy indirectly affected their reflections on the union questions.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>"Letters to the Editor," Church Herald, December 3, 1948, p. 9. Dr. MacLean's article of October 22, 1948 was taken from his inaugural speech as Professor of Old Testament History at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

<sup>101</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1949, p. 9. Fifteen Classes and 2 Particular Synods, all in the East, sent overtures of support for the New Brunswick Seminary, while 11 Classes and 2 Particular Synods in the West requested Dr. MacLean to explain his views on the inspiration of Scripture.

In an expressive resolution, the Classis of Albany not only commended the seminary for the excellent work it was doing but "for the high caliber [sic] of men added to the teaching staff." Minutes of the Classis of Albany, VII (April 19, 1949), 231.

<sup>102</sup>Letter from Dr. Lester Kuyper, April 7, 1949, to Dr. Luman Shafer. "All this had its bearing on the union idea, so that we

The last meeting of the Joint Committee on Church Union took place January 19-21, 1949, at the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The subcommittees had weighed the suggestions and criticisms directed at their particular part of the Revised Plan; the chairmen had all prepared their reports. The Rev. James E. Hoffman, Secretary of the Joint Committee, stressed in a letter of October 22, 1948, that the January meeting had to produce a final plan for presentation to the assemblies of the two churches because a second meeting would be financially impossible.<sup>103</sup> The Minutes of this meeting do not reveal the extent to which these reports were altered but the finalized form appeared in the Plan of Union: 1949.

Part V of this revised union plan contained the opinions of the Rev. Dr. W. H. S. Demarest and Attorney Dr. Tim J. Campbell on the legal aspects of church union first presented at this meeting. This report revealed that while each Church had a method for amending its constitution, neither "expressedly provides a method for union of the denomination with any other denomination."<sup>104</sup> It recommended that because the basis of union involved adoption of a new constitution, the procedures for amendment should be followed. As a result of a further recommendation of this report, the Joint Committee instructed that its

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cannot hope for a sympathetic treatment of the plan when the spirit of the Church is unbalanced." Previously he described the Church as being in an ugly temper.

<sup>103</sup>James E. Hoffman, letter to sub-committee Chairman of the Joint Committee on Union (Church Union file, N.B.T.S.).

<sup>104</sup>Plan of Union: 1949 (n.p., Joint Committee on Union of the Reformed Church in America and the United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1949), p. 113.

declarative statement effecting union should include the notation "that the procedure has been in accordance with the laws and constitution of the church, and that the doctrines and principles of government of the church have not been substantially changed."<sup>105</sup>

The Committee failed to heed the advice that adoption of the final Plan of Union follow the procedures for a constitutional amendment. The Rev. Jacob Blaauw suggested that a three-fourths majority should be required for ratification of this important union plan; the Rev. Harry Hager seconded the motion. Despite the opposition of Dr. T. J. Campbell, the motion carried. It is impossible to be sure which was the prevailing influence in this decision - the logic of requiring a more nearly unanimous approval, the idea that a concession had to be made to insure the opportunity to bring the Plan to a vote, or simply a case of overconfidence on the part of the union proponents. The Reformed Church committee members and observers had held a separate meeting on January 20 at which each informally remarked on his or her feelings toward the proposed union. Thirteen members and two observers favored this movement while two members and one observer claimed to be uncommitted or to have reservations.<sup>106</sup> At the United Presbyterian meeting everyone present favored proceeding on to a union.<sup>107</sup> These

<sup>105</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee on Church Union, January 19-21, 1949, U.P.C.-R.C.A., Kalamazoo, Mich., p. 2.

<sup>106</sup>"Notes on the Individual Remarks at the Meeting of the Reformed Church Members of the Committee on Union," January 20, 1949, taken down by Blaauw (Kuyper Papers, W.T.S.). The Rev. Rozendaal (South Dakota) and Editor Benes were not ready to commit themselves while the Rev. Blaauw had serious reservations. Letter from the Rev. Blaauw to the author, op. cit., stated that "Dr. H. Hager a few days after we adjourned retracted his vote and voted with me against the proposal."

<sup>107</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1949, p. 441.

votes may have been conducive to overconfidence, particularly if the members felt they represented a cross section of their churches and were acting according to the "will of God."

The recommendation adopted by the Joint Committee went beyond the idea of an actual three-fourths majority vote to approve the union. The triple three-fourths vote proposed to the two churches required "a three-fourths majority vote in the Classes and Presbyteries and a three-fourths majority of the total number of Classes and Presbyteries. . . . The vote declaring the union effective shall be a three-fourths majority in each assembly."<sup>108</sup> The great discrepancies in the size of the Classes and Presbyteries potentially meant the required majority to consummate union would greatly exceed 75 per cent.<sup>109</sup> The concluding additional business concerned itself with the mechanics of getting the plan printed, distributed and publicized especially among the women of the churches.

The opposition within the Reformed Church had tried to gain some organization and voice. In 1948 the Evangelical Brotherhood organized and held meetings in Chicago, Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids. A few of these same individuals for a little over one year published without "a great deal of outward success" a paper called The Reformed View.<sup>110</sup> In January of 1949 an active debate broke out in the official

<sup>108</sup>Minutes of Joint Committee on Church Union, January 19-21, 1949, U.P.C.-R.C.A., Kalamazoo, Mich., p. 2.

<sup>109</sup>If union was achieved, dissenting churches would also be required to secure a three-fourths vote of their members to petition the new General Assembly for retention of their congregational property. Plan of Union: 1949, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup>Letter from the Rev. Bert Van Malsen, Grand Haven, Mich.,

organs of both churches. The basis of opposition at first centered on a lack of enthusiasm in either church for a union desired merely for the sake of union. Dr. Albertus Pieters called this "unionitus dogmaticus" a contagious mental disorder of those who contend all disunion is a sin.<sup>111</sup> He found no positive reasons for the proposed union. Through a variety of approaches, the Rev. B. D. Dykstra (Iowa) emotionally expounded upon many of these points. While Dr. Pieters wanted a procedure to permit the sampling of the opinion of the Church's membership, the Rev. Dykstra demanded for the "contemplated disbanding of the Reformed Church at least a plebescite of the people."<sup>112</sup>

The influence exerted by Dr. Pieter's anti-union article is hard to evaluate, for he had touched the lives of a generation of ministers who had graduated from Western Theological Seminary.<sup>113</sup> His

September 28, 1965, to the author. Underlining added. The Rev. Van Malsen feels some of the ideas expressed in this paper helped contribute subconsciously to the defeat of the planned union.

<sup>111</sup>"Church Union . . . Why Shouldn't We? Why Should We?", Church Herald, January 28, 1949, p. 12. Interestingly, he found no answer to the first question, for unlike many other opponents, he found no real danger to evangelical orthodoxy or Reformed tradition in the proposed union. This is very similar to his position and views as expressed during the union talks of 1929 (supra, pp. 175-76).

The first attack in the United Presbyterian, January 17, 1949, p. 12, likewise saw all the benefits as problematical. This was but one of many articles expressing a preference for union with other Presbyterian churches or the fear that this union would prevent further union.

<sup>112</sup>"To Be or Not To Be," Church Herald, April 1, 1949, p. 9. He claimed if denominations "had no right to be, then this union with the Presbyterians must be but the beginning of a process of unionizing . . . until we arrive at Rome," for Oxnam, Jones and the Christian Century's reasonings all pointed that way.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Charles Wissink, "Unitive and Divisive Movements Within the Reformed Church in America" (unpublished M.S.T. dissertation,

article did not go unchallenged. Despite this emeritus professor's declaration that justification of union by John 17:21 "gives me a pain," the Rev. M. Verne Oggel continued to insist this passage meant organic union and not merely spiritual unity.<sup>114</sup> The Rev. Harry Ver Strate also attacked such a loose interpretation of the visible church and felt the Committee's May 1947 Digest of Facts provided just the type of practical arguments Pieter's was seeking.<sup>115</sup> Dr. Lester Kuyper deplored the "unionitus dogmaticus" statement and noted where faith is concerned there is a line where conviction changes into pride and arrogance.<sup>116</sup>

As evidenced in the "Letters to the Editor" column and its United Presbyterian counterpart, "Readers' Rendezvous," the areas of concern and debate widened. Within the Reformed Church the voting procedure, the lack of unity within its own denomination and the "forbearance in love" clause of the United Presbyterians' 1926 Confessional caused most of the debate. The latter clause seemed a more open invitation to liberalism than even the Quatenus (in so far as) ordination vow change in the Netherlands in 1816. So profound were these fears that the 1949 General Assembly deigned to make a pronouncement on it.

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Union Theological Seminary, 1965), p. 86. The Rev. Wissink attached great significance to the adverse influence of this article upon many ministers in the Midwest where Dr. Pieters was highly respected.

<sup>114</sup>"A Plan for Union with the United Presbyterians," Church Herald, February 18, 1949, p. 18; "A Sanction for Church Union," Ibid., May 6, 1949, p. 11, and "Church Union? Yes in Christ's Name!" which makes a strong attack on Pieter's article and questioned whether its author was not simply allergic to all union, this last, a manuscript article (Church Union file, N.B.T.S.) was never published by the Church Herald.

<sup>115</sup>"Letter to the Editor," Ibid., February 18, 1949, p. 14.

<sup>116</sup>"That They May Be One," Ibid., February 25, 1949, p. 8.



The Presbyterian brethren in the first half of the year evidenced a dissatisfaction with the proposed name, their lack of knowledge of and contact with their Reformed brethren and a concern that this union might be a stumbling block to further union. Editor Graves of the Church Union Herald favored these negotiations and anticipated future negotiations but Editor Edie of the United Presbyterian never editorially bestowed his blessing on this union. Professor T. M. Taylor took the initiative in defending the current proposal supported by the members of the Union Committee. Dr. J. Knox Montgomery (Muskingum College) claimed the opponents were using the same arguments used in 1932 but just reversed. Then the church being courted was considered too large and too liberal. He felt the "great and virtuous United Presbyterian Church" remained too concerned over what it might lose instead of "what it might give to the union."<sup>117</sup>

The deadline for suggestions for revision of the 1948 Plan had already expired and current business of more immediate interest, such as the MacLean affair, dominated the spring Classes' meetings. Most Classes did schedule special union meetings and the Classis of Albany took an indecisive advisory vote. The majority (14) of its delegates were undecided while five favored and three opposed the union.<sup>118</sup> The Particular Synod of Iowa indicated a dissatisfaction rather than

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<sup>117</sup>"Why I Favor Union with the R.C.A.," United Presbyterian, March 21, 1949, p. 10. Dr. Montgomery too favored additional union but felt current consummation would facilitate such efforts. All this debate on the effect this union would have on further union was not lost on opposition members within the R.C.A. and eventually provides them with one of their strongest talking points. Cf. Harri Zegarius, Church Herald, May 13, 1949, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup>Minutes of the Classis of Albany, VII (April, 1949), 230.

indecision by overturing General Synod for a five year delay in voting to remove the objectionable features of the Plan.<sup>119</sup>

During this period Dr. John W. Beardslee, Jr., had been assigned the task of preparing a report to accompany the Committee's presentation of the new revised Plan of Union to the General Synod. This took the form of an endorsement both of the Plan and of the proposed union. The report sought to show that union was in accordance with the ideas of the Apostle Paul and John Calvin, that it would strengthen both churches and attempted to answer some of the charges of the anti-group. Since the whole Committee could not agree on all parts of this report, the proponents strove anxiously to avoid a minority report.

Only three of the twenty-one members of the Committee were thought likely to submit such a report. On April 5 Dr. Kuyper wrote to Dr. Shafer that the Rev. Blaauw had assured him he would not sign the report, for he did not feel "the committee was engaged to promote the plan," but that he would not send in a minority report if the Committee persisted. Dr. Beardslee had already received a letter from the Rev. H. T. Rozendaal dated March 31 in which he disapproved submitting the report as constituted. Yet he would permit his name to be attached if a majority of the Committee approved it, and added "I certainly would not bring in a minority report." The Rev. Harry Hager also declined to sign. He based his reason on the failure of the Committee or the Synod to implement his idea of social control over the two denominations' educational institutions.<sup>120</sup> The 1949 Church

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<sup>119</sup>Minutes of the Particular Synod of Iowa (n.p., n.n., 1949), p. 39.

<sup>120</sup>Letter from Dr. Harry Hager, Chicago, Illinois, April 18, 1949, to Dr. Iuman J. Shafer. The Rev. Hager would also have liked

Minutes duly record that he wished his name withheld from the report (p. 167) but they contain no minority reports.

The growing doubts of the success of the union movement on the part of some members of the Committee were only partly offset by the successful avoidance of a minority report. This posed a dilemma.

Dr. Shafer wrote to Dr. Kuyper:

I agree with you that argument will not win the case, and I also agree that I don't know what will . . . . There has been some suggestion that we put this thing off for a year and have more time to make the presentation. My own feeling is that that will not do the job. I am afraid that a postponement now would indicate that the matter was being shelved.<sup>121</sup>

They decided to push ahead and make the best possible presentation of the Plan. Strong pro-union articles were written by Samuel M. Zwemer (March 25), who had served the United Presbyterian Church on loan in Cairo for seventeen years, and by the Stated Clerk, James Hoffman (April 22), who pointed out the historical fallacy of the contention that co-operation removes the necessity and advantages of organic union.

The Rev. Henry Bast, whose agitation had so shaken the Church the preceding year, sought to counter these and other favorable presentations. In an article, "Priorities in Church Union," he declared many of the previous arguments irrelevant to the real question of whether to form a new denomination in the United States.<sup>122</sup> By differentiating between unity and church union he found the Bible had

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to have seen a separate vote in the General Synod on union and on sending the Plan down to the Classes so the latter vote could not be misinterpreted.

<sup>121</sup>Letter from Dr. L. Shafer, May 12, 1949, to Dr. L. Kuyper.

<sup>122</sup>Church Herald, April 29, 1949, pp. 12, 22-23.



nothing to say about the latter. This peripheral matter out of the way, his concern centered on the nature and authority of the Bible and the way this would be taught in the Church's educational institutions. "The view of the Bible taught in the schools of a denomination will in one generation mold the doctrinal position of that denomination." He felt the new church would be Presbyterian in government and administration but Congregational in doctrine and discipline. Since he professed it was only agreement in doctrine that makes a denomination, he opposed an effort to achieve unity through an over-centralized administration.

The General Synod and General Assembly shared the Inn at Buck Hill Falls from May 20-25, 1949. The regular sessions of each met concurrently but they shared joint services each evening and had agreed that their respective body would take up the question of union at 2 P.M. on May 24. Each judicatory received an overture asking for a postponement of the pending vote and each rejected the request. On the appointed hour the Church Union Committees made their reports. Dr. Shafer reviewed the Committee's compliance with the authorizations of the General Synod of 1948 and the results of the January meeting in Kalamazoo. He then presented the Plan which had evolved out of "the best thinking of both Churches" and was "sufficiently well considered to become the basis for decision on the question of union."<sup>123</sup> The Synodical delegates were requested, regardless of personal conviction, to permit the Classes to express their decision on the union. The voting procedure was explained and the hope expressed that votes could be cast by representative but unbound delegates. After calling

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<sup>123</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1949, p. 165.

attention to a property clause for dissident congregations, the Committee asked to be discharged. The Synod concurred but a debate broke out on the nature of the pending decision. Dr. Shafer's contention that the vote was not to be on the merits of the case but only for the purpose of referring the Plan to the Classes lost. Instead, a strict constitutional interpretation prevailed that the General Synod must approve the presented Plan and recommend it to the Classes as an amendment to the Constitution for adoption.

Nevertheless, each church passed the necessary resolution, the Reformed Church, 147-60, and the United Presbyterian Church, 241-9. The vote by the General Synod was not very comforting. Only 71 per cent had approved under confused circumstances what later the classical delegates, the Classes and the 1950 General Synod all had to approve by a 75 per cent majority. Dr. Taylor felt the United Presbyterian vote of 96 per cent indicated not only that the Union Committee had done its work well but that the only requirement "for the consummation of this union is love - love for Christ and for one another."<sup>124</sup> Strangely enough, at the same General Assembly, the State of Religion message defended the healthy division of Protestantism and declared "the immediate issue facing the church today is not of itself church union but cooperation and coordination of efforts."<sup>125</sup> The message concluded that religion needed a reformation that union, being basically a matter of machinery, could not impart, though it might follow in the wake of a religious revival. This message did not

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<sup>124</sup>"General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church," Church Herald, June 10, 1949, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1949, p. 407.

prevent the election of Dr. Tim Campbell, a pro-unionist layman, as Moderator for the next year.

Both Churches appointed committees to help present the Plan to each Classis and Presbytery. The General Assembly took one final action regarding union. It presented the General Synod with an interpretation of its "forbearance in love" clause in the Preamble of its Confessional Statement. While acknowledging that the clause permitted exemption to anyone unable to fully subscribe to the Standards of the Church, it "does not in any way minimize or abrogate the vows taken by ministers or elders in ordination."<sup>126</sup>

The Reformed Church's old Union Committee sent home with each delegate its pamphlet of endorsement entitled "Statement on Union of the Reformed Church with the United Presbyterian Church." The spectrum of advocacy and opposition can be gleaned from its twenty-four subtitles. One stressed that current denominational separation was due merely to different origin. Three centuries ago geography and politics had made a united organization of doctrinal kin impossible. Another ascribed most objections to fear of the novel and untried. Yet it noted the future of the Church would be uncertain whether the denomination remained separate or united. Twenty-five current and past members of the Committee had signed this endorsement.

The 1949 concurrent meeting at Buck Hill Falls had exposed a sizeable number of ministers and laymen of both churches to their first real contact with their proposed partners. A Church Union Herald article evaluated the result: "It is our considered view that this

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

amicable interchange did much to forward the cause of Christian brotherhood even if it may not prove to eventuate in organic union."<sup>127</sup> Others also had doubts not confined to the success of the union approach. The Reformed pastor, the Rev. Theodore J. Jansma (New Jersey), presumptuously questioned the accuracy of the General Assembly's pronouncement on their "forbearance in love" clause for which he was publicly and privately rebuked by some of his colleagues. The Church Herald also reprinted part of the June speech before the "Dutch Arms" Society of the Classis of Orange by Moderator T. Campbell. He testified to the conservative, evangelical character of the United Presbyterian Church and the faithfulness of its ministers to their ordination vows.<sup>128</sup>

The problems faced by the committees of the two churches for presenting the Plan differed. In the Reformed Church it had to be explained widely at numerous meetings to assure a fair presentation and discussion before the voting commenced. In the United Presbyterian Church it involved a "continuing program of publicity . . . lest a false impression that the Committee's ardor has cooled, as was somewhat the case during the past year, gain circulation."<sup>129</sup>

The new Committee appointed to present the Plan to the Classes was headed by Dr. Lester Kuyper, "one of the most vocal and

<sup>127</sup>June 12, 1949, p. 12. This article humourously noted that Moderator Campbell had inadvertently walked off with the R.C.A. official gavel and a messenger had been sent over to retrieve it for "apparently the General Synod could not do business without it."

<sup>128</sup>Church Herald, October 7, 1949, p. 12.

<sup>129</sup>Mimeographed letter from Chairman T. M. Taylor, September 15, 1949 to all members of the General Assembly's Committee on Church Relations (Kuyper Papers, W.T.S.).



articulate proponents for union."<sup>130</sup> It decided at a meeting on August 3, 1949 at Holland, Michigan, to seek to establish sub-committees in each Classis and to publish a pamphlet to assist in presenting the Plan. The instructions from General Synod had called for this presentation of the Plan with the background facts and the reasons for and against the union. In the fall, this Committee published and distributed its brochure, "Information on the Plan of Union with the Presbyterian Church of North America," to all Reformed Church pastors. While it presented reasons both for and against uniting, it placed a negating comment after each reason opposed to union. As Dr. Hager feared, the rather confused vote that committed the Plan to classical action was interpreted as an endorsement for adoption. Meanwhile, the members continued their efforts to reach not only the ministers and elders but in some cases to get past them to the members in the pew.<sup>131</sup> They spoke before special meetings of the Classes and area churches, published articles, corresponded privately and even debated. A series of debates in the Midwest between Dr. Kuyper and the

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<sup>130</sup>Wissink, op. cit., p. 83. This Committee was composed of ministerial representatives from each of the 5 Particular Synods. Dr. Kuyper was to supervise the presentation in the important Particular Synod of Chicago, H. T. Rozendaal (reluctantly) - Iowa, A. E. Dykhuizen - Albany, A. J. Neevel - New York, and M. V. Oggel - New Jersey. Members at large were Mr. Allen Redeker, Mrs. Edith Walvoord and Mrs. J. J. Van Strien.

<sup>131</sup>Letter from committee member Allen Redeker, July 27, 1949, Denver, Colo., to Dr. Kuyper. He suggested a special effort to reach the laymen because of the possibility of classical delegates being influenced by straw votes and also because some ministers were so afraid of the anti-union group that they did not dare speak out even to their own congregations. He felt a special effort was needed in Classes of Grand Rapids, Holland, Wisconsin, Pella, Dakota, and East and West Souix.

Rev. Henry Bast caused a great deal of interest. They did little, however, to advance the cause of union for the exhortation "Let's remain Reformed!" generally evoked the warmest response.<sup>132</sup>

Numerous articles in the church paper helped to further the assertion that "none had to be ill-informed of the issues for they had been given the widest possible coverage throughout the church."<sup>133</sup> During this last interlude before the decisive voting, the major discussion dwelt not on doctrine and theology but on whether or not there should be a Dutch Reformed Church in America. Dr. Paul Harrison, former missionary to Arabia, felt union would help the Reformed Church adapt to the challenging task of evangelizing America.<sup>134</sup> The Rev. Theodore Brinckerhoff (New York) felt that it was a continuing error to attempt to preserve in America the Dutch cultural tradition. He therefore welcomed a union which would "cancel out our respective national cultures and leave our conservative Calvinism as the distinctive feature of our church life."<sup>135</sup> Both insisted the Reformed faith was not dependent upon a Dutch background.

The opposition, too, had ready access to the pages of the Church Herald. On December 2, 1949, Dr. Harry Hager implied the

<sup>132</sup>Interview with Dr. Lester Kuyper, Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, July 3, 1964. Dr. Kuyper felt that the Rev. Bast's speeches aroused a warm emotion and were much better received than his own.

<sup>133</sup>Wissink, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>134</sup>"Union with the United Presbyterians," Church Herald, July 15, 1949, p. 6. He described the East as in need of an "intensifier type of Evangelical faith" and the West as being shaped by the Moody Institute and the State University.

<sup>135</sup>"Should We Remain the 'Dutch' Church?" Ibid., November 11, 1949, p. 13.

choice was between being Reformed or Presbyterian. He felt the rank and file of the Western branch of the Church was psychologically very unprepared and unconditioned for this union. Ignoring the effects of almost a century of competition and debate with the Christian Reformed Church, he felt these members, socially only a very few generations removed from the Netherlands, had barely begun to be fully conscious of their own denominational identity. While he had cast aspersions on the efficiency, productiveness and intent of the United Presbyterian Church, a fellow Westerner, the Rev. Jacob Blaauw, conceded that they were "probably as good as we are."<sup>136</sup> This minister based his opposition on a feeling that union was but a postwar fad associated with the liberal contaminated ecumenical movement. He envisioned the needless extinction of the Reformed Church when every reason advanced for this union could be accomplished by Christian co-operation instead. Earlier he had stated that "to me the over 300 years of Reformed heritage is too valuable and precious just to discard it and within a few years completely lose it, just for the sake of joining another denomination."<sup>137</sup> Both of these opponents quoted statements by United Presbyterian ministers to justify their fear that this union would be but a stepping stone to further Presbyterian union.

The debate continued until after the voting had begun. Dr. Kuyper managed one last appeal to the West. He pointed out the current appropriateness of many of the reasons contained in the letter in which

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., January 20, 1950, p. 10.

<sup>137</sup>Letter from the Rev. Jacob Blaauw, August 18, 1949, to Dr. J. Beardslee, Jr. These views held so doggedly and sincerely in the late 1940s are still held by the Rev. Blaauw today (1966) as he opposes a new union proposal.

the Holland Classis in 1850 had requested union with the Reformed Church.<sup>138</sup> The provision for seriously dissenting congregations to remain outside of a united church and still retain their local property kept the later stage of the negotiation relatively free of schism threats. An Eastern pastor had warned that there could possibly be a reaction of another kind if union failed. The proponents might even conclude that no union of any kind could ever suit the anti-unionists "so we might as well go ahead and try to effect a more ambitious union via the two-thirds majority of our Classes required by our Constitution."<sup>139</sup> Mainly, however, the arguments put forth had become so standardized it was clearly time to vote.

By this time the early balloting in some of the Presbyteries had already taken place. The Plan as accepted by the two churches' highest courts had provided that voting could commence any time after January 1, 1950. In addition, the United Presbyterian Church had required their Presbyteries to have recorded their decisions by March 31, 1950. Many of the Reformed Church Classes were slow to vote. Before the Church Herald began publishing its weekly cumulative results on April 7, the United Presbyterians had already noticed a foreboding trend. Only 66 per cent of the returns favored merger.<sup>140</sup> The early Reformed Church results were predominantly adverse to the cause of union and the later flow of returns failed to reverse this

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<sup>138</sup>Church Herald, February 10, 1950, p. 13.

<sup>139</sup>George B. Scholten, "Letter to the Editor," Church Herald, January 27, 1950, p. 10. The merits of Christian Schools became a livelier issue in this column in succeeding issues.

<sup>140</sup>United Presbyterian, March 20, 1950, p. 20.

verdict. By May 5th the vote had been completed except for two of forty-two Classes and seven of sixty-six Presbyteries. The Religious News Service releases spread the word "Reformed-Presbyterian Merger Fails."<sup>141</sup> Twenty-three out of a total of forty-two Classes had voted either against the union proposal or failed to obtain the required three-fourths favorable majority. The onus for thus failing to consummate the first merger within the United States of a church derived from continental Europe and one originating in the British Isles fell on the Reformed Church of America. Overlooked was the fact that seventeen Presbyteries, sufficient to defeat the Plan, had already voted against union or failed to reach the 75 per cent requirement.<sup>142</sup>

Those statistically minded now got out pencil and paper and went to work. Dr. Wallace N. Jamison, pastor of the First United Presbyterian Church of Indianola, Iowa, was one of the first. In a personal letter to the editor of the United Presbyterian, he voiced his disappointment that the United Presbyterians had turned down the union, though it had been known for some months that the Reformed Church would do so.<sup>143</sup> He expected immediate overtures for union with other Presbyterian bodies and did not want the commissioners to take the recent vote as a mandate from the church not to entertain these future proposals. He reasoned the method of voting had given

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., May 8, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 20. The incongruous individual vote from the Presbyterians showed 85% of the delegates favored the union.

<sup>143</sup>Letter from Dr. Jamison, May 8, 1950 (Church Union file, N.B.T.S.). The close kinship of these two churches was again evidenced when Dr. Jamison joined the faculty at New Brunswick in 1956 and became President of this Reformed Church Seminary in 1963.

a "wholly undemocratic advantage to the smaller presbyteries in deciding the policy of the denomination." Theoretically, eighty votes properly placed within the seventeen smallest Presbyteries, or 4 per cent of the 1,970 possible votes, could block union under a double three-fourths voting requirement. As it was, the votes not being this ideally placed, a 15 per cent minority had defeated the union movement in the United Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Jamison had a point. By applying the same method to the Reformed Church vote, one finds that 26 per cent of the delegates in each of the eleven smallest Classes or 3.94 per cent of the 1,219 delegates could have defeated this union. Only 6.8 per cent of the delegates located in eleven of the Western Classes actually in opposition could have defeated any union movement under these special voting regulations. A double two-thirds voting regulation would only raise the theoretical minimum necessary to have defeated this union to 6.2 per cent of the total delegates. Actually the opposition cast 49 per cent of the total delegate vote in 1950, more than enough to defeat this approach by either the special voting requirements adopted or the single two-thirds rule required by the Reformed Church in America's Constitution.

The exercise in statistics continued when the General Synod assembled at Buck Hill Falls on May 19, 1950. The report of the Church Union Committee listed the result of the vote in each Classis and Presbytery. Nineteen Eastern Classes but not a single one of the sixteen Western Classes had approved this union. According to the three-fourths rule seven Eastern Classes had also been opposed though two of these had favored the Plan by the constitutional two-thirds

requirement. Thirty-one Presbyteries in the United States and all eleven foreign voting Presbyteries had favored this union. Nineteen, predominately west of the Allegheny Mountains, were listed as opposed though six of these also exceeded their constitutional two-thirds requirement. While acknowledging that the vote results ended the plans for consummation of the union, the statistics quoted tried to leave the impression that both a majority of the Classes and of the total Reformed Church classical delegates had favored union. By basing these statistics on a simple majority this could just barely be shown; actually, under the voting regulations agreed upon, only 45.2 per cent of the Classes and 68.9 per cent of the voting Presbyteries had approved of this union. Upon the instigation of the Committee, a fraternal greeting, coupled with an expression of gratitude for the fellowship enjoyed and a pledge of continuing co-operation, was sent to the United Presbyterian Church.

The Classis of Ulster overtured unsuccessfully for a union vote by a constitutional two-thirds majority. It also evidenced a dissatisfaction when it asked, regardless of the outcome of the vote, for the right of churches singly or in groups which, "sensing the deep need for union with churches of kindred faith, may follow their convictions by withdrawing from said union or uniting with affiliated groups without loss of church property."<sup>144</sup> This divisive motion was denied and union was temporarily dead. The Church turned to other interests.

Union was far from being a dead subject when the United

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<sup>144</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1950, p. 115.

Presbyterian Church met on June 14 at Miskingum College. The Committee on Bills and Overtures asked that the Plan of Union overture be considered carried because "the vote far exceeds the requirement of our current standards for constitutional change, from which we can not legally depart."<sup>145</sup> The Committee on Church Relations produced its statistics which they felt evidenced a changing attitude toward acceptance of union with sister denominations. Three Presbyteries had presented resolutions favoring negotiations with two Presbyterian Churches (U.S.A. and U.S.) which had again reissued their invitation to unite with them in the plan of union they were developing. The General Assembly approved this move and also authorized further negotiations for the readmission of that part of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church which had failed to enter their union of 1858. It expressed the "earnest hope that at an appropriate time in the future they [the Reformed Church] may wish to reopen negotiations looking toward the organic union of our two bodies."<sup>146</sup>

Once again the Reformed Church in America had been involved in a serious but unsuccessful union approach. The vote climaxed six years of deliberate and spiritually invigorating negotiations on the part of varied Joint Committee members. Failure resulted basically because of the apathy of a sizeable segment of the membership within each Church and the evidence of a good deal of negative thinking on the part of others. The tendency was to think more of what one might lose through this proposed union instead of what one might bring to it. That apathy should play a part is not hard for

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<sup>145</sup>Minutes U.P.C.-N.A., 1950, p. 830.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 794.



most Americans to accept when even their most important national elections never cause more than 70 per cent of the eligible electorate to vote.

The Reformed Church opponents of the movement are quick to point out that both churches failed to vote their agreement of this union. Yet only the special extra-constitutional voting requirements, hesitantly accepted, prevented the United Presbyterians from registering their approval. Indeed, 85 per cent of the presbyterial delegates voted favorably and even the total number of Presbyteries might have reached the required 75 per cent except "that many of our last voting presbyteries registered negative or insufficiently affirmative simply because they knew from reports that had filtered through that the Reformed Church vote had already defeated the issue."<sup>147</sup> A second factor in the defeat of the Plan of Union by this church was the vote of those who feared its consummation might block efforts for further union with more natural Presbyterian brethren.

As for the Reformed Church, it simply was not ready for this union in 1950. The reasons for the 55 per cent negative vote by the Classes are more complex. Besides the previously noted apathy, the following reasons can be noted:

1. The overwhelming and stereotyped opposition within the Western branch of the church.
2. The fear and/or conviction that one union leads to another.
3. The lack of unity within the Church.
4. Tactical errors of the union committees and proponents.

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<sup>147</sup> Editorial, "Rumination on the Failure of Union," Church Union Herald, June 4, 1950, p. 4.

The overwhelming opposition of the West is evident from their classical vote, for only one of these sixteen Classes (California) cast even a 50 per cent vote in favor of union.<sup>148</sup> The Classis of Muskegon had the lowest percentage favoring union and serves as an example of the difficulty of evaluating classical votes. At its spring Classis meeting, April 10-11, 1950, an unofficial poll of its congregations showed about 17 per cent of their membership and a little over 8 per cent of their consistory members favored union; yet the official recorded vote was 4 per cent.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps this calls into question the representative nature of the delegates to Classis who are selected frequently either on a rotation basis or simply one of availability. Such delegates, for lack of preparation or experience, are generally dominated by their minister's views.

The Western opposition sprang from varied sources and apparently increased as the negotiations proceeded, for both the Classes of Grand Rapids and Wisconsin had initially overtured for this union in 1945. Dr. Winfield Burggraaff had correctly predicted in 1946 that the anti-union votes would hinge basically on "small personal reasons," especially the fact that "we feel at home in our little Reformed Church."<sup>150</sup> Emotionalism played a large part in the defeat of this union. A small, hard core group rejected all union as a threat to the name and heritage

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<sup>148</sup>Minutes R.C.A., 1950, pp. 148-49, lists the results. This is twice the number of Western Classes in existence as when union with the German Reformed Church was defeated in 1893.

<sup>149</sup>These unpublished "Minutes" as is true with the majority of the classical minutes particularly in the West, remain in the custody of the Stated Clerk of the Classis rather than being published or on deposit at the Church Archives.

<sup>150</sup>Supra, p. 26. This also recalls the similar observances of the retiring Presidents of the General Synod in 1943 and 1944, supra, p. 2.

of this beloved denomination; a second group, and the members overlapped, saw liberalism everywhere and feared the truth as they understood it to be too weak to hold its own unless isolated; a third group did not fear the orthodoxy of the proposed partner, but while it found nothing to condemn, it also found nothing to commend this union. All three agreed that neither Christ nor the world situation demanded organic union and felt co-operation could achieve all the advantages of union without its required sacrifices.

Many of the doubts and fears evidenced above were based on the belief that this union would be but the first step to further, even less desirable Presbyterian unions. These fears were not entirely groundless. The Reformed Church Union Committee had stressed the necessity of keeping the negotiations free from other union proposals and the United Presbyterian Church could honestly state after 1947 that no other unions were officially being considered. Yet their church papers carried articles calling for more natural or additional unions with fellow Presbyterians. Editor Graves of the Church Union Herald supported this union but also additional unions. Editor Edie of the United Presbyterian failed to write a single editorial supporting this union but was an ardent proponent of a Presbyterian union. Editor Benes of the Church Herald, the Reformed Church paper, doubted the wisdom of this union because of the likelihood of additional unions developing. This was the most consistent and important reason advanced by the leading opponents of the 1950 union for their negative attitude.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>This is borne out in the numerous articles in the Church

A third factor was the lack of unity within the Church. The steady flow of Dutch immigrants during much of this century had increased the number of Classes in the West and insured their control by what they considered a conservative and orthodox element. This Western element suspected the more Americanized East of liberalism and questioned its dominant control of the boards of the Church. The controversies over continued membership in the then Federal Council of Churches and Professor MacLean's orthodoxy in turn made other positions held by the Eastern branch, including its support of this union movement, suspect. This lack of unity was obvious to many, including the United Presbyterians. At first the West had talked of possible schism but toned down its references after concessions on voting and retention of property were made. By 1950, rumblings of dissatisfaction and secession were being heard in the East instead (Ulster overture). This lack of unity tended to give sectional spokesmen such as the Revs. Bast and Hager increased influence beyond the merit of their contentions that Union meant an overcentralization of authority and a social contamination. Nevertheless, the appeal to delay union until after the Reformed Church had "set its own house in order" was basically a diversionary and an anti-union move and had been correctly identified as such by the Union Committee.<sup>152</sup> There is and always has been a spectrum of opinions and views in every denomination which never

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Herald, in the printed results of various Classis meetings, in the pamphlets of the Union Committee and substantiated by personal letters and interviews initiated by the author.

<sup>152</sup>Information on the Plan of Union with the United Presbyterian Church of North America, p. 6.

completely disappears. The East itself revealed a disunity when the upper Hudson Valley and the Patterson-Newark area rejected the proposed union. The conservative nature of much of the Rochester Classis was well known while Dutch immigration since 1880 into the Classis of Passaic had temporarily reversed the pattern of Americanization there. Newark's opposition is harder to classify though a desire for union with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may have been a contributing factor.

The alert union committees (1945-49) had managed to avoid or negate three of the five reasons responsible for the defeat of the German Reformed approach in 1893, but still tactical mistakes occurred. The efficiency and enthusiasm of this Joint Committee led to the creation of a time schedule designed to lead to a final union vote in 1948. This created the feeling in some minds that the Church was being rushed into a union by an interested few. The Committee presented a skeleton Plan of Union in 1946 primarily because this method had worked in the 1858 formation of the United Presbyterian Church. This was an error on the part of the Reformed Church committee members. The cautious nature of many members of their Church might have been expected to lead to a demand for the spelling out of all aspects of this union prior to a final vote. This demand did arise and necessitated a two year delay in the final vote, which in turn ruined much of the value of an earlier intense presentation of information about the two churches. The program ended in May 1947, almost three years before the decisive balloting. The practice of printing the early results while the balloting is still in progress frequently reveals trends that affect those who still must vote. While this

practice conceivably could be advantageous to either side depending upon the circumstances, it worked to the disadvantage of the pro-union forces in this particular decision.

Perhaps the greatest single error was the acceptance by the Committee of the precedent of a multi three-fourths voting majority to officially consummate the union. The determination of Dr. Shafer and others to have sufficient unanimity to avoid a schism was admirable but probably less drastic voting concession could have been made. A further contributing factor may have been the failure to adequately recognize the spectrum of views in the Reformed Church in America and to select both the personnel and the arguments attuned to these special areas when presenting the Plan of Union.

It is questionable whether any Reformed Church committee, even by avoiding the above pitfalls, could have successfully promoted a union in 1950. Initially the lack of acquaintance between the two churches was felt to be the main obstacle to union. The geographic separation of their congregations seriously impeded this program despite the best efforts of the Committee. On the other hand, one of the chief advantages of union, the conservation of membership and ministers in a mobile age, apparently exerted little influence on the final vote.<sup>153</sup> No amount of reasoning or contact had any real effect

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<sup>153</sup>During the period of these negotiations, the R.C.A. received 33 ministers from other denominations and released 53 ministers to other denominations. Of these 22 arrived from Presbyterian pulpits and 40 departed to become Presbyterian pastors. It is impossible to tell by comparing the Minutes R.C.A. how many Reformed Church members were lost to the Church or to what extent the Church had been infused by those raised in other denominations. The author, raised in the Reformed Church in America, is for the second time a geographic Presbyterian and has thrice worshipped with other denominations for varying lengths of time owing to the restricted size of his natal church.

on the mind-set of the West.

The vote in 1950 provided the answer to the questions the editor of the Church Herald had asked four years earlier:

Are we of the Reformed Church in earnest about union with the United Presbyterians, or only toying with the idea? Are we willing to surrender our wills, and forget our plans, whether they favor or oppose union, for the larger sake of the program of God? Are we interested enough to give time and thought to this matter, and open minded enough to consider it impartially without prejudice?<sup>154</sup>

The answer of the Reformed Church had been an obvious "No!"

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<sup>154</sup> April 26, 1946, p. 5.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Very little in the way of Protestant ecumenism took place from the time of the Synod of Dort in 1619 until the century surveyed in this study. The various national Protestant churches were relatively content to live apart, as were most of the multi-denominational groupings within such countries as the United States of America. During this period, prior ecumenical and unionist tendencies finally bloomed forth in the form of national and international conferences, alliances, federations and other visible forms of co-operation and union. The formation of the World Council of Churches of Christ in 1948 was perhaps the outstanding example of the fact that the forces of Protestantism were "now beginning to find . . . that they belonged together."<sup>1</sup> These tendencies, while not as animated within the Reformed Church in America as in many of its sister churches, never ceased to exist and to seek expression in the years from 1850 to 1950.

This predominately Americanized Eastern church had already forfeited by 1850 any hopes of being a major denomination. For too long a time its eyes looked eastward to the Netherlands rather than westward to the moving frontier. Though it had overcome a prolonged

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<sup>1</sup>Howard G. Hageman, Lily Among the Thorns (New York: Curriculum Committee of the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, 1953), p. 144.



usage of the Dutch language and a shortage of ministers, its influence within American Protestantism continued to decline.<sup>2</sup> The contribution of a few outstanding individual leaders could not reverse this trend in a church which hesitated to expand unless a nucleus of Dutchmen could be found. This practice was not actually modified until after World War II.

The first half century began auspiciously enough from an ecumenical standpoint. The 1850 union with the thousand member Holland Classis of Western Michigan gave new emphasis to the tardy attempt to create a Western branch of the Church. The newly created international Evangelical Alliance received denominational endorsement, while in 1875 membership in the world-wide Presbyterian Alliance began which has continued to the present. During the latter half of the nineteenth century numerous individual members participated in interdenominational Christian bodies for the betterment of society and the evangelization of the world.

Yet the Union of 1850 proved to be the sole union achieved not only during this first half century but the entire one hundred years

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<sup>2</sup>Theodore Brinckerhoff, "A Manifesto Advocating Merger of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches" (Wappingers Falls, New York: by the author, 1962), p. 2. The Rev. Brinckerhoff's persistent advocacy of union with the former Northern Presbyterians is reminiscent of the role played by the Rev. William Veenschoten in the 1880s. In the above four page paper which he sent to all the Church's ministers, he claimed the R.C.A. in 1959 constituted only a minor 4.6% segment of the limited Reformed-Presbyterian family. Others feel the decline in the R.C.A.'s influence can be attributed as much to a lack of productive scholarship within the Church as to its smallness of size. This viewpoint was stressed during an interview with the Rev. Bert Brower, former Director of Adult Work, R.C.A., July 2, 1964; M. Eugene Osterhaven, "Prospects of Calvinism," American Calvinism, ed. Jacob T. Hoogstra (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 132, suggests the fear of non-conformity may have caused this hesitation to research and publish.

investigated. This apparent absorption of an immigrant Dutch Classis actually provides one of the keys to an understanding of why the Reformed Church in America had never achieved another union. While both sections of the Church grew numerically, the slow-to-Americanize West grew at a much faster rate and continued to spread geographically.<sup>3</sup> This newest section brought "a theological zeal and vigorous churchmanship which imparted new vitality to the denomination as a whole, but did not notably improve the situation of the older eastern churches."<sup>4</sup> Although it was a revitalizing force in the Church, the full benefits of this new growth failed to be realized owing to the schisms which shook the West in 1857 and 1882 and the growing dichotomy of the sections. Not only did the proposed bridging of the geographical gap fail to take place, but a growing theological gap emerged after the Western section developed educational institutions of its own. These institutions were expected to produce an orthodox leadership for the Western churches and to enable the Church to compete with the Christian Reformed Church in gaining adherents from among the incoming numbers of Dutch immigrants.

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<sup>3</sup>The following statistics trace the growth of these two sections in terms of Classes:

- 1851 - 24 Eastern Classes and 1 Western Classis
- 1900 - 26 Eastern Classes and 9 Western Classes
- 1950 - 26 Eastern Classes and 16 Western Classes
- 1963 - 23 Eastern Classes and 23 Western Classes

By 1963 the West had surpassed the East in the number of churches but still did not contain quite one half of the communicant membership.

<sup>4</sup>Brinckerhoff, op. cit. The Rev. Brinckerhoff feels the Reformed Church, as such, had already become irrelevant, and was well on the way to merger with the Presbyterians by the mid-1800s when the arrival of the new Dutch immigrants in the Midwest halted this merger. This is an interesting hypothesis but the greater mobility of the country's citizens since the 1850s and the less competitive nature of denominationalism may have fostered this feeling of irrelevancy among numbers of Eastern pastors at a more recent date. The Western branch can not be held directly responsible for thwarting the 1870-74 approach though its opposition has been very real in the twentieth century.

What in 1850 appeared to be an absorption was rapidly achieving a different complexion by 1950. The leadership of the Church appeared to be passing slowly into the hands of those raised or educated in the West. One evidence of this trend has been the fact that the chief executive office in the Church, that of the Stated Clerk, had been in their hands since the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> Although the Western birth of these Stated Clerks did not automatically predestine their beliefs and actions, it insured that the positions and attitudes evidenced in the West were understood and weighed.

In the century studied, the Church's record of union activity was not a very active ledger. It was the threat of an absorption rather than a union which ended the discussions with the much larger Northern Presbyterians in 1870-74 and 1929-31. Mainly for geographical reasons, the Reformed Church failed to actively seek more than co-operation with the Southern Presbyterians. In only two instances in one hundred years had this cautious denomination presented union plans for the approval of its lower courts and each time the Western opposition proved to be the largest obstacle.

After more than a century of predominately friendly relations and six years of negotiation, a Plan of Federal Union with the German

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<sup>5</sup>The Rev. James E. Hoffman was elected to this office in 1943 and was succeeded by the Rev. Marion de Velder in 1961. As for future leadership, the majority of the students and faculties at the R.C.A.'s two theological seminaries are graduates of the denomination's three Midwestern colleges. Statistics for 1965-66 obtained through correspondence with the presidents of these two seminaries reveals that at New Brunswick 24 of its students were educated at these Western institutions, 8 at Rutgers and 15 elsewhere. At Western the respective figures are an overwhelming 60-1-18. The figures for faculty members are as follows: New Brunswick, 3-0-6; at Western, 9-1-1.

Reformed Church received the known approval of over two-thirds of the Classes in 1892. A technicality and the vigorous opposition of the minority West, coupled with the possibility of a wider Pan-Presbyterian union, postponed the necessary General Synod enabling vote for one year. Closing further its own ranks and rejecting amendments assuring the Dutch Church's individuality, the West intimidated by threat of schism a sufficient number of Eastern Classes to reject the union in 1893. Never again did the German Reformed Church, which had given its overwhelming approval, consider seriously the Reformed Church in America as a prospective union partner. This attitude was particularly evident after Dr. George Richards, a leading German Reformed ecumenist, became in 1917 the chief union negotiator for his church.

The proposed union, which seemed such a constructive step in the nineteenth century, could have provided the geographical bridge between the two sections of the Church. A proposed union with the United Presbyterian Church of North America, voted down in 1950, probably could have provided a theological, as well as geographical, bridge. However, the tremendous progress in communications during the first half of the twentieth century mitigated this necessity. The ecumenical movement, missions, and the new wave of immigrants to Canada had broadened the geographical interests of both sections of the Reformed Church, but their differences persisted. By this time the Western branch totaled more than a third of the denomination. By voting as a solid block at the classical level, the West could now prevent any further union with other denominations, even without special multi-majority voting concessions. This actually happened in 1950, when all sixteen Western Classes rejected this union while

73.1 per cent of the Eastern Classes approved it despite the obstructive and non-constitutional voting arrangement. In addition, the inability to really get acquainted at the grassroots level of these two denominations led to an apathy which tended to favor the proponents of the status quo. Lack of an adequate acquaintance was not as much of a factor in the Eastern sections of the Church for wherever there is great mobility there is a type of local ecumenicity as far as denominational lines are concerned. Some areas of the East in 1950 preferred a union with the better-known Northern Presbyterians. The pro-unionist Rev. T. Brinckerhoff sums it up this way: "These churches have continued to stand on a sort of 'dead center,' awaiting the time when the newer Dutch constituency would be ready to enter the main stream of American Calvinism as represented by the Presbyterians."<sup>6</sup> The West still seems content to recognize only the need for Christian co-operation while rejecting any necessity for organic union.<sup>7</sup>

Though written six years after the failure of the federal union effort between the German and Dutch Reformed Churches, the words of the German Reformed historian, Professor James I. Good, still are relevant.

How often it happens that the nearer two denominations are together, the farther they are apart. The closer toward union that denominations come, the larger become the few remaining differences. Mole hills are exaggerated into mountains, until the union is prevented, not by great differences but by petty divergences.

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<sup>6</sup>Brinckerhoff, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>The debate over the interpretation of Christ's prayer for unity (John 17:21) and the necessity of organic unions still occupies the interest of churchmen beyond the boundaries of the R.C.A. See Christianity Today, November 5, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>James I. Good, History of the Reformed Church in the United

The Rev. Wayne Christy, after studying the successful union effort of the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1858 and the subsequent unsuccessful union effort of the next ninety years, reached the same conclusion. He stressed the need to avoid emphasizing small details and to unite on the basis of a rather generalized plan because "the newly formed church is a distinctly new organization, not just a sum of two existing groups. Accordingly the new body should determine for itself what its policy should be."<sup>9</sup> The Reformed Church in America had proven to be too cautious and too self-centered to debate other than a detailed plan of union, even then dwelling consistently on what might be lost through union rather than what she might bring to a union. Emotionalism has indeed enlarged Professor Good's mole hills on the infrequent and selective occasions on which the Church has seen fit to conduct serious negotiations. The fear of liberalism, the loss of their distinct heritage and, to some members, the loss of a distinct mission provide the chief bases for this emotionalism. Other factors which negatively influenced union sentiment have been differences in social customs (including membership in secret societies), disunity within the negotiating bodies, and faulty methods in negotiating.

Rejection of union has not caused a cessation of curiosity

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States: 1725-1792 (Reading, Penna.: Daniel Miller, 1899), p. 478.

<sup>9</sup>Wayne H. Christy, "The United Presbyterian Church and Church Union" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1947), p. 279. This type of plan was employed when the United Presbyterian Church united with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1958. The proposed Presbyterian Confession of 1967 is an attempt to complete the details pertinent to consummating this act of organic union and is also a legitimate attempt to restate a 317 year old standard in terms relevant for the present.

about the growing ecumenical movement nor halted a general willingness to co-operate if the Reformed Church's identity is not endangered. Despite the suspicions of part of its membership, the Church readily joined the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, its successor the National Council of Churches and also the World Council of Churches. Its continued membership in the latter two has never been seriously challenged. It currently participates in the Lutheran-Reformed groups' exploration of areas of theological agreement and differences which have been held since 1962.<sup>10</sup> Reformed Church ministers have normally co-operated in local ministeriums, some of which are engaged in a Protestant-Catholic dialogue. The Church recently went beyond the old community church concept, which merely submerged the denominational name, when they agreed with four major denominations to "jointly sponsor an 'Ecumenical Congregation' in the newly planned community known as Sterling Forest, in Orange County, New York."<sup>11</sup> This attempt to create a single strong church through an ecumenical action is a sharp departure from the former comity idea of non-competitive allocation of new unchurched areas.

The attitude of the Reformed Church toward ecumenicity on

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<sup>10</sup>The Presbyterian Outlook, March 30, 1964, p. 3, explains that this dialogue is aimed solely at a theological relationship, and neither various types of fellowship or organic union are the immediate objectives. This partially explains the R.C.A.'s presence and even more fully the presence of the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>11</sup>"5 Churches Have Vital Agreement," The Daily News (Huntingdon, Pa.), February 19, 1966, p. 3. The other participating denominations are the United Church of Christ, the Lutheran Church in America, the Methodist Church and the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. The idea had been pioneered by the previous co-operation of some of these churches in interdenominational churches located near university campuses.

what was formerly known as the foreign mission field has diverged from the attitudes being expressed by the Church in the United States. The dictates of a non-Christian environment prompted more ready acceptance of co-operation and even unions, despite a consequent loss of the Reformed name and a loss of mission fields themselves. Today the Church has no singular mission effort. A listing of the world mission efforts reveals the extent of the trend.

In Africa the Church functions in association with the Church of Christ in the Upper Nile;

In Arabia the Church functions with the Christian congregations (Churches of Christ) in the Arabian Gulf;

In India the Church functions in association with the Church of South India;

In Iraq the Church functions in association with Christian congregations in Iraq and the United Missions in Iraq;

In Japan the Church functions in association with the United Church of Christ in Japan;

In Mexico the Church functions in association with the Presbyterian Church;

With the Overseas Chinese - in association with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China, the Presbyterian Church in Formosa, the Malaya-Singapore Synod of the Chinese Christian Church.

Despite the fact that missionaries and concern for missions played a leading role in the organization of the modern ecumenical movement, not all Reformed Church missionaries favored the union movements conducted by their Church in the United States.



In the midst of the negotiations with the United Presbyterians, a Reformed Church pastor, the Rev. A. Nelson Doak (Long Island), posed a question which has remained unanswered to the present, namely, "If we can't unite with the United Presbyterian Church, with whom can we unite?"<sup>12</sup> Besides predicting the failure of the proposed union, he evidenced a concern that this might be the Church's last chance to unite with another denomination. It is true that both the German Reformed and the United Presbyterians found more willing partners but the latter fear proved unwarranted. In 1961 the General Synod received overtures from four Eastern Classes for talks looking toward union with various Presbyterian churches.<sup>13</sup> By 1962 the newly created Executive Committee under the continuous leadership of the Stated Clerk decided to concentrate on an approach to the Southern Presbyterians. These negotiations commenced and a union vote is projected for 1970.

Despite the optimism in some quarters within the Church, the Rev. Doak's question probably will not be positively answered at that time. Whatever the outcome of this current union approach, it is very unlikely that the Reformed Church in America can long maintain both its current distinct identity and its present degree of unity. The idea of union refuses to die, while the possibility of disunion

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<sup>12</sup>"Letters to the Editor," Church Herald, May 2, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for 1961 (New York: Department of Publication and Sales, Reformed Church in America, 1961), pp. 135-36. Three additional Eastern Classes sought discussion or action leading to multi-denominational mergers as proposed by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake in his sermon of December 4, 1960 in Grace Cathedral, San Francisco.

has been suggested by elements in each of the major sections of the Church.

While it is obvious that the ecumenical movement has definitely affected the Reformed Church, it is equally apparent that the Reformed Church as such has little affected the continuing ecumenical movement. The central question raised in the "Introduction" was whether the Reformed Church in America would attempt to meet the growing religious needs of the United States individually or together with other churches. The answer throughout the study has been a consistent pattern of co-operation with other denominations locally, nationally and internationally, both collectively and on a more individualized basis. So far the Church has evidenced the belief that the "togetherness" required to witness to modern man in the mid-twentieth century does not require the sacrifices inherent in the closer ties of organic union.

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