


Presbyterian Churchmen United

History and Purpose

An illustration of an open book with a decorative border. The text is centered on the pages.

The Word of Our
God Shall Stand
Forever

Isa 40:8

Presented by
The Executive Committee
Presbyterian Churchmen United

HISTORY

The organization known as Presbyterian Churchmen United is the outgrowth of a conviction on the part of certain ministers and officers of the Presbyterian Church US that a challenge must be offered to the mounting attacks being made in our time against the Church and the Christian faith.

These attacks are evidenced by the downgrading of the Bible as the Word of God; the substitution of humanism for theism in religion; the substitution of universalism for the necessity of Christ in salvation; the secularization and corruption of worship; the substitution of situational for Biblical ethics; a contempt for New Testament evangelism; the support of politically socialistic activism; the glorification of civil disobedience; a surrender of the temples of God to extortioners by invitation; advocating that Marxism be heard from the pulpit; the centralization of power and removal of authority belonging to local Church officers.

Against such evils the constitution of the Church, in its interpretation of Scripture, offers sanctuary and mission. It is to Christ and not men that each ordained officer of the Presbyterian Church US under the constitution* has taken his holy vows of ordination.

Within the Church attempts to circumvent or destroy the constitution take the form of efforts to alter, obliterate or reorganize.

Such efforts exist in plans to: (1) Unite with non-Reformed Churches under the Consultation on Church Union, thus obliterating the constitution in a massive, super-Church organization; (2) Join the United Presbyterian Church USA, which Church unfortunately abandoned its former confessional position in 1967; (3) Write a "contemporary" confession to replace the Westminster Confession of Faith; (4) Weaken the voting safeguards protecting the constitution by reducing the 3/4 majority of Presbyteries now required for major constitutional changes and by changing the present voting system; (5) Amend section 18-6 (9) of the Form of Government thus increasing the centralization of power and enabling the General Assembly, through a new alignment of Synods, to set in motion a new alignment of Presbyteries with attendant evils of less voice from the "grassroots".

The constitution is under attack, but there are those who would stand for it and with it. Word changes may sometimes be necessary for contemporary understanding, but the Confession of Faith has stood in its essential integrity for 350 years because it is a faithful interpretation of the Word of God. It is not founded upon, nor should it be changed to meet, the tempo of any particular generation.

Persuaded of these things, a group of ministers met in

*The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, along with the Book of Church Order.

Asheville, N.C., during the 1967 conference season. Hours were spent in prayer, testimony and discussion.

The Reverend Donald Patterson, then pastor of the McIlwain Memorial Church, Pensacola, Florida (now pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi) was chosen chairman of the informal meeting. Under his leadership prayer groups were organized throughout the Southland as ministers of the Church continued to seek God's guidance.

Next called the Minister's Prayer Fellowship, a larger group met in Asheville, North Carolina, in August of 1968. The occasion was inspired with a spirit of worship and with warm Christian fellowship.

At this second meeting, Patterson was re-elected chairman; Dr. Carl McMurray of Marion, North Carolina, co-chairman; Dr. Morton Smith of Jackson, Mississippi, secretary; and Dr. M. A. Macdonald of Clinton, South Carolina, treasurer. These officers were specifically asked to lead the group into actively meeting the issues of the day.

Broadening the group to include representatives from several recognized groups within the General Assembly, the chairman called a meeting in Atlanta shortly after Christmas, 1968. This meeting and another subsequently held resulted in the drafting of a Declaration of Commitment. At the second meeting a steering committee was appointed to refine the drafted Declaration and present it through the mail to a sampling of Presbyterian US ministers. A copy of the Declaration is appended hereto.

For the purpose of collecting signatures, the committee asked Dr. John E. Richards to serve as correspondent. Due to limitation of funds and staff to handle the work, it was agreed that when the number of signers had reached 500 their names would be published and the invitation extended to additional Ministers, Church Sessions, Elders and Deacons, to join in the Declaration.

Copies of the document were mailed to approximately 1,100 ministers, or approximately 25 per cent of the ordained ministers of the Presbyterian Church US. By October 4, 1969 over 500 ministers had signed, 30 had refused, the remainder had withheld their replies.

Since the publication of the 500 names in advertisements placed in the church papers and in selected secular papers, the signatures of others, as well as of those solicited from among officers of congregations, have been steadily and rapidly added.

During the time of these mailings, in August, 1969, the Minister's Prayer Fellowship met for its third annual gathering in Asheville, North Carolina. At this time the group voted to combine its interests with those developed from the meetings in Atlanta and form itself into an organization identified with the aims of the Declaration. It was further voted to combine the officers of the form-

er Ministers Prayer Fellowship with the ad hoc steering committee growing out of the Atlanta meetings, and elect the whole as an executive committee to serve the newly formed organization. The Declaration was formally adopted by the organization as its own. The executive committee was empowered to determine a name for the organization and prepare guidelines for its future course.

As constituted, the executive committee, including the before-mentioned officers, consisted of Donald B. Patterson, Carl W. McMurray, Morton H. Smith, M. A. Macdonald, Frank M. Barker, Jr., J. Wayte Fulton, Donald C. Graham, James H. Patterson, Robert A. Pitman, John E. Richards, Kennedy Smartt, and G. Aiken Taylor. These men, in formal session, chose for the new organization the name, "Presbyterian Churchmen United".

Many men and minds have contributed to the progress thus far made. The whole can truly be described as a "grass roots" movement. Of the officers and committeemen named, 9 are pastors, 1 is president of a denominational institution, 1 is an editor, and 1 is a seminary professor. These leaders and the original signers represent the widest variety of backgrounds and of personal interests.

Some of those who have identified with Presbyterian Churchmen United are connected with other groups and organizations in the Church. Despite their differences, all are united in the Declaration of Commitment. In this matter, members of Presbyterian Churchmen United believe God has made them of one mind, and in this they support one another.

As the leaders have been drawn together in this opening enterprise, they have felt a spiritual unity. They have become increasingly aware that their disagreements are minor or of no consequence. They have been rendered better able to recognize that which is false in their attitudes and appreciate that which is true, as they have seen collective integrity mount in the growing numbers of those signing the Declaration.

Today, Presbyterian Churchmen United is neither part nor counterpart of any other existing organization. As the organization continues to establish its identity, all categories of Presbyterian Churchmen are invited to identify themselves with the original signers in the Declaration of Commitment.

Actual membership in Presbyterian Churchmen United as distinguished from concurrence in the Declaration, consists of two categories: (1) Those individual ministers from among signers, who indicate or desire to belong; and (2) Sessional units that have voted, as Sessions, to identify themselves with the aims of the organization.

A DECLARATION

To the membership of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., in the light of the questions and concerns being expressed in the Church as to the nature of our faith and order, we, the undersigned, do solemnly declare our conviction:

—That the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ turns men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. By coming to faith in Him alone is there genuine reconciliation between man and God and man and man.

—That the Holy Scriptures are the infallible Word of God, and that these Scriptures commit the Church to a mission whose primary end is the salvation and nurture of souls.

—That Christian faith must bear fruit if it is to remain virile. These fruits vary from believer to believer. But common to them all are evidences of love, concern, and neighborliness, toward all races of men without partiality and without prejudice, especially to the poor, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged. The man of faith views all men as neighbors and himself as debtor, for Christ's sake.

—That for the implementation of the above principles, in obedience to our ordination vows, we must strive to preserve a confessional Church, thoroughly Reformed and Presbyterian. Thus our support of or opposition to any proposed union will be determined by these considerations.

—That being fully committed by our ordination vows to the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, we must oppose all efforts to change in substance or otherwise debase our historic doctrinal commitment.

—That we are, in the same context, by vow committed to historic Presbyterian polity with its representative system and its parity among teaching and ruling elders. Thus, we are forced to oppose the effort to take our Church into the massive organization envisioned by C O C U.

—That, should the basic theology or polity of the Church be altered or diluted, we shall be prepared to take such actions as may be necessary to fulfill the obligations imposed by our ordination vows to maintain our Presbyterian faith.

Signatures

Addresses

PURPOSES

1. To Glorify The Triune God:
Honoring, the Father, as our absolute Sovereign;
Honoring, the Son, as the only Redeemer;
Honoring, the Holy Spirit, as Guide, Teacher and Comforter.
2. To Continually profess the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be **the Word of God Written**, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
3. To defend, support and teach the Reformed Faith as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scriptures.
4. To remind all concerned of the parity of the Eldership and give to all Sessions, Officers and particular Churches the rights and privileges due under the constitution.
5. To work diligently, as Presbyters, to provide teaching and training in constitutional Presbyterianism; and to work for the elimination of unpresbyterian ideas, practices and persons from the servant boards and agencies of the denomination.
6. To fervently support those within the Church who preach the Biblical Gospel, in particular obedience to the Great Commission, at home and overseas.
7. To seek the unity of the Presbyterian Church US by calling ministers and all officebearers to a new commitment to Jesus Christ, serving Him in fidelity to vows taken and to the provisions of the constitution.
8. To hold conferences, consultations, and rallies wherever and whenever feasible, to further the educational aims of the organization.
9. To lend support to any who may incur persecution on account of their fidelity to the Gospel or their public agreement with the aims of Presbyterian Churchmen United.
10. Being devoid of desire or power to threaten, we do solemnly declare to the people of the Presbyterian Church US our promise henceforth to do whatever may be necessary to maintain our Reformed faith and Presbyterian polity.