

G-2.0200 (6) PCUSA, 1925, p. 88, Special Commission ("Swearingen Commission")
Created (The 1926 and 1927 reports follow.)

At the request of the Moderator, the General Assembly adopted the following resolution:

That a Commission of Fifteen members be appointed to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church may be assured.

[Note: The members of the Commission are named at the beginning of the 1926 report.]
PCUSA, 1926, pp. 62-87, [Progress] Report of the Special Commission of 1925
Report of Special Commission of 1925

The order of the day having arrived, the Assembly took up the consideration of the Report of the Special Commission of 1925. After considerable discussion, the report was adopted and is as follows:

Authority for the existence and the work of the Special Commission, and for the presentation of this report is contained in the following resolution adopted by the General Assembly of 1925:

"That a Commission of Fifteen members be appointed to study the present spiritual condition of our church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace unity and progress of the Church may be assured."

In accordance with an accompanying action of the same General Assembly, the Moderator appointed the following members of the Special Commission of 1925:

Ministers: Rev. Henry C. Swearingen, D.D., LL.D., St. Paul, Minn., Chairman; Rev. Prof. Alfred H. Barr, D.D., Chicago, Ill.; Rev. Hugh T. Kerr, D.D., LL.D., Pittsburgh, Pa.; Rev. Mark A. Matthews, D.D., LL.D., Seattle, Wash.; Rev. Lapsley A. McAfee, D.D., Berkeley, Cal.; Rev. Harry C. Rogers, D.D., Kansas City, Mo.; Rev. William O. Thompson, D.D., LL.D., Columbus, Ohio; Rev. Edgar W. Work, D.D., New York, N.Y.

Ruling Elders: John M. T. Finney, M.D., Baltimore, Md., Vice-Chairman; Judge John H. DeWitt, LL.D., Nashville, Tenn.; Hon. Edward D. Duffield, LL.B., Newark, N.J.; Pres. Cheesman A. Herrick, PhD, LL.D., Philadelphia, Pa.; Hon. Nelson H. Loomis, LL.D., Omaha, Nebr.; Hon. Nathan G. Moore, LL.D., Oak Park, Ill.; Robert E. Speer, D.D., New York, N.Y.

The Special Commission has held four meetings as follows: Atlantic City, N.J., September 22-24, 1925, the Commission convening at the call of the Moderator of the

General Assembly, and completing its organization by the election of the Rev. Lewis S. Mudge, D.D., LL.D., Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, as Secretary; Atlantic City, N.J., December 1-3, 1925; Chicago, Ill., March 11-12, 1926; Philadelphia, Pa., May 24-25, 1926.

The Commission appointed a number of Committees, and has pursued its inquiry in a spirit of harmony and unity. It is now privileged to present the following unanimous report.

The report comprises five main sections:

I--Preliminary Statements.

II--Spiritual Condition of the Church and Causes of Unrest.

III--Constitutional Principle of Unity With Its Historical Background.

IV--Power of the General Assembly and Effect of Its Action.

V--Conclusions and Recommendations.

I. PRELIMINARY STATEMENTS

The Commission feels that the General Assembly has given to it a mandate to promote purity and peace within the Church. If there be any possible way of stilling unrest and of adjusting differences, the Commission believes itself obligated to find that way. By the terms of its appointment, it is not permitted to consider any alternative; it has no business except this. With impressive unanimity, the Assembly voted to erect such a Commission. Doubtless it spoke for the whole Church. The Church desires that an end be made of the present unrest. The Church is praying and longing for such a result and, we believe, expects it to be attained.

Accordingly, the Commission began its work with a determination to face the facts, whatever they might prove to be. It consulted with representatives of those who were believed to be well advised as to the causes of unrest, and tried to get their ideas at first hand. It sought to understand their fears, whether these be fears for the purity of the faith, or fears for the rights of individual liberty. The Commission is not willing to deceive itself as to the gravity of the situation confronting the Church, nor does it desire to see others misled. Nevertheless, there are conditions which are encouraging. The Commission does not permit itself to assume the role of alarmist nor to magnify problems unduly.

Certain facts seem to stand out clearly:

1. It is not within the province of the Commission to review any judicial case decided by the General Assembly. Indeed it is a serious question whether the Assembly itself possesses any such power, although it has exercised it in a few instances and has claimed authority to do so where manifest injustice has been done, or where new facts have come to light. But the limitation upon the authority of a special commission in this respect seems to be clear. Accordingly, this Commission will not discuss any case already adjudicated.

2. There is practically no demand for change in the Constitution of the Church. Such suggestions to this effect as have been made, have not met with appreciable response throughout the Church. All parties appear to be willing to rest upon the Constitution of the Church as it stands. They are agreed that the remedies for our troubles are within the Constitution itself. This is an immense advantage. It leaves to be decided the question of interpretation only. If there were insistence upon alterations in the substance of our organic law, if it were proposed to add new articles, or to amend old ones, our difficulties would be multiplied greatly. So long as the Church is satisfied with the Constitution as it is, we have not broken the continuity of our history, and are in position to be guided by courses adopted in the past when the fathers faced conditions similar to those existing to-day.

II. PRESENT SPIRITUAL CONDITION AND CAUSES OF UNREST.

1. In accordance with the instructions which the Assembly gave the Commission, we have studied the present spiritual condition of our Church. Measured by the standard of the perfect Church of Christ, "glorious and without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish," our Church falls far short, and can only bow in penitence before its Head. But judged as an institution of men and women, seeking to serve their Saviour, we believe that with all its imperfections, it is a true and sincere Christian Church, loyal in faith and truly devoted in service.

Throughout its history it has grown steadily. It has increased faster in proportion to the total population of our country than our sister Protestant denominations. In the matter of church attendance, the conditions are better than they have been within the memory of this generation. The number of accessions on confession of faith during the Church year 1924-25 was the third largest ever reported. The gifts of our churches for their missionary and educational work, and for their own support have grown with steady increment from decade to decade.

The question must be asked, however, as to the quality of all this. There are more Presbyterians than ever, but are they as good and true Christians as were the Presbyterians of the past? Is prayer a living reality? Is the Bible studied and read as much as in the past? Are our people as well instructed in the truth? Is our faith Scriptural and practical and fruitful? Without attempting any comparative statement, there is ground for an answer which declared that there have been both gains and losses, which holds to a hopeful view and which, nevertheless, realizes the need for a far richer and truer faith and life among us. We believe that Christian character and faith have not deteriorated.

It is our deep conviction that the great body of the Church is sound in faith, even when that faith is tested by the strictest standards. It holds fast to its historic faith in God's relation to this universe as its Creator and as the vital and unifying and governing Personality who imparts to the system order, stability and moral purpose; in the true deity of our Lord Jesus Christ and His true incarnation and His Virgin Birth and His

resurrection from the dead; in His sinless holiness, the atoning sacrifice of His Cross, and His power to forgive sins. It stands fast in its faith that He is the only Saviour and that He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him; that the new life from above which is essential to entrance into the Kingdom of God is created in the soul by the power of His Holy Spirit; that His Kingdom covers all human relationships and actions and that it includes the exercise of all power in heaven and on earth. It holds fast to its historic conception of the nature of the Church and to the Constitution which we have inherited from the fathers. It stands upon the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, whatever divergences there may be in their interpretation. It is the unshakeable assurance of the Church that once the true content of the Scriptures is ascertained, their authority is supreme and final.

That God by His Holy Spirit has made a revelation of His grace in Christ, and of His righteous will, that we have this revelation in the Scriptures, "the only infallible rule of faith and practice," that they are sufficient to give knowledge of salvation, and of the way of Christian living, and that "the Supreme Judge by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined . . . can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture," is a position upon which the Presbyterian Church stands firmly and for which it is ready earnestly to contend.

In these weighty Christian verities as held by the Presbyterian Church throughout its entire history, and only briefly catalogued here, we have a body of doctrine and a system of polity which bind us into a close and abiding unity, and priceless and common inheritance from the past which vests the title of heirship in every one of us without distinction. This is a tremendous fact that must not be forgotten when we are reflecting upon differences. In spite of wide geographical distances separating our churches and ministers, in spite of varying racial roots which reach back into the centuries and which are fed on sentiments that provoked national wars and reddened the earth with the blood of historic conflicts, in spite of every extreme of difference in residence and education, in social contacts and life-long customs, here we stand, a Church, with one heart beating at the center of its corporate life, bound together by the firm ties of a shining record that embraces the sacrifices and triumphs of the past, of a faith engaging the rich loyalties and abundant labors of the present, and of a hope, yearning, but sure, and drawing into its stimulating experience the holy promise of a fairer future—bound into a unity which, we believe, our generation will not break.

There are valuable moral and spiritual resources in the life of our Church which must not be overlooked even in so brief a survey. Some of these are the deposit and tradition of life and character which we have inherited from the past, the product of home life and training, of Biblical preaching, of a faithful, educated and evangelical ministry, of a loyal and living faith in Christ as the complete and absolute revelation of God, our only and sufficient Saviour. This great deposit and all that lies back of it and produces and sustains it, we all desire to keep and to pass on to the generations following.

At the same time, we believe that the Church, while grateful for its inheritance, realizes how far short we come of the ideal of the New Testament. We believe that

worship expressed in service is good, but we believe also that the service which is needed to-day must be fed from still deeper springs of devotion and faith. We believe that the influences and interest of the Church in the work of moral and social progress is right, but we believe also that if this progress is to be true and lasting, there is greater need than ever of deep personal spiritual character and of definite evangelical faith and teaching. We believe that our Church, fundamentally loyal and true, in spite of all its shortcomings and deficiencies, wants to find the way of largest obedience and service, the way, to use the language of the last General Assembly, "of purity, peace, unity and progress."

2. It is with the conviction that this is the earnest and united longing of the whole body of the Church that we turn now to consider, as we have been charged to do, "causes making for unrest in our Church." These causes we would venture to analyze as follows:

(1) We feel in our Church those general movements and tendencies which make for unrest not only in the churches but in all the thought and life of the nation and of the world. The war brought with it a general unsettling of men's minds, but previous to this the pressure of modern inquiry had pervaded every department of thought, political, economic, social and religious, and everything old and established was called in question. In one sense there was nothing new in this. Again and again humanity has faced just such great times of upheaval and unsettlement. But in another sense the unrest of our day is new. It touches all things and it reaches everywhere, and it is raising the most fundamental questions about God and the world, and man and human society. We and the Church to which we belong are a part of human life and it is inevitable that we should feel the effects of these deep movements of our day. The modern world is feeling its way. The Church is living in this modern world. There is a vast opportunity as well as a vast danger. Perhaps in five respects, especially, these general tendencies have contributed to unrest in our denomination as in all others.

(a) The so-called conflict of science and religion, due to the false ideas either of science or of religion or of both, has disturbed all churches. The only end of this disturbance is to be found in the truth. All truth is God's truth, and all truth is one, as God is one. In His own time and way, God will make it known according to the Scriptural promise, so clearly that all earnest seekers will recognize and grasp it. We can afford to wait patiently until men see this come, seeking ourselves meanwhile to be led on from any error we may hold, to the full truth of God.

(b) Naturalistic or materialistic views of the world which threaten and would destroy the Scriptural view of God and Christ and of the Gospel, have inevitably affected religious thought in all the churches.

(c) Part, but not all, of this conflict between science and religion and between different religious views, would seem to be due to the divergent interpretations of religion and of the unseen in terms of the immanence or the transcendence of God. Back of much of the general unrest would seem to be this failure to coordinate, as men sometimes will

be enabled to coordinate, these two different and yet true and mutually essential thoughts about God.

(d) The lack of religious teaching or the presence of teaching subversive of religious faith and character in some institutions of learning, the dearth of religious instruction and influence in homes, discontent with old and established ideas and practices, the temper of youth, profound changes affecting all departments of human thought, have inevitably had their strong effect upon conditions within the churches.

(e) Changes in the meaning and use of language and diverse understandings and interpretations of the same words, have led to much confusion and uncertainty. Some are disturbed because they believe that others are departing from the faith while making use of its forms of speech, and some are disturbed because they believe that they are accused of such departure, though they declare that in their own consciences they are confident of full loyalty to all essential truth.

These are five of many causes of unrest which, perhaps, can be dealt with ultimately only through the general tendencies from which they originate. It is well to discern what these general causes are so that we may see them and other causes, and the whole problem of our Christian life and work, in right perspective.

(2) Perhaps to these causes coming in from outside, we should add the causes coming down from our past. There are some who hold that there have always been two types or schools of Presbyterianism, merging together at the center, and in the main body of the Church, but more or less discernibly different at the extremes. There are some who hold that the Westminster Confession shows traces of two types of thought and that the Old and New Schools are self-perpetuating forms of Presbyterianism. The present so-called conservative and liberal elements in the Church, it is held by some, represent in a sense these old divisions. Neither element is willing to accept the reproach of departure from the historic position of the Church. Both are convinced of their loyal evangelical character. But one cause of unrest is found in the fear, on one hand, that the liberal element embraces some who have been too much influenced by the naturalistic tendencies of to-day, and the fear, on the other hand, that the conservative element embraces some who would abridge the just liberties guaranteed by the Constitution of the Church. There is distrust between those who believe that they stand for proper freedom and flexibility, and those who believe that they stand for the true authority of the Church and the integrity of its faith. Some feel that the differences here are not too great to be comprehended in our Church. Others feel that they represent irreconcilable divergences.

(3) Causes arising in the realm of constitutional and administrative questions.

(a) There are misunderstanding and diversity of views as to the authority of the General Assembly in the matter of interpretations and deliverances affecting doctrine. The Assembly has made such interpretations and deliverances and has declared its competency so to do, but there are some who hold that in all such actions the Assembly has exceeded its constitutional power, or that it has done so in some of the particular

actions which it has taken. Others deny this and believe that in these matters the Assembly has been wholly within its powers. Still others hold that the Assembly is competent to make interpretations of doctrine, but not to issue doctrinal deliverances.

(b) There is a difference of view also as to the authority of the General Assembly over the Presbyteries in the matter of licensure of candidates. The Assembly has held that it had constitutional power of review and control, and that it was both competent and obligated to determine under this power the essential conditions of licensure. There are Presbyteries and ministers and laymen who hold that, either in whole or in a measure which recent actions of the Assembly have invaded, the rights of determining the conditions and requirements of licensure belong under our government to the Presbyteries. On the other hand, there is unrest because of the claim of some Presbyteries of the right to license candidates in contravention of the admonition of the Assembly.

(c) There has been and is divergence of view with regard to the so-called "Five Points" of the General Assembly's deliverances of 1910, 1916 and 1923. Some have held that it was altogether competent and right for the Assembly to single out these doctrines and to declare them "essential." Others have held that such a discriminatory selection was not warranted, that some of the doctrines are not stated in terms either of the Scriptures or of the Standards, and that the word "essential" is itself indefinite and open to misconception. For whom and to what are these doctrines "essential?"

(d) There are differences of opinion, too, in connection with the question of the true principle of tolerance, the just bounds of confessional freedom of interpretation of the Standards, and the nature of our terms of subscription. There are some who hold that no real issue exists here, that there is full recognition of the right of diverse interpretation of what is in the Standards, but that the real issue is over the denial of plain and essential statements of the Standards and even of plain statements of fact in the Scriptural account of the life of our Lord. Among those who take a different view of this matter, are some who think that there is need for revision of our terms of subscription or for some clearer declaration of the rights of those who subscribe to the Standards, and of their obligation only to the system of doctrine which the Standards contain; but others think that the present terms and declarations and guarantees are adequate and that all that is necessary is a spirit of trust among us and a recognition of divergences of view which are within our just liberties and do not affect our essential evangelical faith.

(e) Involved in these causes of unrest is the general issue already stated, namely, on one hand, fear that the integrity of the doctrines of the Church and the constitutional powers of the General Assembly were in peril, and, on the other hand, fear that just liberties of thought and conscience in the Church and the constitutional power of the Presbyteries were threatened.

(f) The process of Board consolidation and reorganization has not been a smooth and easy one, and there are problems still to be worked out in connection with the new system. Whether justly or unjustly, the Boards have been criticized for their

constitution, their administration and their expenditures. Further questions have been raised also in connection with new plans of administration, budget, and finance, which have brought discussion and unsettlement.

(g) And lastly, there are many women in the Church who are not satisfied with present administrative conditions. Some of them fear the loss of the organizations through which they have worked so long. Some regard as unjust the lack of representation of women in the Church.

4. [sic - (4.)] Doctrinal and theological causes. Is our unrest due to radical theological differences affecting our fundamental evangelical convictions, which cannot be met by our constitutional provisions, and which make our continued unity impossible? There are some who declare that this is the fact. We have given careful consideration to all the evidence which has been available.

(a) It has been declared by some that there has been a general and fundamental departure from evangelical faith. A statement has been brought to the attention of the Commission setting forth the view which some hold of general religious conditions at the present day as follows: "This controversy centers about two great questions; the divine character and authority of the Bible and the deity and work of Christ. One party to the controversy believes and stoutly affirms and maintains that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice; that Jesus Christ is truly God as well as truly man, and as such, an object of worship; that by His life upon earth, and, above all, by His death on the Cross—in which event He offered up himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God—He did that apart from which there could have been no forgiveness for the sons of men; that after having made atonement for our sins, He arose from the dead and sat down at the right hand of the Father, where He reigns as King, and by the operation of His kingly power, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, regenerates and sanctifies His people; that He will return to the earth, according to His promise, and create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The other party, with great violence and ridicule, denies all this, and declares that the Bible is only traditional literature, that Christ was nothing more than a man filled with the Spirit of God, and of service to us chiefly as an example. His death is nothing more or less than that of any good man. He never rose from the dead, and He will never return to the earth."

This statement was not specifically declared to apply to the Presbyterian Church, but there are some who express fear of such condition in our own body. As far, however, as the Commission has been able to learn, there is in the Presbyterian Church no second party such as is described in this quotation. And we believe that the action of the last General Assembly in appointing this Commission to study causes of unrest and to make a report to the next General Assembly "to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church might be assured," is evidence that the Assembly believed in its own evangelical unity and in the evangelical unity of our Church at large.

(b) But even though our Church as a whole is evangelically united, it is held by some that ultra liberal views have crept in and that there are ministers from whose preaching and faith the supernatural note of the Gospel has faded out. On the other hand, it is held by some that there are men of ultra exclusive views who deny the true liberty of Christ and who misrepresent the Gospel to men. To the extent that these things are true, they constitute grave causes of unrest which should be dealt with first by brotherly counsel and then, if need be, by suitable Presbyterianial action. Indeed, we are persuaded that one chief ground of dissatisfaction is the failure of Presbyteries to exercise their proper functions in connection with the life and faith of the Church, and in accordance with the clear provisions of the Form of Government, (Chapter X, Section VII,) and of the Book of Discipline.

Many ministers and elders are without knowledge of the Constitution and history of our Church. During the past fifteen years, of 3,186 new names on our roll of ministers, 1,883 came from other denominations. They now represent some of our most useful and devoted ministers, but they and all of us, both ministers and elders, need to study diligently the Confession and polity of our Church, to the end that Presbyteries may fulfil their indispensable duties toward maintaining "the peace, purity, unity and progress of the Church."

(c) It is believed by some that there are certain differences of doctrinal view that have developed, which lie beyond the bounds of any questions of interpretation or meaning of terms of subscription such as the doctrine of Scripture and the fact of the Virgin Birth, and that these represent a fundamental and unavoidable ground of division of opinion.

5. [sic - (5)] There is a further group of causes of unrest to be considered. We refer to the misunderstandings and misinformation of which we have learned, but far more to the misjudgments and unfair and untrue statements which have been made in speech and in printed publications. Whether or not these be actionable under the laws against slander and libel, they are in clear violation of the injunction of the Church. No one can realize how grave and extensive the moral, and possibly the legal offense in this matter has been unless he goes over, as we have had to do under the instructions of the Assembly, the statements which have been made. If we are to have peace and purity in the Church, all slander and misrepresentation must be brought to an end. The Spirit of Christ must be allowed to bring forth His fruits among us and all evil speaking must be put away, to the end that "speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love."

III. CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLE OF UNITY WITH ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Foremost among the forces making for unity is a common faith expressed in our confessional symbols, but intimately related to this, and defining the way in which the

faith is to be held among brethren in the Presbyterian Church, is the constitutional principle of toleration. This principle has been obscured in the recent controversies which have agitated the Church, and this obscurity underlies many of the causes of unrest set forth in the preceding section.

Thus far the Commission has put emphasis upon the opinions of others and has attempted to present fairly the differences of view which are unsettling the thought of the Church and impairing its spiritual life. The Commission desires now to submit some of its own considerations with special reference to the best method of approach to the problem before us.

A spiritual revival and a reconsecration of every life to Christ are imperative if harmony is to prevail and our Church is to render full service. Doubtless everyone will assent to this statement. In all our discussions its truth should be assumed as a prime condition of accord. We must begin on our knees, with confession of our sins and sincere repentance, and must move forward in the spirit of renewed allegiance to the Master and of closer fellowship with Him which will conquer our selfishness, pride and hardness, and will insure in us humility of mind and the purity of heart which yields a vision of God.

Following this, our only safe and successful method will be found in the field of constitutional processes. Our Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has been bound together by its Constitution, and the Constitution must keep it together.

Some brethren in the Church hold that the provisions and statements of the Constitution are specific and definite, that the very language itself makes an end of controversy, and that this language has been confirmed by official deliverances of a number of General Assemblies.

On the other hand, there are those who claim that such reading of the Constitution is unwarranted, that it cannot fairly carry the restricted and limited construction often put upon it, and that some official deliverances of the Assembly have had the effect of adding to the Constitution, and so virtually amending it by extra-constitutional processes. In support of their position, they quote the words of the Constitution itself, which say, "that all church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God." (Form of Government, Chap. I, Section VII.)

These differences, we are convinced, do not exclude the elements of a basic unity. Ardently devoted to the Presbyterian Church, the supporters of both views wish to promote its welfare, both desire to see it become a mightier agency in the hand of God for extending His kingdom. Surely they are not hopelessly apart if both are moved by a deep

loyalty not only to our Lord, and also to that branch of the Church in which both are now privileged to serve.

The Commission ventures to remind the General Assembly that while the Constitution does contain affirmations of doctrine and provisions for order that are both specific and definite, there is also built into its fabric the Christian principle of toleration. The language of some of the central doctrines of the Confession of Faith is so broad as to give an impression that these were cast in such terms with a studied purpose of covering differences already in existence when the document was framed; and it is a significant fact that whenever, in its entire history, divisions and separations have vexed the Presbyterian Church and weakened its work, these breaches have been healed, if healed at all, by a return to the simple and hospitable statements of the Confession. What stronger witness can there be that, if the principles woven into the Confession of Faith and the phraseology in which they are expressed tend to effect reunions, cordial acceptance of the same principles and a correct reading of the language defining them will tend to prevent disunion?

A brief review of the discussions which have troubled our Church in the past throws a revealing light upon the path which we are now treading. Controversy within the Presbyterian Church is not a new thing. We have passed this way before.

1. The first of these controversies within the American Presbyterian Church ended with the acceptance of the Adopting Act in 1729. The first Presbytery, formed in 1706, and the first Synod, organized in 1716, fell heir to the discussions over subscription to the Confession of Faith which distressed the churches in the motherland and divided the Irish Church. Before 1729 the American Presbyterian Church was divided in its sentiment regarding subscription to the Confession of Faith. Jonathan Dickinson, the first President of Princeton, and one of the ablest men in the Church, opposed it. He said, "I have a higher opinion of the Assembly's Confession than of any other book of the kind existent in the world, yet I don't think it perfect. I know it to be the dictates of fallible men, and I know of no law, either of religion or reason, that obliges me to subscribe to it." The matter was keenly debated and in the end a compromise was effected. The Adopting Act was worded so as to be acceptable to everyone, and laid the basis of a creedal church. The Adopting Act reads:

"Although the Synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with an abhorrence of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the Kingdom of heaven, yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so handed down to our posterity. And do therefore agree that all the ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger, and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being, in

all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith. And we do also agree, that all the Presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate for the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function unless he declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such minister or candidate shall think best. And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious term of those that differ from us in these extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments."

The phrase "essential and necessary articles," thrice repeated, contains the germ of differences that still vex the Church. When the Adopting Act was enacted the particular doctrine objected to was the submission of the Church to the State; those submitting to the Act objected to including this doctrine as one of the essential and necessary articles. The principle incorporated in the Act, however, has a wider application.

2. The second controversy resulted not in union but in separation. It is not necessary here to discuss the issues which led to the division of the Church into the Synod of Philadelphia and the Synod of New York. The separation took place in 1741. Differences developing out of the revival with which Jonathan Edwards was identified led, in time, to misrepresentation, suspicion and distrust. Men in the ministry were openly charged with insincerity and heresy. The immediate cause of the disruption, however, was the contention on the part of the Presbytery of New Brunswick that, as a Presbytery, it had exclusive right to ordain men to the Christian ministry in opposition to the expressed will of the Synod. The Synod divided on a vote of 12 to 10, and Dr. Charles Hodge calls it "a disorderly rupture." The breach existed until 1758, a union was effected on the basis of mutual confidence and the Standards of the Church. The question of the right of Presbytery to the final decision in the matter of ordination of candidates for the Gospel ministry was left undecided.

3. The third controversy led, in 1810, to the formation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The General Assembly had been instituted in 1789, its powers defined and restricted by a written constitution, and the present form of subscription to the Standards of the Church adopted. A wide-spread revival, having its origin in Kentucky, stirred the Church into renewed activity. It was attended, doubtless, by some

fanaticism, but was a genuine work of grace and the Church was brought face to face with new problems and new needs. Candidates for the ministry were ordained who made a qualifying subscription to the Standards of the Church, and the crisis came when the Presbytery of Cumberland, standing upon what it claimed to be its rights, and in opposition to the expressed will of the General Assembly, ordained men who were not able to subscribe to all the doctrines of the Confession of Faith, and in 1810 the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was formed.

This breach lasted for almost a century and was healed after the Revision of the Confession of Faith, and the adoption of the Declaratory Act in 1903. In the deliverances of the General Assembly of 1906, preparatory to the union with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the General Assembly made the following pronouncement: "That ministers, ruling elders, and deacons, in expressing approval of the Westminster Confession of Faith as revised in 1903, are required to assent only to the system of doctrine contained therein, and not to every particular statement in it; and inasmuch as the two Assemblies meeting in 1904 did declare that there was then a sufficient agreement between the systems of doctrine contained in the Confession of the two Churches to warrant the Union of the Churches, therefore, the change of doctrinal Standards resulting from the Union involves no change of belief on the part of any who were ministers, ruling elders, or deacons in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church."

The reunion of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, was effected in 1906 by constitutional processes on the basis of mutual confidence and the Standards of the Church as amended in 1903, no action being taken upon the right of the Presbytery to have absolute jurisdiction over the ordination of candidates to the Gospel ministry.

4. The fourth crisis in the Church issued in the division known as the Old School and the New School. The history which led up to this separation in 1837 is complex and involved. There were several contributing causes. The Act of Union adopted in 1801, by means of which Congregational ministers had voting power in the General Assembly and Presbyterian ministers the right to vote in Congregational Associations, was the chief contributing cause, but doctrinal differences also created suspicion and mistrust. It was declared in the so-called "Act of Testimony," that "Presbyteries were convulsed by collusions and Synods and Assemblies made theatres for the open display of humiliating scenes of human passion and weakness." The issue ebbed and flowed with successive Assemblies and in 1837 the disruption took place. The separation lasted until 1870, a period of thirty-three years, and was finally healed on the basis of mutual confidence, the spirit of toleration and the Standards of the Church which had been accepted and subscribed by each of the uniting Churches.

From this brief review one conclusion is inescapable; divisions and schisms have not cured theological controversy in the Presbyterian Church. If the question be raised as to whether the issues under consideration to-day are more important than those which occasioned unrest and division in the past, the answer is that those engaged in debating them believed that the questions then at stake were vital to the Gospel of redemption.

Prior to the division of 1741 it was stated before the Synod that certain views held by Presbyterian ministers "do entirely overset all supernatural religion, render regeneration a vain and needless thing, and involve a crimson blasphemy against the blessed God." In the circular letter sent out by the General Assembly of 1837, this Assembly set forth the doctrines of the New School as being "in fact another Gospel; and it is impossible for those who faithfully adhere to their public standards to walk with those who adopt such opinions with either comfort or confidence."

The experience of the past teaches us many valuable lessons. Certain of our State constitutions set forth the principle in these terms: "A frequent recurrence to the principles of self government is essential to maintain the blessings of liberty." From the events of our own history we cull the remedy for many of our present ills. Two controlling facts emerge. One is, that the Presbyterian system admits of diversity of view where the core of truth is identical. Another is, that the Church has flourished best and showed most clearly the good hand of God upon it, when it laid aside its tendencies to stress these differences, and put the emphasis on its unity of spirit.

Our constitution, like the tables of the law, has two aspects. It deals not only with our duties to God, but also with our relations to each other, and these are equally imperative. Our Lord Himself condensed all the commandments into two, which are specific on the divine and human relationships, and said "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The Church at large should illustrate, as well as demonstrate, the power of the Gospel to bind up wounds and to soften animosities; and such, we are convinced, was the purpose of incorporating in the Presbyterian Constitution, the obligation for brethren to maintain a patient, considerate and brotherly attitude toward each other. The various groups in the present discussion declare their approval of and adherence to our Constitution. These declarations must be accepted as sincere. All assert that the Constitution is the only adequate test of Presbyterianism. The Church has many times solved its difficulties by this criterion alone.

The principle of toleration when rightly conceived and frankly and fairly applied is as truly a part of our constitution as are any of the doctrines stated in that instrument. Not only is the principle expressed in definite terms, but its place and authority as a part of our organic law is further indicated in a number of articles by clear and necessary implication. Furthermore, it is recognized through unbroken practice in the administration of our form of government and our discipline.

Toleration as a principle applicable within the Presbyterian Church refers to an attitude and a practice according to which the status of a minister or other ordained officer, is acknowledged and fellowship is extended to him, even though he may hold some views that are individual on points not regarded as essential to the system of faith which the Church professes. Presbyterianism is a great body of belief, but it is more than a belief; it is also a tradition, a controlling sentiment. The ties which bind us to it are not of the mind only; they are ties of the heart as well. There are people who, despite variant opinions, can never be at home in any other communion. They were born into the Presbyterian Church. They love its name, its order and its great distinctive teachings. In

its fellowship they have a previous inheritance from their forbears. Their hearts bow at its altars and cherish a just pride in its noble history. Attitudes and sentiments like these are treasures which should not be undervalued hastily nor cast aside lightly. A sound policy of constitutional toleration is designed to conserve such assets whenever it is possible to do so without endangering the basic positions of the Church.

The liberty which toleration allows is not to be judged finally by individuals. It is freedom with boundaries, and these boundaries are fixed by constitutional authority. Perhaps we are prone to forget that toleration begins with the mass. It is the self-imposed restraint which an organized body lays upon its own action. Either by a written constitution or by prevailing practice an organization draws lines beyond which it pledges itself not to pass. It delimits areas which it will not invade, and within these areas the individual member of the organization has freedom. The entire body exercises its own liberty first, in voluntarily circumscribing the field of its action, and this, in turn, guarantees the liberty of the individual outside of such limits.

It follows, therefore, that whenever a question arises as to where these limits are, the issue must be decided by the organization and not by the individual member of it. As applied within the Presbyterian Church, this means that such issues will be determined either generally, by amendment of the Constitution, or particularly, by Presbyterial authority, subject to the constitutional right of appeal.

Toleration does not involve any lowering of the Standards. It does not weaken the testimony of the Church as to its assured convictions. It does not imply that support is offered to what may be regarded as a brother's error. But it does mean that in the spirit of Christ, patience is exercised by the body of the Church toward those deemed to be at fault in some of their beliefs, remembering our own proneness to err, in order that by the manifestation of such graces, and by prayer, together with fidelity in our own witnessing, all finally, may be brought to see eye to eye in a fuller apprehension of the truth, and led into a convincing compliance with the Master's new commandment that His disciples should love one another. The principle here set forth can not be better stated than is done in the Form of Government, Chap. I, Section V:

"That while under the conviction of the above principle, they think it necessary to make effectual provision, that all who are admitted as teachers, be sound in the faith; they also believe that there are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these they think it the duty both of private Christians and societies, to exercise mutual forbearance towards each other."

IV. POWER OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND EFFECT OF ITS ACTIONS

Another constitutional principle which must be recognized and applied, relates to the power of the General Assembly and the effect of Assembly actions. There appears to have been much confusion in the thinking of the Church regarding this general subject.

Until recently our Church has labored under the disadvantage of having no continuing body of judicial officers whose duty it was to study and define the principles, and to analyze and to analyze and classify the precedents and deliverances which express our conceptions of applied ecclesiastical authority. Even now the tenure of membership in the Permanent Judicial Commission is so brief that one scarcely becomes settled in the performance of his duties, before his term of office expires. Previous to the institution of the Permanent Judicial Commission, these matters were handled usually by bodies appointed by the General Assembly as need for them might arise. The result has been that until a comparatively late date, no person or group of persons has been designated officially to keep these matters under continuing investigation. Only as individual minds, and temperamental interest may have inclined in that direction, and this without authority, has there been any orderly and sustained canvass of the problems involved. As a consequence, inconsistencies, and even some contradictions appear in this field along the path of our Church's history. Nevertheless, there are some principles which, in the opinion of the Commission, appear to be sound in logic and well established in practice.

1. The General Assembly is not heir to all the powers of The (General) Synod. This is a distinction often ignored by those who quote the actions of The (General) Synod, as though its authority passed over unchanged to the General Assembly. The (General) Synod was composed of all the ministers in the denomination, and of a representative from the session of every particular church. The (General) Synod was the whole Church. Supreme authority inhered in it. The (General) Synod had no constitution except that which belonged to its own nature and to the nature of the Presbyterian system, besides such statements and decisions as, in the exercise of its supreme power, it chose to make. By the same power, it could rescind or alter any of these actions without reference to any superior authority. The Adopting Act is a case in point. This measure was not referred to the Church through any other channel, because the Church was deemed to be fully present in The (General) Synod itself. The same is true of the reunion in 1758, of the two divisions of the body which had separated in 1741. It is true also of the adoption of our present Constitution. This organic law in its original form was never remitted to the Presbyteries for ratification. Even in so vital a matter, the power of The (General) Synod was complete and final.

There was some similarity between The (General) Synod and the British Parliament in respect to the freedom of both bodies from restraint, except as those restraints inhered in the character of the institutions themselves, and in the will of their members, guided, but not controlled, by precedents. There was no formal, defined or written constitution. Precedent and history and the experience of similar bodies throughout the world had their effect, but the force of all of these could be set aside. To quote actions of The (General) Synod therefore, as though they constituted controlling precedents as to the methods by which similar actions may be taken by the General Assembly, is clearly inadmissible.

A fact supporting this last statement is that the General Assembly has limited, defined, and delegated powers. It has another authority above it, namely, the Constitution of the Church. The General Assembly did not make the Constitution

[although The (General) Synod did make it], but the Constitution made the General Assembly. Herein is the difference between the two bodies.

The only way by which the General Assembly can bring about a change in our Form of Government, Book of Discipline or Directory for Worship is by proposing the change to the Presbyteries, and having it approved by a majority of all the Presbyteries. Before any amendments or alterations in our Confession of Faith or the Larger and Shorter Catechisms can be brought about by the General Assembly, they must be favorably acted upon by a committee of ministers and ruling elders, in number not less than fifteen, appointed by the General Assembly and its action adopted by the Assembly, and they must thereafter be approved by two-thirds of all the Presbyteries.

If the (General) Synod, as respects its powers, may be compared with the British Parliament, the General Assembly may be likened to the three departments of the United States Government combined in one, the executive, the legislative and the judicial. The General Assembly exercises all of these functions, though without confusing them. In our system of national government, each of these departments exercise limited and delegated authority. No one of them is a law unto itself—not even the Supreme Court. The powers and jurisdiction of the Supreme Court are conferred by the Federal Constitution. The Supreme Court cannot transcend these powers against the will of the people expressed in the Constitution, without introducing anarchy into the people's government. The General Assembly sits sometimes in an executive and administrative capacity; again it may act as a legislative body; and yet again as a judicial tribunal; but always with restricted powers.

In the performance of each of these functions, the General Assembly possesses a somewhat different character. The failure to distinguish among these functions performed by the Assembly, as they have been distinguished in our American civil government, is the cause of some of the confusion which has crept into our minds regarding this matter.

2. From the above statement of principles it follows that at least three differing methods of setting precedents and enacting laws within the Presbyterian Church must be separated in our thinking.

(1) There will be no question, perhaps, regarding the legislative and administrative acts of the General Assembly. Every one recognizes the scope and effect of these powers when exercised. It is necessary to remember, however, that deliverances of the General Assembly, when it is sitting either in its legislative or administrative capacity, should be clearly distinguished from decisions in judicial cases when the Assembly exercises the powers of a judicial court; and these in turn are not to be confounded with the ordainment of organic law by the processes provided in the Constitution and referred to above. When the General Assembly as a non-judicial body makes deliverances, they are entitled to great respect and deference, but they are subject to modification or repeal at any time by a majority vote of the General Assembly.

(2) When, however, the General Assembly acts in its judicial character, the effect is different, that is, if we are to follow the practices established in the civil sphere, now become a part of the thought of our people, and we know of no other course so safe. A judicial case is heard upon issues clearly presented, upon notice to and full argument by the parties, and it is decided after mature deliberation. No rule is laid down in such a case that is not applicable to the facts and determinative of the issues.

When a judicial case which comes to the General Assembly by constitutional procedure, a case which is issued by the General Assembly and judgment entered, the matter is disposed of, and the judgment in that particular case is final. The reason is that the Constitution of the Church does not provide for any higher judicial tribunal than the General Assembly, and an end of litigation must be reached somewhere. The decision in such a case stands as a powerful and persuasive precedent until altered or reversed.

The General Assembly has the power in its judicial capacity to record a contrary judgment in another case, resting upon a state of facts similar to, or precisely the same as, those of the former case. The General Assembly has power to do this at the same sitting of the court (though it is highly improbable that it would do so), and any succeeding Assembly also can create such new precedents, by the same means of a judicial decision in a specific case.

(3) It will be seen that this is something entirely different from the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution. It would be intolerable if the General Assembly, whose powers are limited by the Constitution, could, even when sitting as a judicial court, amend by indirection, the organic law of the Church, which contains within itself provisions for effecting orderly change. No one contends that the Supreme Court of the United States has the power to amend the Federal Constitution by adding to or taking from it, its function being limited to interpretation of the Constitution in cases of ambiguity. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church can be amended only by the General Assembly and the Presbyteries acting concurrently, according to methods defined in the Constitution and already referred to.

3. It is important in this connection to make a clear distinction between the judgment which is rendered in any particular case, and the reasoning on which that judgment rests. The reasoning may be faulty, and may be open to attack in another action, but so far as that original case is concerned, the judgment stands. It is not unheard of that a court may accept the contentions of a litigant, but for entirely different reasons than those adduced in the briefs. It has also been known that a court may arrive at a correct conclusion, but may support it by reasoning which is not correct. Thus it is that a principle enunciated in the decision of a court of last resort is always subject to challenge when it is sought to apply that principle in later cases, either because the principle itself is deemed to be faulty, or because the reasons presented in support of it are thought to be not sound.

At this point the utmost caution is necessary. It is to be presumed that the challenging of a principle laid down in a decision of any supreme judicial tribunal will be

undertaken with great reluctance and under a sense of the heavy responsibility one assumes in doing so. As a matter of practice in the civil courts, there has been strong disposition, which has hardened almost into a fixed rule, to let such principles stand. However, the fact is plain and unquestioned that courts of supreme authority have been known, on sufficient occasion, to reverse their own conclusions and not infrequently they modify them appreciably. And anyone in the Presbyterian Church who believes the issue at stake to be vital and imperative has the right, in a new case, to plead for relief in later decisions and should have the privilege of doing so, if he show sincerity and conscientiousness, without subjecting himself to any reflection upon his loyalty to the Church and to its institutions.

The above principles, if rightly applied in a spirit that seeks accommodation and concord, should be capable of meeting, in so far as legal procedure can meet them, some phases of the situation which we are now facing.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The principles which we have discussed in the preceding sections, by no means exhaust the questions at issue. One of the most important of those remaining to be considered is the relative powers of the General Assembly and of the Presbytery as regards matters over which the Presbytery has original jurisdiction. The rights of the Presbyteries and the limits of their independency is a question that has been involved in at least two of the historic divisions of the Presbyterian Church, that of 1741 and that of 1810, but it never has been fully and definitely settled. Divisions in which it played a part have been healed by passing it over. The responsibility of the Presbyteries in licensing and ordaining candidates for the ministry runs down and roots itself in this broader principle of the relation between Presbytery and Assembly, and of the full discharge by each body of its constitutional functions.

Another aspect of the same general problem is the meaning of the phrase "review and control" as used in our Constitution. There are a number of questions which can be asked on this point, and they are being asked, as already indicated in the paragraphs of this report dealing with causes of unrest. They demand an answer.

It is desirable also to secure a more exact definition of the phrase "essential and necessary articles of faith" and of the authority to determine such articles. This phrase has long been prominent in our terminology, and has proved to be a cause of uneasiness and confusion.

It has not been possible to deal adequately with these subject. The Commission believes that the work which it was appointed to do will not be complete until a study of them has been made and conclusions reported.

It is evident to the Commission that these matters cannot be dealt with successfully off-hand. A hasty settlement may prove to be no settlement at all. Interests are too sacred and feeling too strong to admit of a treatment of the subject which does not

take account of the healing effects of time. There must be time for conference and fellowship, for the modification of opposing attitudes, the harmonizing of divergent opinions, and for bringing together positions that seem to be apart.

There must be occasion and opportunity for those not in accord to try to work together upon the basis of principles acknowledged by all, but freshly defined and commonly understood. The Church seeking peace must wait for the spirit of peace to spread and for a full maturing of the purpose to attain peace.

The Commission is profoundly convinced that above all issues in importance and before every other proposal designed to unite our thinking and our spiritual interest, is the imperative necessity of a quickened loyalty to our Church, to its historic standards, and to our living Lord. Any settlement which promises to hold together the great masses of our ministers and members must be one which guarantees that through their unbroken ranks shall ring the note of undying allegiance to the Son of God as He is presented to us in the Scriptures.

It is Recommended—

1. That the General Assembly approve the foregoing report and commend it to the Church for study as a statement of facts and a definition of certain general principles which tend to clarify the issues involved in the recent discussions, and as furnishing a common ground upon which all members of the Church may stand, and from which, by the blessing of God and the leading of His Spirit, all may move forward to more complete harmony of opinion and to full brotherly accord in spirit.

2. That in furtherance of these purposes, the Commission be continued for another year and be charged with the duty of considering further the questions referred to in this report as not yet having been brought under full investigation, and all other remaining questions relating to the general subject, and that it report on these to the next General Assembly.

3. That the General Assembly while welcoming the discussion of great theological and practical issues lays upon the consciences of ministers and members, the duty of exercising patience and forbearance, and of refraining from public expression of hasty or harsh judgments of the motives of brethren whose hearts are fully known only to God; especially from bringing against individuals "in a calumniating manner." and not in the legally prescribed way, charges which assail their loyalty as Presbyterian ministers or ruling elders, and even their Christian belief, and which otherwise tend to weaken their influence as servants of Christ in His Church; so that discussion of the serious problems affecting the welfare of our Church, in so far as discussion may seem wise or necessary, may proceed in a way that will persuade the minds and win the hearts of men, stimulate the Church to greater activity in carrying forward its task and encourage all to provoke one another to love and good works.

4. That this Assembly records its unshaken loyalty to the whole body of evangelical truth, and more specifically, that it declares its purpose to uphold the Constitution of our Church and to maintain the integrity of its historic and corporate witness to our Lord Jesus Christ as He is represented to us in the Scriptures, and to the system of doctrines set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred H. Barr
Hugh T. Kerr
Mark A. Matthews
Lapsley A. McAfee
Harry C. Rogers
William O. Thompson

John M. T. Finney
John H. DeWitt
Edward D. Duffield
Cheesman A. Herrick
Nelson H. Loomis
Nathan G.

Moore

Edgar W. Work
Henry C. Swearingen, Chairman
Robert E. Speer

PCUSA, 1927, pp. 56-86, Report of the Special Commission of 1925
Report of Special Commission of 1925 [Final report]

The Report of the Special Commission of 1925 was unanimously adopted without debate and is as follows:

The original authorization of the Commission by the General Assembly of 1925 is as follows: "That a Commission of Fifteen members be appointed to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church may be assured."

The General Assembly of 1926, in approving the first report of the Commission, adopted among other resolutions the following: "That the Commission be continued for another year and be charged with the duty of considering further the questions referred to in this report as not yet having been brought under full investigation, and all other remaining questions relating to the general subject, and that it report on these to the next General Assembly."

Following the language used in the above resolutions, the present report falls naturally into two divisions: First, further questions relating to the Church's polity; and, second, a consideration of the Church's progress.

I. THE CHURCH'S POLITY

The questions referred to in the last resolution quoted and specifically mentioned in our report to the General Assembly of 1926, as "not yet having been brought under full investigation," are three in number, as follows: 1. Relative authority of General Assembly and Presbytery regarding licensure of probationers and ordination to the ministry. 2. Authority of superior courts, particularly of the General Assembly, covered by the phrase "review and control." 3. Definition of the phrase "necessary and essential articles," and the authority of the General Assembly in reference thereto.

These three questions involve a single principle; namely, the constitutional authority of the General Assembly. Though they present three different aspects of one issue, they are sufficiently distinct to warrant separate treatment.

Unity of the Presbyterian Church

In addition to the broad principle which enters into all of these questions there is also a sentimental interest attaching to them which cannot be ignored. Included in the problem is the whole theory of Presbyterian organization. Is the Presbyterian Church a unity or is it a more or less loose association of separate and independent units? The answer is that the alternatives suggested represent two opposite extremes and that neither of these extremes is accurately and fully descriptive of the organization of our Church.

The Presbyterian Church is not a unity in the sense that it consists of an undivided oneness without distinguishable parts; neither is it a group of smaller bodies with common history and tradition which find it advantageous to work together in close harmony for the accomplishment of purposes common to all of them. Our Church is an organism. Its unity is not a unity of articulation, part touching part, like the bones of a skeleton, but the unity of life, the parts united by vital bonds, thus constituting a living whole and that whole imparting impulse and strength and order to the several parts, as the body to its members.

This principle of vital unity applies whether we think of the whole membership of the Presbyterian Church as a spiritual body, or more specifically, of those only who bear rule in the various courts, from Session to General Assembly, and sometimes referred to as constituting "the official church." The different parts of the organization are bound into each other so that one cannot subsist without the others. Authority derives from Christ through the membership, and then moves upward, according to constitutional provisions, until it reaches the highest tribunal. The result is unity, whether the Presbyterian Church be regarded as a body of Christian believers or as an official organization of such believers for purposes of worship, government, and service.

Balance of Powers

It follows that the maintenance of a proper balance of powers as exercised by these different official bodies, Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly, is essential. At this point, however, diversity of judgment is almost certain to manifest itself. Some fear that the authority of the General Assembly may become so dominant as to absorb the constitutional functions of Presbyteries. Others have apprehensions lest the power of the Assembly be weakened until its voice carries little weight and our organizational structure prove to be insecure and in danger of collapse.

Such conflict of opinion is not new. It appears wherever questions of authority and order are under consideration, whether in Church or in State. It is the old difference

between those who believe in the centralization of governmental powers as opposed to others who favor a wider distribution of these powers. On the one side are people who seek a polity whose principal feature is government as nearly at hand as possible, even though its sway must be restricted in area. On the other side are people who advocate a control of wider and more general character even at the cost of removing the seat of its authority farther away.

Adjustment of Views Regarding Due Balance

In reference to this difference of view which tends always to become traditional and sentimental, three things may be said:

First, this is not a conflict between an idea entirely and exclusively sound and an opposing idea entirely and exclusively unsound; not the difference between one polity wholly right and another wholly wrong. Both of these conceptions are necessary and each of them is an indispensable factor in any system of democratic control which extends over a wide territory, like the government of the Presbyterian Church. The problem is the harmonizing of these two elements.

Second, this difference is not exclusively nor primarily logical, but partly temperamental. One's position regarding it is determined more by mental characteristics than by cold reasoning. It represents a distinction in individual natures and in outlook on affairs in general. It has to do with a line of cleavage which pays little regard to the boundaries of organizations, political or ecclesiastical, and which is liable to bring about in such organizations disrupting divisions. Those organizations which succeed in adjusting themselves to this line of temperamental cleavage are likely to be more stable and more enduring than those which do not. So fundamental a distinction in individual qualities and in mental make-up, and one which is likely to prove so decisive when such an issue as concentration or distribution of governmental power in the Presbyterian Church is under consideration, certainly calls for the exercise of imagination, restraint, and moderation – imagination which will enable one person to appreciate the position of another holding opposite views; restraint when discussing the subject, especially restraint in the use of terms; and moderation when attempting to devise measures designed to effect a correct balance between complementary factors in our problem.

Third, the fathers of our Church were quite as sensible of the existence of this problem as are their descendants. It was an issue fully as acute in their day as in our own, perhaps more so. It resulted then in divisions. Their strivings to avoid breaches and their efforts to heal them after they had occurred, are evidence of their familiarity with this situation and of their fears as to results of a wrong attempt at meeting it. The history of Presbyterian polity in this country shows the imminence of this issue at all times and the purpose to deal with it patiently and, if possible, wisely. Our Constitution is a witness to such a purpose. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church is the fruit of experience and logic and Christian grace. The men who framed it, as well as those who have preserved it, moved cautiously, but theirs was the caution of high wisdom. This is one reason they did not draw lines of definition that were too rigid. They left room for

adjustments. They did not try to decide every issue before it should arise. They erected a system which conferred broad powers. This is apparent in every part of their work. Between general control and local initiative there is not always a clear boundary line. This gives opportunity for conference, for composing differences, and for meeting, practically, difficulties which may arise out of varying circumstances. Perhaps all will agree that it should be so in matters of policy and government. This is one of the most important characteristics of our Federal Constitution and we are not unmindful that the great charter of our national government and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church were put into effect the same year. They were products of the same era, they grew out of the same general conditions and were designed to meet somewhat similar problems.

The Lesson of History

Should not this cause us to hesitate before reaching conclusions that are too sweeping regarding these century-old principles? Does not our history admonish against narrowing too much the field within which those of different minds respecting the application of legal principles may meet? Is it not possible to be conscientious and definite on such points without being too dogmatic? May we not find at a given time and under specific conditions, interpretations which will not be so strict and unyielding as to be unserviceable at a later time and under other conditions?

Such is the spirit of fidelity and of accommodation in which the Commission approaches the remaining part of its task. This is not a surrender of exactness to vagueness. Neither is it permitting the substance of solid opinions to be dissipated into fogs of doubt. It is an attempt to profit by the experience of a long history and to cultivate the humility and discretion which will qualify us to follow in the footsteps of the able and godly men who have gone before.

1. AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE FUNCTIONS OF PRESBYTERIES IN REGARD TO LICENSURE AND ORDINATION.

There may be advantage in listing some of the principles on which all seem to be agreed. These may be stated as follows:

[a.] Supreme authority originating in the Divine Head of the Church is communicated to the members directly by the Holy Spirit. On the human side, therefore, this authority inheres in the people so enlightened and so impelled by the Holy Spirit. This is a fundamental principle of Presbyterianism.

[b.] Beyond the particular church, the Presbytery is the organizational unit and the seat of original authority

[c.] The powers of the General Assembly are specific, delegated, and limited, having been conferred upon it by the Presbyteries; whereas the powers of Presbyteries are general and inherent.

[d.] It follows that the powers of the General Assembly are enumerated and defined; but the powers of Presbytery, being reserved powers, are not necessarily fully enumerated, nor strictly defined. Future conditions may call for the exercise of powers not now employed. If such should be required, they must be found in the Presbyteries and must either be exercised by the Presbyteries directly or by them be delegated to some other body.

[e.] Licensure of probationers and ordination to the gospel ministry are the exclusive functions of the Presbytery. Whatever powers in this connection have been delegated to the General Assembly, the Assembly itself has no authority to perform the act either of licensure or of ordination.

[f.] Doubtless, it will be accepted as a sound legal principle (and this applies to other questions also which are discussed in this report) that the General Assembly cannot do indirectly what it has no authority to do directly.

[g.] The General Assembly is the highest court of the Church, and has authority to interpret the Constitution by general deliverances and also to interpret and apply the Constitution in specific judicial cases. This authority is set forth in the former report of the Commission.

Licensure and Ordination

In addition to the above points, there are two matters about which there is likely to be no difference of opinion but which have, to some extent, fallen out of view. At least, there is ground for believing that they have not received the attention they deserve.

The first of these is the fact that licensure as a probationer for the gospel ministry and ordination to the ministry are two things entirely distinct. The respective powers which they confer are so different as to be scarcely comparable. Licensure is a temporary privilege which can be revoked at any time at the discretion of the Presbytery. A licentiate continues to be a layman. He is not yet a minister. His status in this respect is in no way altered by his licensure. He has neither authority nor voice in the Church's government not possessed by any other unordained layman. He has the permission of the Presbytery to preach the Gospel, but merely as a trial of his gifts for the purpose of ascertaining whether he be acceptable to congregations and may possibly become useful in the pastorate. A licentiate can be deprived of the privilege which his licensure extends to him, without any form of judicial procedure whatever.

In case a Presbytery errs in the licensing of a candidate, the only recourse for correcting the error, if the Presbytery cannot be persuaded to rescind its action voluntarily, is by complaint before a higher judicatory. A licentiate cannot be put on judicial trial by the Presbytery on the ground that he holds or teaches false doctrine. The Presbytery may consider the matter as it considers any other subject having to do with administrative measures and it may revoke his license on this or on any other ground; but there can be no formal charges nor any judicial trial for propagating heretical doctrines.

This situation arises from the fact that the licentiate is not a member of the Presbytery but a member of a particular church, and therefore subject to its Session.

If the licentiate be charged with unchristian or immoral conduct, he can be tried only by the Session of the particular church of which, as a layman, he is still a member, and the Presbytery can consider the matter only in case of an appeal from the decision of the Session.

Ordination to the ministry, however, lies in an entirely different field. It confers upon the candidate a new status. He is a layman no longer. He ceases to be a member of a particular church and becomes a member of a Presbytery. He is amenable to Presbytery's discipline and no charges can be preferred against him in any other ecclesiastical tribunal. Information about any member of a Presbytery may be communicated to the Presbytery from other sources and a superior judicatory may even direct the Presbytery to prefer charges against one of its members, but such a higher judicatory cannot itself frame the charges nor try the case in the first instance unless the Presbytery refuses to act. The importance of this consists in the fact that once a candidate receives ordination in a constitutional manner, he cannot, against his will, be deprived of his status or authority except by the prescribed constitutional procedure, which includes the preferring of specific charges, a formal trial and a legal conviction, followed, if he so elects, by appeal to the higher ecclesiastical courts.

A Minister's Status in the Presbyterian Church

The second matter which possibly requires restatement in this connection is that a minister's membership is in the Presbytery alone. His relationship to the Presbyterian Church as a whole depends on his relationship to the Presbytery. He is not a member of the General Assembly nor of a Synod, as such, but only as he has standing in a Presbytery and is qualified to represent it. Commissioners to the General Assembly are commissioned by the Presbyteries. Even in those Synods which are not delegated bodies, membership is determined not by the fact that a minister resides within a certain geographical area but by the fact that he is a member of a Presbytery which is one of the constituent bodies of such a Synod. The General Assembly may draft into its service on committees or commissions or boards any minister in good standing, but his good standing is within the Presbytery to which he belongs. Moreover, the Assembly, in calling him to serve it, in no way interferes with or modifies his Presbyterian membership. Besides, any authority which the Assembly exercises in the premises must be a constitutional authority conferred by the Presbyteries. The result is that a minister is received throughout the Presbyterian Church and is recognized by the General Assembly solely upon the ground that he is so received and so recognized by a particular Presbytery. No other Presbytery is obliged to admit him into its membership by a letter of transfer. It has full authority to examine him as to his faith and to inquire into his conduct before receiving him. It has the right to refuse him admittance if it deem him unworthy or unqualified. Comity between Presbyteries and recognition by the General Assembly have done much to establish a sense of unity among the ministers of the Presbyterian Church, but neither of these things can annul the well-established legal

principle that a minister in our denomination is such solely because he has membership in one Presbytery.

This, by no means, constitutes any Presbytery entirely a law unto itself, for the Presbyteries have adopted a constitution and have agreed to be bound together by it; but it may assist in clearing somewhat the issue now before us thus to trace to its true source the status of a Presbyterian minister.

Duties of Presbyteries

It is with these general principles in mind that provisions of the Constitution relative to the authority of the General Assembly in licensure and ordination are to be interpreted. The rights of the Presbytery are primary and inherent, even though they may not be supreme and final. These Presbyterial rights have been carefully guarded. The means by which the General Assembly can impress its mind upon a Presbytery with regard to these matters are four in number and strictly defined, namely: (1) General Review and Control; (2) Reference; (3) Complaint; and (4) Appeal. (Bk. Of Discipline, Chap. IX, Sec. 72.) Only two of them are under serious consideration at present; namely, Complaint and Appeal. The right of the General Assembly to take account of the action of Presbyteries in cases of licensure and of ordination is plain, but it is limited by clear constitutional definitions. It is the Presbytery which is to be satisfied with the candidate (Form of Govt., Chap. XIV, Sec. VII). The General Assembly can interpret and apply the broad general principles laid down in the Constitution, but when all these requirements have been satisfied, the candidate may still be unfitted for the ministerial office. On the other hand his more personal qualifications may have a direct and somewhat important bearing upon the application, in his particular case, of the general constitutional principles just mentioned. The Presbytery is the only body whose members see the candidate and hear him, officially. It is the body qualified and constitutionally appointed to judge, at first hand, concerning his spirit and bearing, and his general attitude toward the service of Christ.

Complaint and Appeal

The right of appeal is fundamental and belongs to the humblest litigant. The right of complaint is of like character and may be exercised by a member of any church court except the highest, where dissent or protest is the constitutional method of registering dissenting views and clearing the conscience. The Constitution seems to make it clear that the General Assembly is to have a voice regarding licensure and ordination in extraordinary cases. The Presbyteries are deemed competent to decide these questions unless there are exceptional circumstances. It appears to be the purpose that the jurisdiction of the General Assembly be invoked in cases where the issue is a narrow one and not easily decided, or where the points of difference are of great importance. The adoption of another course might tend to multiply cases in which the General Assembly becomes the judge of such matters and thus incline our practice in the direction of undermining the original responsibility of Presbyteries. A relatively small number of judicial cases in any particular period of our Church's history would seem to give the

General Assembly opportunity fully to define the powers of the Assembly and the rights of Presbyteries as these are related to licensure and ordination. A loyal adherence to the well-settled principles announced in decisions covering the entire period of our denominational existence makes for peace. A Presbytery, if found to be deliberately and finally recalcitrant, can be proceeded against and appropriate action taken; and if dissatisfaction with results of such procedure be general and long-continued, the way is open by constitutional methods to bring the organic law of the Church into harmony with prevailing sentiment.

Licensure Presents Few Difficulties

In the case of licensure which is subject to revocation at any time by a mere vote of the Presbytery and which can be carried to the General Assembly by complaint only (leaving out of view the method of "reference" about which there is no question), there would seem to be relatively few difficulties. If the General Assembly in the exercise of its constitutional authority finds that the Presbytery has erred either in the methods of procedure or in any other respect regarding which the General Assembly has a right to speak in response to a complaint, the error can be corrected with minimum injury either to the candidate himself or to the Church. In extreme cases the license can be revoked by the Presbytery and then renewed later if the former procedure has been improper or inadequate. If the matter complained of be doctrinal, the candidate can be continued under the care and instruction of the Presbytery, without license, until such time as it seems wise, in view of all the circumstances and of the General Assembly's decision, to extend to him once more the benefit of licensure. If it be found not necessary to revoke the license, the licentiate is still under the care of Presbytery, and ordination can be delayed until such time as the difficulties standing in the way have been removed.

The Nature of Ordination

When we come to ordination, however, we are dealing with a different set of facts. As already pointed out, ordination confers a unique status. It has always been the position of the Church of Scotland that this special authority is derived from Christ directly and not through the medium of the people. The ministry is regarded as being, in a peculiar sense, a gift to the Church from her Divine Head. This conception of the ministerial office is well set forth in a report to the Scottish General Assembly of 1911 by a special committee which covered the whole subject of ordination thoroughly. The report states: "The full teaching here (that is, of the Form of Church Government as a whole, as to 'Derivation of the Ministry') is that the Christian ministry derives not from the people but from the pastors, and that a scriptural ordinance provides for this ministry being renewed through the ordination of presbyter by presbyter, that this ordinance draws its origin from the Apostles who were themselves presbyters, and that through them it passes to its source in Christ" (General Assembly Reports for 1911, Church of Scotland, p. 1170).

Without passing judgment on the correctness of this theory, it is sufficient to remember that it accords, in substance, with the views of the Reformers. The fathers of

our system, as it came to be known in later centuries, sought to revive the ancient and scriptural conception of ministerial functions and the original practice in ordination thereto. This principle and the ceremony which expresses it abide to the present day and are still recognized in their strictest form, perhaps, in the Church of Scotland. The Reformers held a theory of "succession" which we accept and which has affected our entire polity and given character to church life.

Based upon this idea is a practice which prevails in all Presbyterian ecclesiastical bodies, the significance of which and the historical connotations of which are sometimes overlooked. We refer to the order by which ministerial status is conferred through "the preaching presbyters" only. The Presbytery as a whole, of which ruling elders are also members, authorizes the ordination, but only those members who themselves have been ordained to the ministry participate in the rite. The reason for this is perfectly clear. It traces back to an original conception of the ministry which has come down across the centuries with unbroken acknowledgment notwithstanding ecclesiastical changes. The upheaval at the time of the Reformation did not alter it fundamentally, and no variations in applications of the theory among the great historical churches of Christendom have ever devitalized the substantive idea itself.

It is necessary that this fact be firmly grasped and that the principle which it teaches be fully understood whenever we attempt to interpret our polity. The principle lies deeply embedded in our system, and its implications appear almost everywhere on the surface. If it has not always been stated in definite terms it is because it was so generally and indisputably acknowledged. There is no other office like the ministry; no status among men provides a parallel; and therefore, there is liable to be danger to our conclusions when we try to draw too close analogies between ordination and induction into official position in the civil sphere.

Ordination by preaching presbyters, "orderly associated," that is, united in the ministerial membership of a Presbytery, has uniformly been regarded as an accomplished fact, as the setting apart of a person to be a man of God with authority to expound His Word, to administer the Holy Sacraments, to perform marriage ceremonies and to bury the dead. It is a solemn creative act which cannot be set aside except by well defined constitutional process. "Once a minister, always a minister" expresses the idea broadly, and involves the thought that the legality of rites and ceremonies performed by a minister constitutionally ordained should not be left open to doubt because of the possibility that the General Assembly may decide, on complaint against the Presbytery, that the ordination should not have taken place. If for any good and sufficient reason he should not be permitted to fill the office of minister he may be unfrocked without casting a cloud upon his official acts, by a trial and conviction on specific charges, against which he has the right to appear and defend himself. About this there is no difference of opinion. The point at which questions arise is when the preaching presbyters proceed to perform the rite. What is a constitutional ordination? How can a proposed ordination be arrested before consummation? And after consummation by the Presbytery is it revocable?

Arresting Proceedings in Ordination

If action is contemplated to prevent ordination until a higher judicatory may review the case, the proper procedure is by complaint against the Presbytery, before the act of ordination takes place. Our Constitution appears to make clear that a complaint filed by one-third of the members of a Presbytery acts as a "stay": "Whenever a Complaint is entered in a non-judicial or administrative case against a decision of a judicatory, by at least one-third of the members recorded as present when the decision was made, the execution of the decision shall be stayed until the final issue of the case by the next superior judicatory." (Bk. Of Discipline, Chap. IX, Sec. 86.)

The effect of such a complaint filed by a sufficient number of the members of the Presbytery present is to arrest the ordination. If, in the face of this constitutional inhibition, the ministerial members of a Presbytery proceed to perform the ordination, not only would the Presbytery become liable to censure, but the pretended ordination itself, not having been performed according to specific constitutional requirement, would be invalid. In other words, there would have been no ordination at all according to the provisions of our Constitution.

When No Stay Has Been Secured

When, however, complaint has been lodged against a Presbytery because it has, through its ministerial members, ordained a candidate alleged to be not qualified, and execution of the decision complained of has not been stayed by one-third of the members recorded as present when the decision was made, joining in complaint against the ordination, the complaint may be answered by the superior court, even by the General Assembly, unfavorably to the Presbytery's action, but this would not invalidate the ordination nor affect the official status of the newly endowed minister, nor annul the sacred rites already performed by him. The Presbytery may be disciplined for erroneous action, and there appears to be no limit to the authority of the General Assembly in dealing with a Presbytery that has proved to be contumacious, but the individual whom the Presbytery has ordained constitutionally can not be reached by this process. If there has been no stay, and he has been invested with the office, the issue, so far as he is affected, is between the General Assembly and the Presbytery and is founded upon a complaint against the Presbytery, to which he is not even a party. The one proper method of proceeding against the newly ordained minister would be to prefer charges against him personally and the substantive charges should be based upon facts coming to the knowledge of the Presbytery subsequent to his ordination. For these he might, if convicted, be suspended or deposed, but the disposition of this case would not affect, technically, the complaint against the Presbytery called to account for ordaining him.

Supporting Considerations

There are at least four considerations which strongly support and, in the judgment of the Commission, determine this construction of the Constitution and the practice of our Church under it.

1. The nature of the sacred office and of the functions of Presbytery in relation thereto. These have been discussed already. The conception of the ministry and the means of conferring its status involve principles so deeply based that they could be altered only by the plainest and most specific statements in the Constitution to the contrary. Such statements do not appear.

2. The other provisions in the Constitution for guaranteeing the Church's unity and for guarding its doctrine are so clear and apparently so ample as to create a strong presumption that, had it been the purpose of those who drafted the Constitution or of those who have had a part in amending it to confer upon the General Assembly additional powers in this regard, the grant would have been expressed in specific and unmistakable terms.

3. This reticence of our organic law relative to nullification of an ordination, a rite which has so many sacred scriptural and traditional associations, points to the conclusion that the Presbyteries have not granted to the General Assembly certain powers in relation thereto, but have either reserved those powers to themselves or have been conscious of some original and inherent disabilities respecting them. Among those disabilities are (a) incompetency of the whole Presbytery to perform the act of ordination, though it has authorized such performance; (b) incompetency of the Presbytery to revoke an ordination which itself has authorized with due regard to constitutional procedure; and (c) incompetency of the "preaching presbyters" who conferred ministerial status by ordination to undo their deed. It would not seem logical to infer that the General Assembly has been clothed with authority to revoke an ordination when the Presbytery itself does not possess this authority, or that the General Assembly can direct a Presbytery to do something by means which the Presbytery is forbidden to employ originally. Particularly does this appear to be a reasonable deduction when it is remembered that the Constitution provides a method of terminating ministerial status and that this method is set forth with precision and in great detail.

4. The most convincing fact of all is that the General Assembly in all its history has never nullified an ordination nor revoked one by the process under consideration. It has never revoked even a licensure. In the two hundred twenty-one years of organized Presbyterianism in this country there has not been, as far as this Commission has been able to learn, a single instance of such an action by the highest court. If the General Assembly possesses such power it has never exercised it. In all the cases brought before our highest tribunal, the Assembly invariably has stopped short of rescinding an ordination or a licensure complained of, or of ordering a Presbytery to do so. This is a fact of first importance to which it is scarcely possible to attach too great significance. Long and unbroken custom observed in administrative practice and confirmed in judicial decisions where adverse interests have been represented by parties whose contentions have been denied, acquires almost the force of written law. It would be a radical departure if we were to change this practice, covering two centuries of time, without some positive mandate from the Presbyteries.

Another and quite different interpretation of this feature of our Constitution has been put forward. It has been strongly and ably contended before the Commission that the view just stated is incorrect and that the General Assembly has, and must have, the power, claimed to be inherent in our system, to reverse any erroneous action whatsoever of any inferior court and to undo by direct methods what the Assembly deems to have been done improperly. In other words, it is asserted that the General Assembly possesses authority to render an ordination null and void by the process of reversing the decision of a Presbytery to ordain, or authority to direct a Presbytery to rescind its own action in such circumstances.

This position is maintained on the ground of self-preservation, that our Church's unity and, indeed, its very life, are dependent upon the existence and exercise of such authority, and that any other course leads to anarchy. A ready answer to this last contention is that in the history of American Presbyterianism a different course has not led to anarchy. A further answer is that the unity of our Church is safeguarded by the strictest and most undeniable constitutional provisions which heretofore have proved entirely sufficient in every emergency.

Undoubtedly the preservation of her faith is a concern of the Church which is paramount and vital. The continuance of her unbroken unity is scarcely less so. And a polity which does not promote both these ends would be, so far as Presbyterianism is concerned, undesirable, if not dangerous. But so far, we have succeeded in holding together and even in healing divisions that have occurred from time to time, without adding to, or subtracting from, the authority of the General Assembly by construction and without discovering in the Constitution grants of power which the fathers did not find there.

Power of General Assembly to Decide in Questions of Doctrine

The authority of the General Assembly to nullify an ordination is urged upon the further ground that the Constitution states specifically, "To the General Assembly belongs the power of deciding in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline." (Form of Government, Chap. XII, Sec. V.) It is held that usually an ordination is challenged because of alleged doctrinal error on the part of the candidate, and that this brings the validity of his ordination within the purview of the General Assembly and warrants that body in voiding the act of formal consecration to the ministry if the reasons for so doing appear to the Assembly sufficient.

The power conferred by the words of the Constitution just quoted is not absolute, however. It is a power which can be exercised under certain conditions only, and these conditions are defined and described in other parts of the Constitution; and this particular provision must be interpreted and applied in the light of all other provisions which bear on the same subject, as, for instance, those relating to the functions of Presbyteries and others containing the ordination vows.

Incorrect Inferences from Analogy

An analogy between a system of civil government and procedure in its courts, and our ecclesiastical system, cannot properly be relied on to support the right of the Assembly under our Form of Government to annul an act of ordination performed by a Presbytery. The jurisdiction of appellate civil courts is conferred by express provisions of law, and where the right of review and reversal exists, it is not by virtue of decisions of the courts or mere reasons of policy. If it is not expressly conferred by law, it does not exist. It does exist because of elaborate provisions of the laws for review and reversal in the judgment of the courts. The vast jurisdiction of the United States Supreme Court is founded on grants of power made in the Constitution and statutes of the United States, and not on any inherent jurisdiction or any custom or line of decisions made by that court. We must therefore find the power of review and reversal by the General Assembly in our Form of Government, and if it is not there found, no reliance can be placed upon any theory of inherent power or upon any analogy with civil systems to support such rights as claimed. The claim that the General Assembly has the right, on complaint, to annul an ordination as of the time it was made, is weakened by the fact that it does not take into consideration the essential difference between an official under civil law and a minister under ecclesiastical law. It ignores the fact that there is no other office like that of the ministry, and that no status among men provides a parallel. It attaches no significance to the sacred character of the functions performed by him, and overlooks the importance of sustaining the legality and sacredness of his official acts. If the General Assembly had the power claimed for it and should set aside and hold for naught the ordination of a minister from the very beginning, it would cast doubt upon all the rites and ceremonies performed by him and bring humiliation and suffering into the lives of many innocent persons.

However, we are dealing with facts, not theories; with precedents as they have been made, not as they might have been created, and we have behind us a record which points clearly to the wisdom of adhering to practices hallowed by time and found sufficient on all occasions for preserving both the liberty and the unity guaranteed by Presbyterianism.

Brotherly Consideration and Deliberation

But there is much more to this matter than a mere question of law. Brotherly consideration and desire to be fair, not only in our judgments but in our methods of procedure, often accomplish more for the peace of the Church than reliance on legal technicalities. Certainly there is room for the practice of such virtues in the circumstances we are now considering.

The welfare of the Church would seem to confirm the admonition of Scripture that hands be laid on no man suddenly, and that in ordinary cases, a considerable period of time be permitted to elapse between licensure and ordination. Particularly would such a course appear to be desirable, if not indeed urgent, in instances where a formal complaint has been made against a candidate's licensure by a number less than the one-third of the membership of Presbytery present, as referred to in the Constitution. To

hasten on to the much more important ceremony of ordination is liable to defeat the lawful purpose of a complaint, because ere the complaint can be heard by the General Assembly the candidate may have been inducted into the office of the ministry by ordination and thus revocation of his licensure be rendered ineffective.

Where ordination of a candidate is contemplated, and examination has been sustained by the Presbytery, and notice of complaint against the sustaining action has been given to the Presbytery, the very nature of the ordination and of the status and powers which it confers pleads for delay in consummating the relationship. It is not necessary that the ceremony of ordination should follow immediately upon examination of the candidate. Would not the peace and order of the Church urge upon Presbyteries caution and restraint and even an extended period of waiting, if necessary, until the issue raised can be decided and the dignified and solemn rite of ordination be proceeded with unclouded by the shadow of pending litigation?

Early Attention to Possible Candidates for the Ministry

As a result of its study of this subject, the Commission has been deeply impressed with the failure of Presbyteries and of Sessions to perform their duties toward the young men who are preparing for the ministry. Our Constitution makes ample provision for the nurture of these young men in grace and faith, and yet the fact is they are left, for the most part, to their own resources except for a brief and sometimes formal questioning when they are taken under the care of the Presbytery. Frequently they have no aid of the kind they most need except the counsels of a pastor, and these are not always offered.

Under our Constitution a student must be recommended by the Session of the church of which he is a member. Yet how few Sessions know anything about the spiritual struggles and the deep anxieties which young men experience when the question of life work and of self-dedication to the Master is uppermost. How few Sessions are on the watch for boys who may become suitable candidates for the ministry. Would it not be a cause of spiritual satisfaction on the part of any Session to make selected individuals among the boys the objects of special prayer and to press upon them the call of Christ to the ministry and the opportunity of service for Him in this office? to instruct and encourage and guide them in arriving at a decision? to prepare them for the moment when they go before the Presbytery to be taken under its care? Under such conditions the recommendation of a Session will be something more than a formality and will become an assurance that the candidate has been carried forward step by step on the arms of prayer and of Christian counsel and made ready for the further act of consecration in committing himself to the Presbytery's oversight.

Duties of Presbyteries Toward Candidates

Then begin the duties of the Presbytery if indeed they do not have their inception much earlier. The young man has put himself in the Presbytery's hands. He is not alone in fitting himself for the ministry, but the Presbytery also is preparing him for the sacred office. The Presbytery bears a fatherly relationship to him. His studies and the place

where he will pursue them and all the circumstances surrounding his preparation are the Presbytery's serious concern. The committee of Presbytery, particularly its chairman, has the rare opportunity to make this concern very personal. And yet, let it be asked, and answered to our humiliation, in how many of our three hundred Presbyteries is any conscientious, continued, patient and prayerful consideration given to the needs of these students? How many members of Presbytery know who they are or what their number or where they are pursuing their studies or what is their mental and spiritual reaction to the instruction they are receiving? Few, if any, know about these things until the candidate presents himself for licensure – perhaps for ordination as well as licensure, after his theological course of instruction has been completed and his opinions rather well-formed as to matters of serious doctrinal and spiritual importance. Then, if he wavers in his theological views and confesses honest doubts, we are ready to take him in hand in a somewhat inquisitorial spirit, to impress upon him without much sympathy and with little evidence of regret such as love might show, his delinquencies in belief and to make him the helpless victim of our own differences and discussions and advertise him before the public to his abiding humiliation as a man unfit for the holy ministry in the Presbyterian Church, or at least one whose credentials are clouded.

The Presbytery should know what these young men are studying and how they are receiving the instruction. If the Presbytery objects to the type of teaching, it should have an opportunity to express its disapproval earlier and in terms of affectionate interest and Christian solicitude, to warn of errors and to point out the safer paths and by every means to make students for the ministry feel that they have in the Presbytery a sure dependence and a constant friend. We wait too long, meanwhile leaving these young men to themselves, and then expect them to pass a rigid theological examination. Many a student can be led out of the fogs of doubt into the clear sunshine of assurance and conviction if he have the benefit of wise and tender counsel by his brethren during the period of his preparation. The Form of Government provides for this and we have grossly neglected its provisions. A return to the specific requirements and to the plain implications of our Constitution in this respect would go far toward promoting the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Presbyterian Church.

2. REVIEW AND CONTROL

There has been much confusion of thought as to the use and significance of this phrase, "Review and Control." The Book of Discipline, however, makes the meaning quite clear. Difficulty in understanding the phrase has arisen from applying it to two distinct things. Sometimes it is used to denote the general authority which superior judicatories have over inferior courts. In this sense, it refers to a broad principle which is fundamental in Presbyterianism. In other instances "Review and Control" is employed to express one specific power which the Constitution vest in superior judicatories, and which gives them the right to review the records of inferior courts, and, on their own initiative, if necessary, to demand the presentation of such records; or even to inquire into facts and conditions not stated or defined in the records, for the purpose of securing the transaction of the Church's business in an orderly and constitutional manner. This second use is the correct one.

Use of Terms Defined in Book of Discipline

It is perhaps unfortunate that this phrase "Review and Control" is ever applied in the first sense, which makes it refer to a general power. The Constitution seems to give no warrant for such use of it. The title of Chapter IX, Book of Discipline, is "Of the Ways in Which a Cause May Be Carried from a Lower to a Higher Judicatory." Immediately under this title is Section 71 which reads as follows: "All proceedings of the Session, the Presbytery, and the Synod (except as limited by Chap. XI, Sec. 4, of the Form of Government), are subject to review by, and may be taken to, a superior judicatory, by General Review and Control, Reference, Complaint, or Appeal." Thus it will be seen that "General Review and Control" is one of four specific methods by which a matter may be removed from a lower to a higher judicatory, the other three being "Reference," "Complaint" and "Appeal."

This process of "General Review and Control" is further defined as follows: "All proceedings of the Church shall be reported to, and reviewed by, the Session, and by its order incorporated with its records. Every judicatory above a Session shall review, at least once a year, the records of the proceedings of the judicatory next below; and, if the lower judicatory shall omit to send up its records for this purpose, the higher may require them to be produced, either immediately, or at a specified time, as circumstances may determine." (Bk. Of Discipline, Chap. IX, Sec. 72.)

It would not appear necessary to carry this explanation further by quoting other sections of Chapter IX, Book of Discipline. It is quite plain that "General Review and Control," notwithstanding the use of the adjective, represents a specific and not a general power. Perhaps the adjective is to blame for the looseness with which we sometimes employ this language. Undoubtedly there is a general authority vested by the Constitution in superior judicatories, an authority which is very broad and effective, but accuracy would require that it be not expressed in the phrase, "General Review and Control," which refers to an entirely different and subordinate classification of powers. Probably the single word "Review" would be a better designation for the more general idea.

3. ESSENTIAL AND NECESSARY ARTICLES

The history of the use of this phrase, "Essential and Necessary Articles," is interesting and illuminating. It was first employed in the Act of 1729, preliminary to the adoption of the Confession of Faith by the (General) Synod. Manifestly, the inclusion of the phrase in the language of the Act was a conciliatory measure designed to bridge a chasm between minds which otherwise could not meet. The discussion on this point during the early days of Presbyterianism in America had been transferred to our shores from churches beyond the seas, and since many of our ministerial recruits were coming from those churches, the issue in this country became rather acute.

It is very significant, however, that this phrase was not employed again in any official action of our Church until 1896. Thus during a period of one hundred sixty-seven years the Church did its work and settled its differences without resorting again to the language which has caused discussion recently. Even in 1896 the phrase was used only incidentally in a report of the Committee on Editions of the Constitution. It was not, therefore, until fourteen years later, in 1910, and after the Church had enjoyed one hundred eighty-one years of tranquility in regard to the subject, that the phrase, "Essential and Necessary Articles," or its equivalent, appeared once more in official actions of the General Assembly in connection with disputed points of constitutional law.

The General Assembly of 1910 declared certain doctrines to be "essential and necessary." The proposed action gave rise to little, if any, discussion at the meeting of that particular Assembly. It was an element in what was thought to be a compromise and was looked upon as a precautionary measure in respect to possible future actions of Presbyteries in licensing and ordaining candidates. Action was recommended to the Assembly of 1910 by the Permanent Judicial Commission when deciding a case, but the action itself was not a part of the decision. The form which it took was determined by the Committee on Bills and Overtures. It was a declarative act and belongs in the class of interpretations of doctrine which the General Assembly is empowered to make from time to time.

The deliverance of the 1910 Assembly covered "five points" as they have now come to be known familiarly. These were quoted in substance and reaffirmed in an action of the same character by the Assembly of 1916, and again by the Assembly of 1923. It was not until the General Assembly of 1925 adopted a judicial decision which appeared to rest in part upon these declarative deliverances of former Assemblies and which seemed to regard at least one of them as a part of "the established law of the Church" that discussion of the question became heated and differences of opinion about it sharp and alarming.

The long silence on the subject of "essential and necessary articles," covering almost two centuries, accounts for the fact that there is so little in the way of precedents upon which to rest an answer to the question now before us. Actions by churches across the seas, particularly the Church in Ireland, at the close of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth, throw some light upon this matter, but it is chiefly a reflected light and the knowledge to be derived from the positions taken by these churches of the old world is drawn from inference only. The one recourse open to us, therefore, would seem to be the application of principles in our own Constitution.

The Question Stated

The specific question is, What authority, if any, does the General Assembly possess for declaring any article to be an essential and necessary one in a sense which renders its statement mandatory and applicable to all cases.

One fact often overlooked is that by the Act of 1729, the decision as to essential and necessary articles was to be in specific cases. It was no general authority that might be stated in exact language and applied rigidly to every case without distinction. It was an authority somewhat undefined, to be invoked in each particular instance.

Furthermore, this authority was to be exercised by the Presbytery or by the (General) Synod. It is very doubtful whether this authority was shared by the (General) Synod merely because the (General) Synod was a body of superior jurisdiction, qualified to hear appeals from a Presbytery. In this particular instance the larger body was joined with the smaller one as co-equal in authority over the matter, because the (General) Synod itself was a Presbytery. The records show that it exercised all the functions of a Presbytery, even to the organization of congregations and to the licensing and ordaining of candidates and the reception of ministers previously ordained.

It was clearly the intention that this decision as to essential and necessary articles was to be made after the candidate had been presented and had declared his beliefs and stated his motives personally, and after the examining body, whether Presbytery or (General) Synod, had had full opportunity to judge the man himself, as well as abstract questions of doctrine.

This is emphasized for the purpose of calling attention to the fact that actions taken either by the Presbytery or by the (General) Synod previous to 1789 and under the authority of the act of 1729, do not settle definitely this issue as it arises now under our Constitution. The polity of our Church since the adoption of the Constitution in 1789 is in certain respects quite different from what it had been before that date. Attention is called to the fact at this time for the further purpose of pointing out that there is nothing in the act of 1729 definitely and certainly inconsistent with the principle that the Presbytery's right to determine the fitness of a candidate is paramount. For even the (General) Synod when deciding in this matter was acting as a Presbytery; and even granting that such a principle could not be maintained under the provisions of our Constitution, the course followed by the Church prior to the adoption of the Constitution warns against the danger of limiting in too great a degree the authority of Presbytery to determine when a particular candidate is, or is not, qualified to exercise the office of the holy ministry.

To What an Article Is Essential and Necessary

A decision as to any article being "essential and necessary," by whomsoever made, calls for definition of language. The question arises, essential to what? necessary to what? Is it essential and necessary to salvation? If so, the number of such articles will be reduced far below the number of chapters in the Confession of Faith. The Confession of Faith is only a subordinate standard. The supreme standard is the Word of God as the Holy Spirit speaks through it; and the Word of God declares, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. 10:13.) And further, the word of faith is said to be, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. 10:9.) Is an article

declared to be essential and necessary to the leading of Christian life and to citizenship in the Kingdom of God? Is it held to be essential and necessary to the existence of the Church? Manifestly, it is not in these respects primarily that we are dealing with essentiality.

To what then, is an article declared to be essential and necessary? The answer would seem to be a system of doctrine. Especially so, since precisely this is what a candidate vows to receive and adopt – "a system of doctrine." It is stated sometimes that there are a number of systems of doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith – as for instance, a system of general Christian doctrines as held by all Churches; a Protestant system, and a Reformed system. It is to be feared that these distinctions are too close and scholastic for the practical purpose contemplated by the question now before us. The Church as a whole, and certainly a candidate under examination, looks upon the Confession of Faith as presenting one system of Christian truth to which the Church bears witness, and this Confession is received as "containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." The Confession of Faith does not necessarily comprise all the doctrines included in the system taught in the Holy Scriptures. Indeed it does not purport to do so, but it contains that system. Moreover, there are features of the Word of God that are not doctrinal, and the lines which distinguish these one from another are not always clearly drawn. But there is broadly speaking, a "system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures," and the Confession of Faith is declared to contain this system, and as such it is received and adopted by the candidate.

To declare an article of faith "essential and necessary" to this system is a serious undertaking. Undoubtedly there are articles, which all will agree fall within this classification, but there are others about which there will be differences of opinion. A doctrine may be entirely true and yet not be an "essential and necessary article" in the system. The question is not as to its truth, primarily, but, rather, is it essential to the system? And the minds of individuals, certainly the mind of the Church itself, should be deeply humble and devoutly prayerful when attempting to decide an issue of such grave import as this.

A Solemn Responsibility

In regard to determination of the question as to which are "essential and necessary articles," within the meaning just defined, the General Assembly has an undoubted right to interpret the Constitution in declaratory deliverances and all must recognize the duty of the Assembly from time to time to bear general witness, as there may be need, to the corporate faith of the Church. Perhaps most persons will concede that it would be a very solemn responsibility which the General Assembly would exercise in designating, even in a declaratory deliverance, any doctrine as an essential and necessary article. An Assembly is not bound in this respect by the actions of former Assemblies, and, therefore, any statement of the sort which it makes may possibly be altered or canceled by later deliverances. Such deliverances might be made under the prevalence of a spirit and under the influence of other conditions not the most favorable. Assuming that the

right exists to follow such procedure, the exercise of the right may lead, as experience has shown, to disturbing results.

It is probable that, after there has been opportunity for reflection, and when minds are not affected by the exigencies of controversy, most of the ministers and members of our Church will agree that the risk of such action is great, and that the General Assembly may well refrain from taking such a course, especially as it may be misconstrued as a virtual amending of our organic law by another method than that prescribed by the Constitution.

Limits of a Mandatory Judicial Decision

The General Assembly, when acting in its judicial capacity, has a right to decide questions of this kind only as they apply to the specific case under consideration and as the decision may be affected by all the circumstances of that case. Should the doctrinal beliefs of a candidate be challenged in a judicial action as not being of a character to qualify him under our Constitution for preaching the gospel, it is competent for the General Assembly to decide that, in view of all the conditions surrounding this particular case, the opinions which the candidate holds are not such as fit him for the office of the ministry in the Presbyterian Church; but this is quite different from deciding, as a general proposition, that certain articles, when considered abstractly and logically, are essential and necessary to the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures.

It follows from the above that the decision of a particular case involving this issue, when rendered by the General Assembly acting in its judicial capacity, cannot be made to rest properly upon a merely declaratory deliverance of a former Assembly. A judicial decision is grounded in the Constitution itself and derives its chief additional support from similar decisions arrived at in the same manner and resting upon the same foundation.

It seems quite clear, furthermore, that, granting for the moment the authority of the General Assembly, acting in any capacity, to declare broadly that an article is essential and necessary, it would be required to quote the exact language of the article as it appears in the Confession of Faith. It could not paraphrase the language nor use other terms than those employed within the Constitution, much less could it erect into essential and necessary articles doctrines which are only derived as inferences from the statements of the Confession.

The outcome of the above considerations, as well as the history of our Church for two centuries, encourages us to seek her peace and purity and unity along the same path which she has traveled hitherto. Referring to the General Assembly, the Form of Government states: "It shall constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among all our churches." Behind the General Assembly is the Constitution itself, the great charter of a regulated liberty within the confines of unifying law. And above the Constitution is the Word of God, the supreme Standard of our faith; and in the Scripture, inspiring and vitalizing it by His Spirit, and speaking to us through

it, is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Himself the Word, who dwells in each one of us, binding us all into a mystical and spiritual union with Himself and with each other, which is displayed in the fellowship of worship and witness and service in the Church here on earth and which will attain its sure and perfect expression before His glorious throne in heaven.

II. THE CHURCH'S PROGRESS

It will be recalled that in the original authorization of this Commission by the Assembly of 1925, the purpose of its appointment was stated as follows: "to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church may be assured." Thus far in our reports we have considered the purity, peace and unity of the Church. We turn now to the thought of the Church's progress.

Go Forward

From of old God's Word to His People has been, "Go forward." He calls the Church to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Peter, 3:18), to increase in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10), to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men (I Thess. 3:12), that our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment (Phil. 1:9). The summons to such progress is very bold: "Wherefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on unto perfection; not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the teaching of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." (Heb. 6:1, 2.) These foundations were securely laid. On them the Church was built, sitting still on no past obedience but running with patience the race set before her, "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2.) The whole New Testament conception of the Church is of a living, growing, advancing society bound together in Christ and moving forward with Him to the fullness of the truth and to the end of the world.

This road of progress is the way of escape from many things which mar the unity, purity and peace of the Church. The law of life for the Church is the same as the law of life for the Christian. "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13, 14.)

Changing Conditions

The days in which we live are challenging and forward-calling days. The forces which make for unrighteousness are alert and busy, and it behooves the Church also to be awake, and prayerfully active. The people of all our Churches, especially children and youth, are facing new and changing conditions demanding fresh and far-reaching

application of the Gospel. We of the Presbyterian Church are sure of the Gospel and of its power to meet every new condition. The younger generation, however, needs to be both strengthened and guided in the intellectual understanding and practical application of the Christian faith. The spiritual interpretation of the universe is being assailed today by men who seek leadership over the mind of youth. A philosophy and especially a psychology which rule a personal God out of the world and make religious experience an illusion, have had wide currency. Economic and social theories which root themselves in class and race hatred have been prevalent in our literature. A theory of life which takes its motive from the desire to indulge in self-expression has captured the minds of thousands and has led to tragic and startling results.

The causes making for unrest in the moral and intellectual world are confined to no one section of the Church and to no one nation. The tides of truth and error break on every shore and what we think and say in America is said and thought in Japan and China and India. In some degree the anti-Christian movements now appearing in the Orient are related to the currents of naturalistic thought which flow through our own land. The Christian religion has always had to fight for its life, and each age has been compelled to fashion its own arguments and create its own defense. There is immediate need for a fresh and a compelling statement of the reasons for our faith. The Church is waiting for it, and the youth of our time are hungry to receive it. The Church must be set for the defense of the everlasting Gospel and must speak to the age in its own language. One cannot read the scholarly and majestic arguments of other generations without a thrill. There have been Christian giants among the scholars in every era of the Church's history, and one of the pressing needs in America and throughout the world is for a fresh and powerful Christian apologetic which will make its appeal to the perplexed mind of the modern world.

Equipped and Aggressive Leadership

This calls for thoroughly equipped and aggressive leadership. We need to lay hold upon the strongest of our young men for the Gospel ministry and for other positions of service in the Church. When things are being shaken and the intellectual and moral currents are running fast, the witness of the ministry must be clear and its ranks full. We would have the youth of our colleges and congregations hear the call of God and know that the Presbyterian Church is vitally interested in their intellectual and spiritual problems and is eager to welcome them to places of great service in this world-wide spiritual warfare.

No low intellectual or spiritual standards for those entering the ministry will suffice. In other professions the courses of study are being enlarged and intensified. We have no data by which to judge accurately of the scholastic preparation of those entering the Presbyterian ministry from other denominations, but the situation in regard to some of our own ministerial candidates is sufficiently disquieting. Of the total number of students, graduate and under-graduate, in our Presbyterian seminaries, only a few more than one-half are preparing for the Presbyterian ministry, and of these latter more than one-fourth have not completed a college course.

It is not necessary to elaborate statistics. The situation existing has been known for years. When education is so universal and our institutions of higher learning are thronged with ambitious youth, there must be some reason which the Church should seek out why young men not fully qualified are admitted to the ministry. The Presbyterian theory of the parity of the ministry presupposes uniformity of intellectual discipline and theological preparation. This has been the historic position of our Church. It was founded on sound scholarship; and we believe that to the relaxing of these standards may be traced some of the causes of unrest within the Church.

Grateful as we are for the strong and able young men of our generation who have entered and are now preparing to enter the ministry, we are impressed with the necessity of maintaining and elevating the standard of requirements. Ultimate responsibility rests with the Presbyteries, and while there will always be provision for exceptional personalities, progress demands unyielding insistence upon a high degree of attainment on the part of the Church's official teachers and leaders.

Revival of Preaching

But scholarship alone will not make a Church; neither will it sustain a Church's life. There are other and higher qualifications for the important tasks and duties to which God is summoning us.

There must be a revival of strong, sound, scriptural preaching – far more earnest and expectant evangelic preaching designed to win men to Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and stimulating every Church member to enlist in direct Christian effort to bring others to Christian faith and discipleship; a great volume of able and enlightening doctrinal preaching and instruction which grapples with the actual spiritual problems and intellectual difficulties of today and sets forth convincingly the solid and reasonable grounds upon which our Christian convictions rest; preaching that will send Church members to their Bibles and revive Bible reading and Bible teaching in the homes and in all the Church's services and schools, which will recover, and add to, old experience respecting spiritual worship and devotional life, which will renew the spirit of prayer and rekindle the waning flame upon the altar of the Christian household.

Regard for Presbyterian Polity

There must be a study by the Presbyteries of our constitution and government, that the large number of ministers who have come to us from other denominations may enter fully into the temper and character of our Church, and that our Presbyteries may preserve the forms of action which are natural to us and whose neglect is chargeable with some of the troubles from which we are now seeking deliverance. The recovery by our Presbyteries of their true functions must be accompanied by an increase of local congregational efficiency, which will bring the great body of our Churches to the level already reached by some which have set the highest standard.

The Present Corporate Task

There must be a sympathetic, intelligent and confident approach by the Church to the problems of education. The education of the present generation has passed too much into the control of forces which are indifferent or hostile to the Christian faith. If Christianity is not true it should be abandoned. But if it is true, as we know it to be true, and the truth without which the world cannot live, then this truth must be carried into every field of human life, into all types of human relationships for the righting of wrong and the achievement of good through the Kingdom of God. And especially must it be brought into the lives of young men and young women that they may find in it the guidance, without which they will surely wander, and the assured answer to their questions as to life's meaning and end.

There must be a more general acceptance by the Church of the principle of stewardship of life and wealth, and acceptance of the Gospel as a trust. Never was there a clearer or more commanding call that the Church advance in her organized corporate work at home and on foreign fields. With resourceful America on one side of the globe, and, on the other, contemplative India and progressive Japan and seething China, there flame before the faces of men the signal fires of a Providential purpose. God has given our Church all the equipment she requires for the fulfillment of her task with respect to that purpose. Now let her rise and go forward.

We call upon the Church to stand with unfaltering loyalty in the abiding truth of the Gospel and with that truth in her keeping and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to advance toward the accomplishment of her Divinely appointed task in the service of our generation by the will of God. We know that such a forward movement is not a matter merely of general appeal or Assembly resolution adopted at the suggestion of a Commission. Not by these, not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit alone can the peace and purity and unity and progress of the Church be assured.

Respectfully submitted:

Ministers
Alfred H. Barr
Hugh T. Kerr
Lapsley A. McAfee
Mark A. Matthews
Harry C. Rogers
William O. Thompson

Ruling Elders
John H. DeWitt
Edward D. Duffield
John M. T. Finney
Cheesman A. Herrick
Nelson H. Loomis
Nathan G.

Moorel

Edgar W. Work
Henry C. Swearingen, Chairman

Robert E. Speer

The Special Commission was discharged with the deep appreciation of the General Assembly

1Mr. Moore signed the Report but dissented in certain particulars from its statements as to the relative power of the General Assembly and the Presbyteries in licensure and ordination. His views were printed with the report as read to the General Assembly.