

# The Blue Banner

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church, Rowlett, Texas / Vol 2 #3 March 1993

## The Pastor's Desk

*Did the PCA lawfully separate from the PCUSA?*

We have received a few requests from readers of Pastor Bacon's book *The Visible Church and The Outer Darkness* to explain how he understands the beginnings of the Presbyterian Church in America to relate to his basic thesis that separation from a true church is rarely justifiable. The question might be phrased somewhat as follows:

Question: Given your position in *Visible Church* that separation is rarely justifiable, how do you view your own denomination's separation from the PCUS in 1973?

Answer: First, let me say that I was not present at the first General Assembly of the PCA (known at that time as the National Presbyterian Church). I have no first-hand knowledge of the event and so I must depend upon the documents produced by that Assembly for my opinion. The primary document, the NPC's *Message*, is reprinted in this issue of *The Blue Banner* in full.

Second, regardless of what the PCA may have done incorrectly or may have left undone, there is no question that the PCA could not presently return to the PCUS. The PCUS has since merged with the UPCUSA to form the PC(USA). In other words, the "parent" church has not become more Reformed, but more apostate in the intervening years.

As *Visible Church* states on page 44, "It is not necessary that we must emulate the apostles down to every particular before separating. Nor is it the case that corrupt church leaders must exactly duplicate the responses of the rulers of the synagogue. What we must demonstrate is the apostles' willingness to withstand every inconvenience before we begin even to speak of separation."

In the National Presbyterian Church's *Message* the claim is made, essentially, that the National Presbyterians are the continuing church. Further, the claim is made that "the decision to separate has come only after long years of struggle and heartache on the part of many of us to return the Church to purity of faith and practice." There may be some who disagree with that statement, but it is impossible to disagree with the principle that before separation, a remnant constituency within the church must avail itself of more modest means of reform. The NPC claimed to have done precisely that.

Later in the same document, the NPC said, "Change in the Presbyterian Church in the United States came as a gradual thing, and its ascendancy in the denomination over a long period of time. We confess that it should not have been

permitted. Views and practices that undermine and supplant the system of doctrine or polity of a confessional Church ought never to be tolerated. A Church that will not exercise discipline will not long be able to maintain pure doctrine or godly practice." Here the assertion was being made that the corruptions in the PCUS were such that the very system of doctrine was undermined and supplanted.

Further, the NPC document asserted that the courts of the PCUS had become heterodox. It had become impossible for the remnant to find relief from the courts of the church. However, when a church repudiates its own constitution and refuses to acknowledge Scripture as the *only* rule of faith and obedience, then it has become a tyrant over the consciences of God's people and no true church at all.

There are some who have expressed disappointment that the PCA has never passed a resolution at the General Assembly level declaring the PCUS, and now the PC(USA), to be apostate. It is true that the PCA has never made such an explicit statement. Yet the founding document does contain statements that imply that those who left the PCUS believed it to be apostate. For example, "We are convinced that our former denomination as a whole, and in its leadership, no longer holds those views regarding the nature and mission of the Church, which we accept as both true and essential."

I freely grant that it would have been much clearer if the document had explained that the deficiencies regarded things essential to the *being* and not simply the *well-being* of the church. Yet it is difficult for me to imagine that anyone would suggest that the PCA should return to the PC(USA) because of a poorly worded sentence.

Even if it were the case that the founders of the PCA misjudged the situation, it was not a single person or even a single church leaving the denomination. There was a mutual communion. These men were not retiring from church life in order to maintain family devotions. They immediately organized themselves according to the scriptural principle of submission to the brethren. They did not leave the PCUS to independency, but bound themselves by covenant

## Contents

<i>Did the PCA separate lawfully?</i>	1
<i>Bibliography: George Gillespie Part II</i>	2
<i>The Ruling Elder by J. Aspinwall Hodge.</i>	4
<i>Dec. 7, 1973 A Message To All Churches Of Jesus Christ Throughout The World From The General Assembly Of The National Presbyterian Church</i>	6

to others of God's people; supporting one another and submitting to the discipline of the broader church.

The PCA has her problems. Some of the problems may even be traceable to the manner in which the PCA was founded. It may be that the PCA began its life unified more by what it stood *against* than by what it stood *for*. It has been twenty-one years since the founding of the PCA. The Presbyterian Church in America will stand or fall-away according to her faithfulness to God's Word. God has removed candlesticks before, and he will no doubt continue to do so in those churches that do not repent and do the first works (Rev. 2:4-5).

Richard Bacon

Note: *The Visible Church & The Outer Darkness* was published by Blue Banner Books last fall. It is still available for \$6.95 postage paid. Make checks payable to FPCR.

## Presbyterian Bibliography

### GEORGE GILLESPIE, PART TWO. A DISPUTE AGAINST THE ENGLISH POPISH CEREMONIES.

In this issue we continue a series on Presbyterian Bibliography begun previously with an article on George Gillespie and his writings. That bibliography was taken from the one prepared for the new edition of the *English Popish Ceremonies*, presently offered by Naphtali Press via a prepublication offer (see the end of this article for details). I now want to examine that book more thoroughly in reviewing the features of the new edition.

#### WORSHIP BATTLES

Throughout the history of the Church, as she has gone through periods of decay, corruption, and apostasy, the battle for purity of worship has been fought many times in many ways. George Gillespie was raised up in his generation to fight the good fight in battling the corrupt worship practices existing in Scotland prior to the Second Reformation. Although the book is from a time long ago, it is important that a new edition of this work be made available in our day. I can't say it any better than the Foreword to the new edition (quoted at length):

#### THE FOREWORD

"Errors and circumstances have compelled many in the Reformed faith to engage over the years in contests for biblical truth. None of these contests has been more frequent or compelling than the struggle for purity of worship. Although these battles were often engaged outside the mainstream of the church's history, there is a renewed interest in this topic in the present generation.

"Now is the time for the successors to those earlier witnesses to bring the debate over the public worship of God out of the wings to center stage. We must join the battle fervently, for the innovators of this generation do not rest: they have reproduced all the expressions of modern entertainment and showmanship in God's worship; they have subjected the institutions and ordinances of God to the rules of expediency, marketing and caprice; they have loosed the church from her biblical mooring.

"How does this generation renew the battle? What establishes an act as lawful worship? Lovers of God's truth must again raise the standard of *sola Scriptura*. [In recent times the application of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* to the worship of God has become known as the *Regulative Principle* of worship.] The Scripture alone is our rule for the worship of God. The Word of God teaches that it is unlawful to change the prescribed forms of worship whether by adding or diminishing (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:29-32). God's royal prerogative to order His worship is therefore the keystone of our defense.

"Those who would pursue this battle in our day will profit from studying the arguments and tactics used by earlier generations. They will profit from having biblical truth confirmed to them, and they will profit from learning what arguments opposers have used in the past. Naphtali Press presents this new edition of George Gillespie's rare classic against human innovation in worship to arm our generation for "the good fight of faith."

"*A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* is an exhaustive defense of God's right to order the institutions of worship in His church. The work first appeared on the eve of the Second Reformation in Scotland. That period of church history is much neglected today. Still, it was a period during which God manifested His providential love for the church as remarkably as during the original Scottish Reformation under Knox.

"When this book first appeared, the author was an unknown man in his early twenties. Despite the author's youth, the arguments of the "learned bishops" fell before his unanswerable assaults. Their defeat was so thorough that the bishops never attempted a reply. Gillespie was master of both his material and his foes. One can truly say that this book marked the end of the theological and biblical controversy.

"As important as this work is as theological literature, it is a seventeenth century polemic. The reader should prepare himself for the literary style of that day. That generation did not satisfy itself in making an assertion and supplying a few "proof texts." They thought it necessary to conquer an error with a multitude of arguments, considering their work only partially done until they had completely eradicated the offense.

"Often, their pursuit of their opponents seems relentless. They multiply arguments and attempt to uncover every possible hiding place an enemy of truth might use. As a result, their works are often much longer than what many would consider sufficient today. Gillespie makes fine distinctions between arguments that many today would not make. Those distinctions result in a degree of repetition (see his Prologue and Order).

"These considerations should not discourage even the hurried twentieth century reader. Significant effort was concentrated on making this edition generally more accessible and usable than any previously published. The patient and diligent reader will find reward for his time.

"God is concerned with us, not merely as individual Christians, but as a body of believers. The church is Christ's witness upon the earth. We should be a people concerned with the church's walk before a watching world. As God calls each of us to sanctification, in like manner, He calls His church to reformation.

"Should the church turn and again honor God's prerogatives, it could herald yet another reformation. Those who

languish today by the rivers of our Babylon (cf. Psalm 137:1) may not live to see our prayers answered. Yet God has promised that when we turn to Him, reformation will come. '[When thou] shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee. . . .' (Deuteronomy 30:2-3). 'Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?' (Malachi 3:7). 'Come and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten and He will bind up' (Hosea 6:1)."

#### THE NEW EDITION

The foreword continues explaining about the new edition:

"A great deal of effort was undertaken to make this edition of Gillespie's *Dispute* useful and accessible to those of us far removed through time and abilities from 17th century theologians. The text is based on the 19th century edition in Gillespie's *Works*. It has been compared, corrected and collated with the first edition of 1637. The text has been revised in so far as possible without marring the author's work, to reflect contemporary spelling, punctuation, and usage. Words or insertions supplied by the editor are in brackets [ ]. Quotations are italicized, while Scripture citations are in quotation marks. The many mistakes introduced by the 19th century editor or printer have been corrected, as well as obvious errors from the first printing. The short Latin phrases or quotes are translated in place, while the longer quotes have the translation in the text, and the original Latin placed in a footnote. There has been some attempt to standardize Gillespie's abbreviated references, and an extensive bibliography has been added, providing full titles and authors for these otherwise rather mystifying footnotes. The pages in the *Dispute* where these books are cited are given in the bibliography as well. Many difficult, archaic or Scottish words are defined within the text, and a brief glossary has been provided. A complete index of Scripture passages cited, and a lengthy subject index are also supplied in this edition. An index of the Section divisions in those chapters with sections is provided for those wishing to cross reference from previous editions of the *Dispute*. An appendix provides a full listing of Gillespie's writings, as well as a reprint of a rare pamphlet from 1638 against the imposition of Laud's service book (see Historical Introduction pp. xix-xx)."

#### THE INTRODUCTIONS

After the Foreword and Table of Contents, there is an excellent historical introduction by Roy Middleton setting Gillespie and the *English Popish Ceremonies (EPC)* in context. It contains a great deal of information from readily and not so readily available sources. The actual text of *EPC* begins with Gillespie's introduction, "To All in the Reformed Churches . . ." This is very good writing, and of a different style of the rest of the work. It is eloquent and witty. The opening section reads much more clearly in the new edition. He says, "But whiles the Church of God, thus disquieted, as well with dangerous alterations, as with doleful altercations, is presented in the theater of this world, and cries out to

beholders, *Have ye no regard, all ye that pass by* (Lam. 1:12)? A pity it is to see the crooked and sinister courses of the greatest part, every man moving his period [*goal*] within the enormous confines of his own exorbitant desires:" Then follows a listing of fourteen types of the "greatest part" of men: The atheistical nullifidian; The sensual Epicurean; The cynical critic; The turn coat temporiser, The disguised Nicodemite, etc., with descriptions of each of varying length. For instance, "The scenical jester plays fast and loose, and can utter anything in sport, but nothing in earnest." "The pragmatical adiaphorist [*Latitudinarian*], with his span-broad faith and ell-broad conscience, does no small harm; the poor pandect [*legal code*] of his plagiarized profession in matters of faith reckons little for all, and in matters of practice all for little." Following this are twelve sections which he calls "wholesome admonitions" to do our Christian duty in contending for purity of God's worship.

In the Prologue and Order Gillespie explains his undertaking this work and why he structured it in the four sections, "Against the Necessity of the Ceremonies," "Against the Expediency," "Against the Lawfulness," and "Against the Indifference of the Ceremonies."

#### THE MAIN SECTIONS

The four sections iterated above contain the body of the work which is the *EPC*. Each of the four parts has nine chapters, whose lengths vary greatly. The longest chapters occur in the third part on the unlawfulness of the ceremonies.

#### THE CEREMONIES ARE NOT NECESSARY

Part One is the shortest section (just over 50 pages in the new edition). Those of Gillespie's day who argued most vehemently for the ceremonies usually began on the high ground, stating that it was necessary for the church to observe the ceremonies, that they could not be left unobserved. This could be seen as an attempt to cut off any debate at the outset, for "necessity" hears of no exceptions. However, Gillespie in several arguments simply shows that this "necessity" does not exist. In chapter one he shows that his opponents do indeed maintain the necessity of the ceremonies. In chapter two he refutes their arguments taken from Acts 15. In chapter three he begins an extended defense based on Christian Liberty which extends through chapter eight. Chapter nine shows "the weakness of some pretenses" used for urging the observance of holidays.

#### THE CEREMONIES ARE NOT EXPEDIENT

In his Order Gillespie says the expediency of a thing hinges on whether it can be done profitably. After opening the argument in the first two chapters, Gillespie proceeds to show that the ceremonies are inexpedient: (1) because they lead the way to greater evils; (2) because they hinder edification; (3) because they are occasions of injury and cruelty; (4) because they harden and confirm Papists in error; (5) because they disturb the peace of the church; (6) because they scandalize the weak. The sixth argument in chapter eight leads to a discussion of twelve propositions concerning scandal, which I believe had a very strong influence on James Durham in his *Concerning Scandal*. Chapter nine is boldly titled, "All the defenses of the ceremonies used to justify them against the scandal imputed to them are confuted."

### THE CEREMONIES ARE NOT LAWFUL

The longest section and bulk of the *EPC* consists in the third part against the lawfulness of the ceremonies. Whereas the "Necessity of the Ceremonies" was the high ground of the ceremonialists, this third section is the high ground of those against the ceremonies. If it is unlawful, it may not be done; end of argument. However, it is not the end of the argument, for those in favor of the ceremonies usually run to the other arguments of expediency (Part Two) or Indifference (Part Four) when they lose the ground of Necessity (Part One) or when faced with the arguments against their lawfulness. The arguments Gillespie uses to prove the unlawfulness of the ceremonies are: (1) They are superstitious; (2) They are monuments to past idolatry; (3) They are the badges of present idolatry; (4) The ceremonies are indeed idolatry; (5) They are unlawful because of the mystical significance attached to them. In chapter six the scripture arguments used to support the ceremonies are shown to be false. In chapter seven Gillespie shows that the lawfulness of the ceremonies cannot be warranted by church law. The argument that the ceremonies become lawful when ordained by civil law is refuted in chapter eight. The pattern of nine chapters in each part is slightly broken in this chapter with four digressions appended before chapter nine. The four subjects which flow from chapter eight deal with: (1) the vocation of men of ecclesiastical order; (2) the convocation and moderation of church synods; (3) the judging of controversies and questions of faith; (4) the power of the keys, and ecclesiastical censures. Chapter nine shows that the ceremonies cannot be urged as lawful from the law of nature.

### THE CEREMONIES ARE NOT INDIFFERENT

The Order prefixed to *EPC*, says that the indifference of something consists in that it can be either done or left undone. In chapter one of this last part Gillespie explains, "If it seems to any that it is a strange method to speak now of indifference, in the end of this dispute, which ought rather to have been handled in the beginning of it, they may consider, that the method is not ours, but our opposites'; for they have been fleeing upon Icarus' wings, and soaring so high, that their wings could not but melt from them: so have they, from necessity fallen down to expediency; from it to lawfulness, and from thence to indifference." Gillespie continues in subsequent chapters by showing the nature of things indifferent and whether there are such things, and the rule by which to measure when something is indeed indifferent, which he proves in several points. In chapter eight he shows how, regardless of any other argument, the ceremonies are not indifferent to the Church of Scotland, which early on took an *oath* against them. In chapter nine he recaps several arguments against the ceremonies' indifference.

### GLOSSARY, AND INDICES.

Several things are added as back matter to the new edition, which I think greatly enhances the usefulness of the book to our day. A glossary of archaic and Scottish terms, index of scripture references, and an index of the chapter sections are useful tools for the reader. The extensive subject index will be particularly useful. One of the key indices is the Bibliographical index. This is not just an index of all the references Gillespie makes throughout the work (footnoted or not). The

original 17th century editions had strange abbreviated references, which will mystify most readers today (these were maintained in the 19th edition, and in a few instances errors were made). These have all been researched and the full name of the author provided, when he lived and his occupation (German Reformed divine, English Puritan divine, etc.) as well as a full title of the book referenced. This is very useful considering there are over 1100 citations Gillespie makes throughout *EPC*.

### APPENDIX.

Two items are contained in an appendix. One is the full listing of the Writings of George Gillespie which formed a part of the previous article in *The Blue Banner* (v.2#1-2). The other item is a first time reprint of a rare pamphlet by Gillespie entitled, *Reasons for which the Service Book Urged Upon Scotland Ought to be Refused*. Although short, it is important as the second publication of Gillespie. It is a concise statement against the imposition of Laud's Service Book.

### A NEW EDITION

A great deal of effort has been put into making this new edition of George Gillespie's *English Popish Ceremonies* useful to the debate over worship practices in our day. A 20th or 21st century statement needs to be undertaken to embrace the battle for the purity of God's worship in our day. In the meantime the republication of classic defenses from our Reformed heritage will equip us for that good fight. That is the hope I have for the *EPC*.

Christopher Coldwell

This new edition is currently available on a prepublication offer as follows:

*A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, by George Gillespie. 6 x 9 format, hard cover, Smyth sewn in a distinctive binding and dust jacket. 592 pp. Extensive subject, Scripture, and bibliographical indices. Historical introduction. Limited printing. Retail, 49.95. **Prepub: \$39.95 postage paid.** Order from Naphtali Press, P O Box 141084, Dallas, TX 75214, and make checks payable to Naphtali Press.

---

## The Ruling Elder

The following, by Rev. J. Aspinwall Hodge, is from his *What is Presbyterian Law as Defined by The Church Courts?* ... 1903

### When Was This Office Introduced Into The Church?

It has been the permanent office in the Church under all dispensations, even under the Abrahamic (see Genesis 24:2; 50:7; Exodus 3:16; 4:29-30; 12:21; 18:12; Deuteronomy 5:23; Psalm 107:32; etc.). Under the Mosaic ritual the elders were the recognized representatives of the people. They were systematically arranged into courts having various jurisdictions, and the highest court of seventy Elders was a court of appeal (Exodus 18:21-25; Numbers 11:16, 25; Exodus 24:1). These elders and courts are frequently referred to in the after

history. When the synagogues were established (the date of which is uncertain) these elders were connected with the different synagogues, and were called the rulers of the synagogue (Matthew 5:22; 26:3; Luke 7:3; Acts 4:8, 23; 6:12; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15). At first the converts to Christianity were made from Jews, and later from Gentiles who were accustomed to the polity of the synagogues, which were established in almost every city in the Roman empire. Often a whole synagogue became a Christian church, retaining its form of government. The other churches were formed in like manner (Acts 14:23; 20:17; First Timothy 5:1, 17, 19; James 5:14; First Peter 5:1, 5).

Many of the fathers speak of elders as distinct from Ministers, ruling as representative of people. The Waldensian and other ancient churches which were regarded by Rome as heretical, but which maintained pure doctrine, worship and polity, have always retained this office. It is adopted by almost all the Reformed churches.

This office has been understood, by a great part of the Protestant Reformed churches, to be designated in the Holy Scriptures, by the title of governments; and of those who rule well, but do not labor in the word and doctrine (First Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:7, 8; First Timothy 5:17). It is the continuation in the Christian church of the office so well known in the Old Testament. "The whole congregation" and the "Elders of the congregation" are constantly interchanged as meaning the same, as in Leviticus 4:13, 15. The elders were the representatives of the people, and as such exercised the prerogative of ruling. This principle of ruling by representatives and the office of elders were introduced into the Christian church from the synagogue by the Apostles.<sup>1</sup>

The "Form of Government" of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland says: "As there were in the Jewish Church Elders of the people joined with the Priests and Levites in the government of the Church, so Christ, who hath instituted government and governors ecclesiastical in the Church, hath furnished some in his Church, besides the ministers of the Word, with gifts of government, and with commission to exercise the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the Minister in the government of the Church. Which Officers Reformed churches commonly call Elders."

#### **Is This Office Distinct From That of The Ministry?**

The quotation above from the standard of the Church of Scotland declares the office to be distinct. This is the doctrine of our own "Form of Government." They have different qualifications, are chosen by different bodies. Elders are ordained by a Minister, and Ministers by the Presbytery.<sup>2</sup> Elders are subject to the Session, the Minister to the Presbytery. Elders cannot take part in the ordination of Ministers,<sup>3</sup> nor can they administer the sacraments. Elders, called to the ministry, must be reordained. Ministers are not permitted to

1. It is common for some older Presbyterian authors to speak of Ruling Elders as "representatives of the people." We understand this to mean that they are elected (and even nominated) by the membership of the church. Ultimately, however, the Ruling Elder (just as every other office in the church) is a representative of Christ. It is Christ's authority and not a popular authority that is exercised in the office.

2. In the Presbyterian Church in America, Ruling Elders are ordained by the session of the particular church with the Minister presiding (*Book of Church Order* 24-5).

serve as Elders except in emergencies on missionary-ground. In the Church of Scotland, ministers are often chosen by Presbyteries to represent them in the General Assembly, but it is not on the supposition that Ministers and Elders are of the same office.

#### **What Are Their Duties?**

"To exercise government and discipline in conjunction with Pastors or Ministers" in the different courts of the Church, and to assist the Pastor in the oversight, instruction and visitation of the people, "studying the peace, unity and purity of the Church." If there be no Pastor, for the time being the government and discipline devolve upon them, and under the direction of Presbytery they must see that the pulpit is supplied from Sabbath to Sabbath; and if this be impracticable, they must themselves conduct the service, "select the portions of Scripture and of the other books to be read;" — "works of such approved divines as the Presbytery within whose bounds they are, may recommend and they may be able to procure." In 1894 the preparation of a Manual for Elders was recommended by the Assembly, and in 1897 it was published by the Board of Publication.

#### **By Whom Are They Chosen?**

"They are representatives of the people, chosen by them in the mode most approved and in use in that congregation." In 1822 the Assembly said that "it would be most desirable to have the communicants only as the electors of Ruling Elders, yet as it appears to be the custom in some of the churches in the Presbyterian connection to allow this privilege to others," the election by the whole congregation should not be considered void. In 1830 it decided that unbaptized persons could not vote for elders. In 1855 the Old School Assembly judged "it most consonant to our 'Form of Government' that communicants only should vote for Ruling Elders." In 1897 the Assembly declared "that only communicants in good standing are qualified voters at the election of Ruling Elders and Deacons."

#### **Who May Be Chosen?**

"In all cases the persons elected must be male members in full communion of the church in which they are to exercise their office." They must be in good standing. A communicant under discipline cannot be elected. Nor can one who does not accept the teaching of the Church in regard to infant baptism.

An unemployed Minister in the congregation is not a member of a particular church, and is therefore not eligible.

#### **In What Church May He Exercise His Office?**

Only in the congregation in which he has been elected, and in those courts above the Session to which he is sent as delegate. An Elder without charge has no jurisdiction. Nor can he hold office in two different churches at the same time.

#### **Must They Be Ordained?**

"The Minister shall proceed to set apart the candidate by prayer to the office of Ruling Elder." In 1868 the New School

3. The Presbyterian Church in America does allow Ruling Elders to participate in the ordination of a Minister (*Book of Church Order* 21 ).

Assembly declared that an Elder elect cannot sit in the Session or exercise his office until he is ordained. This ordination may be either by prayer, or by prayer with the laying on of hands by the Minister.<sup>4</sup> It is left to the discretion of each church which method to adopt, but as the imposition of hands "is plainly in accordance with apostolic example, it is the opinion of the Assembly (in 1833) that it is proper and lawful."

#### To What Court Is He Responsible?

To the Session, being a member of the particular church. When, however, the only Elder or Elders of the church be accused, the Presbytery is the court to cite and try. When an Elder has become incapable of serving the church to edification, the Session may take action with his concurrence, or by advice of Presbytery. In 1869 the Old School Assembly decided that the Presbytery has power to visit particular churches, to inquire into their state, and to order whatever pertains to their spiritual welfare, without being requested by the Session, even to declaring that an Elder shall cease to act.

#### Is The Office Perpetual?

"The Offices of Ruling Elder and Deacon are both perpetual, and cannot be laid aside at pleasure." Nor can an Elder be divested of his office but by deposition. But he may, under certain circumstances, cease to be an acting Ruling Elder.

#### How May An Elder Cease To Be An Acting Elder?

- (1.) By death.
- (2.) When "by age or infirmity he becomes incapable of performing the duties of his office" with his consent or by advice of Presbytery the Session may relieve him.
- (3.) "Though chargeable with neither heresy nor immorality, he may become unacceptable, in his official capacity, to a majority of the congregation," with his concurrence or by advice of Presbytery the session may take order, stating the reasons of their action.
- (4.) If guilty of heresy or immorality, he may be deposed after trial before Session.
- (5.) He may and should resign if he cannot acquiesce in the decisions of the superior courts.
- (6.) By advice of a superior court he may resign to promote the peace of the church. "The resignation should be to the Session; and it will take effect when accepted."
- (7.) "His dismissal by letter from a church terminates his official relation to that church." So the New School Assembly decided in 1867. This is the teaching of "Form of Government," ch. xiii., section. ii., and is implied by the order of the Old School Assembly in 1856, which requires an election and installation in the church to which he is dismissed, before he can act as an Elder there.
- (8.) He may be removed by a superior court.
- (9.) By the expiration of his term of service, when he has been elected to exercise his functions for a limited time, according to section viii. of chapter xiii

#### May An Elder Without Charge Sit In Church Courts?

Not in Session. If elected on the term-eldership scheme, after his term has expired his advice may be sought by the Session (but he cannot vote), and he is "entitled to represent

4. In the Presbyterian Church in America, this is by the "laying on of the hands of the Session" (*Book of Church Order* 24-5).

that particular church in the higher judicatories when appointed by the Session or Presbytery."

#### Does Restoration To Church Privileges of an Elder Who Has Been Suspended From Them Restore To Office?

"The two things are distinct." The removal of suspension from the communion does not restore to office "without a special and express act of the Session for that purpose with the acquiescence of the Church." Yet the Assembly decided in 1893 that the removal of suspension from office only, restored to the active duties of Elder in that congregation without further action.

If he has been dismissed to another church, and returns to the church in which he was formerly an Elder, he must be reelected and installed, as his dismissal terminated his relation to that church. This is plain from the "Form of Government" and the usage of the Church.

## A MESSAGE

### TO ALL CHURCHES OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE WORLD FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Greeting: Grace, Mercy, and Peace be multiplied upon you!

As the National Presbyterian Church takes her place among the family of Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, we take this opportunity to address all Churches by way of a testimony.

We gather as a true branch of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We affirm our allegiance to Him as the sole Head of the Church and the sole Law-giver in Zion. We remember that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against His Church.

The constituency of this new denomination for the most part have separated themselves from the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The decision to separate has come only after long years of struggle and heartache on the part of many of us to return the Church to purity of faith and practice. Principle and conviction entered into that decision, reached only after much soul searching and earnest prayer. We have reluctantly accepted the necessity of separation, deeming loyalty to Christ to take precedence over relationship to any earthly institution, even to a visible branch of the Church of Christ.

In much prayer and with great sorrow and mourning we have concluded that to practice the principle of purity in the Church visible, we must pay the price of separation. We desire to elaborate upon these principles and convictions that have brought us to that decision.

We are convinced that our former denomination as a whole, and in its leadership, no longer holds those views regarding the nature and mission of the Church, which we accept as both true and essential. When we judged that there was no human remedy for this situation, and in the absence of evidence that God would intervene, we were compelled to raise a new banner bearing the historic, Scriptural faith of our forefathers.

First, we declare the basis of the authority for the Church. According to the Christian faith, the Bible is the Word of God written and carries the authority of its divine Author. We believe the Bible itself asserts that it has been given by

inspiration, or more literally, has been "God-breathed" (Second Timothy 3:16). "No prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (Second Peter 1:21). We declare, therefore, that the Bible is the very Word of God, so inspired in the whole and in all its parts, as in the original autographs, to be the inerrant Word of God. It is, therefore, the only infallible and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice.

This was the position of the founding fathers of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. We affirm with them in their "Address to All Churches" the application of this principle to the Church and her mission: "*Let it be distinctly borne in mind that the only rule of judgment is the written Word of God. The Church knows nothing of the intuitions of reason or the deductions of philosophy, except those reproduced in the Sacred Canon. She has a positive constitution in the Holy Scriptures, and has no right to utter a single syllable upon any subject except as the Lord puts words in her mouth. She is founded, in other words upon express revelation. Her creed is an authoritative testimony of God, and not speculation, and what she proclaims she must proclaim with the infallible certitude of faith, and not with the hesitating assent of an opinion.*"

We have called ourselves "Continuing" Presbyterians because we seek to continue the faith of the founding fathers of that Church. Deviations in doctrine and practice from historic Presbyterian positions as evident in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, result from accepting other sources of authority, and from making them coordinate or superior to the divine Word. A diluted theology, a gospel tending towards humanism, an unbiblical view of marriage and divorce, the ordination of women, financing of abortion on socio-economic grounds, and numerous other non-Biblical positions are all traceable to a different view of Scripture from that we hold and that which was held by the Southern Presbyterian forefathers.

Change in the Presbyterian Church in the United States came as a gradual thing, and its ascendancy in the denomination, over a long period of time. We confess that it should not have been permitted. Views and practices that undermine and supplant the system of doctrine or polity of a confessional Church ought never to be tolerated. A Church that will not exercise discipline will not long be able to maintain pure doctrine or godly practice.

When a denomination will not exercise discipline and its courts have become heterodox or disposed to tolerate error, the minority finds itself in the anomalous position of being submissive to a tolerant and erring majority. In order to proclaim truth and to practice the discipline which they believe obedience to Christ requires, it then becomes necessary for them to separate. This is the exercise of discipline in reverse. It is how we view our separation.

Some of our brethren have felt that the present circumstances do not yet call for such a remedy. They remain in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. We trust they will continue to contend for the faith, though our departure makes their position more difficult. We express to them our hope that God will bless their efforts, and that there may come a genuine spiritual awakening in the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

We trust that our departure may cause those who control and direct the programs and policies of the Presbyterian Church

in the United States to reexamine their own position in the light of the Word. Our prayer is that God may use this movement to promote spiritual awakening, not only in the new Church, but also in that from which we have separated. If in the providence of God, such were to occur, we would gladly acknowledge that the grounds for separation and division would have to be reassessed.

We declare also that we believe the system of doctrine found in God's Word to be the system known as the Reformed Faith. We are committed without reservation to the Reformed Faith as set forth in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It is our conviction that the Reformed Faith is not sectarian, but an authentic and valid expression of Biblical Christianity. We believe it is our duty to seek fellowship and unity with all who profess this faith. We particularly wish to labor with other Christians committed to this theology.

We further renew and reaffirm our understanding of the nature and mission of the Church. We have declared that Christ is King and only Lawgiver in Zion. He has established the Church. His Church is a spiritual reality. As such it is made up of all the elect from all ages. This spiritual entity is manifested visibly upon the earth.

The Church visible is found wherever there are those who profess the true faith together with their children. As an assembly of those who do so profess this faith, we have established this denomination in the belief that it is a true branch of the Christian Church.

We believe the Church in its visible aspect is still essentially a spiritual organism. As such, its authority, motivation and power come from Christ, the Head, who is seated at the right hand of God. He has given us His rulebook for the Church, namely, the Word of God written. We understand the task of the Church to be primarily declarative and ministerial, not legislative or magisterial. It is our duty to set forth what He has given us in His Word and not to devise our own message or legislate our own laws.

We declare that the ultimate purpose of the Church is to glorify God. We believe that this includes giving top priority to Christ's Great Commission. We reaffirm the substance of the position taken by the founding fathers of our former Church regarding the mission of the Church.

We desire distinctly and deliberately to inscribe on our Church's banner, as she now unfurls it to the world, in immediate subservience to the authority of our Lord as Head and King of the Church His last command: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." We regard this as the great end of our organization; and obedience to it, as the indispensable condition of our Lord's promised presence. It is the one great comprehensive objective, a proper conception of whose grandeur and magnitude is the only thing which under the constraining love of Christ, can ever sufficiently arouse our energies and develop our resources so as to cause us to carry on with that vigor and efficiency, which true loyalty to our Lord demands, those other agencies necessary to our internal growth and prosperity at home.

As a Church, we consciously seek to return to the historic Presbyterian view of Church government. We reaffirm in the words of that earlier 'Address to All Churches' the following:

*“The only thing that will be at all peculiar to us is the manner in which we shall attempt to discharge our duty. In almost every department of labor, except the pastoral care of congregations, it has been usual for the Church to resort to societies more or less closely connected with itself, and yet logically and really distinct. It is our purpose to rely upon the regular organs of our government, and executive agencies directly and immediately responsible to them. We wish to make the Church, not merely a superintendent, but an agent. We wish to develop the idea that the congregation of believers, as visibly organized is the very society, or corporation which is divinely, called to do the work of the Lord. We shall, therefore, endeavor to do what has never been adequately done — bring out the energies of our Presbyterian system of government. From the session to the assembly, we shall strive to enlist all our courts, as courts, in every department of Christian effort. We are not ashamed to confess that we are intensely Presbyterian. We embrace all other denominations in the arms of Christian fellowship and love, but our own scheme of government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown in the Mount, and by God’s grace, we purpose to put its efficiency to the test.”*

As this new member of the family of Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ comes into being, we necessarily profess the biblical doctrine of the unity of all who are in Christ. We know that what happens in one portion of His Church affects all of the Body of Christ. We covet the prayers of all Christians that we may witness and serve responsibly. We desire to pursue

peace and charity with love towards fellow Christians throughout the world.

To the Presbyterian Church in the United States, in particular, we express our continued love and concern. You are our spiritual mother, in your arms we were nurtured, under your ordinances we were baptized, in your courts we were ordained to serve our Lord and King, and to your visible organization we thought we had committed our lives. We sever these ties only with deepest regret and sorrow. We hope that our going may in some way recall you to that historic witness which we cherish as our common heritage.

We greet all believers in an affirmation of the bonds of Christian brotherhood. We invite into ecclesiastical fellowship all who maintain our faith and order.

We now commend ourselves to God and the Word of His power. We devoutly pray that the Church catholic may be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit, and that she may speedily be stirred up to take no rest until the Lord accomplishes His Kingdom, making Zion a praise in the whole earth.

December 7, 1973 (This Address was signed by the individual delegates to the First General Assembly).

---

## **THE BLUE BANNER**

---

First Presbyterian Church Rowlett, Texas  
 Session: Pastor Richard Bacon, Elder David SeeKamp  
 Blue Banner Editor: Christopher Coldwell

---

### *The Blue Banner*

A Publication of  
 First Presbyterian Church  
 P O Box 141084  
 Dallas, TX 75214

**Place  
 Postage  
 Here**

## **Contents**

*Did the PCA separate lawfully?* **1**

*Bibliography: George Gillespie Part II* **2**

*The Ruling Elder by J. Aspinwall Hodge.* **4**

*Dec. 7, 1973* **6**

*A Message To All Churches Of Jesus Christ Throughout The World From The General Assembly Of The National Presbyterian Church*

---

- *The Ruling Elder* by J. A. Hodge. — p. 4.
- Presbyterian Bibliography: George Gillespie Part II – pp. 2.
- *Did the PCA Lawfully Separate from the PCUSA?* — p. 1.