

Survey of Contemporary Presbyterianism in America

I. Introduction

A. Groups Surveyed

1. Those outside PCUSA
2. Basically conservative

B. Already Covered (previous lectures)

1. PCA
2. Evangelical Presbyterian Church
3. ECO

II. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

A. History

1. Group formed under J. Gresham Machen in 1936
2. Goal: A true Presbyterian church under Westminster discipline
3. Significant split with Bible Presbyterians (1937)
 - a. OPC favoring “Christian liberty” in alcohol & tobacco vs. BPC abstinence
 - b. Eschatology
 - 1) Argument: Over Dispensationalism (OPC view) or premillennialism (BPC view)
 - 2) OPC: An amillennial church that allows premillennial dissent
 - c. Missions through a denominational committee (OPC) or a board (IBPFM—BPC view)
 - d. Main identity: confessional (OPC) or American evangelical (BPC)
4. Westminster Seminary seen as unofficial school
5. Memberships
 - a. Rejected NAE in 1943 because of (1) weak confessional basis and (2) violation of church order (mission work should be church-based)
 - b. Withdrew in 1988 from Reformed Ecumenical Synod because of liberalism
 - c. Failed efforts to merge w/ PCA

B. Character

1. Considered doctrinally rigorous
2. Confessional
 - a. Unremitting Reformed identity
 - b. Stress on church & sacraments—God’s work essentially through church channels
 - c. Tend toward less stress on evangelical conversion and piety and more on sacramental ministry
3. Has remained relatively small

III. Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC)

A. History

1. Founded by Carl McIntire and J. Oliver Buswell from OPC in 1937
2. Tension between “Presbyterian” and “Fundamentalist”
3. Evangelical Presbyterian Church split off (1956)
 - a. Issues
 - 1) Split over presbyterial control vs. McIntire control
 - 2) Protest against McIntire’s political involvement
 - 3) McIntire charged EPC not separatist
 - b. Majority of BPC went into EPC
 - c. Notable members: J. Oliver Buswell, Francis Schaeffer

- d. EPC later merged w/ Covenanter group → Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (1965)
 - e. Eventually merged with PCA
- 4. Later Divisions
 - a. Split into two “BPCs” in 1984
 - 1) Ironically, McIntire accused of compromise
 - 2) Healed after McIntire’s death
 - b. Faith Presbytery, BPC, broke in 2008 over relations w/ OPC
- B. Character
 - 1. One of few Presbyterian groups to call itself “Fundamentalist”
 - 2. In contrast to OPC, BPC is a premillennial church allowing amillennial liberty
 - 3. Organizations
 - a. Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM)
 - b. Presbyterian Missionary Union (PMU)
 - c. Western Reformed Theological Seminary (Tacoma, WA)
 - d. Synod-approved but not synod-controlled
- C. Carl McIntire
 - 1. Left Princeton w/ Machen for Westminster
 - 2. Formed Fundamentalist Counterpoints
 - a. WCC → International Council of Christian Churches
 - b. NCC → American Council of Christian Churches
 - 3. Vigorous anti-Communist
 - 4. Talented expositor, when so inclined
 - 5. Institutions
 - a. Newspaper: *Christian Beacon*
 - b. Schools: Faith Seminary, Shelton College
 - 6. Reputedly difficult to work with
- IV. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP)
 - A. History
 - 1. Roots in Scottish secessions
 - 2. Stayed out of 19th-century reunions
 - 3. Has been predominantly southern
 - B. Character
 - 1. Generally conservative theologically
 - 2. Main school: Erskine College & Seminary
 - a. Tightened up seminary after questions on inerrancy, etc. in 1970s-80s
 - b. More recently efforts to shore up doctrinal/moral standards at school but frustrated by school faculty & students and the accrediting agency
 - 3. Allows women deacons
- V. Free Presbyterian Church of North America
 - A. History
 - 1. Originally a mission work of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster
 - 2. Became an independent presbytery in May 2005
 - 3. Some 20+ congregations—major congregations in Toronto and in Greenville, SC
 - 4. Organizations
 - a. *Let the Bible Speak* radio program and magazine

- b. Geneva Reformed Theological Seminary (Greenville, SC)
- B. Distinctives
1. Open on baptism—individual liberty over mode and subjects
 2. Open on eschatology—Requires only a belief in the Second Coming
 3. Total abstinence on alcohol
 4. Use of Authorized Version in public services
 5. Belief in head coverings for women in services