

HISTORICAL SURVEY
of
The First Church of God
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Prepared for Denominational Distinctions
(Dr. Mason)

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November 12, 1959

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DENOMINATIONAL DISTINCTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

It is most unlikely that a member of the average church would go from place to place gathering material, and then sit down and search the books for knowledge on the denomination with which one is affiliated. I certainly am no exception, and therefore am very grateful for the opportunity of tracing my denominational history back to its origin.

As I have traced the history of the local church from its origin to its present status, many pertinent facts were brought to my attention by way of doctrine, church polity, ordination requirements, financial programs, missionary programs, etc.

I have tried to get the most important distinctions in the denominations and then evaluate them in light of personal convictions, experience, and the Word of God. I might seem to be a little critical when evaluating the Church of God doctrine, but I see no reason to brush past important truths of God's Word. Therefore, I have purposely chosen to be dogmatic in some instances.

The topics that will be discussed in this term paper are: the Main Denominational Family (the Reformed Church), the Branch Denominational Family (The First Church of God of North America), and the Local Church (The First Church of God, Lancaster, Penna.).

The history of the First Church of God of North America can be traced from the denomination of the German Reformed Church back to Zwingli, Calvin, and the great Reformation. The main branch of the First Church of God is the Reformed Church.

History of the Reformed Church

In discussing the history of the Reformed Church, I would like to refer specifically to Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin in their respective order.

The Reformation in German Switzerland is dated from the year 1519 when Ulrich Zwingli at Zurich began his reformatory preaching. He agreed with Luther in much, though there were differences, and in that age they were greatly magnified. Zwingli was very much devoted to the humanists of his day, whereas Luther was not. He also highly esteemed Swiss patriotism, whereas Luther did not confuse the Gospel with the fatherland.

The Reformation in the Swiss cities began by the eating of meat in Lent. Though Zwingli himself did not eat, he justified publicly those who did so. Then priests began to marry, mainly because clerical concubinage was a prevalent system in the Diocese of Constance. Zwingli, himself, judged that out of one thousand priests, monks, and nuns scarcely a single one was chaste. Each of these issues introduced at Zurich was debated and decided by the Rath, a representative assembly of the town.

The great disputations were conducted in Zurich to examine the questions which Zwingli had raised. They included images, relics, food laws, and clerical marriage, the Mass and the use of organs in the

church services. The outcome of these disputations was the abolition of the Mass in Zurich, the interment of the relics of the saints, the removal of images, the smashing of the organ in the cathedral, permission to eat meat in Lent, and permission for priests to marry. Another of the great disputations was the acceptance or the rejection of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. Zwingli rejected it.

Soon Zurich came to be a theocracy. Because of this, friction and violence arose in the boundary lands between Catholics and the Reformed. "The Reformed captured and executed a Catholic persecutor. The Catholics saw war in the offing and countered by making a military alliance with the traditional enemy of the Swiss, the House of Hapsburg. The troops of the Reformed then set out against the Catholic bloc."¹

Though the battle never took place at that time, for on the battlefield the troops made peace, a battle did take place in the near future. Luther believed that the sword should never be used in the defense of religion, but Zwingli was convinced that the sword was the only answer to religious reformation. The result of the battle of Kappel left on the field five hundred of the men of Zurich, and among them twenty-six members of the Town Council and twenty-five of the pastors, including Ulrich Zwingli.

The Reform in Switzerland was not exterminated. Where it was already established it was left alone. The Catholic minorities were not to be disturbed in Protestant lands, and Protestant minorities were not to be tolerated in Catholic lands. From this time forth, the Swiss Federation was marked by two religions.

As the Reformed Church was evident in Zwinglianism, it was even more evident in Calvinism. Both forms were closely related geographically,

1. R.H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 90.

the one originating in German and the other in French Switzerland.

"Calvinism bred a race of heroes".² Their commission was to establish a theocracy which would be a type of "Holy Commonwealth". The purpose of the Commonwealth was that each member should make the glory of God his sole concern. To carry out this purpose, Calvin needed a place, and he found it in Geneva. The Reform started when the Bernese stabled their horses in the Catholic churches and put images of the saints down the wells. Preaching followed these acts of reform. Finally Geneva became a "Holy Commonwealth" by the expulsion of dissenters and the inclusion of the conformists.

From Geneva Calvinism spread into France, Holland, England, Scotland, and New England, and though these lands could not produce the pattern of Geneva as such, Scotland and England came very near to it.

Approximately two centuries later the Reformed Church appeared in the United States. In 1793 the coetus of the Reformed Churches of Pennsylvania was transformed into a synod. Having been a church that was subordinate to and dependent on the Reformed Church of the Netherlands in Europe, it was now an independent body.

The first meeting of what proved to be the synod was held at Lancaster, April 27, 1793. The synod took the following action on its relations to the mother church in Holland: They transmitted only a letter and not the proceedings to the church in Holland. It also adopted its own constitution.

There were two main points on which the Pennsylvania church and the Holland church disagreed. They were the right of ordination, which the Fathers in Holland were slow to grant, and education. The synod

2. Ibid., p. 17.

wanted their young ministers to be well educated, but the Holland church felt differently. Soon the separation took place.

It wasn't until 1804 in Philadelphia when the first appearance of trouble occurred among the Pennsylvania church. The difficulty began as the German families became more English and desired English services because of the difficulty of understanding German. The problem could not be solved and a division in the churches throughout Pennsylvania resulted.

The Doctrinal Distinctives

"Every other Christian church has some common center of union, and its members are connected together by some common bond of doctrine and discipline. But this is far from being the case of the Reformed church, whose several branches are neither united by the same system of doctrine, nor by the same mode of worship, nor yet by the same form of government. It is farther to be observed, that this church does not require from its ministers either uniformity in their private sentiments, or in their public doctrine; but permits them to explain in different ways several doctrines of no small moment, provided that the great and fundamental principles of Christianity, and the practical precepts of the divine religion, be maintained in their original purity. This great community, therefore, may be properly considered as an ecclesiastical body composed of several churches, that vary, more or less, from each other in their form and constitution; but which are preserved, however, from anarchy and schisms, by a general spirit of equity and toleration, that runs through the whole system, and renders variety of opinion consistent with fraternal union."³

Though the interpretations of certain doctrines may vary, the

3. Rev. Lewis Mayer, History of the German Reformed Church, p.23.

Reformed Church holds to a basic doctrine. In its doctrinal position, the Reformed Church is mainly Calvinistic and accepts the faith that is summarized in the Apostles' Creed. The standards of its doctrine are the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1562), and the Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19). The central theme of its doctrine is that salvation is through Christ's substitutionary death. It also emphasizes the primacy of God and His power in the human life.

The Reformed Church observes the festivals of Christmas, Good-Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Whitsuntide, in commemoration of the birth, the passion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles.

Like the Lutheran, the Reformed church considers the Lord's day a sacred season, set apart for the performance of the ordinary public worship of God, and deriving all its sacredness from the service to which it is appointed.

The Reformed Church also admits the use of a liturgy in the worship of God and the administration of the sacraments.

The Polity Distinctives

The Polity of the Reformed Church is essentially Presbyterian for it holds the principle of the parity of all ordained ministers. The governing body of the church is made up of elders, deacons and the pastor, who is always president. The elders have the responsibility of guiding the spiritual life of the church, and the deacons are in charge of the benevolences. They generally meet and act as one body. A number of churches in a limited area are grouped into a classis, which has immediate supervision of the churches and the ministry, and is composed of all the ministers of the area and an elder from each consistory.

"Classes are grouped into particular synods, of which there are five, meeting annually and made up of an equal number of ministers and elders from each classis, and supervising the planning and programing of the churches within the area. The highest court of the church is the general synod, representing and consisting of delegations of an equal number of ministers and elders from each classis. The size of the delegation, however, varies in accordance with the size of classis. The general synod directs the missionary and educational work through its various boards. The president of the general synod, elected by the delegates, holds office for 1 year."⁴

There is also a special kind of church organization in the Reformed Church called the Collegiate Church (college of churches), which is a collection of worshipping congregations controlled by a single consistory.

The Church Ordinances

The two recognized ordinances of the Reformed Church are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Most of the Reformed churches sprinkle when baptising and hold to the doctrine of infant baptism.

The Ordination Requirements

The ordination requirements for a minister amounts to nothing but a few basic questions, which, in my opinion, are not very basic. The questions usually asked are:

1. "Are you persuaded that you are called of God to the office of the Christian Ministry, and do you trust in the grace of the Hely Spirit to aid you in fulfilling the duties of your office?"

4. Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations, p. 185.

2. Do you accept the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God and the ultimate rule of Christian faith and practice; do you acknowledge the doctrinal standards of the Evangelical and Reformed Church as authoritative interpretations of the essential truth taught in the Holy Scriptures?
3. Do you promise to exercise your ministry with diligence and with due regard for the laws and ordinances of the Church?⁵

As one can readily recognize, these requirements allow plenty of room for unbelievers to enter the ministry.

Evaluation of the Reformed Church

One of the characteristics of the Reformed Church that I cannot agree with is the disunion in its doctrinal system. One local church may believe one thing and another local church believe something different. Their disunion in the polity of the church is just as bad. I believe that a denomination should be more united in its doctrine and polity.

I cannot go along with their belief in infant baptism. This was one of the main reasons why Winebrenner, the founder of the First Church of God of North America, was dismissed from the Reformed denomination.

I believe that the polity of the Reformed Church is very good, if only every church of that denomination would use it as their form of government.

Having lived near the Lancaster Theological Seminary and having seen the lives of the students there, I have no great opinion of the Reformed teaching. The lives of many students are not outstanding Christian examples of the New Testament teaching. I believe that this

5. Book of Worship - General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, p.315.

is a direct result of the disunion in the Church's doctrine.

One of the greatest things that I disagree with is the exclusion of the Christian experience in the ordination requirements. It seems to me that the Church believes that everyone who says he has been called by God to preach is a sure Christian. I don't believe that this is right. Every individual should be able to give a Scriptural basis as to why he believes that he is a Christian. When one excludes this pertinent point in the ordination service, he rests on dangerous grounds of getting an unsaved man into the ministry preaching about someone whom the individual does not personally know, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am certainly glad that the Lord raised up a man like John Winebrenner to carry on the message of salvation in a most needed time.

History of the First Church of God of North America

When considering the history of the Churches of God, one must imagine himself in eastern Pennsylvania approximately a hundred and thirty five years ago.

As the history of the Churches of God is related in this paper, three points will be brought to the mind of the reader. They are: the life of the founder, John Winebrenner; the time of the break; and the reasons for the breaking away from the main branch.

In the Glade Valley in Frederick County, Maryland a man by the name of Philip Winebrenner farmed his two hundred acre farm, located eight miles from the town of Frederick. On March 25, 1797, John Winebrenner was born. His parents were members of the Glades Reformed Church. Though his father was satisfied with the formalism which characterized

the religion of the Reformed Church at that time, his mother looked after the spiritual teachings of the Word.

Ever since the days of his early boyhood, John Winebrenner desired to be a minister. Though his father wanted him to go to school to learn medicine or to go to Baltimore and become a merchant, Winebrenner's mother had desired that he become a minister. In this respect, John Winebrenner grew closer to his mother than to his father.

John Winebrenner received some of his education at Dickinson College, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania expecting to graduate in 1816, but the college was closed from 1816 to 1821. In 1817 he went to Philadelphia where he received three years of theological training under the Rev. Samuel Helfenstein. It was during this three year period of his life that he received something that was far greater than theological training. He received the regenerating grace of Jesus Christ. He attended to the formalities of the Reformed Church such as christening in infancy, catechism, confirmation, etc. He even received the training of the church and of the different schools, but he was still lacking something in his life. He could not quite put his finger on the missing link, until Easter Sunday, April 6, 1817. Under the ministry of his teacher, Rev. Samuel Helfenstein, John Winebrenner found that priceless possession for which he had long been yearning. This day Jesus Christ became more than a historical figure. Jesus Christ was now his personal Savior. In an article prepared for a book called "The Testimony of a Hundred Witnesses", compiled by Rev. J. F. Weishaapel, and published by John F. Weishaapel, Jr., in 1858, Winebrenner says,

"I was born in Frederick county, Maryland, on the 25th of March, 1797. My parents followed the occupation of farming, and both were

members of the German Reformed Church. I received my English and classical education in the Glades school, in Frederick city, Dickinson College, and Philadelphia, under Dr. Samuel Helfenstein, of that city. I read and studied theology for three years. I was set apart, and solemnly ordained to the office of the Christian ministry, in the fall of 1820, at a Synodical meeting in Hagerstown, Maryland. From thence, I proceeded to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where I was settled as pastor of the German Reformed charge.

I was, parentally and providentially, restrained from the paths of vice and immorality. And as my mother trained me, from youth up, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and instructed me in the great principles and duties of religion, I was graciously brought to feel my obligations to God at an early age, and my mind was deeply exercised on the subject of my soul's salvation. These convictions, however, would sometimes wear off, and then be renewed again. Hence, I continued sinning and repenting for a number of years, till in the winter of 1817, when deep and pungent convictions laid hold of my guilty soul. Then, like Job, 'I abhorred myself', - like Ephraim, 'I bemoaned myself'; - with the prodigal, I said, 'I will arise, and go to my father', - and with the publican I cried 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'. And after 'chattering like the swallow', and 'mourning as a dove', for three or four weary months, my poor woe-fraught soul found redemption in Emmanuel's blood, even the forgiveness of sins. It was on Easter Sabbath, in the city of Philadelphia, in the presence of a large congregation of worshippers, that Jesus, the 'Sun of Righteousness' arose, and shone upon my soul, 'with healing in his wings'. Truly, that was the happiest day of my life! My darkness was turned into day, and

my sorrow into joy. His people became lovely and precious in my sight. His word was my delight. In it I beheld new beauties and beatitudes. Sin, that dreadful monster, became more odious and hateful to my soul. Zion's welfare lay near my heart. My bowels yearned for the salvation of sinners. I was in travail for my friends and kindred. I felt constrained to join with 'the Spirit and the bride', and say to all, Come, O, come to Jesus!"⁶

Near the end of his theological training, John Winebrenner, received an invitation from the German Reformed charge at Harrisburg, which consisted of four churches: Harrisburg, Sheep's and Wenrick's in Dauphin County, and Salem, near Shiremanstown, in Cumberland County, at an annual salary of one thousand dollars. He consented to the invitation and on September 24, 1820, he was ordained by the General Synod of his pastorate in Harrisburg on Sunday, October 22, 1820. At this time, Harrisburg was a country town with a population of less than four thousand. It had no canal or railroad. There were only a few places of business and four churches.

As Winebrenner continued his ministry, he faced much opposition from his parishioners. They complained that he sometimes attended the Methodist meetings, and even preached for them at other times. They accused him of holding too many prayer meetings and that he allowed individuals to respond with amens. They also complained that the length of his prayer meetings were too long. The result of this opposition was that certain restrictions were layed upon Winebrenner, such as: He must preach for them only and not for other congregations; and hereafter not invite so-called unordained ministers to preach in his pulpit; and not hold more than one prayer-meeting a week, nor keep

6. C.H. Forney, History of the Churches of God, p. 8.

it up later than nine o'clock at night. Winebrenner's reply to these restrictions was, "I will not consent to these arrangements, for I am a free man, preach a free gospel, and I will go where the Lord calls me to go."⁷ The revival spirit by this time was dominant in his heart. February 19, 1822, he had written to his sister, stating: "We have very good and pleasant times here; from three to four prayer-meetings in our congregation each week. And the Lord sometimes comes in sacred nearness to our souls while we are waiting for him. Sinners are awakened and made to cry for mercy. Oh, that God may be with us still, and delight to bless us".⁸

It wasn't too long until one Sunday morning, with a large crowd of people standing out on the sidewalk, he found the door of the church locked. Since he could not enter, he and about one-half the congregation, with many others who were attracted there, proceeded to the bank of the Susquehanna River, two blocks away, and there preached his sermon. On Friday, April 18th, a meeting of the other half of the congregation was held to decide whether or not they should keep Winebrenner as pastor of their church. They unanimously voted not to retain him as their pastor. Winebrenner was also voted out of the other three churches that he served. Jacob Myers, a physician in 1823, describes the events of the church in 1824 in the following way. "My wife and I were communicant members of Winebrenner's church, and Winebrenner christened our first child. At that time there was considerable opposition to Winebrenner by many here as well as in Harrisburg, where he resided. They said he was too much of a Methodist, and departed from the old landmarks of the German Reformed Church. The reason they said so was because he held prayer-meetings, and preached earnestly, and insisted on the people

7. Ibid, p.15.

8. Idem.

to repent and embrace heartfelt religion."⁹

The year 1825 marked a new era in the life of John Winebrenner. His ministry changed from the pastorate to a revivalist. This year also marks the time of his withdrawal from the German Reformed Church, for "various reasons". Though Winebrenner states that he withdrew from the synod in 1825, they say that he did not withdraw, but that they expelled him in 1828 for two specific reasons. The first reason for his expulsion was that he preached against infant baptism. They did not approve his preaching against such a sacred doctrine and felt that he should be expelled. The second reason is that he was too much of a revivalist. He was always preaching on regeneration, which was not necessary to become a Christian according to some of the Reformed congregation. Dr. Nevin, one of the great leaders in the Reformed Church, acknowledged that "True serious piety is too often treated with open and marked scorn. In the bosom of the Church itself it is stigmatized as schwaermerei, kopfhaengererei, or miserable, driveling Methodism. Experimental religion in all its forms was eschewed as a new-fangled invention of cunning impostors brought in to turn the heads of the weak and to lead captive silly women. Prayer-meetings were held to be a spiritual abomination. Family worship was a species of saintly affectation barely tolerable in the case of ministers (though many of them gloried rather in having no altar in their houses), but absolutely disgraceful for common Christians. To show an awakened concern on the subject of religion, a disposition to call upon God in daily secret prayer, was to incur certain reproach."¹⁰ During this period, the Reformed thought that the only requirements for one to become a Christian were to have been baptized, then confirmed, and afterward to

9. Ibid, p.16.

10. Ibid, pp. 19,20.

take Communion once a year. Along with this doctrinal belief, all kinds of sins and vices were practiced among both the professors and non-professors.

With Winebrenner no longer a member of the Synod and no church in which to preach, he and his followers started to hold their own meetings in private houses, in school houses, in barns, and any other location that they could find. Soon there was a need for organization.

The first church was organized in Harrisburg. Its house of worship was known as Union Bethel, on Mulberry Street in Harrisburg. Because Winebrenner and his co-laborers were not organizing Reformed churches, nor local churches for any other denomination they were not able to carry out a familiar formality. Instead, every step taken was on new ground. These problems challenged Winebrenner to make a closer study of the Word of God.

One of the problems of this group was to adopt a name for itself. They believed that Bible institutions should be called by Bible names, and since the church was a Bible institution, they turned to the Bible itself for a name. Again and again they found the title, "church of God", and no other church name, so the new group received its name.

The next problem that faced them was the need of church officers. They found in the New Testament that the officers of the church were elders and deacons, so these were elected in the organization of the churches.

The Doctrinal ^{Distinctives} Distinctives

The main doctrinal distinctive between the Branch denominational

family and the Main denominational family is that the Reformed Church's doctrine was more or less Calvinistic where as the Church of God doctrine is mainly Arminian. Winebrenner said that we have no creed but the Bible. Therefore, the following statements are adhered to.

She believes the Bible, or the canonical books of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, a revelation from God to man, and the only authoritative rule of faith and practice.

She believes in one Supreme God, consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that these three are co-equal and co-eternal.

She believes in the fall and depravity of man; that is to say, that men by nature is destitute of the favor and image of God.

She believes in the redemption of man through the atonement, or vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

She believes in the gift and office-work of the Holy Spirit; that is, in the enlightening, regenerating, and sanctifying influence and power of the Spirit.

She believes in the free, moral agency of man; that he has moral ability, because commanded to repent and believe, in order to be saved; and that the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, has no foundation in the oracles of God.

She believes that man is justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, or by works of his own righteousness.

She believes in the necessity of regeneration or the new birth; or, in the change of man's moral nature, after the image of God, by the influence and power of the word and Spirit of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.

She believes in three positive ordinances of perpetual standing in the church, viz., Baptism, Feet-washing, and the Lord's Supper.

She believes two things essential to the validity of baptism, viz., faith and immersion; that faith should always precede immersion; and that where either is wanting, there can be no scriptural baptism.

She believes that the ordinance of feet-washing, that is, the literal washing of the saints' feet, according to the words and example of Christ, is obligatory upon all Christians, and ought to be observed by all the churches of God.

She believes that the Lord's Supper should be often administered, and to be consistent, to Christians only, in a sitting posture, and always in the evening.

She believes in the institution of the Lord's day, or Christian Sabbath, as a day of rest and religious worship.

She believes that the reading and preaching of God's word, the singing of psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, and the offering up of prayers, are ordained of God, and ought to be regularly and devoutly observed by all the people and churches of God.

She believes in the propriety and utility of holding fast-days, experience meetings, anxious meetings, campmeetings, and other special meetings of united and protracted efforts for the edification of the church and the conversion of sinners.

She believes that the gospel ministry, Sabbath schools, education, the religious press, the Bible, missionary, temperance, and all other benevolent causes, ought to be heartily and liberally supported.

She believes that the church ought to relieve and take care of her own poor saints, superannuated ministers, widows and orphans.

She believes that the manufacture, traffic, and use of ardent spirits, as a beverage or common drink, is injurious and immoral, and ought to be abandoned.

She believes the system or institution of involuntary slavery to be impolitic and unchristian.

She believes that all civil wars are unholy and sinful, and in which the saints of the Most High ought never to participate.

She believes that civil governments are ordained of God for the general good; that Christians ought to be subject to the same in all things, except what is manifestly unscriptural; and that appeals to the law, out of the church, for justice, and the adjustments of civil rights, are not inconsistent with the principles and duties of the Christian religion.

She believes in the necessity of a virtuous and holy life, and that Christ will save those only who obey him.

She believes in the visibility, unity, sanctity, universality, and perpetuity of the Church of God.

She believes in the personal coming and reign of Jesus Christ.

She believes in the resurrection of the dead, 'both of the just and the unjust'; that the resurrection of the just will take place at the beginning, and the second at the end of the millennium.

She believes in the creation of new heavens and a new earth.

She believes in the immortality of the soul; in a universal and

eternal judgment; and in future and everlasting rewards and punishments. ¹¹

This was the original doctrinal statement of the early Church of God.

In 1925, the doctrinal statement was slightly expanded in the following ways:

We believe in the free moral agency of man, as opposed to his unconditional election or reprobation, i.e., that a man must accept Jesus as his Savior, and of his own free will continue in the goodness of God to be numbered with the elect.

We believe that only those who have been born again by the word and Spirit, and who continue to manifest repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and to live virtuous and obedient lives will be saved.

We believe in the miraculous conception, the virgin birth, the vicarious sacrifice, the bodily resurrection, the triumphant ascension and the second coming of Jesus Christ. We believe in his deity—that he was, and is, God the Son as well as the Son of God. ¹²

The latest doctrinal statement of the Churches of God of North America has been expanded to even a greater extent and positively shows the Arminian view point of theology:

Concerning the free moral agency of man the church believes: the possibility that, having once been saved, he may lapse and fall once more into sin from which he was regenerated. Since regeneration is the equivalent of spiritual birth, and since there is a possibility that a newborn infant, or older child or adult can die, so it is entirely possible that the newborn soul may die. Regeneration does not confer immunity against subsequent lapses from the faith. It is not a "shot," or series of inoculations that will protect one from future invasions of spiritual disease.

They make it worse by saying:

If a man is free to make the decision to accept God's invitation, he is no less free later in his life, when temptation confronts him to abandon his Christian profession to yield to that temptation, and turn away from God and be lost.

This is in no sense a doctrine of salvation through "works", for the initiative is still with God, and the power is His. But we must constantly exercise our willpower in responding to His invitation, and in availing ourselves of ¹³ His power to save, and to retain us within the Christian fold.

11. S.G. Yahn, History of the Churches of God, pp. 108-111.

12. Ibid., pp. 112,113.

13. Teachings and Practices of the Churches of God, p. 33.

Finally, they end up with a ridiculous statement explaining the relationship between Sanctification and Justification by saying,

"Since man has a dual character, according to Scripture, i.e., he is both a physical organism and a spiritual being, his sanctification must proceed in both of those spheres. His personality, or self, is sanctified by an instantaneous act, and he must continue in this state of sanctification to maintain his state of justification."¹⁴

The Polity Distinctives

The polity of the Churches of God is very similar to that of the Reformed Church. The governing body of the church is made up of both elders and deacons. The responsibility of the elder is to teach, to oversee, and to be in charge of the task of leading the flock in the right ways of the Lord. The pastor of the local church is a teaching elder whereas the laymen who serve as elders work with their pastor in leading people to understand the Word of God, to live by the teachings therein, and to do what is needful for the healthy Christian growth of each and every member. The responsibility of the deacon is to see that nothing is neglected that must be done to provide financial support for its program, including benevolent, missionary, and educational work beyond its local borders. They must see that the money and property of the church are used in the proper way.

A contrast to the Main body (Reformed Church) of the Church of God is the office of "deaconess". The responsibility of the deaconess is a combination of that of the elder and deacon, with special responsibility for the needs of the women of the church.

Both the elders and the deacons make up the church council. The council's responsibility is to plan the church's work and to work the plans that are made, so that all contributes to the edification of the Church.

14. Ibid, p. 34.

The spiritual qualifications of the elders are found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9. A summary of these qualifications are fourfold: Christian example, a life that has been proved worthy of respect, a knowledge of the Word of God, and the ability to teach and influence others to live the Christian life. The spiritual qualifications of the deacons are found in I Timothy 3:8-13. Christian character and stability are just as necessary for deacons as for elders. They too must live that life which will exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other governmental positions in the Churches of God are superintendents and teachers in the Sunday School, trustees and heads of various church auxiliaries whose work is like that of deacons, and no less important. The spiritual qualifications of these officers are primarily the same as those of the elders and the deacons.

In the early days of the Churches of God in North America, there was little or no need for any organization beyond the local church, but with the establishment of more and more churches, covering a wider and wider area, soon led to the formation of elderships. These elderships, in the beginning, were made up strictly of elders - the ministers or teaching elders, and the ruling elders chosen to represent the various churches or circuits.

The qualification of any member of the elderships is thus: the member must be a committed Christian who sees the Church as God's people who belong together for mutual upbuilding and service to each other as they serve the one Lord of the whole Church. Some of the accomplishments of the eldership have been protection against divisiveness and against ministerial misconduct, development of church camps and church homes, and the safeguarding of property interests by incorporating

so as to have the legal status to hold property in trust for the churches.

The General Eldership which was formed in 1845 under the leadership of John Winebrenner at present meets once in three years. Ministerial lay, and youth delegates are chosen by the various annual elderships. Each eldership is entitled to a delegation the size of which is determined by the total number of members in all its churches.

The Ordination requirements

Action was taken in 1950 at the General Eldership that by the year 1959 one would have his college work finished and by 1962 all men for ordination should have their Seminary work before ordination.

Any person who is called of the Lord to preach who is too old to start the college and Seminary work is asked to take a course of studies which has been designed by the Board of Education of the General Eldership. The local Boards of Elderships are the Administrators or Examiners on the course given. Each man is asked to complete at least four courses a year. There are 48 different assignments made from the following main headings:

1. The Bible
2. Theology and doctrine
3. History and Sociology
4. The Teaching work of the church
5. The minister

The Evaluation of the Churches of God of North America

In my evaluation of the Church's doctrine there are certain points with which I disagree. They are:

1."that a man must accept Jesus as his Savior, and of his own free will continue in the goodness of God to be numbered among the elect."

They cannot understand that though God gives man the responsibility of accepting Christ as his personal Savior, He has also "chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). They only see man's responsibility and miss completely the sovereignty of God. "Oh", but they say, "where in the Bible does it tell us that we have been chosen to salvation?" Again, one must realize that God not only chooses the "end", but also the "means to the end". We have been chosen in him before the foundation of the world, "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4b). How can anyone be holy and without blame before him in love if they have never experienced a real crisis with Christ? Without Christ as Savior it is impossible to be holy and blameless before him in love; therefore, if one is to be holy and blameless, he must first be saved. Likewise, if God has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy, He also must have chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world to be saved.

God has an end for us. He also has the means toward the end. To exclude one (the end) or the other (the means) is to misunderstand and misinterpret the sovereignty of God.

2. The second point of doctrine with which I disagree is "since man has a dual character, according to Scripture his

sanctification must proceed in both of those spheres. His personality, or self, is sanctified by an instantaneous act, and he must continue in this state of sanctification to maintain his state of justification."

To think that God justifies a man and then hopes that he keeps himself in that state by keeping himself sanctified, is ridiculous.

According to Eph. 1:13, when we believed (aorist tense showing a once for all action) in Christ as our Savior, we were sealed (aorist tense showing a once for all action) by the Holy Spirit. How long does this sealing of the Spirit last? The sealing of the Spirit, according to Eph. 1:14 lasts until the day of redemption, "until these corruptible bodies will put on incorruption and these mortal bodies will put on immortality". (1 Cor. 15:54). Also, in Eph. 4:30 we read that the Christian is sealed by the Spirit unto the day of redemption. "But don't we have to keep ourselves sanctified, if we are going to remain justified", asks someone. No! Jude 1 tells us that we are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved (better translated "kept") in Jesus Christ. The word "preserved" is in the Greek perfect tense which shows an action that took place in the past with the result continuing in the present. We were kept in Jesus Christ by the Father when we received Christ as our Savior, and the result is continuing. Day by day, God is keeping us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As wonderful as this may be, God doesn't stop here, for one of these days our Lord will present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

I believe that the polity of the church is very good with a possible exception of the Eldership. I can see the necessity of an eldership, but if it is not made up of real men of God who love the Lord and who will do everything in their power to feed the flock, then it can be a hinderance rather than a blessing. Power for the Lord is good, but if it is used for one's own means it is dangerous. I don't know from first hand experience, but several men of God in the local church have informed me that the Eldership does not appreciate Bible teachers mainly because most Bible teachers teach the doctrine of eternal security. If this be true, they shall receive their reward in the end, but I believe that this is certain "quenching of the Spirit of God".

Concerning the ordination requirements of the Church of God ministers, I wasn't able to get any detailed information, but from the information that I have received, I did not see anything concerning the Christian experience. Because of the lack of detail I will not mention too much about the ordination requirements, but I certainly do hope that the candidate is asked to give a Scriptural basis for his salvation.

There is one more thing that I would like to mention in this evaluation, and that has to do with the "washing of the saints feet". This ordinance has been practiced since the founding of the Churches of God. I know that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, but I do not believe that He intended the act to be continued into the church age for various reasons. First of all, after the John 13 account of the "washing" there is no more mention of it. Paul, John, James, Peter, Jude, and the writer of the book of Acts (Luke) mention nothing about washing of the saints feet, except in I Timothy 5:10 where it speaks of widows.

These widows are to have certain qualifications to be "put on the list" of the church. One qualification is that they are to be over 60 years of age. Another is that they have washed the feet of saints which shows both a fulfilling of an Oriental custom showing hospitality, and secondly, it demonstrated her humility. Nothing is said about the widow doing it because Christ commanded it.

Secondly, the ordinance is held during the communion service. This also is excluded from the I Cor. 11:23-34 passage that deals with the order at the Lord's table. I believe that the washing of the saints feet is like saying the Lord's prayer. Christ had a purpose behind both, but that purpose was not for the Christian to carry on an Oriental custom or to repeat a prayer that was never meant to be repeated.

History of the Local Church

The congregation known as the First Church of God had its origin in 1816 under the ministry of Rev. John Elliott, an Englishman. He was a reformed Methodist, but his congregation was non-denominational. The original purpose of forming this congregation is not known today.

Rev. John Elliott preached in the Old Friends meeting house for several years. All denominations attended his meeting and soon decided to erect a building of their own. A lot was purchased on Chestnut Street between Dase and Queen Streets. The building was erected and was known as the Union Church.

In the Intelligencer of May 7, 1822, the following note was published. "The building recently erected in the city by Christians of all denominations with Divine permission, will be dedicated to the public worship of

Almighty God on the second Sabbath of this month. Services in English and German language".

Another note was published in the Intelligencer of March 23, 1824 stating: "The subscriber's to the Union school house and Church of all Christian Denominations (more generally known by the name of Mr. Elliott's Church) are requested to attend a meeting to be held at the church on Wednesday next, at three o'clock in the afternoon, on business of importance."

Rev. John Elliott remained free from all denominations until the year 1828 when he became intimate with John Winebrenner.

Winebrenner was holding revival meetings that year near Lancaster, and many members of Elliott's congregation went to hear him. Many souls were won to Christ and were added to the church.

Mr. Elliott met with the first six ministers in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who assembled to organize the East Pennsylvania Eldership of the Church of God in October 1830. He likewise attended the next yearly meeting of the Eldership which was held in Lancaster. It was during this meeting that Rev. John Elliott had a difference of views which resulted in his separating from the Eldership. He soon left Lancaster, and the church until 1841 was ministered to by preachers of several denominations being the United Brethren, Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist. The congregation reorganized in 1841 and came directly into affiliation with the denomination known as the First Church of God in North America, and it was also determined to build a new and larger house of worship. Up to that time the congregation had worshipped in the "Old White Meeting House" on East Chestnut Street opposite the P.R.R. passenger station.

In 1841, a plot of ground at W. Orange and Prince Streets was purchased for \$1500.00 and on the 12th of August 1841 the cornerstone was laid and provided seating space for about 800 persons.

Out of the First Bethel of the Church of God in Lancaster, another congregation had branched known as the Second Church. There were 30 or more who left the church on the corner of Prince and Orange Streets to start the Second Church. Several men served in this church, but in later years the Eldership sent Paul Weaver to minister in the church, but they would not accept him. The church closed in 1931. At that time there were approximately 50 members of the church with an average Sunday School attendance of 100.

The pastors at the corner of Prince and Orange and more recently at Charlotte and Chestnut Streets are: H.L.Soule 1866-67; J.C.Owens 1867-8; G.H.Forney 1868-70; C. Price 1870-71; J. Hunter 1873-76; J. Haifleigh 1874-76; G.W.Seilhamer 1876-78; D.A.L.Laverty 1878-81; G.W.Seilhamer 1881-85; C. Price 1885-88; J.H. Esterline 1888-94; M.M. Foose 1894-95; G.W. Gete 1895-98; J.W.Deshong 1898-1915; G.R. Hoverter 1915-30; W.N. Yates 1930-33; E.F. Yoder 1933-45; C.H. Lefever 1945-53; J.E. Lewis 1953 ----

The building at Charlotte and Chestnut Streets was built under the pastorate of Rev. George Hoverter. The cost of the corner lot was \$30,000. The building is 55 by 127 feet, being slightly wider for the Sunday School departments. Mr. Walter Zook, a member of the church was the general contractor. He kept the cost of the structure at a minimum low of \$133,000, the furnishings amounted to \$27,000. A two manual pipe organ was installed which was completely rebuilt with additional stops in 1957. The estimated value of the organ at this time is \$48,000.

Due to the great demands for parking facilities the Dr. Klemmar property next to the play ground was purchased. The two houses at the rear of the Klemmar property facing Marion Street were dismantled. A

parish house for recreation, etc. was constructed from the other two houses, but soon it also was dismantled to make room for parking facilities for 45 cars. The front of the Klemmar property was sold.

At the Annual Congregational meeting of August 6, 1958, the congregation voted to purchase the duplex homes immediately South of the church for the purpose of erecting a two story building for Christian Education purposes. The exterior of the addition will be simplified Gothic, of stone with cast stone trim to match and blend with the present church and Sunday School facade with large aluminum windows. The building will be of fire resistant construction so designed that an additional story may be added in the future. Enclosed stair towers are provided at opposite corners for general use and emergency exits. A cement walk will be provided from Charlotte Street to the parking lot.

Each department will be provided with adequate coat racks with supply cupboards above chalk boards and cork pin up strips and service boxes to corridors so that the roll and collection can be picked up without disturbing the classes. Toilet facilities will be provided on each floor. Some departments have folding, sound deadening partitions to provide separate class rooms.

The basement plan: The present Sunday School will be altered for the young adults, cradle roll, and kindergarten. In the new basement will be the Todlers, Juniors and Primary. The Primary room will be used also for Junior Church services.

First Floor plan: The present Main Sunday School will be altered to provide a Pastor's study and counselling room, and a Future Assistant Pastor's study. On the first floor will be Nursery, Intermediates, Seniors and Young People. The Young People's room will be used for

church council meetings also.

A financial campaign under the direction of Charles Baile and William Fordney has been organized to provide money to purchase the duplex homes and at least 25% of the building cost. The estimated cost of the construction will be \$143,000. The cost of the property \$36,000. The time for the construction cannot at this time be determined due to a sales agreement to allow an elderly gentleman to use the first house for his home as long as he lives.

Doctrinal and Polity distinctives

Both the doctrine and the polity (church government) of our local Church of God adheres to that of the denomination in most of its points, though there are a few variations.

Concerning the doctrinal position of the local church, we have Arminians, Calvinists, and those who don't know. The biggest squabble in doctrine concerns the doctrine of Eternal Security. This has always been a problem in the church.

The only polity distinctive is that we do not have "deaconsesses". We had deaconesses for a period of two years, but for some reason they stopped it.

Ordination Requirements

The ordination requirements are the same as those mentioned in the denomination. There are no changes in the requirements.

The Church Constitution and its evaluation

The Constitution and By-laws of the First Church of God (local) for the greater part are very good, but there are two main issues that I believe would be better had they been changed.

The first matter has to do with Tenure of office for the elders and the deacons. According to the constitution "the elders and deacons shall hold office for a term of two years; one-half of their number to be elected annually". (p. 4). The disadvantage of this statement

has been proved over and over again at our church. Men have been elected for a two year period and then another two year period and then another and another until some have been on the council for a period up to 25 years. Now this might not be too bad if you are fortunate enough to get a good man, but that does not always happen. I believe that it would be much better if there would be a greater circulation of personell on the council over the period of years. To carry out this matter the elders and the deacons could be elected for a period of 3 years. They could be elected for 2 terms making a period of 6 years, and then they would have to be off one year. After this year of vacation they could be reelected for another period of 3 years. By using this method the personell would be constantly changing and new blood would be brought into the council.

The second matter has to do with Nominating. We now nominate candidates at the congregational meeting from the floor. The disadvantage of this method of election is that many people come to the meetings and then look around the room to see who was there and then they nominate them. It usually turns out to be the same ones who have been in office for the past 5 or 10 years, while young ability sits around the room with little or no opportunity to be elected to office. It is all too easy to say to oneself, "he's been in office for a long time and hasn't done too badly, why not re-elect him?" I believe that this disadvantage could be avoided if there would be a nominating committee, that would select and screen candidates for nomination. Then it would present these candidates on a printed ballot to the congregation, leaving space on the ballot for other names to be added if it's the congregation's wish. This would also take up much less time, then

looking around the room hoping to find someone that will fill the bill.

I am certainly glad that the basic qualification for membership in the local Church of God is stated in the Constitution, for I agree with it 100%. "All persons who have given satisfactory evidence of having been born again through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ are eligible for membership in the church". (p. 1).

The Financial Program

Each member of the church is to give regular systematic contributions. The pledge-envelope system is used by our church for this purpose and it has met with much success.

Another provision of the financial program is adequate pastoral support. Each pastor that is giving full time to the work should receive not less than \$3500 per annum, parsonage, garage, utilities, traveling expenses.

A third provision of the financial program is to contribute a stated amount to the budget of the local and the General Eldership in full. Each phase of the General Eldership budget is to receive its full quote and not to be considered paid in full unless this is done.

"The unified cooperative budget of the General Eldership, for apportionment among the local Elderships, shall be \$165,000, made up as follows: Missions, \$65,000; College \$40,000; Seminary, \$25,000; Second Century Advance, \$12,000; Retirement, \$8,500; Publishing House, \$4,000; Contingent, \$4,000; C.G.Y.A. (Church of God Youth Association), \$2500; Historian, \$2,000; Christian Education, \$2,000." 15

The financial standing of the church is put in the bulletin each month, giving the summary of each fund. Also, throughout

the year, the pastor brings messages on stewardship. Finally, on Anniversary Day, which comes in May, our strongest stewardship appeal is made. In this manner, both the privilege and duty of stewardship are continually brought before the congregation.

In the history of the local church I mentioned that there was a financial campaign to meet the expenses of the new building that we hope to construct in the near future. Throughout the following pages there will be material on this campaign.

The Missionary Program and Budget of the Church

Our local church believes that the Gospel is designed for all nations and is therefore obligated to make it known among all the peoples of the earth. They believe that the work of missions and evangelism is alike in that its aim is to lead people to Christ and then co-operate in establishing churches to extend the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the church has several goals in the missions program.

1. One goal is to work as a missionary unit or have an active Missionary Society.
2. There are certain observances of designated "prayer days".
 - a. Men and Missions Sunday, third Sunday in October.
 - b. World Day of Prayer for Missions, first Friday in Lenten period.
 - c. Day of Prayer and Sacrificial Giving for Missions, the fourth Sunday in April.
3. The church also encourages promising young people to consider the Mission Field as their life work by writing letters to some of the missionaries in the Young Peoples Group.

The missionaries which we support from the local church are Miss Mary Hershey, Miss Rhoda Kauffman and Miss Lois Habecker. All three of the missionaries are working in Khanjanpur, East Pakistan.

Letters from two of the missionaries that the church supports will be found on the following pages, along with the financial program for Missions.

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