

Sermon for Sunday, June 20, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"THE CHURCH AND HOW SHE FARES"

Ephesians 4:1-16

Text: "So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles." Ephesians 4:14

The Presbyterian church in America was one of the earliest churches in this country and had perhaps more impact on American life than any other denomination. Our form of government has its roots in the Presbyterian form of government. Our educational system in America today owes its heritage to Presbyterians. But as the country expanded and in the early 19th century as the frontiers began to move westward and as the church tried to keep pace with the rapidly expanding frontier, we Presbyterians found ourselves in a very difficult position for this reason. We did not have enough ministers. We Presbyterians have always insisted on an educated ministry, a college education and then seminary training beyond that. We simply could not produce enough ministers as the frontier expanded to meet the growing needs.

Now, if you want to describe Presbyterians, there are two ways you can do it. You can describe us by how we govern ourselves and when you describe us by government, we are called Presbyterian. But if you want to describe us by what we believe, then we are called Reformed. So to adequately and accurately describe us, you should properly call us Presbyterian--which has to do with our government--and Reformed--which has to do with what we believe. Now there are congregations or denominations that are Reformed in faith but not Presbyterian in government. The Congregational Church historically was such a denomination. They were Reformed in faith. And so as the frontier expanded the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists entered into an agreement so that they would not duplicate one another as the church moved westward. The two churches in effect belonged to the same denomination. This happened in 1801.

It soon became apparent that this was a dreadful error because in the Presbyterian church we have a series of courts that are supposed to maintain the doctrine and purity of the church. But in the Congregational church where there is no such structure, there was no control over the ministry and they had begun to fall victim to the growing disbelief of the age. Modernism had begun to creep into the church and it found its first door among the Congregationalists. By 1839 the Presbyterians, realizing they had made a dreadful mistake, simply cut out that part of the church where the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists were intermingled. And in effect what happened in 1839, was that the Presbyterian church split. The Congregationalist-Presbyterian group became known as the New School Presbyterians and those Presbyterians who adhered to the great faith of their fathers, who maintained the purity of the doctrine of the church, who stood on the integrity and trustworthiness of Scripture, were called the Old School Presbyterians. Now the New School Presbyterians were primarily in the northern states in those days.

In 1861 the war came along and the Old School Presbyterians were split north and south, but the thing that split them was not theology, not faith in the Bible, not Presbyterian government. The thing that split them was the sociological issue--the war. In due time, had all things gone well, as the wounds of war healed, the Old School, north and south, would have gotten back together again soon. There were no serious differences. However, in 1869 something happened that was to change the course of history. And what happened was that the Old School North united with the New School Presbyterians and immediately there broke out a theological battle in what became known as the Northern Presbyterian Church.

By the middle 1930's this battle had been resolved. The New School Presbyterians based on liberalism, a lack of confidence in the Word of God, a lack of conviction about Jesus Christ and who and what he was--these had won out. By the mid 1930's the thing that separated the north and south was not really the Civil War any more, but belief and doctrinal integrity. We in the south were the only remaining descendants of the truly Presbyterian Reformed faith. Some of you may remember the battle of the thirties in the Northern Presbyterian Church, the battle for the Old School Presbyterians was led by a prominent theologian from Princeton Seminary, Dr. Machen. Eventually, they drove him out of the church and he died with a broken heart.

So the battle or the difference between the Presbyterians, north and south, has not been the Civil War, it has been a profound difference in our approach to the Christian faith. But in the south as ministers trained elsewhere began to evade and infiltrate our seminaries, more and more the New School theology permeated our seminaries. More and more the young ministers turned out were men who were not truly Reformed in faith, who did not truly plant their feet on the Word of God, who did not truly believe in Christ as the Son of God invading history and dying for the sins of men and being raised by the power of God for a testimony to our own resurrection to eternal life. And I know this is so because I was such a product of our seminaries. And so the life stream of the Southern Presbyterian Church began to be polluted as more and more of us were fed into her. Fortunately for some of us, we found a need for reality in our relationship to a living Christ and so it was that some of us turned back again to the faith of our fathers--turned back again to plant our feet on the integrity of God's Word and to proclaim Jesus as man's only hope and as the Saviour of the world.

But in our Southern Presbyterian Church, the only true descendant of Presbyterianism in its finest form, we were called conservatives and we were in a minority because the liberals in our denomination had begun to organize and to deliberately gain control of the institutional structures of our church. Since they no longer believed in the validity of the Gospel as you and I believe it, they have nothing left to preach but social action. Since they did not believe anything worth fighting for or dying for, they began to seek to unite with anyone, with our northern brothers and in COCU, this great monolithic Protestant super church they are trying to create where belief is lowered to the lowest common denominator.

This has had tremendous impact on the life of our church and the northern church, too. Our brothers in the northern church have become so socially involved that they have even given \$10,000 to the support of Angela Davis, an admitted communist, a revolutionary. Last year the Northern Presbyterian Church lost 77,000 members, the year before she lost 50,000 and the rate of loss is accelerating. Last year the Southern Presbyterian Church for the first time in modern years lost members--we lost about 500, this year we lost 4,000 and the rate of loss will continue to accelerate. We are losing finances. The money the church needs to carry on its program is declining because laymen who have lost confidence in the integrity of their churches have been voting not only with their feet as they leave the church, but with their pocketbooks as they refuse to give.

So there are two groups in the Southern Church today and for lack of a better word I will call them the liberals and the conservatives. The liberals seek to carry our church away into social action and social involvement and a loss of the Gospel and into union. What do the conservatives want? They want first a return to the Bible. Second they want a return to the Confession of Faith of our church for a purity of doctrine. Thirdly, they want the church to return to a primary emphasis on evangelism and lay renewal. Fourth, they want a balance in the life

of the church between social action and evangelism. The conservatives are not against social action but they realize it is not the primary business of the church. It is not the Gospel, it is a fruit of the Gospel. You cannot change society until you change the hearts of men. And so they are fighting for a balance in the life of the church. Again, they are fighting for a share in the councils of the church where decisions are made that the witness of the conservatives might be made in the councils of the church and have an impact on the life and direction of the church. They are fighting for a disengagement from ecumenical efforts such as our involvement in the World Council of Churches and in the National Council of Churches, in COCU and in the efforts to unite with UPUSA Church. That's what they are fighting for.

But in fighting for these things, they were going up against a machine that has been in power for many years now which is entrenched, which owns and controls the institutions and structures of our denomination. But at this 111th General Assembly the conservatives united for the first time. You see the problem with the conservatives is that they do not believe in church politics. The problem is they are Christians and they have principles and scruples. Therefore, they cannot do things that are dishonest and so the conservatives were at a disadvantage, I'll tell you! They were going up against a machine that was unscrupulous, that was ruthless, that was in power and intended to stay there. At this Assembly the conservatives had a coalition of all their groups, they worked together in a common caucus of which your pastor was the leader. We planned with great care floor fights and floor strategy on the Assembly floor and we prayed together. As a consequence, at this General Assembly, we won some minor battles. In the vote to get out of the National Council of Churches we came the closest we have ever come. We lost by only 25 votes, I believe. But as one of our layman working with us said, "Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades." We were able to get the Assembly to support a black college in Alabama where they are attempting to take young men and women coming off the farms who have a second or third grade education and give them workable skills with their hands where they can make a living. We did get them to support that although the liberals fought it. We did get them to change the statement on Vietnam and instead of condemning our President, we managed to have our church commend him for his efforts for withdrawal. We did get them to appoint a Council on Evangelism and Lay Renewal although they have the control of who they put on the council and I am not too hopeful about it. In the plan of union with UPUSA Church, we have twelve members and they have twelve. We did manage to get one additional conservative added to each group--that is two out of 26 and I think that can hardly be called a victory. They had planned to force our people in the church who handled the investments of the church for example the Board of Annuities and Relief handles great sums of money and invests them wisely and in order that the income from this may be used for the support of our retired ministers--and they were trying to get the church to force the Board of Annuities and Relief to use its funds to try to influence companies in which we had investments. In other words to force them to buy large amounts of stock of Gulf Oil Company, for example, and then use our investments in their stocks to force Gulf to do some things we might want them to do. We beat that back. So we won some minor battles and there are some others.

But the fact of the matter is we lost on all the major issues, we lost the battle to get out of COCU, we lost the battle to discontinue talks with the UPUSA Church, we lost the battle to get any conservatives in key positions where the decision making process works, we lost a battle to limit the power of a committee that has been appointed to rewrite the Confession of Faith and most importantly we lost the battle to prevent the liberals from restructuring our denomination. That's a complicated story and I don't have time to say much about it except to say this was the key vote. The vote was 217 for and 207 against. We lost by ten votes.

What they intend to do is to form great regional synods. We will not be in the Synod of Missouri any more, but in a synod composed of Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma. They will use the liberal strength to restructure the presbyteries then so that they will be able to cut the heart out of the conservative strength and carry us away into union the UP Church.

What would be the result of this? First of all, the conservatives are threatening to pull out and form a new church. Secondly, the conservatives are stronger than they have ever been for the simple reason that for the first time, they are organized under a common leader. Thirdly, as the conservatives got together some new leadership began to emerge from it.

I do not know if the conservatives will pull out. I am still too close to the Assembly to be able to evaluate it very well or to evaluate it objectively. If the conservatives do pull out, I don't know when they will pull out, I do not know who will be in the group. I do not know how large a group it will be. But there are some things I do know. I do know that the conservatives for the first time fought together well. And though we lost, a new spirit has emerged--a new spirit of cooperation and hope and the conservatives were not disacouraged. Dr. L. Nelson Bell, one of the grand men of our church, Billy Graham's father-in-law, called me yesterday and said, "I just wanted to hear your voice to be sure that you were not discouraged." So first we fought well and a new spirit has emerged. I know that. I also know that in spite of liberals, in spite of institutions, in spite of trickery, in spite of a deviation from our faith by many in our church, in spite of all of this, I know the church still belongs to God. Thirdly, I do know also that a spiritual revival is breaking out in this country. Some of you may have seen the most recent issue of Time Magazine and whose picture is on the front? A picture of Jesus. Six pages of pictures and six pages of editorial comment about a spiritual revival that is sweeping across our country. Incidentally, the young man who did most of the work on that article, Richard Ostling of Time Magazine, spent two hours interviewing me and he's a fine young Christian man which pleased me very much.

So I know the conservatives have a new spirit. I know the church belongs to God. I know a revival is beginning to sweep across this country and fourthly, I know that I intend to be a part of it. I want to be where the action is. I want to be on the cutting edge of what God is doing. I want to be a part of the great revival that is beginning to sweep our land. And I want you with me to share in the mighty move of God in the 20th century.

I cannot see very far down the road. Whatever happens however, the conservatives will be back at General Assembly next year and hopefully with more power than before. Personally, I am very tired and emotionally drained and came home to find that my wife must go back into the hospital. But at the General Assembly somebody told the story of a soldier of the Crusades during the middle ages who laid on the field of battle wounded and who said something that expresses how I feel this morning. As he laid there he said, "Here for a while I will lay me down and bleed. Then I shall rise and fight again."