

## ***Discontent!***

**Paul Woolley**

Eight years have passed – it seems longer – since those glorious days in 1936 when the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was born. It is not difficult to recapture in spirit the great enthusiasm of that June day in Philadelphia when the church was first constituted. The fervor was high and it rose ever higher because the church was committing itself to an ideal that had been tested and proved through the centuries – the ideal of a Biblical church, its divinely ordained principles drawn directly from the Bible and its modes of operation in matters not Biblically prescribed based upon the experience of the Reformed churches through the ages. No fads, no newly evolved novelties, no pet ideas of leading individuals were to characterize this church. It was not to emphasize strange notions which had not stood the test of time in relation to the Bible. Its gates were to be as wide as the gates of the new Jerusalem and its path as narrow as the way that leadeth unto life. Its doctrine and its ethics had no other standard than the Word of God.

It was only a year later that a group, which wanted to narrow the stand of the church and make it more intolerant than our Lord and His Word, left its fellowship. It was a sad occasion, and one which neither principle nor history can justify. Perhaps the children will be wiser than the fathers. So it is to be hoped. Thus God preserved the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at its very beginning from un-Biblical fanaticism.

The years that have followed since 1937 have seen slow and constant growth of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Its stability has been tested and proved. Its love of the Word has been manifest. Its steady attention to the privilege of preaching the gospel and ministering to the saints has been demonstrated.

But there is now, in this year 1944, discontent within the church. Now discontent can be of two kinds – healthy and malignant. This discontent is of the second kind as well as of the first.

An American writer has recently pointed out that sooner or later any organization or entity in human society will be seized upon by persons bent upon exploiting it for purposes other than that for which it was originally intended. One of the great sources of discontent in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church – malignant discontent – is the lack of numerical growth. The church does not increase rapidly. This is true. The church was not founded for the purpose of growing rapidly. The Bible gives no warrant for believing that a church in this day and age should grow rapidly. But rapid growth is an American enthusiasm; it is a national sport. Other churches – freak churches, specialty churches, personal churches – grow rapidly. Therefore let us bend all our energies, say these friends, to make the Orthodox Presbyterian Church grow rapidly. Not only should it grow rapidly itself, they hold, it should also grow rapidly by joining other

organizations. Not only should it grow by joining other organizations, it should also grow by swallowing up other organizations.

Now as the writer referred to above has indicated, Gresham's law applies in spiritual matters as well as in monetary affairs. It is doubtless a result of the sinfulness and depravity of man that this is so. Gresham's law says that when debased money is put into circulation along with good money it will soon drive the good money out of use. So here. The urge for numbers, for growth, will drive the great, important, spiritual, Biblical principles out of mind and out of action. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church exists to perpetuate, maintain and propagate the principles of the Bible. The Bible contains no principle which emphasizes large numbers, or rapidity of growth, as a criterion of a true church or as a major aim for such a church.

When these factors become major aims of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the church may be assured that the really valuable results from the church will immediately begin proportionately to decrease.

The question is really a very simple one. Does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have a growing revival of the preaching, teaching, and application of the Biblical and Reformed Faith in these United States in the year 1944? Or does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have many members and much money and read about itself often in the newspapers? It can have one, but it cannot have both.

There is a healthy discontent, as well as a malignant one, within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is concerned with two things: lack of enthusiasm for the Reformed Faith, and lack of completeness in its presentation.

In the eighteenth century, enthusiasm meant practically what emotional fanaticism means now. But modern enthusiasm is a different thing. It is essential to the propagation of any enterprise. Did a man's love ever mean anything to a girl if it was not enthusiastic? The question she asks him (mentally if not aloud) is: Do you think I am the most important girl in the whole world? If he does, he has her on his mind constantly, and is doing things for her or about her. It ought to be the same way with the Reformed Faith among the ministers and ruling elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The maintenance and propagation of the Reformed Faith should be their chief love. I think there is reason for a healthy discontent here. We have not yet reached this standard, I fear. Let us make the faith the love of our hearts.

There is also room for real progress in the completeness with which the faith is preached in our pulpits. Obviously, the degree of well-rounded presentation that is attained varies with every pulpit. I have made no statistical study of the preaching in Orthodox Presbyterian pulpits. I have sent out no questionnaire. But from my conversations with them I can say that there are many people in our pews who have no notion of the faith as a system. Has it ever been put together for them? Do they realize the glorious truth that everything that happens happens in accordance with the eternal plan of God? Nothing has been left at loose ends. God is in control. That seems to me one of the most needed truths of our day.

Do our people hear, for example, about the mystical union of the believer with Christ, about the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Scriptures, about the meaning of the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper, about the personal return of our Lord and the events connected therewith? I would not be surprised if preaching on these subjects would round out the faith for many.

The times are serious. The church is in a dangerous position. Can we concentrate our discontent on the healthy side, on increasing our enthusiasm and comprehensiveness? If not, I tremble for the usefulness of this particular instrument of God's grace. But if so, God's abundant blessing is awaiting us. The Apostle said, "For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).