

AN APPEAL TO THE GENERAL SYNOD  
concerning the name of the church

AND TO THE

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS

OF THE

Reformed Protestant Dutch Church

IN

NORTH AMERICA.

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November, 1867.

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Name

**AN APPEAL**  
concerning the name of the church  
*To the Members of the General Synod of the Reformed  
Protestant Dutch Church, to be convened in adjourned  
Session, in the City of Albany, on the*

THIRD WEDNESDAY OF NOVEMBER, 1867.

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FATHERS AND BRETHREN :

Every free Protestant Church guarantees to its humblest member, though he should stand alone in his opinions, the right of dissent from the proposed action of its highest judicatory, on questions of Church policy ; and of appeal, by argument and remonstrance, against such action. In the exercise of this right, the following paper is submitted for your candid consideration.

It is assumed by the majority of your number, that the constitution of our Church empowers them to proceed at an adjourned session, to " a final determination and resolution" on certain alterations to the Constitution, proposed and recommended by themselves at their regular sessions in June last, and designed to effect an important change in our ecclesiastical title. It is well known to you that the authority of the Synod in this matter, is disputed and denied by some of our most experienced and wisest men, on the ground, 1st : that our distinctive name is inherent in the denomination, and that the Constitution, which was

framed to limit and define the action of the ecclesiastical courts, gives them no power over it, any more than it gives them power over our articles of faith; 2nd: that if the Constitution did give the courts of the Church this power, yet it is contrary to the spirit and intent of the last article of the Constitution, and to its meaning as interpreted by the uniform practice of the Church: for the same General Synod which proposes and recommends an alteration of the Constitution, to proceed at an adjourned session, to "a final determination and resolution" on its own recommendation. It is also well known to you that six of our Classes, including some of our oldest and strongest, and a very respectable minority of ministers and elders in the other Classes, have emphatically recorded their disapproval of the proposed change; moreover it is admitted, that, to a very large number, perhaps to a majority of the membership of our Church, the change proposed is not only unwelcome but highly repugnant.

These unquestioned facts should certainly counsel the extremest caution, and preclude the possibility of precipitate action on your part. However desirable the change may appear to you, yet it must be conceded that the peace and unity of the Church is more so. If the change is to be made, it ought to be done so as to leave no room for animadversion upon the *manner* in which it has been effected. Though the voice of the Church were unanimous in its favor, yet a reasonable doubt of your constitutional power in the premises, should give you pause. But when, instead of a doubt, you are met with a direct denial of your power, and that denial sustained by the authoritative and uniform practice of the Church, as against your action; and your action if legal, is yet so repugnant to a very large and influential portion of your constituents, we cannot believe that you will consent to jeopard the most sacred interests for the sake of an experiment.

The action of the Synod in June, contemplates a final determination of this matter at your coming sessions in No-

vember. But you are under no obligation to carry out that programme against your present better judgment, and why should you burden yourselves with the solemn responsibility of so grave a question, when a very few months will bring it in the natural and ordinary course, before a Synod which will be free from your embarrassments; and whose decision will have the more weight with the Churches because it is not "a foregone conclusion"? No important interest can be endangered by the brief delay, and important questions of Synodical power and constitutional law, may find an easier solution; whilst the final result will be far more likely to secure the acquiescence of all parties.

If the courts of the Church have power over the distinctive name of the Church which has created them, (an assumption which we do not admit,) yet surely it will not be contended that the vote of a majority of the Classes is final in the case. On this point the language of the book is explicit enough. No alteration of the Constitution can be made *without* the consent of a majority of the Classes. The *negative* vote of a majority of the Classes therefore is final. But the same thing is not true of an *affirmative* vote. For besides the "consent" of a majority of the Classes, the article requires something more, and an alteration cannot be made except by this consent, "together with the final determination and resolution of the General Synod for the time being." It is clear then, that after the majority of the Classes have consented, the whole matter is still in the hands of General Synod, and for good and sufficient reasons it may decline in the final action to consummate the change proposed. The wisdom of the Church has thus guarded its fundamental law, so that a proposed change can be more easily defeated than it can be effected; and so that it may be held in abeyance to the last moment, and for the decision of the most matured judgment of the Church.

Now if you are satisfied that the present General Synod has the constitutional right to proceed to the wholly unprecedented step, of a "final determination and resolution" concerning its own recommendation, and you are willing to

assume that responsibility in the face of the uniform practice of the Church; or, if by the action of a majority of the Synod, you should be compelled to vote on the final adoption of the change proposed; then it cannot be amiss to ask you to look over this vexed question once more, before your vote is given and recorded. It is not from the pertinacity of mere disputants, but from the zeal of an honest conviction, that we are disposed to press this matter upon your attention, in a last appeal. We believe the proposed measure unnecessary, unwise, and full of danger; and hitherto in our service of the Church, we have not been counted incapable of at least an ordinary discernment in regard to her welfare. It is no arrogance to claim an equal devotion to her interests, with the most zealous or the most determined advocates of a change; or that we are their peers in every respect which can give consideration to our opinions. That we have been outvoted is no proof that we are wrong, unless it is true that majorities are infallible. The assumption by certain parties, that the action of the courts thus far, is equivalent to the voice of God, is as profane as it is preposterous. The question is still open;—to an extent involving more responsibility than ought to be lightly assumed, its decision is in your hands, and if you desire and expect Divine guidance, it can only be after a thorough and prayerful examination of the issue.

On your assembling in June last, you found the Church at the completion of a decade of years, confessedly the most prosperous in her annals. The Reports, from all the Boards, were not only encouraging, but jubilant, and the language of congratulation, and the voice of thanksgiving, was heard on every side. The affections of our people for the Church of their birth, or of their adoption, were growing stronger with every year. Compact, energetic, and well equipped, with scarcely a ripple of discord to disturb her harmony, the grand old Church was moving on in her distinctive sphere, with dignity and honor. It was at such a juncture that the before-tried, and universally condemned effort, to rob her of her distinctive name, and substitute for it an abbreviated

ambiguity, was successful in obtaining a synodical recommendation. It was at such a juncture that three marvelous things were simultaneously discovered: first, that the Church was outgrowing itself, and therefore could no longer remain the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church; second, that the Church was actually dying out, and would soon become extinct if it remained the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church; and third, that it never had been the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church at all!

It is not in the spirit of badinage that the case is thus stated. We appeal to yourselves; if, on examination, every argument for the proposed change is not reducible to one or other of these three contradictory propositions. Each in turn, they have been elaborately and persistently urged upon the attention of the Church, whilst from the nature of the case, in the attempt to establish them severally, they have mutually destroyed each other. But we go further, and contend that it is capable of demonstration that *no one of them is true*.

In regard to the origin of the name which we now bear, the very able and conclusive historical induction of Gov. Vroom, showing what the name was in the beginning of our ecclesiastical existence in this country, and what it has been ever since, is unanswerable, and forever disposes of the convenient but baseless theory, that the word "Dutch" was the mere outgrowth of English usage. In the face of the facts so clearly stated in the paper referred to, all the talk about "returning to our original name of Reformed," is perfectly idle, and positively absurd, and if persisted in, becomes something worse than either.

As to the decay of the Church, and the danger of its dying out, under the incubus of its present and time-honored name, statistics are more eloquent than arguments, and they stamp this proposition in all its forms of presentation, as a mere pretence. In the language of the *Intelligencer*, of June 6th, "A brief retrospect at this time, of the growth

of the Reformed Dutch Church in this country, during the past ten years, cannot fail to awaken gladness of heart, and inspire every generous mind with the courage of abounding hope for the future. \* \* \* We present some statistics which are eloquent beyond all words which might be shaped into description. \* \* \* The progress made by our several Boards, deserves attention."

|   | 1857.        | 1867.        |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Board of Foreign Missions.....  | \$12,303 99  | \$119,580 89 |
| Board of Education.....   | 6,260 00     | 10,290 00    |
| Endowed Scholarships.....   | 39,700 00    | 72,000 00    |
| Exclusive of Van Benschoten and Knox<br>Fund.....                       | 22,000 00    | 22,000 00    |
| Board of Publication.....   | 00,000 00    | 28,660 48    |
| Board of Domestic Missions.....   | 16,000 00    | 27,519 14    |
| Annual Contributions.....   | \$74,263 99  | \$258,050 51 |
| Collections for all the Boards, and other be-<br>nevolent purposes..... | \$135,265 00 | \$277,209 00 |

Surely, if the benevolence of a Church is any evidence of its vitality, these figures cannot be interpreted into signs of decline. A corresponding result would doubtless be a *grateful review* to any denomination. But these are only a part of the statistics "more eloquent than words," in exhibiting the untruthfulness of the proposition that our name is killing us. During the same decade of years, the following sums have been received for permanent endowments :

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Hertzog Hall, Grounds, etc.....                   | \$64,750 00  |
| Theological Seminary, and Professors' Houses..... | 48,000 00    |
| Rutger's College Endowment.....                   | 138,000 00   |
| Hope College.....                                 | 47,000 00    |
| Building Fund.....                                | 19,000 00    |
|   | <hr/>        |
|   | \$276,750 00 |

The Reports of the Boards during these years, all speak the language of encouragement, growing warmer and stronger year by year. It would be tedious to quote all that might be adduced to prove that this doleful cry of decline is an expedient used for a purpose, and at variance with truth. Let a few examples suffice, from the Reports of the Board of Domestic Missions.

1863. "The evidences of prosperity in this cause seem to call upon us more than ever, to thank God and take courage."

1864. "In many respects the past year has been one of more than ordinary blessing." "Reports from Missionaries and Mission churches, for the most part present very encouraging features." "The general report is a decided increase of influence upon the public mind where we have raised our standards."

1865. "The year has been one of great blessing." "The general aspect of the work is very encouraging."

1866. "The Reports from the various fields not only present few discouraging aspects, but, on the contrary, bear convincing testimony that the influence of Gospel truth is going deeper into the hearts of those who are reached by this agency, and the cause of the Redeemer is thereby growing stronger and stronger."

1867. "There has scarcely ever been a year so fruitful, in a spiritual point of view, in the history of the Board."

We may add, as a pendant to the above, the testimony of the *Christian Intelligencer*, for June 17th: "There were no more inquiries as to whether the Reformed Dutch Church could go West. The feeling now is, we must go West, and we can go anywhere with Divine blessing. The Church begins to realize her strength, and wherever she puts forth earnest effort the results are marvelous." "She has never raised so much in one year, for this cause, as the last year. It is evident the churches possess the means; with this spirit we must succeed."

It is not a Church in a decline, of which such things can be said. If space permitted, we might cite to you from the Reports of the other Boards, and from the Committees of General Synod, expressions stronger than these, of grateful acknowledgment, in view of the increasing progress and

prosperity of our Church. But the evidence is within your own reach; it is patent and undeniable, in all that you see and know of the Church's work and welfare. No one who is at all acquainted with our past and present condition, believes that the Church, as a whole, is declining; and the absurd cry would never have been heard, but for the exigencies of an argument, and the desire to carry a favorite measure,—a measure which we believe to be unlawful in itself, and disastrous in its consequences.

But when the folly of one pretence is exhibited, our opponents shift their ground to the opposite extreme. Compelled to acknowledge that the last ten years have been the most prosperous in all her history, and that in proportion to her numbers, her growth has even exceeded that of other denominations; then this very progress and growth is made a reason for the self same thing, for which the alleged decline of the Church had before been used as an argument. "The Church is dying out, her name is killing her, and therefore it must be changed!" But it is shown by their own declarations and statistics, that the Church never was so hearty and vigorous, and behold! *presto, change!*—the magician waves his wand, and a new argument appears!—"The foregoing statistics, instead of affording the faintest argument in favor of retaining the word Dutch in our title, do in fact furnish invincible reasons for its removal!"—(*Intelligencer, June 6th.*)

The weeping prophets that now go about whining and wailing over our decline, are confronted with their own figures, when they rub their eyes, and exclaim, "Oh! that is it! it is our *prosperity* which proves that you are wrong in wishing to go on as we are, and that we are right in insisting upon a change!"

Can you wonder that those who have the interest of the old Church deeply at heart, and who are sensitive to anything that touches her past renown and her present honor, are impatient at such trifling; or that they are even led to

suspect an ulterior object, on the part of those who are consistent only, in an evident determination to carry a point? But let us try to look seriously at this new "invincible reason" in the very best aspect in which it can be put.

The sum of it is, that as a denomination, we have outgrown ourselves, and must relinquish our distinctive name for one that is more Catholic, in order to find profitable employment for our increased and increasing resources. Or, as it has been presented, "we are cabined, cribbed, confined," to employ the rhetorical and positive language of one of them, we are like "a vigorous oak planted in a flower-pot."

Now let us see how far the oak has outgrown its nourishment, or the Church the field in which its resources can be profitably employed.

For the purposes of extension, the visible resources of a Church are of two kinds,—men and money. If the "invincible" argument which we are considering has any force whatever, it must appear that we possess one or both of these resources, in greater measure than we can profitably employ; that we have an actual plethora of available means beyond our denominational wants. Again we appeal to facts and figures, and whilst we rejoice to know that they indicate life and vigor and progress, it is very certain that they show no overplus of either, for the demands of our distinctive mission in the vast field which lies open before us. Nay, the indications are, that we need special grace and consecration, to carry forward successfully the work now upon our hands. Only last year our Board of Foreign Missions had reached a crisis which gave great and just anxiety to its friends, and from which it was delivered only by the extraordinary munificence of a single individual. Describing the embarrassment to which they were reduced, the Board say in their Report: "The Missions, prospered of God, were importuning for larger appropriations that we could not altogether refuse. \* \* \* Moreover, the

Churches had already reached a high standard of liberality. When October came, and we began again to present our appeals, we had to tell of a debt of \$31,000. Then came forward a man whose name is forever embalmed in grateful memory, to announce by his pastor, to the assembled and perplexed friends of the Board, the noble gift of \$56,500, to pay the debt, and provide for carrying on the work. Very sensible that such men as Warren Ackerman are not found every day, and such a princely offering cannot be relied upon for every emergency; the Board and the Synod urge upon the Churches an advance upon even the present "high standard of liberality." In regard to *money*, we certainly have not outgrown our work, in the foreign field. In the same Report they say, "We report to the General Synod a present and most urgent need of *men*. We beg the Synod to call the churches to prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers."

Turn now to the Report of the Board of Domestic Missions, and it is the same story over again;—the want of more money, and more men, for the successful prosecution of their work.

"It is well for the churches to be informed that the present rate of contributions is inadequate to sustain the present operations of the Board; and but for the present provision which was made by Divine interposition in the legacies which have been received, and but for several liberal personal contributions, the Board must have been very seriously involved in debt."

In the newspaper discussions upon this subject, we have been told repeatedly that our young men were seeking fields of labor in other denominations, from the want of favorable opportunity in our own. And yet the men making these assertions had before them at the time, the Report of this Board, which says: "Your Board is compelled to report a *lack of men* for the work. It has not been able to fill promptly the vacancies which have occurred, to say nothing

of the occupying of the new and promising fields which have presented themselves. The funds on hand have not been sufficient to induce pastors who are well settled in the East to occupy fields in the West, and the theological students who graduate are in such demand in the older and well established churches, that it is only occasionally that one can be secured for the service of the Board. The brethren in the field are often discouraged that so few helpers are sent to co-operate with them in the great work. In order to an adequate supply of Gospel laborers, there is pressing need for more earnest prayer on the part of the Church." (*Rep. Domestic Missions, 1867.*)

Are we to take the language of the Board in a Pickwickian sense, or, is all this ado about an "*oak in a flower-pot,*" a mere rhetorical flourish?

The Board of Education may be supposed to understand the resources and the wants of the Church. But its language is, "The well known facts of the immediate settlements furnished the graduates of our Theological Seminary, and of the still remaining vacant Churches, as also every expression coming from all parts of the Church concerning the importance and necessity of our interests in Hope College, are proofs that *instead of outrunning, our work does not even yet meet the needs of the Church, yet though still below the measure of pressing necessities, what work we have undertaken compelled us to report a debt upon our treasury at the close of the last year, an increase of it at the end of this, and the prospect of still further additions during the present.*

A single sentence from the Synodical Report, (Min. 1867, p. 196,) will conclude these quotations, "There thus remain 345 ordained ministers, for 444 Churches, of which Churches we need not be surprised to hear that 78 are "vacant;" while new missionary fields are opening on all sides at home and abroad, and at the same time the relative number of candidates for the ministry is decreasing in our own as well as some other Churches."

It is in the face of these facts, that our conceded progress and prosperity, is set before us as an invincible argument that we are in danger of perishing from a plethora of unemployed, and yet available means. If our recollection of some recent statistics serves us, we are contributing more, per member, to the cause of Christ than any other Denomination, and yet so extended is the work on our hands, that every Board unites in the appeal, which the Synod echoes, for *more men and more money*.

Not only, then, are the three chosen positions of the advocates of the proposed change, inconsistent with each other, and mutually destructive, but taken severally and apart, neither of them is tenable,—no great measure of Church polity was ever projected upon a narrower basis of argument, and it is hard to conceive how the heat and persistency with which it is pressed, can possibly emanate from the reasons assigned for it. Upon the promoters of this measure must rest the responsibility of endangering that peace and prosperity of the Church which was acknowledged to exist upon your assembling in June last. Upon you it now depends, whether you will consummate in disaster, a measure which has thus far been so inauspicious in its progress. To an extent, greater, perhaps, than any of us can estimate, the Church has already suffered damage by this ill-advised movement. Let it go on to its completion in the manner proposed, and we may all live to deplore the infatuation that could perpetrate the blunder. We have neither time nor inclination to review the spirit and conduct of the controversy. The quips and turns of a flippant sarcasm, the personal allusions and innuendos of editorial license, the disparaging epithets and patronizing exhortations, the alternations of pious platitudes with paragraphs of personal offensiveness; all of these as used against ourselves, are to us as the idle wind. For ourselves we have maintained a decided, vigorous, and determined opposition, to what we believe to be wrong in itself, and pernicious in its effects. In all this we have exercised the rights, and discharged the duties of members and friends of

the Church. Our record is clear, and we intend that it shall be. Therefore it is, that we make to you this final appeal.

To do what is proposed in regard to our name, is to assume a power, which we do not believe belongs to you, or to any Synod, even with the consent of the Classes. To do it at your adjourned meeting, is to violate the spirit and intent of the last article of the Constitution, as interpreted by the uniform practice of the Church. It is moreover to take this responsibility unnecessarily, since the delay of a few months, until the meeting of the next Synod, can make no material difference, if the Church actually demands the change. It is further to take this responsibility, in the face of an extensive and unmitigated opposition to the measure itself; at the hazard of the peace and unity of the Church; and for no reason that cannot be shown to be fallacious.

We show our loyalty to the Church by resisting such action, in all lawful ways; and we show our respect for you as a Synod, in frankly and clearly stating our views, before your final determination is taken and recorded. If, notwithstanding, the objectionable measure is consummated, so far as your votes can accomplish it; we shall have discharged our consciences in this final appeal, and it will then remain for us, to follow that course, which our best judgment of duty to the Church and duty to ourselves may demand.

May the Great Head of the Church guide you and us, to that conclusion which He will own and bless.

Signed, in behalf of himself and many others, both ministers and laymen, by

JAMES ANDERSON,

NEW YORK, *Nov. 17th*, 1867.