

Session Four: Presbyterian History

Class Study Questions
(to be completed before class)

Sources: “A Brief History of the PCA,” by Ken Keyes; “What’s So Great About the PCA?” by Tim Keller

1. What are the three historic branches of the reformed faith that Keller writes about?
2. Define each branch.
3. Do you see evidences of any of these branches in Faith Church? If so, which ones?
4. Explain the American influence on determining true professors of Christianity.

5. What were some of the causes of concern that startled conservatives in the PCUS to begin to work for reform in the Southern Presbyterian Church?

6. Explain what split the church in the 18th Century.

7. Explain what split the church 19th Century.

8. Explain what split the church in the 20th Century (see any trends here?)

9. What was the “Fellowship of St. James?”

10. What vehicle was established to inform and encourage conservatives in the PCUS?

11. When was the first General Assembly of the PCA held? Where?

Timeline of Presbyterian History

Date	Event
1640	The Southampton, Long Island, congregation, generally reckoned to be the oldest Presbyterian church in the USA, organizes.
1647	The "Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster," now known as the Westminster Confession of Faith, is published. Intended as a consensus confession for all of the United Kingdom, the Confession, with its catechisms, becomes the confessional standard for Presbyterian churches in Scotland (1648).
1683	Francis Makemie, whose work in founding churches in the US earns him the title, "Father of American Presbyterianism," arrives from Ireland.
1706	Makemie, with six other ministers, organizes the first presbytery in the American colonies in Philadelphia.
1718	William Tennent, minister and educator, arrives in Philadelphia. His cabin academy, dubbed the "Log College," (1746) evolves over several decades into the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). One of these Log Colleges was at Manor Church not far from Quarryville.
1729	The Adopting Act establishes the Westminster Confession and its Larger and Shorter Catechisms, "in all the essential and necessary articles," as the confessional standard for the American church.
1741	"Old Side" and "New Side" factions within the church, at odds over the excitements of the First Great Awakening, divide into separate synods. The schism, the first in the American church, lasts for seventeen years.
1749	Jonathan Edwards, foremost of American Reformed theologians, publishes The Life of David Brainerd, missionary to the Indians. The Life becomes one of the most popular religious biographies of the century.
1755	Samuel Davies, evangelist and educator, helps organize the Presbytery of Hanover (VA) and prepares the way for substantial Presbyterian church growth in the Upper South.
1768	John Witherspoon, minister and educator, arrives in Princeton to be president of the College of New Jersey. A delegate to the Continental Congress, he becomes the only active minister to sign the Declaration of Independence, 1776.
1789	The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA meets in Philadelphia, May 21.
1801	The Presbyterian General Assembly and New England Congregationalists agree to a Plan of Union, a spectacularly successful cooperative work to plant churches on the frontier. In the West, Barton Stone's "sacramental meeting" at Cane Ridge, KY, breaks out into six or seven days of frantic revival. Waves of camp meeting revivals spread throughout the

- South and Midwest giving rise to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1810) and other denominations.
- 1807 First African Presbyterian Church organized in Philadelphia, the first African-American Presbyterian church in the U.S.
 - 1812 The Theological Seminary at Princeton established by the General Assembly as its first national school for ministers.
 - 1816 Isabella Graham and Joanna Bethune, pioneers in female and [childhood education](#), found the Female Society for the Promotion of Sabbath [Schools](#). The Bellevue Church, Caledonia, MO, the first Presbyterian church west of the Mississippi, is organized.
 - 1817 A local adult Sunday school union, founded by Alexander Henry, a Presbyterian layman (1816), becomes the American Sunday School Union. The ASSU will become one of the largest of private benevolent agencies in the nation.
 - 1818 The General Assembly pronounces against slavery and calls for gradual emancipation, but George Bourne, an immigrant Scottish cleric, whose tract *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable* (1816) infuriates the South, is deposed from the ministry.
 - 1822 Theologian Charles Hodge begins his long (1822-1878) and distinguished teaching career at Princeton Seminary. He eventually trains over two thousand students.
 - 1831 The Synod of Pittsburgh organizes the Western Foreign Missionary Society, the precursor to the Board of Foreign Missions.
 - 1833 John B. Pinney, first foreign missionary of the PCUSA, sails for Liberia.
 - 1834 Albert Barnes, minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and popular Bible commentator, publishes his *Notes on Romans*, and is tried for heresy (1835). His acquittal in 1836 was a leading cause in the Old School/New School division.
 - 1837 After a decade of increasing theological and institutional tensions, the "Old School" party of the General Assembly abrogates the 1801 Plan of Union and expels four largely "New School" synods from the denomination, precipitating a bitter 30 year national division of the Church. Board of Foreign Missions established. Elijah Lovejoy, minister and abolitionist publisher, dies while defending his printing press against a pro-slavery mob in Alton, IL.
 - 1838 First Presbyterian church in the Pacific Northwest organized, Wailatpu, WA.
 - 1840 Daniel Baker, the "apostle of Presbyterianism in Texas," and eventual founder of Austin College, lands at Galveston to begin a career as missionary and church builder.
 - 1842 Henry Highland Garnet, a freed slave, is ordained by the Troy (NY) Presbytery. Editor, preacher and abolitionist, Garnet eventually preaches before Congress and becomes the U.S. ambassador to Liberia.
 - 1847 Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, celebrated explorers and medical missionaries in the Pacific Northwest are killed, blamed for a measles epidemic that decimated the native

population but left them untouched.

- 1851 Stephen Colwell, Philadelphia manufacturer, calls attention to the increasing poverty of the Northern industrial cities in *New Themes for the Protestant Clergy*.
- 1853 First Chinese Presbyterian church organized by William Speer in California.
- 1854 Ashmun Institute, later Lincoln University (Oxford, PA), founded by John M. Dickey. The school becomes one of the major colleges for African-Americans following the Civil War.
- 1855 Charles Baird re-introduces American congregations to their largely forgotten liturgical past in *Eutaxia: or the Presbyterian Liturgies*.
- 1858 Two denominations which trace their roots back to 18th century Scottish dissenters unite to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America.
- 1859 Anna Warner, New York author of several popular but sentimental novels, publishes *Say and Seal*, in which appears "Jesus Loves Me," soon to become the anthem of the American Sunday school movement.
- 1861 In the midst of the Secession Crisis, the General Assembly (OS) pledges loyalty to the Federal government. Southern commissioners protest and withdraw. The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (renamed the PCUS in 1865) organizes in Augusta that winter.
- 1869 Reunion of the Old and New School General Assemblies in Pittsburgh, ending the "Presbyterian Thirty Years War."
- 1870 Women's Foreign Missionary Society, the oldest and largest of the women's boards dedicated to the cause of foreign missions, organized in Philadelphia.
- 1877 The First General Presbyterian Council meets in Edinburgh Scotland. The ecumenical venture eventually results in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- 1884 Sheldon Jackson, tireless missionary on the western frontier and founder of dozens of churches, becomes first superintendent of public instruction for Alaska Territory. Alarmed by starvation among the Eskimos, Jackson directs the introduction of Siberian reindeer into Alaska (1891).
- 1889 Louisa Woosley, first woman Presbyterian minister, ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The Cumberland General Assembly refuses to recognize her ordination for two decades.
- 1892 Charles Briggs, brilliant and argumentative professor at Union Seminary, NY, is embroiled one of the most publicized heresy trials in the church's history due to his "higher-critical" views of Scripture. Reacting to the controversy, the General Assembly adopts language defending the "inerrancy" of Scripture.
- 1895 The Hymnal, edited by Louis Benson, is published as an official hymn book for the PCUSA. It becomes a model for subsequent church hymn books.

- 1896 William Jennings Bryan, journalist, politician, crusader, and sometime Bible commentator runs for President for the first time at age thirty-six. He runs twice again before serving in Woodrow Wilson's cabinet (1912).
- 1903 PCUSA adds two new chapters and two Declaratory Statements to the Westminster Confession-the first substantial changes to the confessional standards since their adoption.
- 1906 The majority of Cumberland Presbyterian churches reunite with the Presbyterian Church in the USA, ending a division of nearly 100 years.
- 1908 The Federal Council of Churches, predecessor to the National Council of Churches (1950) organized with heavy Presbyterian participation.
- 1910 The Fundamentals, a non-denominational tract series sponsored by two Presbyterian elders, is distributed widely across the nation. The series gives its name to the growing "Fundamentalist" movement.
- 1912 Woodrow Wilson, Presbyterian elder, and a son of the manse, elected President. He is still considered by some to be the most deliberately theological of U.S. Presidents.
- 1928 Norman Thomas, Presbyterian minister, runs for President as the Socialist Party candidate.
- 1930 The PCUSA's constitution is amended to allow women to be ordained elders.
- 1936 J. Gresham Machen, minister, scholar, and author of Christianity and Liberalism (1923), leads secession from the PCUSA and forms The Presbyterian Church in America. Church is sued over the name PCA and becomes the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
- 1937 Machen dies and two parties emerge. The fundamentalist party lead by J. Oliver Buswell and Carl McIntire and the confessionalist party led by Cornelius Van Til. Buswell and McIntire split over the confessionalists refusal to condemn social drinking and form The Bible Presbyterian Church.
- 1938 Bible Presbyterians form Faith Seminary. One if its early students was Francis Schaeffer.
- 1948 The Faith and Life Curriculum, a highly ambitious and integrated educational program launched by the PCUSA. PCUS adopts a broadly similar Covenant Life Curriculum, 1963.
- 1952 Presbyterian Dwight Eisenhower elected President.
- 1953 John Mackay, President of Princeton Seminary and Moderator of the PCUSA General Assembly decries the panic of McCarthyism in "A Letter to Presbyterians." Justice William O. Douglas, a Presbyterian, cites the "Letter" as a landmark statement against repression (1954).
- 1954 The General Assembly of the PCUS becomes the first church body to endorse the Supreme Court's ruling against racial segregation.
- 1956 Margaret Towner is ordained as the first woman minister in the PCUSA. Rachel

- Henderlite becomes the first in the PCUS, 1965.
- 1958 The PCUSA and the United Presbyterian Church of North America unite to form the UPCUSA, the largest Presbyterian denomination in the country.
- 1961 Evangelical Presbyterian Church forms as a reaction to McIntire's control of the Bible Presbyterian Church and its agencies. The EPC began to struggle to overcome its separatist background.
- 1963 March on Washington. Martin Luther King, Jr., addresses crowd of 200,000. Presbyterian Eugene Carson Blake also among the speakers.
- 1964 Edler Hawkins elected first African-American moderator of the UPCUSA General Assembly. Lawrence Bottoms elected first Black moderator of the PCUS, 1974.
- 1965 Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod forms from the union of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.
- 1966 Eugene Carson Blake, minister, Stated Clerk of the PCUSA and UPCUSA ecumenist, and civil rights leader, becomes general secretary of the World Council of Churches. An advocate of Christian unity, Blake gave early leadership to the Consultation on Church Union.
- 1967 UPCUSA supplements the Westminster Confession with a Book of Confessions, containing Christian confessions from the fourth century to the twentieth, including the newly-drafted Confession of 1967.
- 1971 The National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship is created between the RPCES and conservative southern Presbyterian churches.
- 1972 Lois Stair elected first woman moderator of the General Assembly, UPCUSA. Sarah Moseley elected first woman moderator of the GA, PCUS, 1978.
- 1973 The Presbyterian Church in America is established.
- 1982 RPCES joined the PCA bringing 190 churches and over 26,000 members into the PCA.
- 1983 The UPCUSA and the PCUS, the largest American Presbyterian denominations, reunite after 122 years, forming the PC(USA).
- 1984 Presbyterian Ronald Reagan elected President.