

**HISTORY AND ECCLESIASTICAL
RELATIONS OF THE CHURCHES
OF THE PRESBYTERIAL ORDER
AT AMOY, CHINA**

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J. V. N. TALMAGE

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OF THE
CHURCHES OF THE PRESBYTERIAL ORDER,
AT
AMOY, CHINA.
BY
REV. J. V. N. TALMAGE,
MISSIONARY OF THE PROT. REF. DUTCH CHURCH.

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P R E F A C E .

To the Ministers, Elders, and Members of the Reformed Dutch Church :

It is proper that I give some reasons for the publication of this paper. The importance of the subject of the ecclesiastical organization of the churches gathered in heathen lands, I conceive to be a sufficient reason. Those who may differ in regard to the views set forth in this paper, will not dispute the importance of the subject. Instead of the questions involved having been settled by any of the Presbyterian Denominations of this country (the Dutch Church included among them), by experiments in India or any other heathen land, very few of the churches gathered from the heathen, by these various Denominations, have yet arrived at a stage of development sufficient for practical application of the experiment. (See foot-note, page 160.) There are, however, a few mission churches, where the subject is now becoming one of vast practical importance. The Church at Amoy stands out prominent among these. With the continuance of the divine blessing there will soon be many such. Hence the importance of the discussion, and its importance *now*.

Many experiments have been made in reference to the best way of conducting the work of missions. The Church has improved by them, and has been compelled to *unlearn* many things. We are continually returning towards the simple plan laid down in God's Word. As the Church by experiment and by discussion has thus been led to retrace some of her steps in the preliminary work of missions, should she not be ready to take advantage of experiment and discussion, in reference to the ecclesiastical organization of the mission churches, and stand ready to retrace some of her

steps in this second stage of the work of missions, if need be, in order to conform more fully to the doctrines of our Presbyterian church polity? I would use the phrase *Scriptural church polity*, but I suppose it is the universal belief of our Church, that Presbyterian polity is scriptural. At any rate, it is the duty of the Church to examine the subject carefully. She has nothing to fear from such examination. She should fear to neglect it.

In addition to the importance of the subject in itself considered, I have other reasons for discussing it at the present time. There are mistaken impressions abroad in the Church, concerning the views and course of your missionaries at Amoy, which must be injurious to the cause of missions in our Church. It would seem to be a plain duty to correct these impressions. I will quote an extract from a letter, I recently received, from an honored missionary of a sister Church :

“ I have heard much, and seen some notices in the papers
 “ of the battle you fought on the floor of Synod, and would
 “ like to hear your side of the subject from your own mouth,
 “ as the question has also been a practical one with us. * *
 “ * * * We have our own Presbytery, and manage our
 “ own business, and insist on not having too much of what
 “ they call the new science of Missionary management; a
 “ science which, I believe, has been cultivated far too assidu-
 “ ously. It was this, more than anything else, which kept
 “ me from going out under the A. B. C. F. M., and to Amoy.
 “ * * * * * I hear, however, from some, that what you
 “ and the brethren there had formed, was some sort of loose
 “ Congregational association. If so, I must judge against
 “ you, for I believe in the *jure divino* of Presbytery (or
 “ Classis if you choose so to call it), and I think you and
 “ they should have been allowed to form a Presbytery there,
 “ and manage all your own affairs, and that your Boards at
 “ home should be content to consider themselves a committee
 “ to raise and send on the funds. But it is hard for the D.
 “ D's and big folk at home to come to that. They think
 “ they must manage everything, or all will go wrong; while
 “ how little it is that they can be brought to know or realize
 “ of the real nature of the work abroad; and then it is the

“old battle of patronage over again. Those who give the money must govern, and those who receive it must give up their liberty, and be no longer Christ’s freemen.”

This is only a specimen, one of many, of the mistaken impressions abroad in the Church concerning the views and doings of your Missionaries. May we not, *must* we not, correct them? The letter also illustrates the evils resulting from allowing mistaken impressions to remain in the Church uncorrected. There has long been an impression in our Church that the A. B. C. F. M. interfered with the ecclesiastical affairs of our missions. We have been informed that several of our young men, before our Church separated from that Board, were deterred thereby from devoting themselves to the foreign Missionary work. The writer of the above letter, probably having more of the Missionary spirit, was not willing, on that account, to give up the work, but was led to offer himself to the Board of a sister Church. The Mission at Amoy, and our Church, have thus been deprived of the benefit of his labors by means of an erroneous impression. When we learned the fact of such an impression existing in this country, we endeavored to correct it. In our letter of 1856, to General Synod, we called particular attention to the subject. Here is a part of one sentence: “It seems to us a duty, and we take this opportunity to bear testimony, that neither Dr. Anderson, nor the Prudential Committee have ever, in any communication which we have received from them, in any way, either by dictation, or by the expression of opinions, interfered in the least with our ecclesiastical relations.” We failed to get that letter published, and I find the erroneous impression still prevalent, working its mischief in the churches.

But to return to the subject of the mistaken impressions concerning the views of your Missionaries at Amoy. These impressions would have been partly corrected in the Church, if the report of the proceedings of Synod, in “The Christian Intelligencer,” had been more correct on this subject. That paper states, that, on Friday evening, “Rev. Mr. Talmage then took the floor, and addressed the Synod for nearly two hours,” but does not give a single word or idea uttered by him. It is careful to report the only *unkind words*

against the Missionaries uttered during that whole discussion, which, with this single exception, was conducted in a spirit of the utmost Christian kindness; but does not give a word of the remarks made on the Friday evening previous, on that very subject, in justification of their course.

It seems to be a duty, though painful, to speak particularly on this subject. Look at the following language: "I know that we are told that the *hybrid organization* [i. e. the *Classis, a court of the Church of Christ, at Amoy*] which now exists is every way sufficient and satisfactory; that it is the fruit of Christian love, and that to disturb it would be rending the body of Christ. Here one might ask, how it came to exist at all, seeing that this Synod spoke so plainly, and unambiguously, in 1857; and I, for one, cordially concur in the remark of the elder, Schieffelin, that the brethren there 'deserve censure.' We do not censure them, nor do we propose to do so; but that they deserve it is undeniable. But the point is, how can our disapproval of the *mongrel Classis* mar the peace of the Amoy brethren?" This language was used by the President of Synod, after asking whether the Synod was ready for the question, "the question being about to be put," when an attempt to answer it seemed altogether out of place. In all the circumstances it seemed almost like the charge of a judge to a jury. I do not say that there is any improper spirit manifested, or opprobrious expressions employed in this language, or that the President did wrong in waiting until the discussion was over before he uttered it, or that the missionaries are not deserving of such severe censure—of all these things let the Church judge—but I do say that the spreading of such language and such charges broadcast, before the Church and before the world, demands that the missionaries be heard in self-defense, or, which is all they ask, that they be allowed to state the facts and views which guided them in their action.

Doubtless it was an oversight that such a one-sided report on this subject appeared in *The Christian Intelligencer*. At least it was not at all designed that injustice be done to the Missionaries, but, unless they be allowed to speak for themselves, is not injustice done them? It seemed to me that a very mistaken impression concerning the views expressed by me,

near the close of the session of Synod, was also conveyed by the Report. This I attempted to correct by a note to the editor, but even the right of correcting my own sentiments and language was refused, my note garbled, and, as I thought, my views again misrepresented. More than this, the *implied* charge is published to the world that I am seeking to excite "dissension among the churches," and "opposition to the constituted authority of Synod."* It would therefore be great dereliction of duty to return to my field of labor, allowing my own views, and the views of my co-laborers, to be thus mistaken in the Church, and such serious charges against our course unanswered. I am not aware that any censorship of the press has been authorized by General Synod. Surely if others are allowed to be heard for us we should be allowed the right to be heard for ourselves. We were unable by writing from Amoy to get our views before the Church. I must, therefore, while in this land, endeavor to make them known.

I have been advised by some to delay the publication of this paper a few months, until we learn the effect of the decision of the last Synod on the Mission at Amoy, and see what course the Church there may feel compelled to adopt. I do not see the force of such advice. Whatever may be the course of the Church there, the intrinsic merits of the question will be unchanged thereby. Besides this, I cannot afford such delay. I have been looking forward to as speedy return as possible to that field of labor. Would it be right to leave the whole subject to the eve of my departure, and thus shut myself off from the possibility of defending or further explaining my views, if such defense or explanation be called for?

I have been asked, Why not bring this subject before the Church through the columns of the *Christian Intelligencer*? This question, after what has been said above, need not now be answered. Doubtless the editor is responsible for what appears in his columns. The only resource left the Mission seems to be the one I have chosen.

I regret the necessity of discussing the subject, since the

* If this language seem too strong or uncalled for, see Appendix B, at the end.