

The Bush Still Burns: The Expansion of Calvinism

In this lesson we are going to be talking about the Reformed faith as it spread outside of Europe to different parts of the world, including Australia. I would like to begin with a prayer from Ernest Northcroft Merrington, an Australian Presbyterian. Let us pray.

“God of eternity, Lord of the ages, / Father and Spirit and Savior of men, Thine is the glory of time’s numbered pages; / Thine is the power to revive us again. / Pardon our sinfulness, God of all pity, / Call to remembrance Thy mercies of old; / Strengthen Thy church to abide as a city / Set on a hill for a light to Thy fold. / Head of the Church on earth, risen, ascended! / Thine is the honour that dwells in this place: / As Thou hast blessed us through years that have ended, / Still lift upon us the light of Thy face. Amen.”

One of the five themes that I want to cover in this course, and I hope that we have to some degree, is the theme of ecumenical reform. We have tried to take a look at the church as it developed in various ways and in different traditions, but we have also focused more on the developments of Reformed tradition within church history. This lecture is going to focus especially on the Reformed side of that theme. In the next three lessons, we will look at the ecumenical side as we look at developments in the twentieth century in the Protestant church in general, then the Roman Catholic Church, and finally, the Greek Orthodox Church. I wonder if you could name the most Presbyterian, most Reformed countries in the world in terms of percentage of population. You would probably get some of them correct. Switzerland and Scotland stand at the top with about 40% being Presbyterian and Reformed. Any of those people could be nominally connected with those churches. Nonetheless, they have some kind of identification with the Presbyterian Church. Holland would be next with about 30%. You may not get the next one right, but Hungary would be next with about 20%.

I want to say a little about the development of the Reformed faith in Hungary before we look at its expansion to North America. Hungary had influences going back to the pre-Reformation period because of the popularity of the teaching of John Huss, the martyr. His teaching was popular in Hungary and adjoining areas in Eastern Europe. Luther’s teaching, in time, came into Hungary. Many people embraced Lutheranism. However, it was really the Swiss Reform (the Helvetic Reform) that became the most popular shape of Protestant Christianity in Hungary. A Hungarian scholar has talked about the amalgamation of the spirit of Bullinger and Calvin in the Hungarian Reformed Church.

The second Helvetic Confession was Bullinger’s great personal confession and was later adopted by different Reformed churches. In 1567, the confession of Bullinger was adopted by the Hungarian Reformed Church as its own confession of faith. A Hungarian Bible was published in 1590. By the end of the sixteenth century, it was estimated that 80% to 85% of the population of about three-and-a-half million had converted to Protestantism. Most of those were Reformed. Some were Lutheran. It is also interesting to realize that during the early seventeenth century the great influences from Puritanism from England poured into Hungary and brought a renewal and revitalization of the Hungarian church at that time. By the time that was happening, the forces of the counter-Reformation were being felt. In the second half of the seventeenth century it brought great reversal to the Protestant cause. It was a time of war and suffering for the Hungarian people. There was a dramatic decrease in the percentage of the population, which was Reformed, from about 80% to about 30%. Continued suppression of the church and of the Protestant cause by the Hapsburg rulers continued the decline in the great Hungarian Reformed Church, which at one time was probably the strongest Reformed church in the world. From the eighteenth century down to the present, the Hungarian Reformed Church has struggled to hold its

own. It has done that in terms of numbers but has suffered, at the same time, a disastrous decline in theological Orthodoxy and in spiritual life. So, we need to remember something of the history of the church in Hungary and pray for that church today—that God might revive and restore it.

The Presbyterian Church in the new world developed largely through immigration, particularly through Scots moving to other parts of the world. Scots were both Presbyterian and given to wandering and settling in other areas. In the United States, it was the Scotch-Irish who came over in large numbers in the eighteenth century. They brought the Presbyterian faith with them. The Presbyterian faith had already begun in America before the Scotch-Irish arrived. The first American presbytery began in 1706 in Philadelphia, which for many years was almost like a Presbyterian Jerusalem. The General Assembly was held there every year. Almost anything that happened in the Presbyterian Church in America focused in Philadelphia and later in other parts of the country as well. In 1706, there were seven ministers who comprised that first presbytery. Those ministers were from England, New England, Scotland, and Ireland. It was during the eighteenth century that the great Scotch-Irish immigration took place and greatly strengthened the Presbyterian Church. Some Presbyterians came directly from Scotland. The first Presbyterians, or Scots, to arrive in this country were slaves. They were indentured servants, which were almost like slaves. They could work and buy their freedom, but it generally took them many, many years to do that. Cromwell sent those Scots to America in 1651. Others came voluntarily after the defeat of the Jacobite cause at Culloden in 1745. But far more Scottish Presbyterians came from Ireland.

The Scotch-Irish are not really Irish. They are Scottish people who immigrated to Northern Ireland and spent a generation or two there. Then, many of them moved on to North America. Over 200,000 came during the eighteenth century. Many of those people sailed from the Irish village of Londonderry in small boats. The perilous voyage took weeks and sometimes months depending on the weather. Many came into Philadelphia and then gradually moved westward. Some went out as far as Allegany, or Pittsburgh as it was later called. That part of Pennsylvania became one of the strongest Scotch-Irish and Presbyterian sections of the country. Those who did not push straight west went west for some miles and turned south through the great valley of Virginia. They made their way down the valley, settling in different counties between the Shenandoah and the Allegany Mountains. Augusta County and Lexington County are probably still the most Presbyterian counties in America. Then, these people pushed down into the Carolinas and finally into Tennessee and Kentucky through the mountains as those states opened up. There is a Scotch-Irish display at Western Carolina University in the little mountain town of Cullowhee, North Carolina. It is part of the mountain heritage center, which describes in very interesting ways the migration of the Scotch-Irish from Scotland to Northern Ireland down to the Shenandoah and finally into the western areas of North Carolina. There were other, smaller groups of Scots—Highland Scots—who came directly from Scotland during the eighteenth century. They settled in places such as the Cape Fear area of North Carolina. In that area today, there is a Scotland County. Some people in that area still speak the Gaelic language. So, the Scotch-Irish and the Scots came, and with them came the Presbyterian Church. Although the Presbyterian Church was established before this immigration, it strengthened the church in the American colonies.

As the Reformed faith was coming from Scotland, it was also coming from the Netherlands. There was a Dutch Reformed Church in America from the very early days in New Amsterdam. New Amsterdam, or New York as we call it, was a Dutch city at first. There were Dutch people living there as early as 1624, and the Dutch Reformed Church was planted. Forty years later, the city became English, but the Dutch still lived in the area of New York City, up the Hudson, and down in New Jersey. Theodore Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed pastor, had a great deal to do with the beginnings of the First Great Awakening. The Reformed Church in America, as it was called, was organized in 1792. In the

nineteenth century, there were new ways of Dutch Immigration. Scottish immigration was largely in the eighteenth century. Dutch immigration was in the nineteenth century, not to the Eastern Seaboard or to the South but to the Midwest, particularly to Iowa and Michigan. Pella, Iowa and Holland, Michigan became important centers for Dutch settlers and the Dutch church. As the church in the Netherlands went through various secessions, so did the American Dutch Church. Dutch people who left the Reformed Church of America formed the Christian Reformed Church in 1857. There were two strands in the Christian Reformed Church: the Seceders of 1834 and the followers of Kuyper, who came out of the state church in the Doleantie.

Let me talk a little bit about Canada. Calvinists came early to Quebec, or Lower Canada as it was first called. The French founded Quebec in 1608, just one year after Jamestown and before the Pilgrims arrived in New England in 1620. Those French who settled Quebec included some Huguenots—Protestant Calvinists. However, as Quebec became more and more Catholic in its orientation, the Huguenots were banned in 1633, and Lower Canada became an exclusively Catholic area until Quebec fell to the British in 1760. At that time, Scottish Presbyterians began to come into Montreal and other areas of Quebec. McGill University in Montreal is a Presbyterian University. It is a kind of Canadian Princeton with connections with the college in New Jersey. Some of the teachers at McGill studied at Princeton. Nova Scotia and the Maritimes became British possessions earlier in the eighteenth century. Many Calvinists settled that area of Canada. Later, after the Revolutionary War, there were Americans who did not want to be independent but still had loyalty to Britain. People from New England moved up to the Maritimes in Canada, including Congregational Calvinists. (There were not many Presbyterians who moved to Canada from New England because there were not that many there.) They were joined by Presbyterians from Ireland and Scotland.

The same thing happened in Upper Canada, which is Ontario. Presbyterians arrived from the United States, Scotland, and Ireland. In Canada, as we would expect, there were the different divisions in the Presbyterian Church that had already taken place in Scotland. So, there were Berger and anti-Berger Seceders, and then later there were Free Church Presbyterians. Some of these groups I have not even talked about. All of the Scottish Presbyterian divisions were recognized and existed in Canada. However, by 1875, almost all Presbyterians had joined together—a bit earlier than it happened in Scotland. They formed the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1875.

By the twentieth century, Reformed witness in the Presbyterian churches, Baptist churches, and other churches in Canada had considerably weakened. In 1925, the United Church of Canada came into existence. Virtually all of the Methodists, almost all of the Congregationalists, and about three-fourths of the Presbyterians joined the United Church of Canada. There was a continuing Presbyterian Church of Canada. Today, that church has some ministers (a minority) and congregations committed to a revival of Reformed doctrine and faith. Also, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is present in Canada in a few congregations, attempting to revive and recover the historic Presbyterian and Reformed position in Canada. Several graduates of Covenant Seminary in recent years who were Canadian are ministers there now. They went back to serve the PCA in Canada. In the twentieth century, Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada. Most have become members of the Canadian part of the Christian Reformed Church. The best one-volume history of the Protestant churches in Canada was published in 1990 by the Canadian historian George Ralley. It is also important for us to note that Mark Noll's 1992 *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* gives significant space to the development of church history in Canada. Americans have tended to ignore Canada and leave out the history of the church in our adjoining nation. There are some interesting similarities between the history of Christianity in Canada and the history of Christianity in the United States. There are some great differences as well. One way to understand the church history of either country better is to know the history of the other country. By seeing how our

paths at times tended to merge and at times separate helps us to understand both American and Canadian history.

Next, let us talk about the expansion of Calvinism in Australia. The first British colony was established in Australia in 1788. It really seems quite late when you think of the history even of the United States, which is not that old either. The first colonists from Britain did not go to Australia voluntarily. It was a penal colony, and these people were forced to go there. That does not mean they were all bad people. People were sent to Australia for all sorts of things like debt and other things that would not be considered reasons for imprisoning people today. However, that history does mean that Australia did not have in its founding the religious purposes that this country had. Puritans came to America to escape religious persecution in England. They came in order to freely establish their own faith. But this does not mean that religion was not important in the history of Australia.

The Church of England was present early. The Church of England in Australia included, from the very beginning, evangelicals and Calvinists. The early ministers of the Church of England, including Samuel Marsden, who is the most famous of that list, were influenced by people like William Wilberforce and Charles Simeon. So, they brought to Australia a very vital, Orthodox, Anglican faith. The result of that was the fact that even today the diocese of Sydney is the most evangelical, Anglican diocese in the world. Presbyterians soon arrived in Australia. These Presbyterians were from Scotland. The first Presbyterian preacher came in 1822. The first presbytery was formed in 1832. The Disruption in Scotland in 1843 produced similar divisions in Australia so that Australia, like Canada, had the different Scottish-oriented Presbyterian churches. Later, reunions produced two major Presbyterian denominations: the Presbyterian Church of Australia and what became known as the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, where most of the Scots had settled. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia continued and still continues the Free Church of Scotland tradition. The same story that happens everywhere (the story that we will look at in more detail in connection with late eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century history) is the gradual decline of Orthodoxy into liberalism. This happened in Australia as well leading up to the Uniting Church in 1977, which was a union of the Methodists, the Congregationalists, and the Presbyterians. It repeated what Canada had done about 50 years earlier. Once again, there were some Presbyterians who refused to go into the union. So, there is a continuing Presbyterian Church of Australia, the smaller continuing Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, and several other small, Reformed denominations including a Dutch denomination called the Reformed Churches of Australia, founded by Dutch settlers after World War II. People described it as the spiritual sons of Kuyper.

The story in New Zealand is similar. Scottish Presbyterians came to New Zealand in the 1830s. Many of them settled around a city they call Dunedin. Interestingly, Dunedin is the old Gaelic name for Edinburgh. The Anglicans settled at Christ Church, a province of Canterbury. These people tend to take their names with them. So, the Presbyterians were in Dunedin. There was also a Free Church. After the Disruption of 1843, those churches united in 1901. Once again, the trend was toward liberal theology in the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand. The Westminster Fellowship was founded in 1950 in that church to conserve the distinctive Reformed testimony of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand as a daughter of the Scottish Church and of the Calvinistic Reformation. A new Reformed Church was formed in 1953 by settlers from the Netherlands.

There has been some interesting and encouraging historical work done on the Presbyterian Church and the evangelical movement in Australia in recent years. Stuart Piggin, a very fine Australian historian, has written *Evangelical History in Australia*. He concentrated largely on Anglican history but included important and helpful material on the Presbyterian and other churches. Then in 1994, *The Australian*

Dictionary of Evangelical Biography came out. It startled some people who did not realize that Australia had important evangelical history. I remember reading one review of that dictionary in which the reviewer said he expected it to be a pamphlet, not a big book, but there are 700 entries in that dictionary. It has helped to establish the significance of the evangelical heritage of that country, which is only 200 years old. One of the decisions made by the editor was not to include in the dictionary anyone who is still living. This is a problem because that eliminates the last 50 years, which is a fourth of Australian history. It means that people like Marcus Sloan and others do not have an entry. However, this is the beginning, and there could be a second edition someday. So, there has been some encouraging work done in church history in Australia, which will be very helpful in understanding not only Australian church history but also how history has influenced Australia in order to help us do some of those things in other places as well. Stuart Piggin's book is a particularly interesting, insightful, opinionated book. It is the kind of book I like to read. He is not really cautious about everything. He really says it the way he thinks it is. American historians tend to be much more cautious and balanced, which may be good in some ways but not nearly as interesting.

Next, let us look at the history of the Reformed faith in South Africa. The Dutch colony in South Africa dates back to the 1650s when the Dutch settled Cape Town in order to have a place for provisions for their ships sailing around the horn and tip of Africa. As soon as the Dutch arrived, of course, the Reformed Dutch Church arrived. Just as the Dutch churches divided in the Netherlands, the same thing happened in South Africa. There was the state church, the Dutch Reformed Church. There were also the secession Churches of 1834. Then later, there were the Doleantie Churches of 1886. Not only did Dutch people come to South Africa but English and Scottish people as well. After 1795, there were ministers and missionaries from the London Missionary Society and other societies that sent missionaries to South Africa. The missionaries were sent to work with the settlers but also to evangelize the native South African people.

Andrew Murray came from England. He was the father of the famous author and preacher of the same name, Andrew Murray. You may know something of his writings. The second Andrew Murray is very important for his ministry in the Dutch churches of South Africa and for his spiritual writings on prayer, meditation, and devotion. One of the great English missionaries to go to South Africa was John Philip. Philip was a member of the London Missionary Society and a Calvinist. He had great sympathy for the native peoples—the black peoples—of South Africa. He tried to help them and evangelize them. When I was doing my doctoral dissertation at Princeton, I got into the student records of the Student Society of Missionary Inquiry at Princeton and found letters that the Princeton students had written to John Philip and his replies. It is very interesting that the Hottentot people of South Africa with whom John Philip was working were praying for the Princeton students back in New Jersey. The Princeton students were likewise praying for the Hottentot people of John Philip early in the nineteenth century.

I do not have time to describe the decline of Calvinism and the Reformed faith in South Africa, but let me point out three causes for that decline. I do not mean that the Reformed faith is missing in South Africa. It is still a very important part of the religious aspect of the country. However, the Methodist influence grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mr. Mandela is a product of one of the Methodist missions. His early education, training, and influence came from the Methodists. He often refers to that. Also, in South Africa, there was not a real Calvinist, Reformed, evangelical presence in the Church of England like there was in Australia. Finally, the Reformed faith, in some disastrous ways, became connected with apartheid. Some people supported that, but others did not support that within the South African Reformed community. By and large, the Reformed Church did not nearly do what it should have done to object to that way of life and to stand with their black brothers and sisters in South

Africa in repudiating apartheid. Some did, but not many. It is now a new day for South Africa. We can hope and pray that it is also a new day for the Reformed faith in South Africa.

I started by saying that the four most Presbyterian and Reformed countries in the world in terms of proportion of Reformed people in the population are Switzerland, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Hungary. What do you think is the fifth most Presbyterian country in the world? It is South Korea, with almost 7 million Presbyterians, which is over 15% of the total population. In sheer numbers of Presbyterians, South Korea may be the most Presbyterian country in the world. It is ahead of the United States and any of the other countries I have mentioned. Also, if you look at the Presbyterian Church in Korea, you will discover that Korean Presbyterians have done what Presbyterians do everywhere, but they have done it more aggressively, and that is to divide into different churches. Samuel Moffit says there are 45 different Presbyterian denominations in Korea. Well, I will not tempt to sort through all of that except to say that there are two large Presbyterian denominations: the Presbyterian Church of Korea, called the Tong Hop Church, which is more within the ecumenical framework of Reformed churches worldwide, and the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Hop Dong Church, which withdrew from the World Council of Churches in 1959.

This is an amazing story when you think of it because Christianity came to Korea just a little over 100 years ago. We think of the history of Australia and there is at least 200 years. However, there is only 100 years of Christian history in Korea. A Korean named So Sang Yun was converted by Scottish missionaries in Manchuria. This man returned with Scripture portions in Korean to form a Christian group in his own village. The next year, in 1884, the first resident foreign missionary arrived who was a Presbyterian doctor. In 1885, the first Presbyterian clergyman arrived. One of the secrets of the growth of the Korean church is what is called the Nevius method. John Nevius was a Princeton student who went to China as a missionary. There, he began to promote a certain way of planting churches and organizing missions so that churches would be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. This had some influence in China, but it had tremendous influence in Korea as Koreans took hold of that idea. The Nevius method flourished in Korea.

In 1907, the first Korean presbytery was organized, and this is important as well. That first presbytery sent out the first missionary. So, the Korean church was a missionary-minded church from the very beginning. The beginning of its organization was also the beginning of its missionary activity, which has become so important today as Korean missionaries are serving the Lord in many, many parts of the world. In 1945, there was the tragedy of the division of North and South Korea. Many of the Protestants, many of whom were Presbyterian, lived in North Korea. Two-thirds of the Presbyterians and the Protestants of the country were in North Korea. Some of those fled to the South. North Korea has officially become a very non-Christian country. Only now are there some polite signs that there might be a possibility of a Christian witness in North Korea once again. However, the Presbyterian churches in South Korea have continued to grow at a rate that is impressive and challenging to Presbyterians all over the world. I do admire the Korean church because it is a church of prayer and missions. So, we can forgive those Presbyterians of their many divisions, or at least overlook some of those. We have to because the PCA is also a church that has divided—we think and hope over important issues. But, the Korean church is an example to us all in its commitment to the important matters of prayer and outreach.

Regarding John Nevius, he was a student at Princeton. He was trying to decide what to do with his life. He was attracted to all kinds of opportunities both in this country and elsewhere. He was engaged to a young lady while he was at Princeton, and he wrote to her. He said, "Everywhere we hope to have God with us, and everywhere we shall have as much work as we can possibly do. The great question is where

can we do the most for our Savior, and where would He have us go?” Well, John and Helen Nevius went to China and did a great work for God there. However, most of the fruit of their labor is surely in Korea.

“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

I have been asked about the nature of the Nevius method. The nature of the Nevius method in church planting was basically to attempt to have an independent church from the very beginning, not linked in financially or other ways to the American church, or the sending church, or to the mission. His concern was that the church would emerge quickly and immediately as a self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing church. Not all missions will go that way, and it is often that the sending church will dominate the emerging church for a long, long time until there is some kind of traumatic division. Nevius felt the church should be independent of foreign entanglements from the very beginning. I think that was a wise method. It could be misused because we should not, at any time, start churches and then ignore them in terms of their needs for help. However, the American mission tended to dominate the emerging churches too much, and I think it hindered the growth and independence of these churches in different parts of the world. So, I would say the Nevius method was the right way to do it.

The question has been asked, “Why did the Nevius method develop?” I do not think it was largely because of culture concerns. It was John Nevius’ conviction that this is the way it should be done. This was a biblical approach. A number of missiologists in England were making the same point. So, Nevius was not the only person thinking along these lines. His ideas were right, and they were at the right place and right time for the growth of the Korean church. I am sure there were cultural factors there. No church wants to be controlled by foreign domination. One of the curious and rather sad things to me is the way European and American churches have transported everything everywhere—the good and the bad. At one time, there was a church in Singapore with the official name of “The Dutch Reformed Church in America in Singapore.” This was because when Dutch Reformed people came to America they called their church the Dutch Reformed Church in America. When missionaries from that Dutch-American church went to Singapore, the name they gave to the new denomination in Singapore was “The Dutch Reformed Church in America in Singapore.” Well, people in Singapore did not need “Dutch” or “America” in their name. Why not call it the Reformed Church in Singapore? Eventually, this is what happened. The Dutch Reformed Church in American became the Reformed Church in America (RCA), as it is today.