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A Translation of the Minutes of the First Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan

P. T. Moerdyk

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27 February 1882

Holland, Michigan

2138

A translation of the minutes of the First Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, of the stormy session when the congregation (males only at that time) voted to leave the denomination of the Reformed Church in America.

In Dutch; translation by P. T. Moerdyk, 22 May 1957

Original in the Joint Archives of Holland [?]. The translation is in the papers of P. T. Moerdyk, the Holland Museum.

MEETING OF THE FIRST CONGREGATION OF HOLLAND, MONDAY, FEB. 27, 1882

Translated from Dutch by P.T. Moerdijk

*

Kenbeek
On Monday evening a congregational meeting, as announced, was held in the First Reformed Church to decide whether or not the Church should remain with the Reformed Church of America.

The meeting was called to order by Elder Keppel and after singing a psalm was opened with prayer. The roomy auditorium was filled to capacity. From far and wide, from Zeeland and other places delegations came to attend the meeting. Among those present were Rev. Steffens of Zeeland, Rev. Uiterwijk of Grand Rapids, Rev. Broek of the 3rd Reformed Church of Holland and also later Rev. Van der Veen of Grand Haven.

After the reading and approval of the minutes of the last preceding meeting, Chairman of the meeting Elder T. Keppel read the following resolutions which the Consistory unanimously referred to the meeting for action.

- I. Since we have frequently at congregational meetings expressed our sorrow at the position taken by the Synod of the Reformed Church in regard to the matter of Free Masonry and other kindr matters.
- II. Since this sin as an offensive evil is recognized by three of our Western Classis and as such brought to the attention of general Synod and the reasons given whereupon the voice of Classis rests.
- III. Since the matter in itself is not recognized as sin, nor by it are the foundations of the church violated, about which the voice of the people rests.

After these recommendations and resolutions were presented, a

short discussion took place and when no one wished to speak further a motion was made to approve the resolutions.

1. Rev. Steffens of Zeeland arose and said as presiding officer of the Classical Commission for vacant churches --

2. Elder T.Keppel, the presiding officer interrupted saying that Rev Steffens is no member of the congregation and therefore has no right to speak. If he wishes to speak he must first ask permission.

3. Rev. Steffens then said -

Let me then finish what I have to say -

After some disturbance Rev. Steffens said -

As Chairman of the Classical Commission for Vacant Churches, I ask permission to speak.

4. Elder Keppel replied that Rev. Steffens must first in a few words state the matter on which he wishes to speak before permission to speak can be given him.

5. Rev. Steffens stated that loyal members of the First Reformed Church of Holland have not the right to vote yes or no on the announced resolutions.

This statement aroused more disturbance and antagonism among those present.

6. Elder Keppel then asked from whom Rev. Steffens received authority to bring trouble in the congregation.

7. Rev. Steffens answered that he would say no more than he had said.

8. Mr. Wijkhuizen remarked that this was no answer.

9. Elder Keppel also declared this to be no answer. Rev. Steffens has no right. It is not reasonable of him. He must be decently treated by the Pastors from Zeeland. We are not unwilling to hear the Pastor but he must state what the nature of his remarks will be. Elder Keppe then read Article 2 of Section 17. of the Church Constitution in

regard to the authority of the Committee for vacant churches from which it appears that the Consistories of vacant churches will permit no preacher to preach whose character is not known, and if in doubt as to this matter, they must consult the committee. As long as we have not broken off our relationship we must stand by the Constitution. Rev. Steffens has no right to interfere or to say we have no right to do this. We will do it.

The meeting proceeded to vote by ballot. The rule was passed that each member must place his name under his vote, so that the Consistory might know who will stay and who will not.

During the ballot Elder Schroder advised those who did not wish to break relations not to vote.

The result of the ballot was as follows; For the recommendation and resolutions presented by the Consistory and therefore in favor of secession;

D. Meeboer, H. Wijkhuizen, W.B.F. Beeuwkes, S.W. Bosman, B. Kruidenier, D. Te Roller, J. Pluim, J. Meeboer, C. Rosenboom, C. Booijenga, G.J. Vaarwerk, Hessel Postma, H. Geerlings, G.J. Haverkat J. Kieft, A. Leenhouts, E. A. Van den Berge, H. Doesburg, B. Bouman, Wm. Bolhuis, Jan Bolhuis, S. Stolp, R. Oostenma, Ferwerda, J. Van de Berge, Jan Van Appeldoorn, Peijster, H. Hidding, Jacob Labots, H.J. Hesseling, Jan Witteveen, Hendrick Van den Belt, Jan Pauels, A. Smit D. Pauwels, Cornelis Rot, F. de Vries, W.C. Melis, S. Holkenboer, R.S. Postma, I. Marsiljie, Jan Sm ts, S. Van der Wal, H. Te Roller, T. Keppel, L. Vliet, H. de Maat, J. Ter Beek, R. De Maat, Nauta, H. Dekker, D. Te Roller, G. Venhuizen, G. Dekker, Wiersma, K. Masten broek, D. Miedema, H. Wijtgraaf, J.C. Doesberg, T.A. Berkompas, H. Plaggemans, Kamper Lijs, L. Beeuwkes, C. Braam, H.G. Iliohan, A. Roos, G. Vander Belt, C. Dok, M. De Fuijter, and H. Meengs -- 77.

Against -

C. Lepeltak, H. Torren, J.A. Wilterdink, G. T. Kroon, E. Vissch
G. Wakker, A. van Dam, Buursema, J. Van Landegend, G.B. Karsten,
D. Jonker, G. J. Dinkeloo, G. Slink, H. Van Winkoop, J. M. Reidsma,
P. Berghuis, J. A. Ter Vree, and Johannes Elenbaas. -- 18

The following persons cast blank votes: -- J.S. Stoop, A. Van Di
and B. Steketee.

After the reading the result of the ballot, G. Boeve stated that
he had voted in favor but that his name was not read. His vote was th
counted so that 78 had voted in favor.

After this certain sealed votes sent in by persons who could not
attend the meeting were opened and read. It then appeared the followi
persons were in favor of secession; L. Boersma, A. Verplanken, H. Van
Rij, H.H. kok, B. Booijenga, Jilles A. Drost, H. Marsilje and L.
Sprietsma. - 8.

The total therefore was that of the 107 members, 86 voted for th
secession and 18 against it and 3 blanks were cast.

Mr. I. Marsilje ~~made~~ a motion to decide as follows:

That our Consistory hereby ask the classis of Holland at her fir
meeting, so that the information might be given them as soon as
possible, that because of our grave reasons we the First Protestant
Dutch Reformed Church of Holland give up our relationship with the
Reformed Church in America.

This motion w as carried.

Mr. I Marsilje also made a motion;

Since we have reasons to believe that there are members of our
Congregation, although in hte minority, who vannot seceed. And since
this Congregation wishes to make a peaceful parting with those that
voted in the minority.

Therefor be it decided;

That our Consistory be asked to make a settlement with those in the minority in regard to their part in the goods of this Congregation so that the minority leave with their right proportionate share as approved by them.

Mr. Schaddelee asked the question: If it is now definitely decided to seced from the Reformed Church, is the Consistory -- still the Consistory?

Elder Keppel replied: Yes, we are Reformed and hope to remain so. There is nothing changed in the Congregation.

This motion was also carried.

Elder Keppel then suggested:

That the Congregation ask the Consistory to call a Congregational meeting as soon as possible to form a trio for the calling of a Pastor.

This was carried.

The Chairman then said, that if no one had anything further to bring before the meeting, the meeting would be adjourned after singing a psalm and prayer was offered by Elder Labots.

Hereupon Rev. Steffens arose and asked the loyal members to remain.

Elder Keppel asked, what right Rev. Steffens has here.

Rev. Steffens states that Elder Keppel is no longer Elder or Chairman. They have done their work and now the minority wishes to hold a meeting.

This aroused a great disturbance, and the assembly began to crowd forward.

Elder Keppel asked the meeting to be quiet and motioned them to be seated.

After this was somewhat accomplished, Elder Keppel stated that

the consistory has more right here than Rev. Steffens of Zeeland.

Mr. Wakker says the Chairman has right to call to order. If we can not behave orderly any more as Christians, let us then do so as Citizens.

Mr. Kanters said that as yet the minority had no voice during the evening, since he thought it was not the place to speak, the meeting is adjourned and if permission were given them, they wished to hold a meeting.

Elder Keppel said that it would be wrong, and out of order for him to allow a meeting which had not been announced beforehand in the church. Therefore he had no power to grant the request. That request would have to be decided by the Consistory of the Congregation. The minority has the same right as the majority. Therefore he has no right to allow the request. As Rev. Steffens says; You have done your work, now let us do something else. Without previous announcement, this would be unlawful.

Dr. Phelps stated that he had 22 years of close relationship with the First Church during which he had been held in the highest respect and love. Therefore he could speak as a friend, but the majority this evening had made a mistake. They have meant to do good, and to extend God's Kingdom, but they have hindered it. Their secession will boost Free Masonry and hinder God's Kingdom.

Those who have voted for secession are far in the minority if the women members and baptized members are taken into consideration.

Mayor Kanters asked permission to speak but Elder Keppel replied that it was time to go home.

Rev. Steffens arose and said he wished to make a statement.

Elder Keppel replied that he would be given permission if he would

speak in an orderly manner.

Rev. Steffens replied that Elder Keppel need not speak to him in the tones of a schoolmaster.

Elder Keppel replied that this reply of Rev. Steffens lowered the dignity of a servant of the Gospel.

Rev. Steffens said that when he made the request to the minority to remain he thought the meeting was adjourned. He desired an opportunity to be given to the minority to pass a resolution to be brought before the Classis also. He stated he had that right as Chairman of the Committee for Vacant Churches, which gives him the right to speak for the minority

Elder Keppel stated that this could never happen in this church this evening. First an accusation must be made before the Classis, before any Classical Committee has any work here. If a complaint is made, then it will be brought before the authorities, but that something should start here without the knowledge of the consistory is entirely out of order.

Mr. R. Schaddelee remarked that Rev. Steffens was well enough versed in the Constitution of the Church to know he had violated the Constitution. Only at the request of the consistory could the Classical Commission act. He stated that he had not voted because he was not yet decided if secession was best as to the right of the matter he must say that Rev. Steffens has no right to act as Chairman of the Commission.

Mr. Wijkhuizen made a motion that all present should depart and that the consistory should lock up the Church.

The motion carried.

Rev. Steffens again requested the loyal members to remain and com

forward.

A very great disturbance followed this.

All present moved to the front of the Auditorium.

The members of the congregation who were against secession retired to the pews on the right of the platform. These members were M. Kanters, Johs Elenbaas, G. Slenk, G. Wakker, D. Jonker, Dinkeloo, Van Landeland, J.A. De Vries, J. Schrader, and perhaps a few more. To these were added, I. Cappon, Rev. Vander Veen of Grand Haven, G. Van Schelven and a few others, non-members of the Congregation.

They were joined by Rev. Steffens of Zeeland who in vain tried to gain permission for a meeting of the minority but was hindered by loud cries and confusion.

The others of the meeting remaining were gathered close to the platform where Elder Keppel stood, trying to quiet the assembly and gain order.

The request that Rev. Steffens be Chairman of the minority, and that those who were non-members leave the church, was voiced a number of times, each time interrupted by Elder Keppel.

The Mayor and City Marshall who were on the platform were asked to bring about order but the Mayor replied that as long as no complaint was brought he had no power to act.

Dr. Phelps declared that he agreed with the minority but he advised them to go home and not defame God's House.

Old-Elder Broek said the same and declared he was going home.

All this was without result.

Dr. Phelps tried to take Elder Keppel out of the church but he

declared that since he was responsible as chairman of the meeting and of the consistory he could not leave until order was restored

and the meeting broken up.

While the disturbance was at its highest point, Rev. Steffens informed Rev. Phelps that he was ready to leave, and left with him.

But the time to calm down the uproar was past, especially since the minority continued in arguments with the non-members especially with Rev. Vander Veen and G. Van Schelven.

After some time M. Kanters declared himself chairman of the meeting and tried to read the resolutions but he was drowned out by the cries of those nearest him while Elder Keppel tried to tell him that at the present time he had no right to say anything in the church and especially as chairman.

After frequent interruptions the resolution was read by Mr. Kanters and Mr. Wakkers declared himself Secretary of the meeting and was empowered to ask for the keys of the church and parsonage of Mr. Keppel.

When Mr. Keppel gave us (no) answer to this request Mr. Kanters asked for the keys and also received no answer from Mr. Keppel. Then Mr. Kanters went to the platform where Mr. Keppel stood and asked him for the keys. Then Mr. Keppel said that he did not wish to answer the request and that Mr. Kanters should keep still and since the meeting was adjourned all should leave the church.

Meanwhile a motion was made that the meeting should leave the church and that all who did not agree with the decision of the meeting should meet together. Because of the confusion this was not voted upon.

After Mr. Kanters had again asked Mr. Keppel for the keys and had again received no answer he joined his party and they left the church.

Then others left (it was then about midnight) and the consistory saw to it that the church and consistory rooms were safely locked.

The resolution read by Mr. Kanters was to the effect that the Minority of the members of the church would hold a meeting the next Wednesday afternoon at two o'clock in the consistory rooms.

We imagine that the consistory, since they are responsible to the congregation, will decide that the consistory room is no place for such a meeting. That the church is not available for the meeting of the Classis of Holland which is to meet on Wednesday morning.

* G. J. Maerdyk
5/22/57