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The Minutes of the Consistory of Hope Church

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9 April 1867

Holland, Michigan

In the Minutes of the Consistory of Hope Church, this Consistory agreed on the following recorded resolution: "Resolved, That the Consistory admonish these brethren belonging to the Order of Free Masons to cease their connection with that body, in order that peace and harmony may prevail among us and others of our brethren who deem such connection contrary to the Word of God."

In English.

Original in the Joint Archives of Holland, Minutes of Hope Church then known as the Second Reformed Church, Volume I, page 44.

"Consistorial Minutes," "RECORDS 2ND R. D. P. C. HOLLAND MICH." Located at Theil Center, Holland, Michigan, Accession Number: W91-1034. Hope Church, Box 1. AKA *The Hope Church Minute Book, 1861-1896*. Size: 8 and 1/2 x 14 inches.

In this volume, pages 1-40 for the years 1854-66 are in the hand of Philip Phelps Jr., pages 40 through 68, though "signed" by various consistory clerks, are written in the hand of William A. Shields. Clerk of Consistory 1867-1869 was W. B. Gilmore.

page

68 "From Page 40 thus far, the recording has been done by Wm A. Shields"

In minutes of Consistory March 13, 1867 is the following, quoted verbatim:

42 A letter was received from the Consistory of the 1st R. P. D. Church of Holland. It was read, and the following is a copy:

Holland, Mich, Jan 1867.

The Rev'd Consistory of the 2nd Ref. Dutch Church of Holland.

Beloved Brethren: Please bear with us in addressing you on the subject of the Secret Society of the Free Masons, and allow us to bring our objections before you against the connection of Church members with that Society.

We know every one of the Asiatic churches did receive her own epistle of Jesus, and was held respon-

43 sible for her own peculiar field of action. Yet allow us, on account of our close connection and the mutual influence on one another and duties towards one another. We believe this connection to be unworthy the Church of Christ, especially on account of the abuse of the Oath.

The oath belongs to the public adoration of God to his divine service: Deut. VI:13. Thou shalt fear the the [sic] Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

Therefore we believe the oath to be allowed when the magistrates demand it of subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm fidelity and truth, to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbor.

Then the sacred oath ought not to be used for light-abhorring ends. It is said that the Society is harmless and innocent; that the oath is only used to bring about attraction, a certain reverence, and to make the Society more efficient for works of love. This refuge of strength for heathen idolatry is below the light-living and light-spreading character of Christendom.

Then, we deem it unmanly and unchristianlike to swear away to man our sacred privilege to be a witness for truth: our high calling of giving testimony must remain free, and only subject to God and conscience.

This Society requires the oath of secrecy, even before the nature and working of the Society is known. And, even if it was known, how can a Christian swear secrecy to a body of men, even if that body was as holy as the Church of God, where the constant change of persons and circumstances at any moment may reveal to him facts which he may be obliged for God's glory and men's welfare to uncover?

Dear Brethren, may the Lord give us harmony on this subject, for Jesus' sake.

With love and best wishes,
Your Brother in Christ,
A. C. Van Raalte,

Per order of the Consistory of the 1st Reformed Dutch Church of Holland.

Rev. A. T. Stewart was authorized to reply.

Adjournment.

Benediction by the Pastor.

Holland Mar. 13th, 1867

W. B. Gilmore, Cl'k.

- 44 An informal meeting of the Consistory was held at the Parsonage April 18th....

The letter of Rev. A. T. Stewart in reply to the communication from the Consistory of the 1st R. P. D. C. per Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D. with reference to the lawfulness of admitting to the membership of the Church those who were members of the Order of Free Masons, was read and approved

Whereupon the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Consistory admonish these brethren belonging to the Order of Free Masons to cease their connection with that body, in order that peace and harmony may prevail among us and others of our brethren who deem such connection contrary to the Word of God.

The following is a copy of the letter: __

Holland, Mich. Apr. 9th 1867

To the Consistory of the 1st Refd Prot. Dutch Church of Holland.

Dear Brethren: __

Your letter, sent to us the last week in February, containing "objections against the connection of our Church members with the Society of Free Masons" has been carefully considered.

The majority of us do not see the subject in the light that you do. To us, Free Masonry seems like some other things, a matter about which Christians do and many conscientiously differ.

The persons of that Order admitted to our Church answered the requirements of the 81. question of the Catechism, and we could not refuse to receive them.

They do not belong to the character described under the 82. question, and we cannot exclude them.

We appreciate your letter, and the kind spirit in which it is written; and, for the sake of

- 45 harmony, we will endeavor to persuade these brethren to withdraw from their society. And we desire you to ask yourselves whether, on a view of the whole subject, it would not be better for you, as well as for us, to receive these people into the Church on their giving evidence of conversion; and then teach them a better way.

With great respect and Christian love, we remain your Brethren in Christ

Abel. T. Stewart, Pastor

The meeting adjourned. Closed with prayer by the Pastor.

W. B. Gilmore, Cl'k.

Holland, Apr 18th, 1867.