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1909 Ursinus College Founders' Day Address

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At the first celebration of Founders' Day at Ursinus College, February 11, 1909, the Rev. D. Ernest Klopp, D. D., the only one still living of the ministers who took part in the founding of the College, was invited to deliver an address.

The address was highly interesting and of much historical value. By action of the Board of Directors of Ursinus College it has been printed and is hereby transmitted to the public.

ADDRESS

My only regret in being here this afternoon is that I am not equal to the task that is laid upon me. Not because I do not know about these things of which I am to speak, but just because as memory reaches back, there comes before me so much ; so much first of all of fear and trembling ; so much of loyalty and unceasing devotion of the men whose pictures, not only, of face and form are graven on my memory, but whose manliness and greatness are far more deeply fixed in my heart.

The Apostle Peter said, "Be ready at any time to give a reason to anyone who may ask, the hope that is in you." Give a reason for what you believe ; for what you do. Another has said, "We, each of us, must give an account of himself." Greater than either of these has said, "I must do the will of Him that sent me." The principle, or law the Lord laid down is this : I have no right to be ; I have no right to think ; above all, I have no right to do, except in so far as I can give to myself, to my fellows and to God, a justifiable reason for my being ; for my thinking and my doing.

God Himself, when He had fashioned this and other worlds, had placed man upon the throne of this world's dominion, and had handed him the scepter, looked about Him and into his own image, into the face of man, and was not content to think that He had carried out His purposes, that He had made good the plan of His heart, but wrote on it all His own infinite approval, and said, "It is good." If God himself must justify himself for what He does, shall we, you and I, escape this fundamental law of true life? So then, it comes to be that an institution, as well as the individual, organized for a purpose, should be able to give itself and others a justifiable reason for being, for con-

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trolling principles and aims, and hold itself absolutely and strictly accountable for how these are accomplished.

Has Ursinus such a justifiable right to be? Did she ever have a right for her existence? Has she a proper place among the agencies that work for the world's uplift and furtherance? It is a question that she needs to answer. She has answered it for herself again and again. Perhaps not in some formal way like this, and yet, it is right and proper that when given the particular occasion, she should remind herself of the law that binds her. She must, as others, re-examine the foundations on which she rests and ask and be able to answer for herself, whether or not, in the sight of God, in the sight of man, aye, before her own eyes and her own heart, she has a right to be. Has she?

In every age there have been two tendencies; one toward pure, clean-cut individualism; the other toward an organized absolute authority where individual right is put in the background, if not entirely ignored; where power and authority alone rule and master everything.

It takes no very learned or hard search of historic records to discover this. It was just because Romanism, that fearful domination of ecclesiasticism before the Sixteenth Century, had reached and enforced such absolutism, that over against it there arose that other movement, that of liberty, the right to think and act to the satisfaction of every man's conscience under the guidance of the spirit of God and according to the plain word of God.

Again and again these tendencies have appeared, not only in the history of the church in general, but also in the history of our Reformed Church. Sixty years, perhaps a little more ago, over against a cold formalism, a lifeless creed, there arose an emotional imperialism, that swept as a fire over the land. It is true, the Reformed Church perhaps felt comparatively little of it, and yet it was fast taking hold of her very vitals, and so some years after, about 1850, some leading minds of the Reformed Church began

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to examine anew the foundations of faith and practice. Unfortunately for them perhaps, and the church, though in the light of unfolding history probably not an unmixed evil, they did not stop to begin at the Sixteenth Century finding these foundations, but went back into the far earlier history of the Church, and found that the Church as an organism embodied every power of authority, for both faith and practice. The right of private judgement was entirely ignored, at least overshadowed.

The Reformed Church in her institutions and in her work began to swing over into an extreme ecclesiasticism, until we had no personal Pope, the vicar of Christ, but had, or at least were in danger of having, a synodal papacy.

The more immediate condition and occasion of this was the fact of a general looseness and excessive variety of modes of worship, and so a deeply felt need of a greater uniformity in this respect. The desire for better things thus universally felt, found definite expression in an action of East Pennsylvania Classis overturning the Eastern Synod. The matter was by the Synod referred to a committee, with particular instructions to form a Liturgy, which should embody the doctrines and especially the general type of worship as found in the Palatinate Liturgy. This resulted in the production of what was known as the Provisional Liturgy. True, it was formally acquiesced in by the greater part of the committee, but it did not satisfy, because first of all, it did not adhere strictly to the type indicated by the instructions of the Synod, but was more ritualistic and less of a directory of worship.

Secondly, it set up a theory which by one side was regarded as sacerdotal and extremely sacramental. On the other hand, it was regarded by others as not coming up to the standard of liturgies as now apprehended by a large part of the church. This led to a revision, which resulted in the Order of Worship reported to the Synod in 1862. The revision did not result in satisfying a large minority

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of the ministry in the East, and as was then believed, did not meet with the approval of the great majority of the people. The western part of the church, together with nearly all the Germans, stood in very decided opposition to this liturgy. The objection to the Provisional Liturgy still remained, and if anything, was intensified.

Thirdly, during this same period there arose for the Reformed Church a new conception of the Church. The supreme and all controlling authority in the conduct of congregational activities belong primarily to the Synod alone. Over against this centralizing ecclesiasticism, this movement toward unquestionable authority that would bind the congregation; over against the assumption that the Synod's voice should control the use of certain liturgic services in the worship of the church, leaving no real choice to the people, arrogating to itself also the sole right to direct the channels through which all benevolences of the church should go, was a large body of the Church. But they who refused to be bound by any such ecclesiastical chains were black-listed. Anything else was regarded as ecclesiastical bastardy.

So also Synod took the position that any training of the ministry, anywhere and by any one or more persons, except in the regular institutions of the church under the control of the Synod was illegitimate. The high tide of this tendency was reached between 1863 and 1866. The western church felt comparatively little of the pressure against the rights and privileges that had hitherto been enjoyed by the whole church. Almost the entire force of the movement centered in that territory of the church covered by the Old Eastern Synod. At the Synod of York in 1866, the parting of the ways was reached, when the two sides in the controversy arrayed definitely with one tendency or the other. Here, I first, as a black haired young man, met and learned to know personally Rev. J. H. A. Bomberger, D.D., and from then on we labored side by side with others in the at-

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tempt to stem the extreme churchly movement, and sought, if possible, to bring the church to her old mooring, to the historic faith and practice of our fathers, as these had come down to us in the symbols of the Reformation, as well as to the government of the church as it was embodied by our fathers in the Constitution of the Reformed Church.

After this meeting of Synod there came in 1867 the first organized effort in the way of protest. A call, numerously signed by ministers, elders, and prominent laymen, resulted in what has since been known as the Myerstown Convention. Any student of Reformed history will be well repaid in the reading and study of the transactions of that Convention. I do not positively and personally know, but I have the best of reasons to believe that then and there, more or less fully, came to be felt the need of some organized work in the direction of training a ministry more in accord with the historic faith and practice of the church.

During the summer of 1868, a number of men, for the most part elders in the churches of Philadelphia, gathered in a North Fifth street real estate office, between Market and Arch. As I remember them now, they were Dr. J. H. A. Bomberger, John Wiest, A. VanHagen, Samuel H. Bibighaus, Abram Kline, Wm. L. Graver (the only one besides myself still living), A. W. Myers, and others I cannot recall. Through these conferences a plan was projected, to establish a school, the opportunity just occurring to buy the property, and I had almost said the educational heritage, of Freeland Seminary. In 1869 a charter was obtained for an institution, which independent of synodical control, should none the less, in its religious teachings, adhere strictly to the Reformed faith and practice as understood by those who opposed the extreme churchly tendencies. The faculty consisted of Rev. J. H. A. Bomberger, D. D., Rev. H. W. Super, D. D., Rev. J. VanHagen, Prof. J. Shelly Weinberger and some assistants. Dr. Weinberger is still

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with us and we are glad to greet him here today. A year or so later S. Vernon Ruby, was added to the faculty.

From what has now been said, there seems to have been good reason for the birth and existence of Ursinus College. Does her right to *be* ground itself in proper motives? Was her aim a proper one? Does her call seem to have been a providential one? Who will dare to say *no*?

But there is further justification for her being, and the work she has been doing. From time to time she sent out men into the ministry, and her existence itself was an open challenge to stop, listen and think. Her influence grew wider and stronger until her students, as well equipped as others, are filling not only some of the best pulpits in the church, but her sons and daughters occupy other honorable walks of life.

In 1872, at the General Synod of Cincinnati, the dawn of a new day appeared. The Dunn Appeal Case, which involved the right of each congregation to control and direct the channel and object of its benevolence, which right was contested by the extreme churchly element, was settled by the following action :

(a) "That no consistory, or other judicatory, has any right to alienate any fund from the purposes for which they were contributed."

(b) "That the consistories have the undoubted right to designate the direction which benevolent funds shall take, when not specially designated by the donors."

So too, the same settled the right of persons not synodically authorized to teach theology. This was done by its action in the case of the appeal of the Rev. Dr. H. W. Super, from the action of the Eastern Synod at Martinsburg in 1872. The sustaining of this appeal was decided by Synod's action to mean:

(a) That the General Synod in its action on this appeal decides that the Rev. J. H. A. Bomberger, and those associated with him in Ursinus College, in giving theological instruction at the request of the Board of Directors, is not disorderly, nor acting contrary to the con-

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stitution of the Reformed Church, although they have not been invested with the office of 'Teacher of Theology,' nor are conducting their theological teaching under the direction of the Synod of the United States."

(b) "That the General Synod has decided that the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States acted unconstitutionally in assuming original jurisdiction in the case of one of the ministers of Philadelphia Classis."

Here was the real Gettysburg of the ecclesiastical warfare that was raging throughout the bounds of our Zion. But not at once were the issues accepted as settled. Another great stride, however, was made when in 1879, at the General Synod at Lancaster, the matters in controversy were referred to the Peace Commission, whose findings were at last more fully and generally acquiesced in. Finally the culmination was still more fully reached in the adoption of the New Constitution wherein the doubtful points were more clearly and definitely and legally fixed.

No one can fail to be impressed with the importance of the issues involved, and which took nearly a half century to settle, if not to the entire satisfaction of the whole church still to such an extent that there is now a very general agreement in regard to these things. We therefore feel that in all this is found a very good reason to give to ourselves, to the church and to her divine Master, for the existence of Ursinus College and her work.

The wonder in all this is the self-sacrificing devotion, the self-abnegation, the supreme faith, the sublime courage manifested on the part of those, who during all her history thus far, but especially in the first half and more, bore the heat and burden of the day. The Reformed Church in the United States owes them a debt of gratitude, which she can only repay by working out her true destiny on the lines thus won.

What reason can Ursinus give for her continuance beside that of helping in the general work of the training of men and women to do their true life's work in the noblest way?

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Is it not to be found in the steadfast adherence to the principles fundamental in the purpose and aim of her organization? Thus she will continue a strong bulwark against, on the one hand, an extreme individual latitudinarianism, and on the other, excessive churchliness that would destroy the freedom of the Gospel.

All honor then to Ursinus College and Godspeed in her divinely appointed work. May she, in faithfulness to the highest ideals, especially of sound religion, weave for her brow in the future, a crown of righteousness which the Lord, whose cause she seeks to serve, will give her in that day—a wreath whose flowers shall never lose their beautiful color, and whose fragrance of faithfulness to trust shall ever remain to fill the air men breathe and live in.