THE GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH AND THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT (1787-1855)

By Glenn Weaver

The French and Indian War (1754-1763) was an important milestone in the history of the German-speaking inhabitants of British North America. Prior to this conflict these German-speaking British subjects had regarded themselves (and had been regarded by their English-speaking neighbors) as a foreign group, hardly even remotely interested in the affairs of their English rulers. The war, however, largely because of the cruel massacres by the Indian allies of the French, brought the majority of Germans to feel that the cause of the English was the cause of the Germans, and during the conflict the Reformed clergy unanimously exerted their influence to aid the British cause.

Doubtless, the French and Indian War marked an important step in the Anglicanization and the Americanization of the German Reformed Church, but their almost exclusive use of the German language prevented the members of this communion from extensively participating in colonial politics. Nevertheless, during the American Revolution both pastors and people were ardent supporters of the independence movement and were almost without exception loyal to the patriot cause.

The German Reformed Church had suffered spiritually and materially during the Revolutionary period, and the years immediately following the signing of the peace were lean ones indeed. One Reformed schoolmaster, who may not have been typical of the denomination’s “intelligencia” wrote in his journal (1786) “the war

1 This subject is treated in considerable detail in the present writer’s The German-Speaking Religious Denominations and Sects in British North America during the French and Indian War 1754-1763, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania [Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Lehigh University], 1947.


4 Ibid., pp. 388, et seq.
which was to bring liberty . . . [has] brought only slavery to our poor people."

But with the establishment of the new federal government in 1789 and with the inauguration of President Washington on April 30 of that year, the small and struggling denomination looked forward with a new hope for the future. At the meeting of the Coetus held in Philadelphia June 10 and 11, 1789, the members, realizing that "other prominent religious denominations of English and German nationality . . . [had] sent their congratulations to the worthy General Washington on his elevation to the highest office of the Government," resolved to send a similar address. The committee of three clergymen and three lay-delegates wrote to the Chief Executive, extending the felicitations of the synod and wishing the President well in his new capacity. To this letter the President replied:

I am happy in concurring with you in the sentiments of gratitude and piety towards Almighty God which are expressed with such fervency of devotion in your address, and in believing that I shall always find in you and the German Reformed congregations in the United States a conduct correspondent to such worthy and pious expressions. At the same time I return you my thanks for the manifestation of your firm purpose to support in your persons a government founded in justice and equity, and for the promise that it will be your constant duty to impress the minds of the people entrusted to your care with a due sense of the necessity of uniting reverence to such a government and obedience to its laws with the duties and exercises of religion. Be assured, gentlemen, it is by such conduct very much in the power of the important office

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6 The Coetus of the German Reformed Congregations in Pennsylvania was the governing body of the German Reformed Church in the United States. It was founded in 1747 and operated as a mission branch of the Reformed Church of Holland. Despite its name (the Coetus of the Reformed Congregations in Pennsylvania), by 1789 there were congregations in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey. Congregations in New York, Virginia, and the two Carolinas existed independently of the Coetus but regarded themselves as unofficially a part of the communion.

7 Minutes and Letters of the Coetus, p. 428.

8 Ibid., p. 434.
which I have accepted, and to give me occasion to rejoice in this world for having followed therein the dictates of my conscience. Be pleased, also, to accept my acknowledgments for the interest you so kindly take in the prosperity of my person, family and administration. May your devotions before the throne of grace be prevalent in calling down the blessings of heaven upon yourselves and your country.9

The tone of Washington’s letter to the Coetus indicates a genuine affection for these German-speaking people, and the relationships between the two were thereafter always cordial. On occasion he attended worship at Reformed Churches,10 and during the yellow fever epidemic which swept Philadelphia in 1793 the President is said to have spent three months at the home of the Reverend Dr. Frederick Lebrecht Herman, the Reformed pastor at Germantown.11 The death of President Washington in 1799 was the occasion of memorial services in various congregations from Pennsylvania to North Carolina.12

Whatever may have been Thomas Jefferson’s appeal to the contemporary German vote, some later theologians of the Reformed Church seem to have held him in low regard. J. H. A. Bomberger in 1851 referred to him as an “obsequious and ambitious politician . . . whose sympathies with the masses were . . . sickly and selfish.”13 President James Buchanan, a resident of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which was after 1853 the intellectual center of the Church, was a close friend of various Reformed clergymen who were affiliated with Franklin and Marshall College. Dr. John Williamson Nevin, the head of the institution, was the president’s personal friend. Marshall College had granted Buchanan the degree

9 Ibid., p. 435.
of Doctor of Laws in 1842 and in 1853 when Franklin College combined with Marshall College he became President of the Board of Trustees of the new institution. Dr. E. V. Gerhart, who had more than a speaking acquaintance with Buchanan, occasionally visited at the Buchanan home "Wheatland" and also attended "the meeting ratifying Buchanan's nomination."\(^{14}\)

Not only presidents, but governors as well cross the pages of denominational history. In 1822 the Honorable Joseph Hiester, governor of Pennsylvania, honored the Synod of Harrisburg with his presence, and the Synod returned the honor by rising during the governor's entrance. In 1822 Governor De Witt Clinton of New York made a contribution of either money or books to the Library of the Reformed Theological Seminary.\(^{15}\)

The pattern of the Federal Government of the United States was from the beginning reflected in the denominational polity of the German Reformed Church. Ever since the organization of the Coetus in 1747 the congregations had looked to the Reformed Church in Holland for guidance and financial support. Each year the Coetus submitted a formal report to the fathers in Holland, and for each official act—such as the ordination of a new pastor—permission had been respectfully asked.\(^{16}\) In the Coetal Letter to the Church Authorities in Holland, written in 1789, however, a new and independent spirit became apparent, for the president and secretary of the Coetus wrote:

Most Reverend, Most Learned, and Esteemed Sirs and Fathers:

... Since the new Constitution and established government of the country bring changes with them, we notice, among other things, that the several denominations throughout the States unite, form Classes, and then Synods. This will also become necessary for us, the German Reformed, and then the name, Coetus of Pennsylvania, would be too limited. In this matter we await the opinion of the Reverend Fathers. As the establishment, growth and reputation of the Reformed religions was always the chief aim of your noble exertions, we hope that the information concerning the union of the High

\(^{14}\) "The Diaries of Dr. E. V. Gerhart" (Selections from, edited by George W. Richards), Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, III (July 1932, 39-62), 57.
\(^{15}\) Klein, op. cit., pp. 120, 140.
\(^{16}\) Minutes and Letters of Coetus, 34, et seq.
German Reformed churches through the extensive American States will be most agreeable and desirable to the Most Reverend Fathers.17

In spite of this bold resolve to take upon themselves the task of reorganization along federal lines, the congregations continued to chafe under the rather stern discipline of the fathers in Holland18 until Coetus in 1792 appointed a committee to prepare a set of rules and regulations according to which the business of the Coetus could be conducted and by which “the Rev[erend] ministerial association may be united by closer bonds in sincere brotherly love,”19 obviously a move toward centralization and independence.

Instead of preparing a set of rules and regulations, the committee prepared a constitution, not for the Coetus, but for a “Synod of the Reformed High-German Church in the United States of America,”20 which was adopted by the Coetus in 1793.21 This document reflects the influence of the constitution of the United States in several important respects. The preamble moves with the majestic poetic prose so characteristic of the Constitution of the United States and contains the same simple statement of purpose.

Whereas, in accordance with the injunction of the Apostle Paul everything in the Church of God is done decently and in order; therefore all the ministers of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Pennsylvania and adjoining states have deemed it necessary to establish among themselves a wholesome Christian Discipline and to observe the same, not with a view to invade the rights of the civil authority, but that, governing themselves, they may not be exposed to the censure of others. For this purpose we have unanimously adopted for ourselves and our successors the following Christian ordinances and laws.

As in the Federal Constitution, there was a definition of power and duties, a statement of requirements for officeholders, and a sort of

17 Ibid., 431-432.
18 Ibid., 438, et seq. The Coetal Letter of 1790 (ibid., 441-443) reveals that while subordination to Holland was odious, the financial assistance which the Dutch Church from time-to-time provided almost necessitated connections of this sort.
19 Acts and Proceedings of the Coetus and Synod of the German Reformed Church in the United States from 1791 to 1876 inclusive (Allentown, Penna., 1930), pp. 4-5.
20 Ibid., p. 9. An English translation of the text of this constitution is reproduced in H. M. J. Klein, op. cit., 81-89.
clerical "Bill of Rights" guaranteeing pastors from abuse by their congregations. All in all, the constitution was intended to serve as a fundamental law (which could be amended by a two-thirds vote of clerical and lay members) in the conduct of ecclesiastical affairs and so serve as the basis of adjudicating legal cases involving congregations or clergy without recourse to the civil courts. While the document definitely recognized the separate spheres of civil and ecclesiastical law, its creators were careful to imply in the preamble that the laws of the Church may not be repugnant to the laws of the state.

The Synod was brought into being to serve as the single governing body for the entire communion which was in 1793 largely concentrated in Pennsylvania, but by 1818 the denominational boundaries had been extended so as to include congregations in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and the two Carolinas. As travel was difficult and few of the delegates from the more remote regions could attend Synod with any degree of regularity, the denomination was in 1819 divided into "Classes" or sub-divisions of the Synod (largely along lines of states or counties) in order that congregations and pastors would be able to enjoy fellowship with others within a more restricted area. Synod at this point became a "delegate" unicameral body whereby each classis rather than congregation (as formerly) received representation.

The formal separation of the German Reformed Church in the United States from the Reformed Church in Holland, as well as the adoption of the new constitution so closely patterned after the Federal Constitution further reminded the denomination of its distinctively American nature. No longer was it bound to the ecclesiastical system of the Old World, but this independent position

22 Articles V, VI, VII, X, XV.
23 Each congregation or pastoral charge (when a pastor served more than one congregation) was entitled to one clerical and one lay vote. Article IV.
24 Article XV.
25 Supra, Preamble.
27 The first session to be held outside Pennsylvania was at Baltimore, Maryland in 1806. Subsequent to this date only three sessions were held in Maryland (1809, 1813, and 1848). None were held in other states. Klein, op. cit. pp. 370 ff.
28 Klein, op. cit., pp. 103-108.
and a rapidly increasing membership notwithstanding, the members of the groups were slow in showing a willingness to participate in affairs of state and to be vitally concerned with political affairs. The serious manner in which the Germans regarded their religion and the doctrine of separation of church and state, one which characterized the denomination throughout its early New World history—a reaction to the continental state-church system which the German immigrants regarded as having been prejudicial to their interests—contributed to their attitude that it was better to serve God than Caesar.

To this general expression of attitude there are several notable exceptions, most of which were inspired by the actions of the large English-speaking bodies, and which invariably were prompted by the feeling that the action taken was as a last resort in cases where silence was regarded as dangerous to religious freedom. The books and pamphlets of Thomas Paine were condemned by the Synod of 1796 as being "blasphemous," but no suggestion was made regarding a government censorship. The pastors, however, were instructed to "endeavor to operate against these [works and their] results, by watching and prayer, according to the example of the apostles."

In 1813 Synod, deploring "the critical and sad condition of our country" brought about by the war which was then in progress, unanimously resolved to set "the first Thursday in August, as a day of humiliation and prayer," to urge the Lutheran Synod to take a similar course, and to "transmit a petition for a similar purpose to the Hon. Governor of this State [Pennsylvania]."

Early in the nineteenth century several clergy assumed public office, quite to the disapproval of the church authorities. James R. Reily, a licentiate, who was in 1816 in the employ of the state legislature of Pennsylvania, was for this reason temporarily denied...

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29 *Acts and Proceedings of the Coetus and Synod*, p. 19. In June 1790 the Coetus had favorably received a communication from "a committee of the Ministers in Massachusetts assembled in Boston" stating that the New England clergy had petitioned Congress "to see to it, that no edition of the Bible is published in these [United] States, without first having been subjected to a close examination [by the clergy] as to its correctness." The communication urged other religious societies to do the same, and the Coetus voted to send a similar petition "in case Congress has not yet done any thing in this matter." *Ibid.*, p. 3. There seems to be no evidence that such a petition was submitted to Congress.

ordination by the Synod.\textsuperscript{31} The Reverend George Wack, pastor of Boehm's church in Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, in addition to his pastoral duties and the operation of a thirty-seven-acre farm, served from 1817 to 1820 as Register of Montgomery County. The question was raised in a session of the Philadelphia Classis as to whether a clergyman could legitimately engage in secular work. As the classis was unwilling to decide the question, the Synod was petitioned for an answer. A synodical committee appointed for the purpose gave a lengthy report with recommendations to the effect that under the laws of the German Reformed Church clergymen could not engage in secular work. Pastor Wack thereupon resigned his office and thereafter devoted his time exclusively to religious work.\textsuperscript{32}

In more prosaic ways the denomination was obligated to deal with the civil government. The Coetus, the Synod, and most of the individual congregations came into being without legal recognition from the civil government. The funds administered by these bodies were small and the Synodical Constitution was long felt to be sufficient legal foundation for the administration of denominational affairs.

Notable as an exception to this early rule was Franklin College at Lancaster which was chartered on March 10, 1787, by the Assembly of Pennsylvania. The idea of a German College was conceived by both Lutheran and Reformed clergymen whose "chief purpose in establishing the school was to have our German youth instructed in such language and sciences as to qualify them in the future to fill public offices in the Republic... and to prepare young men for the ministry."\textsuperscript{33} The college, however, was by no means narrowly sectarian. The charter provided that one-third of the board of trustees should be Lutheran, one-third Reformed, and the remaining third selected "from any other society of Christians." Consequently, the original board consisted of Lutheran, Reformed, Episcopal, Moravian, and Roman Catholic clergy, and of laymen from still other bodies.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{33} Coetal Letter of 1790, Minutes and Letters of the Coetus, p. 441.
\textsuperscript{34} [L. H. Butterfield], A Letter by Dr. Benjamin Rush Describing the Consecration of the German College at Lancaster in June 1789 (Lancaster,
The impoverished Germans were unable to assume the full financial support of the institution and they consequently turned for assistance to public-spirited non-German Pennsylvanians. One of the most influential supporters and well-wishers was the eminent statesman and physician, Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, who visualized the college as part of a vast projected educational system of schools and colleges culminating in a federal university offering instruction in law, history, economics, and political science. Selected graduates of the college would enter the federal university to prepare for federal officeholding. The peculiar part in this grandiose system for Franklin College would have been the channeling of young German-Americans into positions in public life.

Other public figures of Pennsylvania lent support to the institution for less idealistic reasons than those of Dr. Rush. Robert Morris, George Clymer, Thomas Mifflin, and Benjamin Franklin—the latter seldom had a good word for the Germans before receiving the honor of having the college named for him—were all promoters of the institution, but their interest may have been in anticipation of political support from the large German population of the state. Still other non-Germans became interested in the college as a means of Anglicizing the Germans or of promoting religious unity among the competing German sects.

The festivities incidental to the opening of Franklin College included a dinner at a public house in Lancaster after which twelve toasts (the number was intended “to insult Rhode Island for her separation from the federal Union”) to: (1) Franklin College; (2) The President (Franklin) and State of Pennsylvania; (3) “The influence of Science upon agriculture—manufactures—government & religion in the United States;” (4) The Convention of the United States; (5) “George Washington Esqr President of the Convention;” (6) “May the Citizens of the United States discover as much Wisdom in adopting a vigorous federal Government to preserve thier liberties as they did zeal & fortitude in defending them;” (7) The King of France; (8) The United Nether-

Pennsylvania: Franklin and Marshall College, 1945), p. 10. This work which consists chiefly of Rush's letter and editorial notes gives a rather complete account of the political background of the beginnings of Franklin College.

Butterfield, op. cit., p. 5.
Ibid., p. 9.
Ibid., p. 11.
Letter by Dr. Benjamin Rush, in [Butterfield], op. cit., p. 16.
lands; (9) "Spain & the other friendly European powers;" (10) "The friends of Science—liberty & Religion in Germany;" (11) "Perpetual harmony among the citizens of every Nation & Sect in Pennsylvania . . . ;" and (12) "The friends & benefactors of Franklin College."39

Having in the company of their English-speaking brethren discharged themselves of their patriotic sentiments, the Reformed clergy set themselves to the more prosaic task of supporting and administering their newly-chartered college. The donations of the much-lauded "benefactors" were paltry, and as the fathers in Holland had many misgivings regarding the project, no assistance was received from that quarter.40 These financial limitations notwithstanding, the institution prospered for a time, operating largely on student fees and contributions.41

As originally conceived by the Lutheran and Reformed Synods and by the non-German promoters, the school was to operate as a quasi-public institution. The Pennsylvania Assembly had made a land grant, but had appropriated no money. The land at the time, moreover, was regarded as practically worthless. The state, nevertheless, recognized its interest in the institution and in an attempt to reassure the Germans of its good intention, on February 27, 1788, passed an act granting the college the use of the "public Store House" at Lancaster, a building which had been used during the Revolution to store military supplies. The college accepted the grant and moved to the new quarters, but for some time the building served a dual purpose—school and warehouse—for not until some time had passed were the last of the supplies removed.42

Vast as were the lands granted to the college by the assembly, they proved to be a burden rather than a blessing. The ten thousand acres were widely scattered in small parcels, and there was even uncertainty as to the county in which the parcels were located. Investigation by the trustees confirmed the early suspicions that the lands were of a poor quality, and by 1813 it was found that certain areas had already been occupied by settlers who claimed "squatters

39 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
40 Coetal Letter of 1790, Minutes and Letters of Coetus, 441.
41 Coetal Letter of 1788, Minutes and Letters of Coetus, 426.
rights." Furthermore, the state claimed that, while the college buildings and lands used for educational purposes were to be tax exempt, the western lands were subject to taxation from the time of the original grant. In several instances the lands on which the taxes had not been paid were advertised for sale by the state, and the trustees were put to considerable expense to secure their recovery.43

These legal complications, as well as movements to secure Reformed educational institutions which would be independent of Lutheran or state influence, brought about a lag of Reformed interest in Franklin College. Unwilling, however, to allow the institution to pass from Reformed hands completely, the Synod in 1820 contributed the sum of $100.00, with the understanding that the acceptance of this support would be regarded as legal evidence of the Reformed interest. In 1823 one classis, realizing that the institution had long since ceased to fulfill its original purpose,44 voted to grant no further appropriations, but another resolved not to relinquish the Reformed share.45

In 1827 Franklin College ceased operations, but the board of trustees continued to function. Being relieved of the instructional expense, the board found that the funds of the institution continued to increase so that by 1840 (when the college re-opened) the total assets (including an endowment of $27,826.79) amounted to $38,069.78. Contrary to expectation, the revived institution failed to attract large numbers of students, and to meet operating expenses the trustees in 1846 entered into an agreement with the directors of the Lancaster public schools whereby the school board paid the salary of the professor of mathematics, and the advanced pupils in the public schools of the city were to attend classes in the college. The agreement was terminated in 1849.46

As Franklin College served no practical denominational purposes, the Synod as early as 1818 was considering the establishment of a theological seminary—oddly enough, in light of the difficulties encountered in the administration of Franklin College—in co-operation with both Lutheran and Dutch Reformed Synods, and pro-

43 Dubbs, History of Franklin and Marshall College, pp. 89-94.
44 The German Department, upon which the Reformed clergy had based their hopes for theological training, had been closed since 1789. Ibid., p. 89.
46 Ibid., 115, 124-134.
posals were even made to take legal measures to secure the endowment of Franklin College for the operation of the projected institution. The idea of a co-operative institution met with little support, and after the consideration of numerous details—both legal and ecclesiastical—the Synod decided to accept the offer by Dickinson College (at that time supported by the Presbyterian Church) of the use of that institution’s facilities in exchange for the services of the theological professor as Professor of History and German Literature in the college. The seminary opened at Carlisle in March 1825, but no steps were taken to secure a charter of incorporation until the following year.47

The committee which had been appointed for the purpose petitioned the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania for the granting of a charter, but when the draft which had been submitted was read to the Synod many weaknesses in the document (such as provision that the institution should remain in Carlisle forever) were pointed out. The committee made numerous changes and presented the revised document to the court, but in 1828 further revisions necessitated the presentation of a third draft. The Charter was finally granted in 1830.48

The first students at the Seminary demonstrated an utter incompetence in pursuing theological study,49 and it was soon realized that some sort of preparatory institution would have to be created. Franklin College had not been satisfactory in this respect, for it had never exercised its right to confer degrees but had operated as a local academy, and in 1827 had closed its doors.50 From the beginning of the Seminary, work of a collegiate or preparatory-school level had been conducted, and when the institution was moved

47 Ibid., p. 111; Klein, op. cit., pp. 135-140. An interesting but somewhat partisan and inaccurate account of the early history of the seminary is Theodore Apple’s The Beginnings of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States from 1817 to 1832 (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication Board, 1896).

48 Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of the German Reformed Church, 1836, p. 39. The text of the Charter may be found in Klein, op. cit., pp. 149-152.

49 Report of Dr. Lewis Mayer on the Theological Seminary, Klein, op. cit., pp. 138-139. The “Centennial Register,” Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, VIII (January 1937), reveals that so far as is known only one of the ten students who entered the Seminary during 1825 held a college degree and the other nine had no previous training on the collegiate level; of those who entered the Seminary from 1826 to 1833 none seem to have had any previous preparation.

from Carlisle to York, Pennsylvania, in 1830 it was only natural that a “High School” should be established as an auxiliary institution. Attempts were again made to secure all or a part of the Franklin College endowment, but all that resulted was an invitation by the trustees of Franklin College to combine the two institutions at Lancaster.\textsuperscript{51} While the Seminary and the High School were to all intents and purposes independent, the latter had no legal status and it operated under the shadow of the former until in 1835 the High School was moved to Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and the following year was chartered as Marshall College.\textsuperscript{52}

Marshall College offered all the advantages which the founders of Franklin College failed to achieve. Here at last was an institution of the higher learning, free from inter-denominational incumbrments and all semblances of state control, which would provide pre-theological training and would also serve the higher-educational needs of the entire communion. The faculty was regarded by contemporaries (particularly German-speaking contemporaries) as being second to none, and the physical plant was adequate. Money, however, was scarce and the institution was forced to subsist on student fees, synodical appropriations, and congregational donations. The Marshall trustees continued to pursue their campaign for a portion of the Franklin College endowment, so successfully that in 1849 certain of the trustees of the latter institution even proposed that the Franklin endowment be divided between Marshall College and Pennsylvania College, a Lutheran school located at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The proposal was acceptable to all except the local interests in Lancaster who reminded the Franklin trustees that there was this third interest in addition to the Lutheran and Reformed. It was thus obvious that any arrangement combining the resources would necessitate the location of the institution at Lancaster, and in light of this recognized limitation, the negotiations between the two boards continued. Early in 1853, one-third of the assets of Franklin College were paid by the trustees to Pennsylvania College and the tax-payers of Lancaster voted to transfer the third interest of “the outside community” to the Reformed Church. Shortly thereafter the Pennsylvania legis-

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 136.
\textsuperscript{52}Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of the German Reformed Church, 1836, p. 10.
lature ratified the union of the two institutions as Franklin and Marshall College.\textsuperscript{58}

Charters for individual congregations did not become popular until the 1840’s, when numerous groups, some of which had been in existence for almost a century, applied for and received articles of incorporation. The Dartmouth College Case had demonstrated how a charter could protect an educational or religious body from government interference. The congregational charters thus often became legal instruments to protect peculiar religious or political prejudices of the incorporators and frequently there were stipulations strictly defining the corporation. St. John’s (Host) Church at Robesonia, Pennsylvania, according to the charter, was to remain a “Calvinistic” church forever,\textsuperscript{54} and in some instances the charters were so worded as to render the congregation legally independent of synodical jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{55}

While the Reformed congregations in most instances were typical cross-cuts of the German population (especially in Pennsylvania) and contained some men of considerable wealth, they sometimes found themselves in rather desperate financial straits. Taking advantage of the precedent of a Pennsylvania law of 1765 which permitted the conducting of lotteries for religious and charitable purposes, in the early decades of the nineteenth century a number of congregations petitioned either the state assembly or the county court for the authorization of lotteries. In many cases these petitions were granted and the drawings were usually conducted with considerable profit for the congregation.\textsuperscript{56}

Quite idealistically, the Synod’s founding fathers had envisioned the Synodical Constitution as sufficient basis for the enactment of by-laws which, with the accepted canons inherited from the Old World Reformed Church, would permit ecclesiastical law to order the corporate life of the communion without recourse to civil courts. Contrary to these expectations, the denomination found much of its dirty ecclesiastical linen washed before public gaze in courts of civil law. Questions of property rights in “Union” churches owned

\textsuperscript{58} Dubbs, \textit{History of Franklin and Marshall College}, pp. 138-147.
\textsuperscript{54} Thos. S. Stein, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 200-202.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 293-346. The congregations here mentioned were at Alleghenyville, Berks Co., Pennsylvania, and at Gibraltar, Pennsylvania.
jointly by Lutheran and Reformed congregations were frequently decided in this manner. The Synod's claims to the property of congregations which had affiliated with another communion also resulted in court litigations.

Of the controversial political issues of the early nineteenth century, the one most immediately concerning the German Reformed people was that of free public education. The Reformed laity and clergy in their opposition to public supported education have often been regarded as having little interest in learning for the masses. Nothing could be farther from the truth, for from the earliest days of congregational life the Reformed congregations gave such hearty support to their parochial schools that the arrival of the teacher often preceded that of the pastor. These schools were comparable in calibre to the average parochial school of the day, and some were conducted under exceedingly competent masters. Of this the Reformed people were justly proud and any attempt to introduce English education on the elementary level, was regarded quite naturally as an attempt to modify (particularly linguistically) the typically Germanic character of the Reformed people. Furthermore, the tax-burden which the public school system would entail would place a double burden upon the members of these congregations which already supported parish schools. Also, the idea of having education secularized was repulsive to a people who had lived for so long a time under a system which combined both religious and secular studies under the direct supervision of the church. In Pennsylvania where the opposition had been greatest—obviously because here was to be found the greatest concentration of Reformed population and consequently the greater number of parochial schools—the opponents of free public education met with their first defeat when in 1809 each county was required to provide

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60 The earliest of these movements was the Charity School program of the middle eighteenth century. The definitive work on this subject is: Samuel E. Weber, The Charity School Movement in Colonial Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: G. F. Lasher [1905]), passim; a more readable account is to be found in Arthur D. Graeff, The Relations Between the Pennsylvania Germans and the British Authorities (1750-1776), (Norristown, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania German Society, 1939), pp. 33-46.
schools for all children between the ages of five and twelve years of age whose parents were unable to pay for their education. While this act of the Pennsylvania state legislature did little immediately to hamper the activities of the Reformed schools, the Free School Act of 1834 gave its quietus to the parochial systems, although some Reformed congregations supported their schools for a decade or more longer. The new order proved to be less offensive than its opponents had anticipated, and the church at large lent its support to the public school system.

The slavery question was not a particularly important issue among Reformed people as most of them lived either north of the Mason and Dixon Line, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, or in the Carolina piedmont—the latter two regions were largely non-slave-holding. Of the major religious bodies in the United States the German Reformed Church was one of the few which did not divide into northern and southern branches over the question of slavery. It is true that the Classis of North Carolina seceded from the Synod in 1853, but the withdrawal was because of theological differences and not over the slavery issue.

It is surprising indeed that a group so largely concentrated in non-slave-holding states should have had but a few abolitionists among its members. Perhaps the best known and most influential of these few was the Reverend John H. A. Bomberger of Philadelphia. While Bomberger was the most outspoken of the abolitionists, he never actively engaged in politics and seldom did he engage in public controversy. In 1861, Philip Schaff defended slavery as a means of raising the Negro from a state of barbarism and heathenism to a place—low as it might be—in Christian

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61 100 Years of Free Public Schools in Pennsylvania 1834-1934 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction [1934]), pp. 1-20.
63 E.g. In 1838 Susquehanna Classis petitioned the Synod to request the Trustees of Marshall College to make special preparation for the training of public-school teachers; Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of the German Reformed Church, 1828, pp. 11-12.
64 There were, of course, exceptions to this rule and an occasional Reformed pastor was to be found who owned slaves. Jacob Calvin Leonard, History of Catawba College [Salisbury, North Carolina: Catawba College, c. 1927], p. 16.
65 The Classis returned to the Synod of 1866. Jacob Calvin Leonard, History of Catawba College, pp. 142-143.
Schaff recognized the evils of slavery, but thought that public debate on the subject merely added to the evil effects, and that these evils would disappear in the natural course of events.

So far as political parties were concerned there seemed to have been no unanimity among Reformed communicants. Here as elsewhere, the people followed whatever course seemed to be most advantageous. Since the German Reformed Church was widely spread along the frontier of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, and as those members who inhabited the thickly populated areas had few contacts with the Federalist hierarchy, the sympathies of both clergy and laity during the early national period may well be said to have been largely with the Democratic Republicans (or Anti-Federalists). This was true in spite of the fact that their two colleges were named for Federalist leaders, Benjamin Franklin and John Marshall, and that such Federalist leaders as Benjamin Rush attempted to use their influence in Franklin College to further their political purposes. As the party-lines of the young nation became more sharply drawn, the Democratic Party seems to have been the choice of a majority of the articulate Reformed people.

From the foregoing it may be seen that there were numerous factors which kept the German Reformed people from becoming actively interested in political affairs: their use of a foreign language (German); their ideal of separation of church and state; their pride in an almost outmoded elementary parochial school system; a love of their German cultural heritage and a sensitivity

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71 Of interest to the antiquarian, is the altar of the Muddy Creek Union Church (near Adamstown, Pennsylvania) upon which the craftsmen who erected a new church edifice in 1847 inscribed their names and party affiliations. Of the five builders, four were Democrats and one was a Whig. Daniel G. Glass, *et al.*, *History of the Classis of Lancaster of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States* ([New Holland, Pennsylvania, n.d.]), pp. 177-178. See more on this subject, *infra.*
regarding any suggestion that this culture might be inferior to that of their English-speaking neighbors; a pre-occupation with earning a livelihood which their largely rural society necessitated; a membership made up largely of farmers and having few capitalists and artisans; and—what was the result of the combination of the other factors—the absence of instruments of propaganda geared primarily for the purpose of awakening political consciousness.

Franklin College, which had been intended partly by its early promoters to serve this function, had, from the beginning, little influence upon Reformed youth. At Marshall College, however—where the enrollment was almost exclusively German and predominantly Reformed—political discussions were encouraged and controversial subjects were heatedly debated by the students.  

The Messenger, the official Reformed religious newspaper, which was begun in 1827, regularly carried several columns of national and international news, often of a trivial nature but usually quite impartially presented. In 1849, however, the Mercersburg Review, the Reformed Church's first and only literary journal was begun. This journal was born out of the theological and liturgical controversies which had separated the communion into two hostile camps, and the promoters of the Review (who were alumni of Marshall College) attempted to vindicate the position of the "high church" party which was coming to be known in theological circles as the "Mercersburg Group." Since the contributors to the journal attempted to justify their position on historical grounds, it naturally followed that many of its pages should have been devoted to subjects of an historical nature. Furthermore, the subject of contributed articles was not limited to theology, and articles on literature, philosophy, and natural science were submitted by the finest minds of the church. It was in the pages of the Mercersburg Review that political science as interpreted by the intellectual leaders of the German Reformed people came of age.

In the July issue of the Review for 1851 appeared an article by the aforementioned J. H. A. Bomberger, "Our National Religion,"  

"The Diaries of Dr. E. V. Gerhart" (Selections from, edited by George W. Richards), Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States, III (July 1932, 39-62), 41.

Begun as The Magazine of the German Reformed Church, it was continued after 1832 as The Messenger of the German Reformed Church; after 1835, as the Weekly Messenger of the German Reformed Church; from January to November 1848, as Weekly Messenger; and after December 6, 1848, as German Reformed Messenger.
in which the author attempted to evaluate both past and contemporary relations of church and state. Holding up the federal government's official recognition of no one particular sect or even religion as "lay[ing] the axe at the root of all religion under the hypocritical practice of patronizing none," Bomberger pointed out that the policy in practice gave undue encouragement to non-Christian or anti-Christian groups. Professing abhorrence of the state-church system as practiced in Europe, he proceeded to condemn the federal and state governments for their failure to recognize the superiority of the Christian faith above all others, a lamentable situation since the majority of Americans who professed any religion were Christians. Admitting that the function of civil government is not that of serving as a "theological tribunal," he proceeded to argue that since "his [man's] religious and social nature ... [are] both derived from God, they can find their true life only in Him. The two inseparately interpenetrate each other, and cannot prosper in a political divorcement;" and therefore, the government's interpretation of the constitutional articles forbidding the imposition of religious tests upon office holders and the establishment of religion represented a shameful repudiation of the appeals to Divine Providence contained in the Declaration of Independence.

From these observations and criticisms of the federal government, Bomberger turned next to the government of the several states. Here he pointed out that his own state (Pennsylvania) had long since created laws and had seen to their enforcement regarding such matters as the profanation of the Christian Sabbath, blasphemy, "incestuous" marriages, and perjury—all finding their roots in Christian, rather than in natural laws.

Having demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the states were de facto Christian and that the federal government was failing to recognize a similar responsibility, Bomberger's peculiar logic next led him to conclude that the United States was Protestant since

71 Mercersburg Review, III (July 1851), 305-339.
72 Ibid., 309. Italics are the present writer's.
73 Ibid., 317.
74 Ibid., 329.
75 Bomberger almost gleefully cited court decisions affecting Jews and Seventh-Day Baptists. Ibid., 332.
76 Ibid., 232-233.
Roman Catholicism was in itself an ecclesiastical monarchy (temporal and spiritual) and thus incompatible with republicanism.\textsuperscript{89}

Perhaps Bomberger was attempting to wrestle with the idea of "manifest destiny." Perhaps he was trying to urge his fellow religionists to take a more active interest in affairs political. Then, too, he may have been advocating the enactment of "blue laws."\textsuperscript{81} Certainly, whatever may have been his objective, he did little to promote constructive thinking along political lines.

What Bomberger obviously failed to do, more able writers again attempted in following years. The visit of Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, to America late in 1851 brought forth an article by Theodore Apple in the January 1852 issue of the \textit{Review}, in which he denounced the European Revolutionists of 1848 as being dangerous radicals and in which he also censured the Congress of the United States as well as the religious, civic, and fraternal groups for their having been "taken in" by a revolutionary whose only claims to recognition were that he was a foe of Hapsburg monarchy and did not "whilst in Turkey . . . apostatize to Mohammedanism."\textsuperscript{82} Unlike Bomberger, Apple argued for complete separation of church and state, and by broad implication, accused Protestant American statesmen of having their sympathies for Kossuth deepened by the fact that the revolutionary leader was a Protestant.\textsuperscript{83}

One of the most learned of the political articles to appear in the \textit{Review} was that of July, 1853, by A. K. Syester, a layman of Hagerstown, Maryland, in which the writer eruditely traced from the time of the Persian Wars to his own what he regarded as a fundamental conflict between authority and freedom, coming to the (albeit not original) conclusion that in a republic the "government derives its power from the people, that it can confer no right, no power on the people; and that there can never be justly any conflict or repugnance between the rights of government and the rights of citizens." His contention "that the nationality [the United States] that grounds itself on individual freedom, the same nationality that has hitherto presided over the discordant elements, . . . will rule

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, 333-334.
\textsuperscript{81} He used as his point of departure the \textit{Sunday Mails} Report of 1829, \textit{ibid.}, 308.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Mercersburg Review}, IV (January 1852), 81-89.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, 82.
on, its controlling forces unimpaired” is a far cry from Bomberger’s confusion of religious liberty with moral license.84

Certainly the period of the 1850’s was the period of the crystallization of many of the doctrines of the German Reformed Church, and, as such, it was the period during which many doctrines, long adhered to, were formally stated. It must be remembered that the Synod avoided making any final statement upon the church and state question or upon any of its manifold ramifications. Characteristic of the time, however, was the rationalization of the Public School question by Dr. Emanuel Vogel Gerhart which appeared in the Review of April 1854.85 Recognizing the public school as a fait accompli, and assuming three classes of society—the productive and nourishing class, the governing and defending class, and the instructing class (shades of Plato)—Gerhart maintained that the government, which existed as the organic expression of Society, was obligated to provide useful instruction to the youth of the nation.86 Apart from these sentiments regarding public education, Gerhart’s article presented his observations respecting the nature of the civil government:

The distinctive feature of our Republican Government is the supremacy of the law. Not rank, nor blood, not wealth, rules in our free land, but law; . . . the eternal principles of right and wrong hold the sway in our Federal and State Constitution. . . . Every fundamental law has thus on the one hand the sanction of God’s authority, and on the other the approval of conscience. . . . Government owes it as a first duty of itself, imposed even by the law of self-preservation, to promote the intellectual, moral and religious culture of the masses by all the means at its command.87

Here, perhaps, may be found the synthesis of Bomberger’s legally enforced morality and Apple’s advocacy of complete separation of church and state—a position which called for governmental encouragement of religion without state control or regulation.

86 Ibid., 282-285.
87 Ibid., 289-290.
Acting as an unofficial ambassador of American Protestant Christianity, Philip Schaff, Professor of Theology at the Theological Seminary, delivered an address before the Evangelical Union at Berlin on March 20, 1854. While Schaff's address contained little, if any, new information regarding the history of the United States, the speaker reviewed in brief detail the story of the development of the American republic and also presented an outline of the governmental system of the United States, taking care to point out those phases which reflected the religious interests and loyalties of the people. Two considerations of contemporary questions were significant. The Mexican War was regarded by Schaff as "a typical example of American self-reliance," and the unsuccessful Revolutionists of 1848 who had come to America were regarded as being both licentious and godless.

An article which was less philosophical and dealt more directly with the political problems of the 1850's was that by J. W. Santee which appeared in the *Review* of July 1855, in which the writer deplored the corruption of the political parties and condemned the Congress—particularly the House of Representatives—as being a disgrace to the United States.

These articles may have been of little political significance in the total picture of American political life, but the fact that they were written by some of the leading thinkers of the German Reformed Church indicates that the Communion had ceased to feel that it was outside the stream of national affairs. The fact that the articles are almost entirely free of denominational reference also reveals that the Reformed people—or their spiritual leaders, at least—had cast aside the sectarian opportunism which had characterized the political attitudes of the preceding half-century. The fact that there was no apparent unanimity of opinion expressed in the several articles is unimportant, for this is the expression, pure and simple, of the freedom of thought peculiar to both political and ecclesiastical democracy. The philosophical, rather than the prac-
tical nature of the articles is, perhaps, typical of the German mind; the great crusades of the 40's and 50's—temperance, missions, abolition, had almost passed unnoticed by the Reformed people and it was not until the period following the Civil War that a definite social consciousness found expression within the Communion.\footnote{Fred E. Luchs, “The Social Consciousness of Reformed Church Ministers from 1850-1900,” \textit{Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States}, IX (July 1938), 115-125.}