

The Covenanter Witness

"THE FIELD IS THE WORLD, THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD" ①

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THE LATE REV. W. J. McKNIGHT, D.D.

For more than fifty-six years an ordained Minister, Pastor, Lecturer, and Author, in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

AN INCIDENT AND AN APPRECIATION

Remo I. Robb, D.D.

I was sorry to hear of the rather sudden passing of Dr. W. J. McKnight. I had written him a letter asking permission to use a few paragraphs from his recent book, as young people's comments. Then I learned that he was taken sick before my letter possibly could have reached him. The young people's comments had to get along on my very inferior writing.

I liked him very much. On several occasions we have had some fine fellowship. The first, I think, was when I was in Seattle in 1931, and he was assisting me in communion. In the preparatory days we were discussing our communion program and he stated his dislike for concluding the sacramental service with the long meter of Psalm 72. Said he, "For three hundred years our fathers have sung the common meter,

'Of grain an handful in the earth

On tops of mountains high,

With prosp'rous fruit shall shake like trees

On Lebanon that be.'

"And" he continued, "I don't like this 'On-hilltops-sown-a-little-grain' stuff. We ought to have respect enough for our forebears to keep on singing as they have done."

I was disposed to argue, and said "But look at the tune set to the common meter. If 'Miles Lane' is not pitched exactly right, it either wallows in the depths or scales the heights. And at communion time it's best not to run the risk of spoiling a good psalm by a hard tune."

"Oh, but," he continued, "'Miles Lane' is the very tune for that 72nd Psalm. The last line of every verse in that number is emphatic, and that rising scale on the fourth line fits every verse exactly. You get it pitched right, and sing it."

Well, we sang long meter that time, but the more I considered his point, the better I agreed with it.

In 1946, fifteen years later, through some illogical series of circumstances I was asked to lead a Psalm festival at the White Lake conference. Along in the afternoon before the singing, I met Dr. W. J. out on the hilltop, and told him that I was going to conclude the singing that night with one of his favorites.

"And which one is that?" he asked.

"The seventy second, common meter, to 'Miles Lane'."

"I'll be there. I'll be right there!"

Later he met me again, and said "Now, I wouldn't want to interfere with the setting up of your program at all, but I was wondering, if it would be all right, just before you sing that final psalm tonight, if I would read it. I think I could give them a setting for singing it."

I said "I think that would be perfect," and I meant every word.

You know how White Lake sings. The group was at its best that night. Strong soprano to carry the melody, other parts well balanced. After they warmed up they really sang beautifully. We sang praise psalms, prayer psalms, we had special groups do

singing, and after about an hour and three quarters we came to the last one.

With all his love for the Psalms of the Bible, the inspired songs of Zion, Dr. W. J. McKnight read the closing verses of Psalm 72, dramatically, with deep feeling, and when he reached "The whole earth let His glory fill" his reading was in itself music.

And then White Lake conference sang! And how they sang! Never have I led a group that followed my leading so closely. They took the rising tones on the last line of each verse in full volume. When at last they sang "Amen, So Let It Be," the harmony was full and true, and they held it as if loathe to leave it. Then softly on the descending tones of the repeated line they sang it again like a prayer. Dr. McKnight then pronounced the benediction.

Immediately he turned and went back toward the wall and blew his nose hard. He was the first to greet me, and he said "It'll never be prettier this side of heaven."

Now he's hearing it on that side of heaven from the choirs of saints before the Throne. Among the "young fellers" left over here, one, at least, with the memory of a Divine song sung in praise by redeemed sinners, looks forward to meeting him again where alone that song will ever be prettier.

A few years ago my father, who differs with many on the subject of Close Communion, wrote his opinions, and sent about thirty copies to selected ministers for criticism and comment. He wrote me, "W. J. McKnight, while disagreeing almost entirely, was the most gracious and courteous in his reply of all the correspondents, far more courteous than some I had counted close friends."

There were several other associations—at Synod, at Lochiel, Canada, in correspondence and conversation. I liked him a lot. I count it one of God's blessings on my life to have known Dr. W. J. McKnight, and the recollections of our contacts will bear weight with me in many a decision that lies before me.

In Appreciation

of Dr. W. J. McKnight

The Psalmist prayed: "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes." Whether Dr. W. J. McKnight ever formally offered that petition or not, it was surely characteristic of him. His supreme purpose in all of his ministry was to be sound in God's word. He diligently searched out the precise meaning with keen precision. He delighted to meditate on the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments as the word of the Lord.

With all his scholarship as a student of the Word for pulpit presentation, or the writing of commentaries, he excelled as an enjoyable guest in the home of friends. Whether in a friend's study or in the sitting room, he had the unique ability to take up certain portions of the Word and make them interesting topics of conversation. He enjoyed making the hidden meaning of texts stand out in all their beauty. He was skillful, moreover, in doing that very thing.

The hostess in the home also enjoyed Dr. McKnight as a guest. At the table he was delightful. Even a young bride, where he was being entertained, after the first meal, found pleasure in preparing and serving all the food during his stay. His first visit in the home of friends made him forever after a welcome guest. His sense of humor and his keen wit were always refreshing.

As hosts in their own home, he and his good wife who preceded him in the final home going, were more than cordial. They knew how to make their friends feel right at home with them. It will be a great joy if these friendships of life may someday be renewed in the Father's house of many mansions.

T. C. McKnight

The passing of Dr. W. J. McKnight has meant the loss of one whom I counted a great friend.

It was always an uplift to me to be in his presence, for he was one of the whitest souls I ever knew. The one Scripture that stands out in my mind as I remember W. J. is, "Finally, brethern, whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honest; whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Early in my life he made two deep impressions upon me. He stirred up in my heart a great love for the Word of God, and a deep conviction as to the Scriptural basis of the distinctive principles of the Covenanter Church. More than fifty years ago I heard him expound the first chapter of Romans and that exposition impressed the thought upon me as to the rich veins of truth consecrated scholarship could discover in the Word. A few years later he gave his series of lectures on our distinctive principles. Then and there I had the conviction that here were unanswerable arguments for the teachings of the Covenanter Church. Surely those lectures must have fortified many of the members of the church in her testimony.

May the Lord raise up from our young men such another champion of the truth.

Dr. Robert Park
Moderator of Synod, 1951

Where shall we find a man to take his place? There is no man to take his place. And besides, his work here is finished; *well done*. He has gone on to do a greater work in the service of our Lord. And it is himself we love. His place in our hearts shall never be without him.

It was my good fortune to be near him, from time to time, while he was giving his Testimony Bearing lectures in the State of Kansas, and I, as a licentiate, was trying to preach sermons thereabout. His counsel and criticism, given as a wise and considerate friend, sometimes during long walks across the prairie were most helpful and have never been forgotten. Neither has the fun we had been forgotten. He knew how to start good fun and keep it going. His lofty and reverent conceptions of God, his sincere love of truth and holiness, without the slightest tinge of cant or sanctimoniousness, and his fidelity to the Scriptures as the Word of God, not the word of man, have been an inspiration to me through the years, as no doubt they have been to many others.

He had received in large measure "*the love of the truth*," and was a ready armed foe of deceit, hypocrisy, and unfaithfulness, wherever he encountered them. He treated the devil and his angels roughly. He was too honest and straightforward to do otherwise.

To all his study of the Word he brought a truly scientific spirit. He was a scholar of the first order, and, for his findings and the publication of them, was master of the Greek and English languages. As to the Greek, he understood and was intimate with its genius. He wrote and spoke beautiful English, but aimed at accuracy rather than decoration. Often I have heard him say, "I must get this *accurately* stated." He was exceedingly careful lest he give any wrong, even slightly wrong conception of the truth. He sometimes used words not found in the daily newspaper, because they more precisely expressed the truth he wanted to tell.

I wish every Christian would read his exposition of the Book of Revelation. It is his legacy to us all. A legacy rich in the treasures of the Word, and uplifting to the soul.

F. D. Frazer

It is most difficult, I am told, to have a minister living in bounds of your congregation. I did not find this to be true. It was a joy to have Dr. McKnight within bounds of the Newburgh Congregation, and to enjoy his fellowship. He was sympathetic and understanding. The wisdom he gained throughout his ministry was available and the counsel he gave proved invaluable. It was always a pleasure to talk with Dr. McKnight and in the two years we were together at Newburgh many afternoons were spent discussing the Word of God, especially the last Book of that wonderful volume.

"It was with sorrow that we learned of Dr. McKnight's passing. A mighty soldier has fallen."

The Reverend Chuck Sterrett
Newburgh, N. Y.

"We will all miss Dr. W. J. McKnight as a personal friend and as a pillar in the meetings of Synod. The words come to our minds, "How are the mighty fallen," and, "Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen." He was always at Synod, always in his place, and always an ardent, courageous defender of the faith. Many also remember messages of his lectures, of his teaching and, of course, his writings will remain.

The thought of his departure comes to me in an unusually touching way as it seems like a pillar had been knocked from the support of our church, especially as I think of him in his work in Synod."

F. E. Allen, D.D.

It will be a lonely Synod for Mrs. Withrow and myself, should we be able to attend again, when we miss the helpful humor of Dr. W. J. McKnight. His gain is the loss of every one of us. We have too few real scholars and real friends—and real Christian teachers.—Dr. J. R. Withrow, Columbus, O.

The loss of Dr. W. J. McKnight will be shared by our Church in Ireland and Scotland for the ministry which he exercised in his lifetime was worldwide. We all feel, as we read his books and pamphlets, that though he is dead he yet speaketh. We

all ought to be thankful to the King and Head of the Church for giving us such a noble champion of the truth.

The Rev. W. Dodds, Ballenon Manse, Ireland

We are going to miss Dr. W. J. McKnight very much. With all his personal attainments he was so quick to praise a piece of good work, or to give needed encouragement to better work. I personally feel the loss of a good friend.

Professor D. Ray Wilcox, Geneva College

Dr. W. J. McKnight was my friend. He was my whole family's friend. He not only received us into the Covenant Church but taught all of us in such a way that I cannot read the Book of Isaiah without hearing and seeing him as he read it. And how he could read it and how he could explain it! There never was a man in my life who could compare with him in his preaching and teaching.

Cloud Millican, Wentworth, N. H.

Dr. W. J. McKnight was always acceptable either as a speaker or as a camper at White Lake. This was unusual for a man of his years. The Rev. R. W. Caskey, Winchester, Kansas.

(Written Oct. 11. At that time Professor Ramsey had not learned of Dr. McKnight's death.)

It is certainly uplifting to note that you are still going strong and that your God-given force of mind and spirit is not abated. I have lived in the hope that you would be able to finish the work on The Revelation which you have so reverently and intelligently begun. I rejoice in the prospect (God willing) of the fulfillment of that hope.

Professor John Ramsey, Portstewart, N. Ireland.

(The last letter received by Dr. McKnight before his death)

Your card came today and made us heavy-hearted. Your splendid, unfaltering faith in our Lord has always been like a beacon to my wife and to myself. I must always thank you with all my heart for the faith you implanted in our hearts. The many talks we had together during your visits in our home were the determining factors in leading me to join the Covenanters. I shall never regret it and it has been a continuous stream of inner joy to me. It is the example of real Christian lives that you and other Covenanters have shown that will bring people like myself to the Church and to God through Christ. For what you have done for me I can only say—Thanks.

Mr. and Mrs. H. Glen, Rock, N. J.

I was shocked to hear of the sudden calling of Dr. W. J. McKnight to the higher life with his Lord. He was an eminent, earnest and faithful servant of Christ and His Church. His painstaking labors made for himself a place of distinction in our generation. I shall miss him much.

Dr. F. M. Wilson, Philadelphia, Pa.

How thankful we should be that Dr. W. J. McKnight was spared to finish his book on The Revelation. With so many wild interpretations of The Revelation being published, it was necessary that a sane and scholarly volume should be written. That he did. He will be greatly missed in the councils and Courts of the Church, and at White Lake. More than

once when I had gotten stuck on some problems of exegesis I wrote to him. I have a number of his letters in which he made things clear.

The Reverend G. M. Robb, Syracuse, N. Y.

Dr. W. J. McKnight was a man of fine mind, perhaps the greatest intellect in our Church and such a loyal friend—that is where he shone at his best.

Mrs. T. M. Slater, Montclair, N.J.

We shall always remember Dr. McKnight for his steadfastness in support of the truth. To my knowledge he did not waver on any question of right and wrong. The sound of his trumpet was clear.

Elder Charles D. Murphy, Syracuse, N. Y.

As a member of the Robson household (Lisbon, N. Y.) I want to assure you that we have always considered Dr. McKnight as a very dear and cherished friend. How eagerly we awaited his visits and how thoroughly we enjoyed them! He was so individualistic, so stimulating and so thoroughly genuine. One thought of the world as a better place because he was in it.

Helen W. Kerr, New York 21, N. Y.

Dr. W. J. McKnight was a scholar of the first order. The last time he was in our home my sons hung on his words with absorbing interest. Robert held him in very high regard and always considered it a privilege when he could talk with him.

Professor J. Boyd Tweed, Geneva College

I considered it an honor to be counted a friend of Dr. W. J. McKnight.

John Peoples, M.D., Philadelphia, Pa.

Universal Week of Prayer

Again American Evangelicals join in the observance of the "Universal Week of Prayer" sponsored by the World's Evangelical Alliance. This is the oldest continuous fellowship of special prayer in the History of Protestantism, having been organized by the WEA in 1846. In 1952 it will be observed from January 6 to January 13 in practically every land outside the "iron curtain." Some 250,000 copies of the topics have been mailed to Christian leaders throughout the world and are in the process of being translated into many languages for further printings and distributions.

In the words of the Call: "The Holy Scriptures bid us to make supplications, prayer, intercessions and thanksgivings for all men. The method prescribed is that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (I Timothy 2). The Universal Week of Prayer is designed to fulfill this command and to practice this way. We are to take very seriously the Apostle's exhortation to holiness, charity and faith, for these are ever the conditions of effective prayer.

"The Church of Jesus Christ remains a minority in the modern world, but it is the most significant minority of all. Our concern is to be not with the numbers of our ranks, but with the quality of our obedience. Throughout history God has used the few to bless the many. The saved remnant has always to become a saving remnant. And it is only through prayer that this can be.—U.E.A.