

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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Editorial Notes and Comments

THE BENNET CASE

IT SEEMS advisable to precede our present comments on this case with a brief history of its background to date.

MR. JAMES E. BENNET, one of the original members of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, is a member of the Fort Washington Presbyterian Church of the Presbytery of New York. If said Presbytery had promptly obeyed the Mandate of the 1934 Assembly it would have seen to it that disciplinary action was instituted against Mr. BENNET as one guilty of "a disorderly and disloyal act"—approximately ninety days after he had been officially notified of the Assembly's action. The Presbytery, however, contented itself with addressing a Communication to the 1935 Assembly affirming "its loyalty to the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and its desire to be guided by the Deliverance of the General Assembly" but confessing its loss to know how to proceed in this particular case and asking the Assembly either to give specific directions or permit the Presbytery to refer the case to the Assembly for its direct action. In response to that Communication the 1935 Assembly took the following action: "The Assembly acknowledges the expression of loyal intent of the Presbytery of New York, and that the responsibility in this matter be left where it has been placed,—with the Presbytery of New York and the session of the Fort Washington Presbyterian Church." When this action of the Assembly was brought to the attention of the Fort Washington Church, its session referred the matter to the Presbytery with the request that it take such action as it deemed wise. After further delay the Presbytery of New York addressed another Communication to the 1936 Assembly setting forth its reasons for believing that "it would be inexpedient for this Presbytery to undertake disciplinary measures with Mr. BENNET"—an action that was equivalent to a refusal to obey the Assembly's Mandate. The circumstances being what they were, the logical thing for the Assembly to have done would have been to institute disciplinary action against

the Presbytery for defiance of its Mandate. Apparently intimidated, however, by the Presbytery's bold front, it side-stepped the issue by directing the Synod of New York "to assume jurisdiction and conclude the matter itself in connection with its next meeting" (1936 Minutes, p. 73). In obedience to these directions the Synod of New York at its October meeting elected a Special Judicial Commission to consider and conclude the case in question. On February 2, 1937, this Special Judicial Commission by reason of the breakdown of its efforts to conclude the matter "referred the case to the General Assembly for ultimate trial and decision." It is to be assumed, therefore, that this case will receive attention in connection with the next General Assembly.

The breakdown of the effort of the Synod's Judicial Commission to conclude the case came when Mr. BENNET and his counsel, Mr. WILLIAM S. BENNET (a brother of the accused) withdrew because of the Commission's repeated refusal to consider motions or arguments that questioned the validity of anything the General Assembly has said or done. Mr. BENNET was able to withdraw on safe legal grounds by reason of the fact that the Commission had failed to serve him with a citation, as required by the Book of Discipline, Chapter V, Section 4, requiring his presence. As a result, technically speaking, Mr. BENNET had not been on trial at all, he having appeared before the Commission "voluntarily and specially but not generally" for the purpose of arguing certain motions and demurrers intended to show that the proceedings relating to himself should be terminated. In harmony with this contention each of these motions and demurrers were prefaced with the following statement: "Now comes the said JAMES E. BENNET, appearing specially and under protest and for the purpose of this motion (or demurrer) only, and moves to dismiss the charge and specifications served upon him December 15, 1936, by this Commission, and to terminate all proceedings relating to himself before the said Commission for the following reason:—"

MR. BENNET was prepared through his counsel to present no less than twenty-seven motions showing cause why the charge against him should be dismissed, but after

I shall never forget the sight of the wan smile that went the rounds with the report of the meteorologist at daybreak that the river had reached the crest and would soon start falling.

I saw the prison threatened with the crumbling of the walls and reverberating to the cries of the convicts rioting inside. I couldn't blame them, if the report that I heard is true; which was that they had heard that the Dix River Dam had broken. It is a large dam on the Dix River near where that stream empties into the Kentucky. They thought they were trapped like rats in the very path of the descending flood. It was bad enough with water ten feet deep in the prison itself, the kitchen flooded with all light and heat out of commission. But I saw them on Monday morning come over the walls and down by a ladder one at a time in an orderly way, across an improvised bridge, and up the steep embankment under heavy guard to be loaded in trucks and busses and taken to various near cities until a temporary prison camp could be established on high ground.

These ideas that I have given of the flood conditions were, of course, repeated in many other places on a larger or smaller scale. While I did not do definite work in the flood area of Louisville at the height of the disaster, I was there on two occasions at the height of the water and have had occasion to see much of it in the last two weeks.

It was in Louisville that such a tremendous proportion of the territory of the city was flooded, with an equal proportion, or larger, of the population driven from their homes. I saw water in Louisville in what is one of the principle thoroughfares, Broadway, so deep that those passing along the street in a small row-boat with an outboard motor were obliged to stoop, as they sat on the seats of the boats, to pass under the trolley wires. Another section of Broadway was the course of a current so swift that not even motor boats could breast it. Only the marine motors were able to face that current. More than one boat with an outboard motor was wrecked in front of the Presbyterian Seminary at First Street and Broadway as a result of trying to navigate Broadway upstream.

It is difficult for one to imagine the destruction who has not seen it. I saw refugees all over Kentucky in school houses, churches, club houses, and in private homes; in cars, trucks, busses, and on the train. I saw them standing in Louisville in front of a Red Cross kitchen in a que that reached for three blocks. I saw their homes. I drove down streets and saw what had once been furniture, in many cases very fine furniture, piled in great heaps in the gutter and along the curbs waiting to be hauled away. I saw beautiful hardwood floors warped and sticking up at all sorts of crazy angles. I saw mud, mud, mud; sticky, slimy mud that clings tenaciously to whatever it touches. I saw rugs and overstuffed furniture full of it. I saw automobiles unrecognizable through it. I saw great cave-ins in the streets. I saw houses washed from their foundations. I spent most of the day on Thursday, February 11, inspecting homes in the colored section in the West End.

I saw houses washed entirely away. I saw a dead dog hanging by his hindquarters in a grape arbor, six feet above the ground. I saw houses in which the furniture and everything that had been in the house was total loss, nothing but junk.

I stood in a great and beautiful church, the Warren Memorial Presbyterian, and saw where the water had been in that auditorium, upset the pews, ruined the carpets, damaged the floor to an extent as yet unestimated, deposited mud on everything in the plant, including all furniture, floors, walls, carpets, and equipment; soaked and warped the paneling on the front of the rostrum, and, they are afraid, completely ruined the lovely pipe organ. There was nothing unique in that church's experience. Many suffered in like manner.

I saw all this. But I saw something else. I saw a people rise to an occasion as I did not dream was possible. I saw cooperation that was glorious. I saw self-sacrifice that was inspiring. I saw courage that was magnificent. I saw, to be sure, human weaknesses assert themselves in some instances; but others who have seen the flood more thoroughly and have been through it more completely by far than I, agree with me when I say that it is a matter of growing inspiration to be a part of a people that can meet a disaster on such a scope with the spirit that has been manifested. I saw, above all, the church of the Living God go into action in His Spirit; and I saw, unless I am a poor interpreter of human reactions, that church command for itself a new respect in the thinking of the masses of the people.

The flood area is an area in which people are sobered, but not beaten. It is an area in which, perhaps, humanity has been bound together in a new relationship of brotherhood; and I feel that it is not too much to hope that God will turn even this great disaster to the end of furthering His Kingdom among the sons of men.

AND WALK IN DARKNESS

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth.

I John 1:6.

Man was created to enjoy the fellowship of God. He was created in the light and for the light. But this relationship sustained by the uninterrupted outflow of the divine complacency and the response on the part of man of loving and adoring worship has been broken by sin. Man has been alienated from the fellowship and presence of God. He now walks in darkness and dwells in the region of the shadow of death.

It has ever been the attempt of man to disavow this fact. It strikes his pride too much to acknowledge that he has been separated from the fountain of life and of light. And so he has ever been attempting to combine a walk in darkness with the profession of religion. Indeed it is here the ingenuity of hell has been exercised to the utmost. It is often claimed that it makes no difference what religion we profess so long as we are sincere devotees of some religion. But oh the blasphemy of it! Mere religiosity is the high-road to destruction. Let God be true and every man a liar. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth."—JOHN MURRAY in *Daily Manna*.