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By Rev. Wm. C. Robinson, D.D.*

The Apostle would allow neither bonds nor afflictions to turn him aside from the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus: **To Testify The Gospel Of The Grace Of God.** When our Lord Himself preached in Nazareth they wondered at the **Words Of Grace** which fell from His lips. In this day when flesh is being torn and hearts are being broken let us comfort God's people with the message of the Father's mercy. In the midst of his warmest debate on Church Polity, Thornwell stopped to declare that the government of the Church was second to the Gospel of the grace of God. There is a proper logic in this thinking. God brings us, His rebellious creatures, to Himself by the outpouring of His love for us in Christ. It is when we see Christ on the cross dying for our sins that we place Him upon the throne of our lives and of our Churches. God brings us into the obedience of Christian faith by the way of His gracious communion with us, by commending His own love for us in that Christ died for us, and by shedding abroad in our hearts that love by the Holy Ghost.

When we come to Christ as our loving Saviour we come thinking generous thoughts of our Kingly Lord. Surely this dear Friend has not been short or parsimonious in the provisions He has made for us, His household of faith. When John Knox and his associates sought a Church according to the pattern shown in the mount, they did not do so feeling that the Lord had put them into a strait jacket. They could not think such unworthy thoughts of their bountiful Redeemer. Trusting the wisdom of His loving and generous heart, they proclaimed Jesus Christ as the alone King in Zion. And thus they went to the Word of the King for Zion's form of worship, her form of government, her form of doctrine, and her way of discipline. They seriously tried to make Him who is the Chiefest among ten thousand and the One altogether lovely King and Head in every department of Church life.

This approach bore definite and concrete fruits in the life of the Church of old Scotia. The everyday Scottish worshipper who loved to tread the courts of the Lord's house in ways of God's own ordering carried as certain a conviction that Christ was present with the means of grace—because they were of His ordering and administered in the way of His covenant—as any Roman Catholic was ever sure that Christ was in the mass. Indeed, it was this unshakeable conviction that brought down the house of Rome and established the Reformed faith in Scotland. When King Charles I sent a Dean to read a High Church Anglican Prayer Book, without warrant of Christ's written Word, Jane Geddes started such a commotion that Prayer Book, Bishops and Archbishops were removed from the Church of Scotland. Yes, Charles found himself confronted with an army of Scottish plow boys in their blue stockings ready to whip his black silk hosed cavaliers. And the Scottish troops marched under this banner, "For

Christ's Crown And Covenant." The meaning of that glorious page in our Church history is that Christ alone is to be King in Zion and that Scottish covenanting Presbyterianism is to have a faith, a government, a discipline and a worship only according to His Word. These were the things for which the Westminster Assembly was convened and for these several things the Divines made explicit provision from the Word of God.

The Westminster Divines began their statement of the form of Presbyterian Government with a magnificent Preface setting forth the Headship of Christ as the keystone upon which rests all our government, worship, discipline and doctrine. This great Preface was taken over by all of the Presbyterian bodies in America and is still found in the Churches of Scottish dissenting origin. However, when the largest Presbyterian body reorganized as a General Assembly for some reason they left out this cornerstone and substituted for it a set of Preliminary Principles drawn up perhaps by Dr. John Witherspoon. There are some fine things in these principles . . . but the best principles are a poor substitute for the Kingship and the Headship of Christ. Therefore, when we organized the Southern Presbyterian Church we restored this noble preface and built our second chapter of the Form of Government around it.

Our Book states the Westminster Preface thus: "Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even for ever; having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him on his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all; he, being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things; received gifts for his Church, and gave all officers necessary for the edification of his Church and the perfecting of his saints."

We follow this by a great statement of the historic Scottish Presbyterian position thus: "Christ, as King, has given to his Church, officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has he ordained therein his system of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship; all which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deducted therefrom; and to which things he commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away."

In the 58th paragraph of our Book of Church Order we draw the proper inference from these premises that the Church can make no laws binding the conscience, but can require obedience to the law which Christ the King has given in Scripture and can make rules or regulations for government, discipline, worship and extension agreeable to the teachings of Scripture, the circumstantial details only of these matters being left to Christian prudence. Christ, the King, is the only law-giver. The Church regulates the circumstantial details.

This principle that only the Word of God is law is carried into our Discipline. Law is essentially a command with a penalty affixed. And our Book defines an ecclesiastical offense, the proper object of judicial process, as nothing but what the Word of God condemns as sinful. If the Plan of Reunion were modified so as to embody the sundry provisions of our Book on the Headship of Christ it would remove one of the major objections we have to that plan and also make it easier for the Presbyterian Churches of Scottish dissenting origin, which have magnified the Headship of Christ more than has the USA Church, to enter the merger.

Our Larger and Shorter Catechisms carry the Headship of Christ into the conduct of Christian worship. According to these official interpretations of the Word of God the primary question is not whether the *Ave Maria* is beautiful music, or whether an altar arrangement suits a noted architect, or whether a picture or an image or dim religious light pleases an interior decorator.

If these become our primary questions we shall certainly promote the Roman Catholicizing of Protestant America. A religious masterpiece is one thing, the obedience of the faith is another thing. The primary question for the servant of the Lord is this: Has the one King in Zion given us Scriptural warrant to introduce these things into the New Testament worship of His Church? Has He authorized us to tread His courts in these ways?

No doubt some minister is objecting, well we just cannot get our people to see things that way today. Of course, we cannot drive people to accept the yoke of the Lord in these or in any matters. And no one of us can boast that he has brought every thought into captivity to Christ.

It is only by the cords of love and by the bands of a man, of the God-man Christ Jesus, that the King of Love bows our stubborn wills to Himself. When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost—when He is the moving force in the Church—His presence evokes from thankful hearts the obedience of Christian faith.

The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance. The love of Christ constraineth us. The Apostle beseeches us by the mercies of God to present our bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God which is our rational worship. Only the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost will enthrone Christ as King in our Churches or sanctify Him as Lord in our hearts.

An Inspection Of The Plan Of Union Presented By The Joint Committees Of U.S.A. And U. S. Presbyterian Churches

By Rev. D. J. Woods, D.D.*

We commend the evidences of careful, painstaking work presented in this book.

A careful reading of it, comparing with our present standards, is well worth the trouble.

The Confession of Faith and Catechisms presented are our own Presbyterian U. S. standards along with our amendments.

We should have no difficulty in agreeing upon these parts of The Plan of Union, if sincerely received by both parties.

The Form of Government, Rules of Discipline and Directory of Worship are more detailed and in many respects superior to our own. The Regional Synods present a rather radical change; but a change necessary for a body so much larger in territory and membership than our present church bodies. As to exceptions, I must emphasize two:

In Chapters 7:2; 8:1; 13:1; 14:4; 15:7, Page 106, and 21:7, Page 123, of Form of Government of this plan, there is a distinct and dangerous depreciation of the Ruling Elder. The minister absorbs the function of the Ruling Elder and as-

sumes the title of Bishop. In ordination and installation the Ruling Elder is ruled out. We must remember that no court of our Church is constituted without the presence of the Ruling Elder. While the minister, for very good reasons, is under the authority of the Presbytery and not of the Session of any particular Church, yet the Ruling Elders of the Churches are essential members and usually a majority of the Presbytery. And they should take part in ordination and installation services of ministers as well as of congregational elders. History makes it plain that the first step in the departure of the early Church from the simple, apostolic, presbyterian government in its downward course through prelacy to popery, was the demoting of the Ruling Elder and the undue exaltation of the minister as a Bishop. There was no separate office of Bishop in the New Testament. As supervisors all Elders were bishops. A large feature in the strength of our Presbyterian system is in the presence as equals in authority of our Elders. We ministers need them to restrain our presumptions and to advise us in many practical matters where they are wiser than we. So much as to government.

But my chief difficulty in agreeing to organic