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GENERAL CHURCH NEWS

Are The U.S.A. Liberals To Determine The Terms Of Union?

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

When the Plan of Reunion of the Presbyterian Church US and the Presbyterian Church USA was published, the "liberal" wing of the USA Church through its organ, **The Presbyterian Tribune**, vigorously opposed two aspects of the plan: (1) They objected to separate synods and presbyteries for Negroes, and (2) they objected to the ordination vows taken over from our Book of Church Order which require an officer to notify his presbytery on his own initiative of any change in his doctrinal position since ordination.

Now from 1888 through 1943, whenever reunion was broached, the USA spokesmen assured our people that they were willing to allow the synodical and presbyterial lines to stand as we had them with separate courts for Negro congregations. The racial question is a very delicate matter. I have served and I can serve in a presbytery with a Negro congregation or two in it. I can conceive of circumstances in which I would have a Negro member in a white congregation. But I object strongly for USA "Liberals," who do not have the Negro question as acutely before them as we do, deciding how we shall handle this thorny matter. If they are free now to say that we must have them in our presbyteries and synods, they will be free after the merger to say that we must have them in our congregations. Indeed, the recent report of the Federal Council for Race Sunday called upon us to receive them into our churches and into our fellowship, to use them to teach in our Sunday Schools and to preach from our pulpits. The states of the South have laws forbidding intermarriage and presumably most of the people of the South favor these laws. The Apostle says that God has determined the bounds of every race's habitation (Acts 17:26). In serving our colored brethren in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we should be free to do so in ways that would not encourage them to think that we expect the amalgamation of the races. We should be free to handle the matter apart from dictation by the USA "liberals". Therefore, we greatly regret that the report received from Dr. Dunbar Ogden is to the effect that our Committee has agreed to this change requested by **The Presbyterian Tribune**, that is, to the amalgamation of the colored presbyteries and synods of the deep South with the proposed regional synods and presbyteries.

Even more we regret that Dr. Ogden also reports that the Committee has agreed to the other change requested by the **Tribune**, namely, the modification of the ordination vows so as to eliminate the provision that if a minister changes his doctrinal views he will, of his own initiative, notify his presbytery of this change. Indeed, we are opposed to the proposed Plan of Reunion because it does not maintain the safeguards which our Presbyterian Church, U. S., has erected for the maintenance of the faith. First, it changes our ordination vows as noted above. Secondly, it fails to include the Declaratory Statement unanimously adopted by our 1939 General Assembly and approved by the 1940 Assembly and for substance by the 1942 Assembly (the Lilly Resolution). While the Plan of Reunion embodies the USA Declaratory Statement designed to satisfy the Cumberlanders who united with the USA Church it entirely omits our Declaratory Statement designed to preserve the faith of the Son of God. Thirdly, it fails to safeguard the faith in dealing with the infants and children. Our Book of Church Order provides that parents be asked to acknowledge their child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit. This first question for infant baptism is omitted in the proposed Plan. Our Book directs that "the Bible, together with the catechisms, shall be the chief text books of the Church School, the center of every course of instruction." This safeguard is totally omitted from the Plan.

Moreover, the Plan of Reunion is breaking down our safeguards in the face of an increasing need for them. The Plan of Reunion is designed to bring into one organic body with ours the larger USA Church with its membership four times ours and with its larger element of theological liberals. The large "liberal" element in the USA ministry is evident in the Auburn Affirmation, in the ministers licensed and ordained without accepting the Virgin Birth of Christ (cf. Minutes of USA General Assemblies, 1925-28), in the Socinian attack upon the atonement made by President (later Moderator) Henry S. Coffin in **The Meaning Of The Cross**, pp. 118-121, in the "liberal" presentation of Christ as a mere temporal human person by President H. P. Van Dusen in the book, **Liberal Theology: An Appraisal**, in the denial of the objective, historical nature of the Resurrection of

Christ by Vice-President Ilion T. Jones in *The Presbyterian Tribune*, March 30, 1939, in the declaration of Professor J. W. Buckham also in the *Tribune* that a literal return of Christ "is next to impossible." If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? If the bulwarks our fathers have erected be overthrown, what becomes

of our witness to the truth of God? Rather let us hold fast to Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone, the foundation which God has laid. And then will the house that rests thereon be the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

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What Shall I Preach?

By Rev. Adrian DeYoung*

"For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27, R.V.)

Few people know how much trouble ministers have with the question, "What shall I preach?"

There are preachers for whom this must be a most annoying problem. I refer to those whom Dr. J. Gresham Machen described as the convenient middlemen, who present a number of worthy causes, each in its proper turn, to that picked audience of charitable and public-spirited citizens that meets on Sunday mornings in church. I mean those ministers whom he called specialists in the human phenomena of religion, who have studied its various manifestations in human life, and who must stand in the pulpit to tell people which kind of religion seems to work best in the age in which they are living. I refer also to the clerical H. V. Kaltenborns, who must analyze the news, counsel Congress, and advise the United Nations Organization. I mean the ministerial psychiatrists, who must assist their people at self-integration, the modern substitute for that offensive thing called Christian salvation.

Some clerics have found the question so annoying that they have given up preaching. I do not mean that they have left the church. On the contrary, they are very much in the church. I mean, however, that they have turned to what looks like the priesthood. They have become devotees of the so-called "fine art of public worship." The slightly aesthetic find it rather easy to plan atmospheres that will arouse religious sentiments. They find it much simpler than a sermon.

While the question I referred to is a troublesome one for most ministers, there are some who have an excellent and a satisfying answer. These are the men who know themselves to be "the stewards of the mysteries of God." These are the men who know that God has spoken, and that they are his spokesmen. These are the men who are humbly willing to go along with Paul, whose

words are the text: "For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."

Those words appear in Paul's parting charge to the elders of the church at Ephesus, who met him on the strand at Miletus. It was the close of his third missionary journey, the eve of his departure to Jerusalem. The great Apostle gave the presbyteries a quick glance at his labors and sorrows among them, and then at his own future which, he said, was not bright. The details of his trials had not been disclosed to him by the Holy Spirit. This, however, was clear—imprisonment and suffering awaited him. Yet the sacrifice of his life, he assured them, he counted as nothing, if only he might perfect his earthly course, and prove faithful to the ministry which the Lord Jesus had entrusted to him—to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace.

The Ephesian church's future, Paul continued, was no less threatening. From its number, false teachers would appear, seeking with their perverse talk to draw away the disciples. Against this he urged his hearers to be on the watch, and tenderly commended them to their God and to the Word of his grace, which was able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among the saints. He did not conclude, however, without solemnly reminding them of the full measure of their responsibility—full because of their complete possession of the divine truth through his ministry. Should they fall into snares along their future paths, they could not, before the awful bar of God's justice, plead their ignorance or Paul's negligence. "I take you to record this day," he said, "that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."

There, let us observe, is the proper subject for the preacher—the counsel of God, the whole counsel of God. Let no man draw back from declaring it.

1. Let me divide the words of Paul and say, The proper subject for the preacher is the counsel of