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Towards God Or Towards Man?

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

"Is the Church directing its life towards God, or towards man? It cannot face two ways and these are two ways." So writes Professor D. W. Hay, M.A., the eminent Scottish divine who has come direct from the British chaplaincy to the Chair of Systematic Theology in Knox College. Then the Professor pays his respects to the inclusion in the Church Hymnary of Whittier's lines:

"To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly word
a prayer."

According to this erroneous couplet "the second commandment has taken the place of the First and Great One. For there can be no doubt whatsoever that to our Lord loving God and loving man were not one and the same thing, nor equal things. He, before all, had made the love of man necessary (not central!), but he could not commit the blasphemy—for blasphemy it is—of making them one and the same. He laid down the love of God as the First and Great Commandment" and the love of man as the second. "These are two commandments, not one. The second is second, not first, and the second is not called great. Fulfillment of the second does not meet the requirement of the first. To believe it does is to break the first."

When the Church directs her first attention manward she merely hastens the process of secularization and betrays man's supreme interest. When her chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, she conserves man's chief end and true destiny—his life for and with God here and hereafter.

In 1938 European theologians were deeply concerned about our American activism. They regularly described our humanistic emphasis as the American heresy. Instead of W. P. Merrill's

"Rise up, O men of God!
His Kingdom tarries long—
The Church for you doth wait
Rise up and make her great!"

Professor H. R. Mackintosh of Edinburgh preferred a parody on the same which runs about as follows:

"Lie down, ye men of God!
Ye cannot do a thing.
God will His own Kingdom bring,
Without your aid or nod."

Without holding a brief for either the original or the parody, it is well to remember that our Lord Jesus did not teach us to pray to men for the success of God's Kingdom. He taught us to pray:

"Our Father which art in Heaven . . .
Thy Kingdom come."

Yes, and He even taught us to pray to the Lord of the harvest when we need more laborers for His field.

The Ritschlian definition of the Kingdom as "an association of men interacting on the principle of love" shifts the realization of the kingdom from the Work of God to the activity of man. It thus "de-religionizes" religion. On the lips of our Lord the emphasis falls on God. It is His Kingdom, His power brings it in, His Spirit makes His reign efficacious. God translates us from the Kingdom of darkness and transplants us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. And the seed of the Kingdom is the Word of God. Man's part is primarily to preach the Word by which God plants and nurtures His own Kingdom.

Before the War confidence in man rose to such heights that poems were written telling God how proud He ought to be of MAN. Indeed one of these occurs in the program of worship for Senior and Young Peoples' Groups published in *The Journal of Religious Education* for April 1937. It bears the illuminating title:

SALUTE TO MAN!

Well, despite the humanistic promise that we could prevent war if we would. The War came. When the lives of men and nations were at stake, when Roosevelt and Churchill met to draw up the Atlantic Charter, they sang no hymns to man. But over the waves of the Atlantic rang out:

"Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come
Be Thou our guard while life shall last
And our eternal home."

When our loved ones sailed the treacherous seas we prayed,

"Eternal Father! strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave.
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep,
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
for those in peril on the sea."

"O Trinity of love and pow'r!
Our brethren shield."

We turned with the psalmist to the LORD of hosts. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust." "The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid." "Wait on the LORD and He shall strengthen thine heart." And as we prayed and praised our God and trusted in His strength, He comforted our hearts, He covered precious heads in the days of battle, He overthrew our enemies, until with Marshall Montgomery, we cried in the day of victory:

"This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

Now the Psalmist bound his soul to the LORD with the cords of gratitude: "I love the LORD,

because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live . . . Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

How is it with us? With our nation? With our Church? Shall we continue to direct our eyes and our lives toward God, or now that the emergency is past shall we return to the trough of humanism? When the War was on we sang with Luther:

"A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
Christ Jesus, it is He;
And He must win the battle."

Because we no longer have the tension of war forcing us back upon God are we now to shout the opposite:

"Lord we are able,"
To be crucified with Thee
"Yea," the sturdy dreamers answered,
"To the death we follow Thee."

This is the boast with which James and John implemented their ambitious request. But our Lord approved neither. Nor were they able to be crucified with Him. "They all forsook Him and fled." Only the grace of God in Christ Jesus turned these craven cowards into witnesses. And like them, without Jesus we can do nothing. Only by the grace of God are we Christians at all, and only in Christ who strengtheneth us can we do or be or bear anything worth while.

When the guns were firing and the planes flying we sang:

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.
Cover my (or his) defenseless head,
With the shadow of Thy wing."

Now that the battle smoke has lifted are we to bid our Lord and Saviour, good-bye, and dash away after the first humanistic slogan which strikes our fancy crying, "Time makes ancient good uncouth," give us "Some great cause, God's new Messiah?"

With Professor Hay we call for a peacetime direction of the Church's life and heart and trust and worship and energies toward God. We plead for a Reformation vision of the King in His beauty, God in His majesty and a sense of our absolute dependence upon Him. We depend upon Him for light and He gives us His Word with the illumination of the Spirit, we anchor in Him for life and the everlasting arms of our Maker sustain us, we look to Him for redemption and behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, we cry to Him for salvation and the Holy Spirit raises us up with Christ and makes us sit with Him in the heavenlies, we raise our bruised hopes and our bleeding hearts to Him and He opens the portals of the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ—bringing with Him the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness. Wait upon the LORD! And, again I say, wait!

There are many things for Martha to do, but Mary has chosen that good thing which shall not be taken from her: she sits at Jesus feet and hears His Word. "What does the love of God mean in practice? Above all, it means worship, together and alone; it means prayer; it means waiting upon God's revelation of Himself in Scripture—Bible-reading. These things make up the essence of practical religion, or the practice of religion" (Hay).

—Wm. C. R.

What Do Presbyterians Believe?

By Mrs. John S. Nisbet*

(This article will be published in three installments. This is the first installment. Look for others to follow. H.B.D.)

(In the following article much of the material is taken from "The Creed of Presbyterians" by Dr. Egbert W. Smith, the writings of Dr. R. A. Webb, and this year's Auxiliary study book, "I Want To Know.")

In the first chapter of our book for Auxiliary study this year, the question to be answered was, "Why Are We Presbyterians?" We learned why we are so called and something of the organization, government and history of our denomination.

In the second chapter we found the question, "Why Are We Protestants?" We heard something of the things against which the Church has protested in times past and also of the things against which we must lift our voices today if we be true to the faith we claim.

In this third chapter we have the question, "What Do Presbyterians Believe?"

We will recall that in the Circle devotional lessons last year we had one topic—"Does It Matter What I Believe?" We found that it does matter very much indeed what we believe, for "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7).

So it is good for us to take stock in the matter of our beliefs and set them in order anew before us, that we may indeed be better able "to give a reason for the hope that is in us." (1 Pet. 3:15).

When we come to consider and answer this question, "What Do Presbyterians Believe?" we feel that we should stand with heads uncovered and feet unshod for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.