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The Southern Presbyterian Journal

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WEAVERVILLE, N. C.

Wednesday, August 19th, 1959

SUBJECTS TO BE PRESENTED

- THE CHURCH SPONSORED CHRISTIAN DAY SCHOOL
Dr. William E. Hill, Jr.
- EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH
Dr. Arthur E. Fogartie
- THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH, BULWARK OF A NATION
Dr. L. Nelson Bell
- THE PRESENT RELEVANCE OF OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH.
Dr. Robert Strong
- MASS EVANGELISTIC EFFORTS WITH REPORT ON THE AUSTRALIAN CRUSADES
Rev. Leighton Ford

MANY HAVE WRITTEN FOR RESERVATIONS
May We Hear From You?

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*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice
with trembling.*

*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye
perish in the way, when his wrath is
kindled but a little.*

*Blessed are all they that put their
trust in him." (Psalm 2:10-12)*

—L. N. B.

Is It Proper To Plead Calvin For A Divided Chancel?

In the August issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN SURVEY the article favoring the divided chancel in church architecture is headed by an appeal to Calvin's practice in St. Pierre at Geneva. We have no desire to be personal and we are not aware of the exact setting and practice of the distinguished pastor in his own great Church. But the article is written in advocacy of an architecture and a point of view that are all too common in our Church. Accordingly, we wish to reply not directly to the writer of the article or to his congregation, but to the general position which he was selected to represent. It is quite likely that the usages in the Covenant Presbyterian Church of Charlotte are "better" than those often found in churches of the point of view defended in the article.

In his *Summary of What a Christian Ought to Believe*, 1525, Guillaume Farel turns all his guns against the Roman Catholic Chancel which separates the laity who are kept on the outside, who receive only the bread, and that only once a year, from the clergy who fill the chancel, who receive the cup as well as the bread and that with great frequency. He laments that the Lord's Supper, which was once the fellowship of the body of Christ with offerings taken for the needy, had become the sacrifice offered for the alleged concerns of souls in Purgatory in order to "fill the bellies" of the Priests and Monks who offer it.

Thus Farel and Calvin did all they could to get rid of the chancel in the old Cathedral of St. Pierre. They removed the chancel screens and gave the whole house of God to the people of God that they might sit on all sides of the high pulpit and the table of the Lord. To whatever extent a chancel is built, it restores what Farel and Calvin removed. The Reformers had no lecturn or reading desk separate from the pulpit; the divided chancel introduces this from Anglo-Catholicism.

The Reformers removed the Altar from the East end of the Church at the head of the chancel and put the Table into the body of the Church generally at the transept. In St. Pierre's the Table is

beside the pulpit in the transept. On the other hand the divided chancel generally places the Table again at the end farthest away from the congregation in the Altar position and often makes an Altar of it (e. g. King's Mountain, Rock Springs), or at least speaks of it as "the Altar."

In St. Pierre, Farel and Calvin brought the Table down to the level of the congregation; in many divided chancel churches the Table-Altar is elevated by several steps above the floor where the people sit. In St. Pierre, every communicant comes all the way to the Table, and is there served by ministers and elders who stand behind the Table. In many divided chancel Churches the minister is the only one who dares come to the "Altar". Thus he mediates between the "Altar" and the deacons who receive the offerings and the elders who distribute the elements. And these officers further mediate between the minister and the laity. In such cases, the OT ritual is restored with the minister as the High Priest who alone may approach the Altar, the elders as priests carrying the elements down to the people, and the deacons as Levites receiving from them their offerings to be taken up to the Altar.

In the BOOK OF COMMON ORDER written by John Knox with the help of John Calvin for the English speaking congregation in Geneva, it is provided, "The exhortation being ended, the Minister commeth down from the pulpit, and sitteth at the Table, every man and woman taking their place as occasion best serveth."

Calvin and Knox brought the Table out from the chancel in to the congregation, down from the elevated floor to the level of the people, and invited every believer to come all the way to the Table of his (or her) Lord.

We do, however, rejoice that appeal is being made to Calvin on this, his anniversary year. We invite our brethren also to re-study Calvin's doctrine of "legitimate worship" according to God's Word, cf. *Institutes*, I.ii.2, I. xi.12, and II.viii.17.

Let us listen with Calvin to the Second Commandment, to Isaiah's sundry warnings against making objects of or aids to worship, and to the testimony of the Psalms (115:5-8; 135:16-18) that these picture worship centers have mouths that speak not, eyes which see not, ears that cannot hear.

On the other hand, the Voice of the living God Who spoke the Second Commandment, Who made the heavens, Who graciously intervened for us and our salvation in Jesus Christ is heard in the faithful exposition of His Word, His saving acts are seen with the eyes of faith in the Gospel sacraments, and His ears hear the prayers of His people offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

—W. C. R.

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