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— EDITORIAL —

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positions of leadership are in a special category should go without saying. This unfortunate controversy over Dr. Gill has been highlighted in the press around the world. The students at San Anselmo know of his equivocation. The world at large now knows that the highest court of a great denomination has sustained this position. This has brought sorrow within the Church and confusion outside.

—L. N. B.

The Reign of Law, or the Rule of Leaders?

The President of the United States has set aside a particular day in the year to be celebrated as LAW DAY. The President of the Georgia Bar Association has asked that this day be the sign of grateful recognition that we are ruled by law not by individual whim. In the light of our recent experiences with the leadership principle exemplified in Mussolini and in Hitler — kept alive today in the Diary of Anna Frank — we ought heartily to cherish the principle of order under law.

Just before the Dark Ages settled down on Western Europe, the old Roman Empire under Justinian spread itself out anew over its old territories. The same distinguished Emperor had his great jurist, Tribonianus, gather the legislative wisdom of republican and imperial Rome, with the humanizing influence of Stoic philosophy and of the Christian religion into the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. In the twelfth century this body of law was rediscovered in the West and taught at the University of Bologna. Law and order again lifted their heads. Thus both medieval and modern history teach the superiority of the reign of law over that of the reign of leaders.

In the Church there is even more need for the full recognition of the reign of law. For the chain of command in the Church is: Christ the Lawgiver for Zion; His law given in His Word; the Confession and catechisms as the Church's standard exposition of Scripture; the rules of Church order in accord with the Word which are set forth in the Book of Church Order; the equality of the eldership under the Constitution of the Church. There may well be errors in the law of the State or the law of the administration of the one and of the other. But there are no errors in the laws of our Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ. In His Church we have, then, every reason for respecting law that anyone has for honoring it in the civil government, plus many more that do not exist in the state.

But there is always the temptation to exalt the rule of some prominent pastor, or session of important Church, or significant presbytery to a parity with the law of Christ "the only Lawgiver in Zion". Such efforts generally end in making the law of the Church more significant and the penalty for violating it more severe than for breaking the law of Christ. A recent master's thesis points out that in the dominant Church in Brazil violations of the rules of the Church are treated as the deadly sins, while transgressions of the commandments of God are often treated as venial sins.

Is this, however, confined to the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil? Has our discipline gotten into such a shape that when it is a case involving a prominent minister or an important congregation then the Book of Discipline, to which we all subscribe, may be set aside and the leaders undertake to do as they think best? And then, if it be a case of an ordinary member, a minister of a small field, a ruling elder, the provisions that limit an offence the proper object of judicial censure to violations of the Word of God may be set aside and such a man deposed for disobeying the action of a Church Court?

There was a time in Scotland when the adage ran: tell me who your kin are and I will tell you what your judgment will be. The exaltation of any minister above his brother ministers is a derogation from the authority of Christ and of the laws and regulations He has provided for His people. We shall always be better off under the law of Christ than under any and every leader no matter how kind he thinks himself to be. Over against the false adage quoted from Scotland stands the Word of the Lord; THOU SHALT NOT FEAR THE FACE OF A MAN IN JUDGMENT. Indeed, in the Old Testament the judges of Israel were sometimes called by the Hebrew name for God, Elohim, as an indication that they were to stand in the place of God and administer His law. The LORD has shown us what is good and what does the LORD require of us but to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God?

—W. C. R.

Recommend The Journal To Friends

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