

the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

The circulation leader among independent publications in the Presbyterian-Reformed world

Signs of the True Church

A true Christian Church, now as always, will be radically doctrinal. It will never use the shibboleths of a pragmatist skepticism. It will never say that doctrine is the expression of experience; it will never confuse the useful with the true, but will place truth at the basis of all its striving and all its life. Into the welter of changing human opinion, into the modern despair with regard to any knowledge of the meaning of life, it will come with a clear and imperious message. That message it will find in the Bible, which it will hold to contain not a record of man's religious experience but a record of a revelation from God.

—J. Gresham Machen

S. S. LESSON AND YOUTH PROGRAM FOR APRIL 16

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MAILBAG

ABOUT THAT 'OPEN LETTER'

That "open letter" in the March 15 *Journal* left me with mixed feelings. If these men are dissatisfied with the Church today it seems to me they might consider if some of them, as top leaders, did not help put the Church where it finds itself.

Or do they imply that they are satisfied with the Church but are fearful of the two "extremes"? When one individual or group de-

fends the Bible as the revealed Word of God, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and is labeled "extreme," it suggests that the Church itself has come quite a far piece.

—Tom C. Martin
S. Charleston, W. Va.

wrote "An Open Letter to the Church," have voiced the fears, hopes, feelings and convictions of a large number of us who find ourselves unhappily caught in the cross fire between the widely divergent views now zealously at work in our Church.

By the use of this letter, I should like to add my name to those who signed this document and to take my stance along side them.

—(Rev.) John L. Newton
Selma, Ala.

The thirty Presbyterians who

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Generally speaking, the appeal (of the letter) is well put, excepting the first paragraph of the resolution which calls for *unilateral initiatives* on the part of those who seek integrity in matters which come before our Church courts. Until such time as love and respect for fellow presbyters are *practiced* in our courts, any degree of acceptance of the reasoning proposed in the "open letter" would be capitulation and acceptance of the illegal and un-Christian acts sometimes practiced in the operation of Church courts.

Let us have "more responsible individual churchmen" and perhaps the time will come when everything can be done "properly through the courts of the Church."

—Chester B. Hall
Louisville, Ky.

I realize that no request was made (in the letter) for approval of the covenant, nor for additional signatures, but I do want you to know that I applaud and approve this statement which so nearly expresses my own point of view. I feel that these men have spoken for a large group in our Church, and I am personally most grateful for the initiative which they have taken in expressing my own feelings so well.

—(Rev.) J. Hoge Smith Jr.
Covington, Va.

Among various thoughts prompted by the "open letter" the first was this: Does the recognition that "the overwhelming majority of our people" are "largely without a voice" say anything about the official denominational magazine? It is hard to conclude otherwise.

—(Rev.) William S. Smith
Alexandria, La.

of Jesus Christ. And when the minister is a herald of the great truths of the Bible he is cast in his proper and true role.

But why the emphasis on preaching? Simply because Jesus said that we are to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:19). The early Church also recognized the importance of preaching — they appointed deacons in order that the apostles could function as “ministers of the Word” (Acts 6:3-4). The Bible makes it very explicit that preaching is God’s ordained way of saving souls — “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (I Cor. 1:21).

To be sure, going into the streets to meet humanity is the task of every Christian. But again this raises the question of what must be preached? The Bible gives the answer. While in Corinth, Paul preached Christ and Him crucified. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God” (I Cor. 1:18). We must, as Paul did, proclaim the Gos-

pel to men in high or low society.

No, we are not opposed to taking the Gospel into the streets. This has been the thrust of the Church since Pentecost. Although the new breed shudders at the declaration of the Bible, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” this is our message to the man in the streets — rich or poor.

The task of the preacher is to “preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2). Thus, preaching is not optional for the minister. He is under strict orders to “Go and preach.” This is the injunction of the Bible.

Old Truths

Church history bears out the fact that God’s men have been preachers. Noah and Nehemiah were preachers. The prophets were preachers. John the Baptist was a preacher. When Jesus was on the Mount, He gave a sermon. At Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached a sermon and thousands were con-

verted. Philip preached in Samaria. Martin Luther proclaimed the Word. Calvin, Wesley, Spurgeon, and Moody, to name a few, were preachers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

“How shall they hear,” Paul asks, “without a preacher?” Will they hear through the movies, television, a jazz band, the latest novels, dancing in the aisle of a church? No! Will liturgy save you? No! The orders for the 20th century preacher remains the same — *go preach!*

The space age minister fulfills his role when he is a “vehicle of the Word of God, to be the means of conversion, of edification, of exhortation, and of instruction.”

Jesus told His disciples to preach the Gospel. And the task of the modern is not organizing picket lines for every cause that fancies his taste, but he is to be a herald of the Gospel. And the purpose of his preaching is to win men to Christ, to build men up in Christ and to send them out for Christ. And in doing this the minister equips the laymen for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). ☐

The word “Reformed” has a particular, and important meaning —

Reformed by the Word of God

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON, Th.D.

What do we mean when we affirm that we hold the “Reformed faith”?

Historically, the branch of the Reformation which stems from Switzerland is called the “Reformed,” while that which comes from Germany is known as the Lutheran or Evangelical. But the meaning of the word Reformed is that of a faith and life re-formed by the yardstick of Holy Scripture.

Those who call themselves Reformed have ever admitted that there is a constant need for the Church, and our part of the whole Body of Christ, to be ever more fully Reformed by the Word of God.

The author is professor of Church History at Columbia Seminary, Decatur, Ga.

This was the contention, for example, of the Puritans. They did not wish to stop at the half-way house to complete reformation authorized by the Tudor rulers of England. They sought a more complete reformation along the lines which John Calvin had laid out, and which the Huguenots of France and the Covenanters of Scotland had taken.

So the Presbyterian Church US, today, ever needs more careful reforming. Only it ought to be according to the original Christian source, that is, the Bible. And again it must be the Head and King of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, who reforms His Body. But in that work He is pleased to use even earthen vessels, as we commit ourselves to Him and ask Him to

fit us into His program by which He purifies His Church.

But this original idea, namely that Presbyterian Churches ever need to be better reformed by the Word of God, is not always what is meant when one sees a call to “be Reformed” today. For instance, it is not the idea advanced by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake in his *Presbyterian Survey* article explaining his call for a new united Church (“truly catholic, truly evangelical and truly reformed”). Dr. Blake’s suggestion is based, at least in part, on the liberal or radical sentiments of the Unitarian poet James Russell Lowell’s *The Present Crisis*. Wrote Lowell:

“Time makes ancient good uncouth.”

But the poetic cadences of these haunting lines ought not to deafen us to their non-Biblical, non-Christian implications. To be Reformed is not to cast away ancient truth in favor of "constantly emerging new truth." Any "new truth" which may break forth from God's Word only confirms and clarifies the old truth drawn from that same source.

The Reformed faith clings to Jesus of Nazareth as God's final Messiah, the Lord of all, the ultimate judge of nations. It does not bypass Him with the Unitarian line: "Some great cause, God's new Messiah."

Current Movements

Are current movements in our day evidences that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly reforming His Body, or are many of them perversions brought about by ecclesiastical bureaucrats who have put their own reasoning and their mystical intuitions above the Word of God?

In medical terms, "humanizing experiments upon the divine Revelation are apt to be pathological (diseased)."

Describing the way modern movements can be perversions of original Christian influences, Bishop Dibelius called Nazism "a frightful mixture of race, blood, soil and the New Testament."

In another illustration, Hegel's logic of "thesis, antithesis and synthesis" was turned by Karl Marx into a dialectical materialism which issued ultimately in Communist atheism; and by Tom Altizer into a "death of God" theology.

Less radical efforts to improve on the past may have had less radical results. But it is not evident that these have been improvements. For example, the recent study book turned loose in the Presbyterian Church US, *New Wineskins?*, left out the atoning Cross of Jesus Christ, though Martin Luther testified that the cross met him everywhere in the Scripture.

E. Schweizer has shown that the Church order in the New Testament presents everywhere a government based on the total rule of Jesus Christ, and this is the explicit teaching of the Presbyterian Church US's *Book of Church Order*. But sundry current publications offered for use in the Christian education program are proclaiming instead that ours is a "representative democracy."

If Christ be our King we are to be reformed by His Word, "the Mouth of God." But if ultimate authority is to be given into the hands of the people, in a democracy, then the Church can be expected to change with the whims of the people.

The mass of church members decided that unless the ordination of women as elders and ministers was authorized the Church was treating our "elect ladies" as mere "second class citizens." Thus democracy changed the Church's government; but it is yet to be shown that this change brought the Church into closer conformity to Holy Scripture. Nor is this question raised only by the voice of an ancient conservatism. The strongest objection to the ordination of women as ministers and elders I have found is stated by Karl Barth in the volume of his

All Should Be Concerned

The use of the term *laity* has a smell to it of which we ought to beware. If we are all prophets, priests and kings, then the affairs of classis and synod as well as of the local congregation must, as far as possible, become the business of all of us. Apathy on the part of the rank and file is an indictment not only of church members themselves but also of their leaders who fail to keep them informed and to stimulate their interest. — JOHN VANDER PLOEG in *The Banner*.

Church Dogmatics on the doctrine of man, and especially in his treatment of I Cor. 11:3.

According to His Holy Word, God declares that His grace was wrought in the obedience and sacrifice of Christ to vindicate His righteous justice. This grace becomes ours when He forgives us sinners who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-28; 5:19). Sixteenth century Socinianism repudiated this position of God's Word, alleging an antagonism between God's grace and His justice. They alleged that forgiveness which is free to us (grace) may not be costly to God (justice). But in His *Institutes* (II. xvii) Calvin answers this hoary chestnut by showing that the mercy of God is the primary cause and the merit of the Mediator is the subservient cause

of our salvation.

These two are not opposed to one another; both are opposed to salvation by our good works. God's saving grace is not cheap grace.

Today the old Socinian heresy is being pushed in the Church under the argument that this is a modern way of being more completely reformed. I refer, of course, to the Socinian teaching in the popular volume, *The Westminster Confession for Today* (pp. 111-112, 135-137).

No Perversions

When John Robinson sent over the Pilgrim fathers to the New World he properly advised them to expect that God would have more truth to break forth from His Word. But He did not say that truth would break forth from our perversions of that Word.

In the Scots' Confession of 1560 John Knox and his colleagues "... protest that if any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugnant to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honors and fidelity, by God's grace do promise him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is, from His Holy Scripture, or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss."

Publicity attending the progress of COCU (the Consultation on Church Union) insists that all the participating denominations may properly be called "Reformed" as all have been willing to be changed as led by the Holy Spirit. But no Church may properly call itself Reformed unless it is re-formed in faithful obedience to the Word of God.

(One of the parents of COCU is Bishop Pike. His recent book, *What is this Treasure?*, presents a faith and life reformed by Socrates and "man come of age" — not by the Word of God.)

• • •

When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one. — BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.