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the

PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

Supporting continuation of a Presbyterian witness loyal to Scripture and the Reformed faith

What Kind of Invitation?

Curiously enough, some Presbyterians profess enthusiasm for a genuine invitation to accept Christ as being vital to a Gospel message, but at the same time they express reservations over what they consider to be the potential dangers of asking people to "walk the aisle."

They are not loath to give their reasons. Most of these, I must say, seem to me to be exaggerations and caricatures of what people who issue public invitations really practice. More significantly, most of the arguments advanced against the "invitation system" would apply to a decision privately made as well as to a decision publicly made!

For example, it is argued that a public invitation tends to identify the moment of salvation with a decision to "go forward." But if the hearer were asked to decide for Christ privately, wouldn't that also tend to identify the moment of salvation with the decision?

—The Editor
(See p. 7)

S. S. LESSON AND YOUTH PROGRAM FOR MARCH 30
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CONCERNING INVITATIONS

Many who now seem to be rejecting and fighting the evangelistic "altar call" came to Christ through a comparable means. Would they now say their experience was not a valid experience of receiving Christ? If the Lord worked in their lives

through such means, can He not also work in the lives of others through the same means?

I agree that the "altar call" is often abused, but could that not also be said of a personal evangelistic witness in the living room with the "Gospel invitation" extended? Not

all who respond to an "altar call" are truly converted, neither are those who make a "commitment" in the living room.

The "altar call" opponents say they give a Gospel invitation. Then is it simply the practice of issuing a public invitation they object to and against which they bring the charge of being Arminian?

Man must give evidence of his salvation. What is wrong with doing this by responding to an invitation to give evidence of what the Holy Spirit *has already done* in the heart? Dr. J. B. Green's statement on repentance is appropriate here. He said, "Repentance is not an atonement for sin, lays no basis for pardon; yet in the nature of the case there can be no pardon without it" (*Harmony of Westminster Standards*).

We (the "altar call" guys) do not say responding to an invitation saves, but it is an evidence that we have responded, by God's grace, to the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Can there be any genuine conversion experience without the evidence in life of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? We readily admit that anything God does in the heart of sinful, rebellious man He does in spite of us.

Finally, "altar call" is not a proper term, and I take exception to the application of that term to our "Gospel invitation," as we do not believe in the altar in Reformed theology. Christ was sacrificed once and for all on the altar of Calvary.

—(Rev.) Reuben J. Wallace
Laurens, S.C.

UNCOMMON BEHAVIOR

I read in the *Journal* (Jan. 29) that 14 "religious" groups within the organized Church will pressure seven corporations to withhold trading with the Union of South Africa.

Computers sold in South Africa by the IBM could be used militarily other companies contribute to slave working conditions by their dealing with that country. Thus saith the Fourteen in their corporate and, of course, infinite wisdom.

The Union of South Africa does not do three things common with other nations regularly receiving computers, grain, truck plants and every conceivable commodity from United States sources: The Union of South Africa is not a threat to world peace; it does not maintain a vast system of slave labor camps

the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

Rev. G. Aiken Taylor, Ph.D., Editor

Charles E. Boyce Jr., Assistant Editor

Rev. Henry B. Dendy, D.D., Managing Editor

Seeking to defend, encourage, interpret and report developments in the Presbyterian Church in America as long as it is truly Reformed. Reporting conservative efforts in the PCUS, while encouraging Reformed conservatives in the PCUS in their witness, showing them respect, goodwill and sincere appreciation. Reporting important events in other Churches in the Presbyterian and Reformed family.

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Liberalism and Trinitarianism

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON

The premises of religious liberalism have a built-in bias against Trinitarianism. This kind of bias is one the believer needs constantly to fight against—first of all in himself—and one the Church needs continually to watch, especially when the Church is in the process of formulating a creed.

Liberalism begins its thinking about God with a philosophical idea of His unity, and then modifies His Biblical threeness to conform to its preconceived notion of His oneness. However, the living God reveals Himself both in His unity and in His plurality.

We are not left with the hopeless task of putting together a speculative unity with a Biblical triad. Both the one and three are given in the Biblical revelation and they coexist in Biblical harmony.

Closely related to this is the view that the God of the Old Testament is a simple and indivisible unit. In their polemics against Christian Trinitarianism, Jewish theologians exaggerated the unicity of God. Thus much of the monotheism of Judaism, like that of Mohammedanism, lacks the fullness, the depth and the richness of the self-revelation of the Lord God of Israel.

Christian liberalism has gravitated toward this conception. In Harnack's *What Is Christianity?*, the Jewish rabbi asks the liberal preacher what essential difference exists between Judaism and liberal Christianity. The liberal preacher answers, "Essentially nothing."

Intimations in the Old Testament foreshadow the revelation of the tripersonal God in the New Testament with promises that come to fulfill-

ment in the ministry of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Israel's great text in Deuteronomy is more a declaration of duty and devotion than a dogma of monotheism. It should be rendered: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5).

The word *Elohim*, used here and elsewhere for God, is a plural formation. God spoke in the plural in Genesis 1:26-27, "Let us make men in our image . . . male and female made He them." And God appeared as three to Abraham: ". . . and the LORD rained fire from the LORD (Gen. 18; 19:24). There are distinctions between God almighty, the shield of Abraham; God, the fear of Isaac; and God, the holy one who changed Jacob into Israel.

In the Old Testament the word rendered God generally refers to His work as creator, LORD to Him as the Lord of redemption and of the covenant, and the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the Lord, to God in His executive functions. There are indications of the Trinity in the angel of the LORD—the Word, the Wisdom, the Spirit of God.

Passages in Isaiah, such as 48:16, have a close approach to a trinitarian formulation. Preparation was made in the Old Testament for the further revelation which the living God was to make of Himself in the incarnation of the Son and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

A third premise of liberalism is its minimistic treatment of man's sin and fall. Liberalism speaks too lightly of man's sin and too little of God's grace. It no longer affirms that Christ offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God (although our General Assembly has declared that the acceptance of this is required in our ordination vows).

. . . the living God reveals

Himself both in His unity

and in His plurality.

Likewise liberalism forgets that to escape the wrath and curse due us for our sins, God requires of us faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works this faith in us, uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. Liberalism is prone to follow Tillich in telling the sinner that he is already pardoned and already accepted. This minimizing of the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit issues in obscuring their personal distinctions in the Godhead.

The logical outworking of this thinking is seen in the history of New England's "liberal Christianity." That movement began as an affirmation of the divinity of man against the Calvinistic doctrine of the depravity of man and resulted in the Unitarian Church.

On the basis of His all-perfect obedience and all-sufficient sacrifice, Christ is our righteousness at the right hand of God. We are commissioned to offer Him to all men. John Wesley described his own preaching as offering Christ to men. We properly say to the sinner, Christ is yours in the free offer of salvation. But we need to go on and say to the inquirer, Christ becomes truly yours in the experience of salvation only when you accept Him, receive Him, and rest upon Him alone for salvation.

Then in His name you pray to God, Abba, our Father, and give thanks that you have been brought to this faith by the grace of the Holy Spirit. ☩

The author, professor emeritus of Church history, Columbia Seminary, Decatur, Ga., now lives in Claremont, Cal.