

# he PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

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

## Repentance and Commitment

It is also said that decisionism, although I do not like that word, fosters the idea that salvation comes by "decision." Decision is, of course, one element of faith. The two elements we dare not separate are repentance and commitment.

If we have true, saving faith, these two characteristics emerge like primeval protozoa, side by side, and the life of the true man of faith exhibits the willingness, the *desire*, to repent of sins against God, and a ready commitment to God through Christ—even recommitment, like Jonah or the prodigal son, for example. They never stood a chance of really escaping the sovereignty of God; it only appeared that way.

Everyone would probably agree that a man cannot respond in true faith and yet be damned. Again, I would leap into that breach and say, "No, not even if he responds to an altar call!"

—A. Boyce Spooner  
(See p. 7)



## MAILBAG

### WHO IS 'MILITARISTIC'?

I read with sorrow the letter in the July 23 *Journal* printed over the name of the Rev. Arch B. Taylor Jr., from Japan. May I suggest that he write a similar letter to Moscow?

How many civilizations have suffered an unnecessary death as a result, in part, of repeatedly believing such sentiments as those expressed by Mr. Taylor, and of following them with unilateral disarmament

in the very face of an active aggressor?

For thirty years we have listened to such allegations—like the claim that America is "militaristic"—while we were actually continuing to disarm; and now our nation is weaker than the Soviets in practically every military category. Our people seem to lack pride, shame, or even the will to resist evil. More and more of our politicians seem to

spend their time (and that of their large staffs) searching for military officers to humiliate.

Does this feel a bit like 1937 or 1938 all over again? It's time for truth again, time to face the hard lessons of history—including those contained in the Old Testament.

No one has better analyzed the continued aggressive expansion of Russia than did the late writer Homer Lea who traced its course for hundreds of years. He traced the tremendous loss of human life even before the rulers of the Kremlin began to utilize socialism as an opiate for the masses on both sides of the lines.

"By their fruits shall ye know them:" Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, etc., etc.

—Frank Brandt  
Amherst, Va.

# the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

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*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.*

### THIS WEEK—

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### THIRD PCA ASSEMBLY

When the third General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America meets in Jackson, Miss., in September, we will learn that the new Church has had a phenomenal growth and is rapidly reaching maturity. My conviction is that the Church will continue to grow for many years to come.

The growth of this Church has not been sectional but national. We now have congregations from coast to coast. The PCA has a strong presbytery in California, and several others are in the process of organization across the nation. We acknowledge that from an organizational viewpoint we have some problems, and we trust God prayerfully as we try to find solutions.

The largest number of churches to unite with the PCA came from the conservative South, and we are grateful for the gracious attitude shown by some of the Presbyterian Church US presbyteries.

We can hope that the PCUS will honor the rights of local congregations which have built sanctuaries independently of financial help from any denomination and which have their deeds recorded in the name of the local church. Congregations which have borrowed from and repaid to their respective denominations should be given the same honor and consideration.

The PCUS withdrew from the "Northern" Church before the Civil War actually started. During and after the war, there is no record that

# The Trinity: God in Action

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON

The Church's interpretation of the Trinity, wrote Bethune-Laker of Cambridge in *Early History of Christian Doctrine*, "is that of one God existing permanently and eternally in three spheres of consciousness and activity, three modes, three forms, three persons; in the inner relations of the divine life as well as in the outer relations of the Godhead to the world and to men."

In his current book, *The Triune God*, E. J. Fortman concludes that God is not dead. "God is, was and always will be the Triune God who has revealed Himself by His inhabitational presence."

These words emphasize that we must look to God Himself and His gifts to keep our beloved Church in the Trinitarian faith; we must not permit the Church to be devoured by a unitarianism such as that which captured so many English Presbyterian and New England Congregational churches. Trinitarian experiences ed Horace Bushnell to answer Unitarianism thus: "But my heart needs the Father, my heart needs the Son, and my heart needs the Holy Spirit, and the one as much as the other."

God is the living God, and as such He may be expected to reveal Himself primarily in action, not formula. This He has done in the incarnation of God the Son and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament is the preparation for this revelation, the New Testament the product of the revelation—spoken and lived by the Son and brought to believers by the Holy Spirit.

The climax of this record is found

in many places: the farewell discourses in the book of John; the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus; the Gethsemane prayer; the Gospel of the forty days before the ascension, with the Christian name of God given by the resurrected Lord in His Great Commission; the account of Pentecost and the acts of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts and in the epistles.

Mindful that much of God's self-revelation has come through divine-human encounters—Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Paul—we agree with Frederick Gogarten that "faith is the concrete meeting with the triune God." We also agree with Rahner that "the immanent Trinity as such confronts us in the experience of faith, a constitutive component of which is the word of Scripture itself."

Through revelation man perceives revelation. "In His light we see light." By being in God the Holy Spirit, we behold the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God's self-revelation as the Trinity is no impersonal system of hypostases in an essence. As Hodgson wrote, "It is the living, loving communion of Father, Son and Spirit into which we have been adopted in Christ." That is, we have been adopted to share in the "family life of God."

God the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that God the Father has accepted us as His children and bids us call upon Him as "Abba," our dear Father, because of the merits of God the Son. The Trinity represents the concept of God involved in the Christian life, and the Christian shares by adoption in the sonship of Christ. Thus the Christian looks out upon the world from within the divine social life of the Trinity.

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We are brought into this life by the threefold actions of God in the riches of His grace. God is before all and above all that He has created, and He has given to and for us His only begotten Son, the unspeakable gift of His love, for love came to earth in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

This Son, of His own will, came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. His kind lips rang with the gracious invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden," with the reassuring promise that "him who comes to me I will in nowise cast out."

We accept the Father's gift and the Son's invitation. We come to Christ and we cast ourselves upon Him; we entrust ourselves to Him. Yet we do this only as we are drawn by the Father, persuaded and enabled by the effectual calling of the Spirit. It is in the tripersonal experience of the presence of the Father, and of the presence of the Son, and of the presence of the Holy Spirit that God reveals the glory of His grace in saving us sinners.

An Anglican scholar, Bishop K. E. Kirk of Oxford, has said this: "The

(Continued on p. 16, col 1)

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

## In Public—from p. 8

Both public and private professionalists are guilty at times of caging the tiger of God. The man who says "only in public" is as guilty of limiting the power of God as the man who says "never in public."

I must be able to say freely: Believe and be saved; repent and believe; know your sins and repent. I must make disciples. I must see some evidences of growth and life. If a man is alive again, he grows; if a man is once more God's man, he reproduces—a sign of life. I must leave some work to the Holy Spirit and not take all His work for myself. I must allow the Spirit of God to work when and where and how He will, publicly or privately.

In many ways the public appeal for men to confess Christ as Saviour has been abused, and three things must be in focus for me to be able to say I believe in an occasional appeal for public affirmation of faith: the prelude to the call, the presentation of the call, and the reaction to the call.

If un-Scriptural preaching is used in either prelude or presentation, then the reaction can also be un-Scriptural. To the sinner, even a Scriptural position can be misunderstood, whether he has opportunity to come to Christ publicly or remains unregenerated by the Spirit of God.

All I want is the right as a minister of the Gospel, a minister of the Word, a shepherd of the sheep, to be able to sharpen the demands of my Gospel by asking for *decision*, not some other time but now and here. Anything else is drifting, and we do not build the visible Church of God with driftwood. We must be careful so that in our concern to avoid undue emphasis on the response of man's will we do not avoid the joy of fulfilling God's will! ☐

## Trinity—from p. 9

doctrine of the divine personality of the Spirit emphasizes what has been called the *prevenience* of God in the aspirations of the human heart, just as that of the divinity of the Son emphasizes that same *prevenience* in the work of human redemption, and that of the divinity of the Father—which is the doctrine of the existence of God—His *prevenience* over all the forces and powers in the creation and sustenance of the universe."

Professor Claude Welch put the

truth this way in his book, *In This Name*: "God is present to us in a threefold self-differentiation. He makes Himself known as the one who stands above and apart, the one to whom Jesus points as His Father and therefore our Father. At the same time, He is the one who confronts man in Jesus Christ as the objective content of revelation, i.e. the Son. And He is the one who seizes and possesses man so that he is able to receive and participate in revelation, new life, salvation, viz, the Holy Spirit."

It may be that the religious experiences of some denominations or congregations focus more upon one person of the Trinity than another. Certainly it is true that a person will find peculiar satisfaction in the contemplation of one person on one occasion and another in a different situation. But in the course of a normal life span, each Christian avails himself of the complete revelation of the holy Trinity.

As our propitious heavenly Father, the creator, who has life in Himself and gives life to all His creatures, has graciously revealed Himself in the gift and mediation of His only begotten Son. He bids us call upon Him as the Jewish toddler cried out to his parent, "Abba," dear father. In hours of stress, uncertainty, anxiety and loneliness, we draw close to the everlasting arms and nestle nearer to the heart of Him who makes all things work together for good to those who love Him, those whom He has called into His family.

The guilty soul finds the answer to the most poignant question life ever poses in Him, who is the eternal reason, the light of the understanding, and the source of all knowledge. "The work of Christ in relation to sin," wrote J. Denney, "is the culminating point in revelation; not the insoluble problem, but the solution of all problems." We do have an advocate with the Father; He is Jesus Christ, the righteous, the

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propitiation for our sins.

When the meanness, the wickedness, the littleness—the sin that does so easily beset us—threaten to engulf the soul in the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, and the machinations of Satan, we then cling to the Holy Spirit, the author of all goodness, wisdom, love, mercy and purity that bless this sin-cursed world. In the words of Jonathan Edwards: "Holiness is entirely the work of God's Spirit."

The living God dispenses the riches of His grace in this threefold way: not just in our daily living; He also has "dying grace" for His people for the triumphant God is sufficient for Himself and for His people. In their last hours God is present with those who are His, so that each is enabled to say with confidence, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me." Our gracious God refreshes our memory with the promises of the many mansions in our Father's house, echoing back the final words of the Saviour Himself: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

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