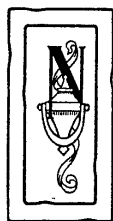


Three Observations About the Assembly

By The Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D.

I. The Board and the Appraisal Report



NOTHING that was brought out in the report of the Board of Foreign Missions to the 1933 General Assembly or at the Assembly itself has invalidated the charges which are presented in my Argument entitled "Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A."¹

It is true, the report of the Board of Foreign Missions does state that on March 20, 1933, the Board took unanimous action to the effect that the first four chapters of the Report of the Appraisal Commission "do not conform to the fundamental aim of foreign missions as expressed in the manual of the Board." This action constitutes the one and only approach to anything like basic disagreement of the Board with the Appraisal Report which has yet been made known. It does not, however, at all invalidate the objection which Bible-believing Christians have raised against the treatment by the Board of the Appraisal Report. That is so for several reasons.

In the first place, the action of the Board came too late, and in particular was made known too late, to free the Board from the charge of dodging the issue raised by the Appraisal Report.

The Appraisal Report appeared in November, 1932, and it was undoubtedly known to interested persons prior to its public appearance. The Board issued a statement about it, reporting an official action of November 21, 1932. That action carefully avoided any basic disagreement with it. Let it not be said that so long a document as the Appraisal Report required time for study, and that that was the reason why the Board did not express disagreement with its fundamental thesis. The trouble is that the Board did issue a statement about the Appraisal Commission. That statement contained a long list of points in which the Board agreed with the Appraisal Commission. If therefore the Board was in fundamental disagreement with the main thesis of the Appraisal Report, that fact should have been publicly stated in the very first statement which the Board made about the Appraisal Report.

Only after the people of the Church had been led astray for months by this great broadside of modern unbelief, the book *Re-Thinking Missions*, the Board took action expressing disagreement with the book. Was that a proper course of procedure for a Board of Foreign Missions of a Christian Church? Surely the people of the Church have a right to ask that a Board, in such basic questions, should lead rather than follow. As a matter of fact, it was not until earnest protests from the Christian remnant in our Protestant churches had arisen against this thoroughly anti-Christian book that our Board expressed any basic disagreement with it whatever. Its expression of disagreement was dragged out of it, when as a matter of fact it ought to have been prompt and spontaneous and clear. Evangelical Christians cannot possibly have any confidence in a Board of Missions which pursues a course of action like that.

Moreover, when the Board finally did take action, on March 20th, it seems to have kept its action carefully secret. Even now no great publicity has been given to the action. It stands buried in a long official report to the General Assembly, and the only public propaganda of the Board about the book *Re-Thinking Missions* is the utterly evasive statement issued in 1932.

What was the reason for this secretive policy? Was it a mere failure in the publicity agencies of the Board; was it a mere

failure in efficiency? We are inclined to think that it was something far more significant than all that. By delaying and then keeping in the background any basic disagreement with the book, *Re-Thinking Missions*, the Board avoided offending Modernist donors who agree thoroughly with the book. That it had no right to do if it was a truly Christian Board.

In the second place, the utterances of the Board in its report, and particularly its action on March 20th, are, in addition to being too late to be convincing, vague and unsatisfactory in themselves.

The Board says, on p. 16 of its Report, that "at several most critical points our Board and Missions find themselves out of sympathy with its [the Appraisal Report's] positions and its recommendations." Here we have that piecemeal way of treating the Appraisal Report which has done so much harm. The outstanding fact is obscured that the Appraisal Report is an anti-Christian book from beginning to end. Surely the thing is put mildly when the disagreement between the Board and the Appraisal Report is said to be "at several most critical points."

It is true, the Board does go on to say, in the next sentence: "Fundamentally the point of view of the Board is not that of the Report as to the purpose of Missions, as to the relation which missionary work holds to existing religions and as to the distinctive elements of the Christian religion." That statement is certainly better in itself. But even there the plain man receives no very clear guidance as to just what it is that is wrong with the Appraisal Report. The same criticism can be made of the official action of the Board, which is reported on the same page of the Board's Report. That action is to the effect that

"(1) These chapters do not conform to the fundamental aim of foreign missions as expressed in the manual of the Board.

"(2) The Board affirms its loyalty to the Standards of the Presbyterian Church and maintains the absolute finality, sufficiency, and universality of the Gospel of Christ."

Here again the plain man still asks: "What exactly is wrong, in the opinion of the Board, with the Appraisal Report?" That question could have been answered very simply and very fully if the Board had been willing to make a clean break with Modernism. That the Board was unwilling to do, and could not possibly do if it was to obtain unanimous action. There we have the whole thing in a nutshell. The Board is unwilling to make a clean break with that Modernism which is the deadliest enemy of the Christian religion—that Modernism which is so deeply embedded in the entire machinery of the Presbyterian Church. Until the Board does make a clean break with Modernism, it cannot have the confidence of Christian people who are really aware of the great issue of the day. No mere general expressions of loyalty to the Presbyterian Standards like that which appear in the second paragraph of the Board's action just quoted can have the slightest effect in restoring such confidence.

Of course, the objection of Bible-believing Christians based on the attitude of the Board and of the General Assembly to the book *Re-Thinking Missions* has received an enormous impetus from the action of the General Assembly itself in adopting the majority report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Missions. As will no doubt be reported elsewhere in the present issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, one member of the majority in the Committee was actually a member of the Appraisal Commission itself. The report of the Committee was therefore perfectly acceptable to a man who had actually

¹Copies of this Argument may be obtained free of charge by application to the author at 206 South Thirteenth Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

engaged in the issuance of that great attack upon the very heart of the Christian religion. It is no wonder that the Committee's report expresses no doctrinal disagreement with the Appraisal Report at all but makes the ridiculously meaningless statement: "The Assembly does, however, definitely repudiate any and all theological statements and implications in that volume which are not in essential agreement with the doctrinal position of the Church." We could make that statement about the most orthodox book that was ever written.

II. Union with the United Presbyterian Church

The propaganda for church union assumed a particularly dangerous form at the 1933 General Assembly. It assumed that form through the issuance of an unfortunate compromise proposal, and the danger has been rendered greater because of an overture of Chester Presbytery, concurred in by a number of other Presbyteries, which opens the way for such compromise.

We had hoped that the issue between the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1925 Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church had been becoming clear, but now it is obscured again by this dangerous compromise proposal. This compromise proposal appears on p. 34 of the General Assembly's "Blue Book," where it is said, in the report of the Joint Committee on Organic Union of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. and the United Presbyterian Church of North America:

"The Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church and the brief statement of the Reformed faith adopted by the 1902 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. have been made a part of the Plan of Union as 'historical interpretative statements'."

Unfortunate comfort has been given to this compromise proposal by the overture of Chester Presbytery, which contains a clause to the effect "that, if it should seem to be advisable that any other instrument of doctrine be associated in that basis, it shall be agreed that the declarations of the above Westminster Standards shall be paramount and conclusive in all doctrinal disputations." We are well aware of the good motive of the Chester overture, and we are in hearty agreement with what it says about the Westminster Standards. But we do think that this compromise proposal is one of the most dangerous of all the proposals that have so far been made.

There are two ways of making a creed operative. One way is to abandon it directly. The other way is to keep it formally but interpret it so that it means nothing. It is this latter way which will be chosen if this compromise proposal prevails.

Even now the Westminster Standards have enough violence done to them by minimizing interpretation. But if this compromise proposal is adopted a stamp of official proposal will inevitably be placed upon such minimizing interpretation. We may take as low a view as possible of what is meant by the phrase "historical interpretative statements." Perhaps a rather low view of that phrase will be taken by the evangelical portion of the proposed united church. But unquestionably a very high view will be taken of it by the Modernist and indifferentist part of the church, and I am bound to say that a certain color of support will be given to that Modernist and indifferentist interpretation if this compromise proposal is adopted.

Let us recall to our minds the really central question about this 1925 Confessional Statement. What is wrong with the Statement? Well, a great many things are wrong with it. In particular, it is not really a Calvinistic or Reformed confession. That has been shown, for example, by Mr. John Murray in his articles in *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. But the most important thing that is wrong about it is that it is derogatory to the true authority of the Bible. It undermines the faith of the church at the foundation, and if the foundation is destroyed there is little value in the superstructure, be it in itself good or bad.

The 1925 Confessional Statement states that the Bible is "the supreme source of authority in spiritual truth." When it says that it gives comfort not to any ordinary error, but to the really central and deadly error of the present day. Clear expression is given to that error by Mrs. Pearl S. Buck when, in the May number of *The Cosmopolitan*, she says that to her it is a matter of indifference whether Christ ever lived at all in a body of flesh and bones upon this earth. Confused expression—no less deadly because confused—is given to the same error when this Confessional Statement speaks of "spiritual truth" as though it were something different from scientific truth or historical truth. Again and again, and in a thousand misleading forms, this central error appears in the Church of the present day—this error which makes Christianity a matter merely of the inner experiences of men's souls and does away with its solid historical basis in what Christ did in the external world nineteen hundred years ago. Let it not be said that the authors of the Confessional Statement did not intend such destructive consequences to be drawn from their phraseology. The point is not at all what they intended, but what use will be made of this statement if it is made a part of the constitution of our Church. The true function of a creed is to exclude the error of the day. But this creed, unlike the Westminster Confession, gives comfort to the error of the day and will actually be interpreted to justify the presence of that error in the Church.

There is only one hopeful element in the church-union situation. It is found in the hope that the United Presbyterians themselves may be led to relinquish this faulty modern Statement altogether and have sole recourse to the glorious Confession of Faith which is their heritage as well as ours.

But above all let us avoid compromise in this matter. Compromise is the most dangerous thing of all. If the church-union propaganda forces the issue upon the Church, let us not obscure the issue in any way. I for my part cannot see how in the world a true Bible-believing Christian, if he studies that United Presbyterian creed carefully, could ever feel that he was occupying a foursquare position if he continued to be a member of a united church which adopted that Confessional Statement in any way, shape or manner—as primary or secondary, as actually part of the Confession of Faith of the Church or as an "historical interpretative statement."

III. Modernism in the New Hymnal

The progress of Modernist propaganda has been gradual in the modern Church. First it captured the books on theology and the books on Biblical criticism, while the commentaries remained fairly sound. Then the commentaries were captured. But even after the commentaries were captured the hymns remained for the most part Christian. Now, however, the hymns are going the way of all the rest, and we have actually issued officially by the Presbyterian Church a hymn like that of Dr. W. P. Merrill, No. 416 in the new Hymnal presented to the 1933 General Assembly, which asks God to save the people "from the clash of race and creed" as though distinctions of race and distinctions of creed belonged in the same sphere as merely worldly distinctions, and which speaks of "faith in simple manhood" as that which will "find its full fruition in the brotherhood of man." The religion which finds expression in the last stanza of that hymn is the same religion as that which Dr. Fosdick propagates when he speaks of the article in his creed, "I believe in man." It is a religion of confidence in human ability and human goodness, and it is the diametrical opposite of the Christian religion as set forth in the Bible and in the Confession of Faith of our Church.

The conflict of the present day in the Church is no mere cold, academic conflict. It concerns the heart as much as the head, and it concerns the whole direction of men's lives. Between the Christian religion and that stanza of Dr. W. P. Merrill's hymn there can be no real compromise.

Bible-believing Christians in the Church will scrutinize the new Hymnal carefully in other particulars, and they will be grieved, no doubt, by many other things

which they will see and by the absence of many other things which they will not see. The Committee has safely gotten rid of that stanza of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," which declares that "man alone is vile." We lay no particular stress upon that one point. But man is vile all the same, and he needs now as always the free and mysterious grace of God. When the Church becomes sound at heart again, its hymnody will be sound; but it is out of the abundance of

the heart that the mouth speaketh, and true Christian hymns are hardly to be expected from a Church in a condition like that of the Church of the present day.

Meanwhile, we shall cling to the splendid old Hymnal of the Presbyterian Church, which contains some things which it should not contain, and which omits some things which it might contain, but which, in general, has truly nurtured the devotional life of the Church.

Sunday School Lessons for July

(International Uniform Series)

Lesson for July 2, 1933

JOSHUA

(Lesson Text—Chapters 1 to 6, 23, 24.
Golden Text—Josh. 2:9.)

THIS quarter begins a series of Biographical lessons. Perhaps there is no study so fascinating as the record of life as it has been lived by great men of time past. And in the Bible we have biography at its best: not one false estimate, no wrong glossed over, no right disparaged. This is because God is the great author. He sees all clearly, and causes all to be written justly.

The life of Joshua might be summed up in a sentence: "He was obedient to God." Yet what a sentence that is! What a glorious epitaph for any man! And the life of Joshua shows us that obedience is not merely passive resignation. This man was willing to obey God's command, no matter what he was ordered to do. Activity or inactivity, peace or war. Whatever he was commanded he did, and whatever he did he did with a will. Judged by any standards the life of Joshua was a success. And the key to that success is only in his willingness to submerge his own will, ambitions and desires in the Will of God.

It is hardly necessary to review here in detail the outward events in the life of this man of God. From beginning to end they are illustrative of what has just been written. When he began his generalship of the nation, and was commanded to go in and possess the land, he did it speedily and energetically. His parting counsel to the people before his death reveals the same inflexible will to do what God willed. To him the great need of the people was to remain separate: separate to God and from the surrounding idolatrous nations. Full well he saw the danger, and knew what Israel's besetting temptation would always be. If Christ's Church would only read and absorb the twenty-third Chapter of Joshua, if it would only *obey* and be separate, how different the visible Church would be!

Lesson for July 9, 1933

CALEB

(Lesson Text—Numbers 13, Joshua 14.
Golden Text—Psalm 40:4.)

This lesson might well be entitled: "Faithfulness Rewarded." When Moses halted the people at Kadesh-Barnea he sent out spies, one from each tribe, to look over the land, and report on the strength of the enemy. The spies came back with a majority and a minority report. Both reports agreed that the land was "flowing with milk and honey." But after that the reports differed. The prudent, human-wise majority had made a careful "survey" of the situation. The enemy, they found, was much too strong to be engaged in battle. They recommended, therefore, that prudence and wisdom should dictate the decision not to attempt to conquer the land.

Caleb's minority report was entirely different. True, he recognized the power of the enemy. But he recalled a greater Power, and a solemn promise. So he turned his eyes away from the obstacles and lifted them up to the glorious face of his God. Let us go in and possess the land, he said. We are well able to overcome it!

The General Assembly of the people, however, voted in favor of the majority report. The anger of God was kindled against the people for their rebellion, their faithlessness. And He decreed that out of them all only Caleb the faithful should receive a part in the land when it was finally possessed.

Forty-five years have passed. Caleb is now eighty-five years of age. The Conquest of Canaan has proceeded for five years. Caleb claims his right to a portion of the land (Joshua 14). The right is accorded. He is given Hebron, a post of danger. The lion of Judah is old, but he can still fight.

Lesson for July 16, 1933

DEBORAH

(Lesson Text—Judges 4, 5. Golden Text—Psalm 46:1.)

God uses whom He will, and when He will. Deborah, a woman, judged Israel. It was in the midst of those times when Israel was alternately sinning and repentant. Now they had been oppressed by Sisera, Captain-General of Jabin, King of the Canaanites, for twenty years. The flame of rebellion was kindled by this woman. She called Borak, and at her insistence he gathered ten thousand men from two tribes, Naphtali and Zebulun. These men he took toward Mount Tabor. Sisera, hearing of this threat to his power, determined to stamp it out at once. He marched against Borak, the battle was given by God to the ten thousand. The Canaanitish host was annihilated. Only Sisera escaped. Seeking refuge in the house of Joel, he was treacherously done to death.

It is a little hard for us, at this distance in time, and with meager facts before us, to judge Joel's action. Certainly she was regarded by her contemporaries, or at least by some of them, as a great heroine. Deborah's song, recorded in chapter five of the Book of the Judges, praises her. God's word, it should be remembered, records this song without comment, there is no hint that the song itself was inspired, although the fact of it has been recorded in God's infallible Word. The words of Satan are recorded in the Bible, too, but God has never approved them.

But this lesson shows that once, at least, it took a woman to shame men into fighting for their freedom.

Lesson for July 23, 1933

ISAIAH DENOUNCES DRUNKENNESS
AND OTHER SINS

(Lesson Text—Isaiah 5:1-30. Golden Text—Prov. 14:34.)

Drunkenness is no new sin. Indeed, it may be doubted whether there are any such things as new sins! Certainly the description of Isaiah in Verses 11 to 23 sounds modern. Whatever the teaching of the Bible as to total abstinence from anything alcoholic, there is no doubt whatever of the Biblical estimate of drunkenness. It is the fashion of these days to regard intoxication as "smart." In God's sight is it merely repulsive. For man the surrender up his will to the contents of a bottle is to lacerate and deface that within man that makes him man. It is destroying the very ends of his being. I purposely refrain from saying that it makes man as an animal, for the state of man in drunkenness is a state to which no dumb animal could ever sink. It