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CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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The Corporate Witness of the Church

THE primary task of the organized church as of the individual Christian is to bear witness. Our LORD's final command was: "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." In obedience to this command the apostles (as soon as the Holy Spirit had come upon them) entered upon a campaign of witnessing—a campaign in which they continued active until their memberships had been transferred from the church militant to the church triumphant (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3-15; 5; 32; 10:39-42; 13:31; 22:15; with which compare MATTHEW 24:14 and LUKE 24:48.)

This campaign of witnessing stressed both the facts and the doctrines that constitute the Christian religion. "I delivered unto you first of all," PAUL wrote to the Corinthians, "that which I also received: that CHRIST died for our sins according to the Scriptures." "CHRIST died"—that was the statement of a fact. "CHRIST died for our sins"—that was the statement of a doctrine, i.e. the true explanation of the fact. The fact without the doctrine would have been meaningless: the doctrine without the fact would have been empty. He who is silent either as to the facts or the doctrines that lie at the basis of the Christian religion is worthless as a Christian witness.

It is conceivable that CHRIST should not have established a church. In that case we would be under obligation to witness for CHRIST as individuals; but would not need to be concerned about the

corporate witness of the church to which we belong. As a matter of fact, however, He did establish a church. Moreover there is nothing to indicate that He approves of un-attached Christians, those who accept Him as their personal LORD and SAVIOUR but who are not members of His organized church. Hence, the situation being what it is, we are both under obligation to be members of the organized church and to do all in our power to see to it that its corporate witness is both clean-cut and adequate. Ideally there should be but one church and this one church should bear faithful witness to a full-orbed gospel. Lacking this one church we must be content to belong to the church that best wit-

nesses to the gospel in the community in which our lot is cast. But, whatever the church to which we belong, we are under obligation, as much as in us lies, to see to it that in its corporate capacity it bears full and unequivocal witness to the gospel of the grace of God. This is not to say that it is enough that we belong to an organization calling itself a church. Conceivably all the churches in a community may have "so degenerated as to become no churches of CHRIST but synagogues of Satan" (Confession of Faith, Chapter 25). Suppose, for instance, that the Presbyterian Church should so modify its creed as to bring it into harmony with "Modernism." In that case its corporate testimony would be hostile to the gospel of the grace of God and as such an organization to which no genuine Christian should belong.

We would not be understood as minimizing the importance of the witness of the individual Christian. Important and indispensable as that is, however, it is insignificant as compared to the corporate witness of the church to which the individual belongs by as much as that organization is greater than the individual. How little, for instance, is the significance that attaches to the witness of any individual Presbyterian as compared with the corporate testimony of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. with its two million members! The corporate witness of the church is therefore a matter of great importance in the maintenance and propagation of the Christian religion, true as it is that

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the effectiveness of this witness is greatly weakened by the fact that everywhere throughout the churches, and especially throughout the Protestant churches, what one man proclaims as saving truth another man denounces as fatal error. Hence distraction and confusion. "If the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?" There is therefore no more pressing need than the creation of a situation wherein the Church of CHRIST will bear undivided witness to the gospel of the grace of God.

Some churches boast of their "comprehensiveness" and seemingly glory in the fact that Arminians and Calvinists, Sacramentarians and Evangelicals, Liberals and Conservatives, feel equally at home within their borders. Such churches are little concerned about their corporate testimony. Other churches, however, like the Presbyterian Church (until recent times at least) have been keenly concerned about their corporate testimony. In order to maintain the integrity of this testimony the Presbyterian Church receives into its ministry only those who profess to believe the Bible to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and who profess to believe that its Confession of Faith contains the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. In proportion as ministers are intelligently loyal to their ordination vows it is obvious that the corporate testimony of the Presbyterian Church will be clear and definite. If it be true, as unfortunately it is, that the testimony given by the Presbyterian Church today is discordant and contradictory, this finds its explanation in the fact that its ministry contains many who have been false to their ordination vows.

It is impossible to close our eyes to the fact that there are many within the Presbyterian Church today who are bent on making it an "inclusive" or "comprehensive" church. This, if we mistake not, is the motive back of most of the union movements that are being pressed. In as far as this is the case, such movements should be determinedly resisted. If they succeed and the Presbyterian Church becomes an organization which in its corporate capacity ignores the distinction between Modernists and

Evangelicals not only its glory but its usefulness will have departed. Then there will be nothing left for those who worship CHRIST as GOD and who are conscious of themselves as sinners who have been redeemed by His blood except to leave the organization in order to join with some organization that in its corporate capacity would bear witness to the gospel of the grace of God. The fact that we are opposed to an "inclusive" church does not mean that we are opposed in principle to revision of the Confession of Faith. It does mean, however, that we are opposed to any revision that would weaken it as an expression of the Reformed Faith or that sits lightly to the Bible as divinely authoritative in all its length and breadth.

Whether we speak of the witness of the individual or the corporate witness of the church we mean, of course, a witness in deed as well as a word. The word without the deed is insincere. The deed without the word is dumb. An effective witness must be both sincere and articulate. In harmony with this the corporate testimony of the Presbyterian Church witnesses to the Bible as the infallible rule of practice (as well as faith) and so to Christianity as a mode

of life as well as a system of doctrines. These two are inextricably bound together, organically related as the tree and its fruit. In the interest of the Christian life itself, we must maintain the purity and vigor of our doctrinal witness. Get rid of the doctrines and the Christian life will be cut at its roots. Other things being equal, the life will be vigorous and well-developed as the doctrines are known and believed. Ours is not a religion that loves darkness rather than light or that thrives best where it is least understood.

Shall the Presbyterian Church maintain its historic and corporate witness as a church of the LORD JESUS CHRIST? That is one of the most important questions before us today. If we thought that the proposed basis of union with the United Presbyterian Church would purify and strengthen the corporate witness of our church, or even leave it unimpaired, we would heartily favor this particular union. But inasmuch as it seems to us that it would seriously weaken the corporate witness of our church and thus render it less efficient as an agent for furthering the gospel we are constrained to oppose it. Size gained at the cost of purity and integrity of testimony is secured at too great a cost.

Editorial Notes and Comments

A Significant Letter

CONFIDENCE in the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. on the part of men and women of evangelical conviction will not be strengthened by the information contained in the "Letter to the Editor" printed on page 12. Inasmuch as the significance of this information is in no wise dependent on the identity of its author we see no objection to allowing it to appear anonymously. Under the circumstances, however, it may not be out of place to say that the Editors of this paper have seen copies of the letter from which our correspondent quotes and vouch for the accuracy of its factual representations.

The significance that attaches to the letter from which our correspondent cites lies largely in the fact that it is signed by the Candidate Secretaries of the Board of Foreign Missions, i.e. the man and the

woman who interview prospective missionaries for the foreign field and upon whose recommendations, it is safe to assume, the Board largely depends in making its selections. We have previously directed attention to the fact that Mr. HADLEY is a signer of the Auburn Affirmation in which it is expressly affirmed that the full truthfulness of the Scriptures, the Virgin birth of CHRIST, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection and miracles of our LORD are not essential doctrines of the Word of God and our Standards. Mrs. CORBETT not being a minister is, of course, not a signer of the Auburn Affirmation. The fact, however, that she has joined with Mr. HADLEY in signing this letter would seem to indicate that she is in full sympathy with his position. Thus it would appear that neither a young man nor a young woman has much chance of being sent as a missionary under existing conditions unless he or she first secures the approval of those