

F. S. DYNES
MAY 1934-R
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QUARRYVILLE PA

Fourth Anniversary Number

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Published monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN AND
REFORMED PUBLISHING CO., Inc.
501 Witherspoon Bldg., Phila., Pa.

MID-MAY, 1934
Vol. 5 No. 1

\$1.00 A YEAR EVERYWHERE
Entered as second-class matter May 11, 1931, at
the Post Office at Philadelphia, Pa., under the
Act of March 3, 1879.

The Question of the Hour: An Editorial



MORE than once in the history of nations and churches, issues in themselves important have suddenly and dramatically given rise to other issues of such tremendous moment, that the new have come to overshadow the old. That is happening now in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. The issue concerning Foreign Missions is a great issue—let no mistake be made about that. Yet, it is the evident intention of the bureaucracy now dominating the machinery of the Church to compel support of the official Board of Foreign Missions and to use force against those who have established an Independent Board. Thus a new issue, that of Christian liberty, has arisen. And with it the Church must now answer a question which will determine her future.

The question is simply this: Who is to be the master of the conscience of the Christian man? God or men? When a minister stands up in the pulpit, whose minister is he to be—the minister of men or a minister of Christ? To whom does the minister go for his authority? The moment you make a man pledge to support a board or agency—any board or agency, no matter how good it is now—whatever its policies may become in the future (on the plea of loyalty or any other plea), that moment you have created a slave—a man who cannot call his soul his own. For this man's conscience has abdicated in favor of the consciences of other men. The ordination vows of a minister do not pledge support to the future policies of successive General Assemblies, much less the policies of the Boards, the creatures of those Assemblies. To ask a man who has sincerely taken his ordination vows, who is completely loyal to the Bible and the constitution of the Church, to pledge support to an agency that he himself believes not to be loyal to the Word of God, is to ask a fearful and a monstrous thing. This is true even if the man is mistaken. The instant that the Presbyterian Church (or any other church) decrees that the Christian conscience must be bound by boards, agencies, courts of the Church, or any thing beside the Word of God, then that Church ceases to be an abode of free men, ceases to be a truly Protestant Church. And no matter how vigorous or large such a church may seem now, if it sets up its own authority as binding on men's consciences in the place of the Word of God, it will surely die as a Church of Christ.

All these things ought to be recognized not only by those who do not have confidence in the Board of Foreign Missions, but also by those who do. They should see clearly, looking down the corridors of the years to be, that if they introduce the principle of compulsion in support and giving, in order to meet

the challenge of a temporary emergency, they will be cutting the very spinal cord of missionary and benevolent giving. The Presbyterian Church has behind it a great record as a truly liberal church. By whom was that record made? By slaves who toiled at the crack of the taskmaster's whip? No—it was made by the voluntary, free outpouring of gifts of the plain man and woman—men and women whose hearts were inflamed with love for Christ and those for whom He died. Nothing less than this motive will maintain a great volume of gifts over a period of years. And if Christian people do not believe that any particular agency will spend their money in the way they want it spent, the remedy is not to threaten and coerce these donors, but to see to it that the agency involved is so reformed and so administered that the question of confidence need never again be raised.

These are the counsels of prudence and foresightedness, which the General Assembly of 1934 would be well advised to consider. Doubtless other counsels will be urged upon the commissioners. They will be told that loyalty to the Church and its law demands the suppression of those who believe the whole policy of the Board of Foreign Missions to be not loyal to the Word of God, and who have, whether wisely or unwisely, yet clearly within their constitutional rights, established their own voluntary, independent agency. The commissioners should resolutely refuse to be stampeded by the excitement of the moment or by the misdirected zeal of those who think they do God's service in making support of the agencies of the Church a matter of compulsion and not of free will. If they are so stampeded in their anxiety to save a Board they may succeed in wrecking and disrupting a whole Church. For there are hosts of persons in the Church who, while they may not as yet be concerned about the Independent Board, will rise in indignation to fight for their liberties if short-sighted counsels prevail, if in the hysteria of an hour, the General Assembly sets itself up as an authority to bind men's consciences, coordinate with the Word of God. No Christian but wants Christ in His Word to be the master of his conscience; no Christian truly aware of what Christian liberty means, but will resist to the death any attempt to make the will of other men the master of his conscience. Let the commissioners ponder carefully the great pronouncement of the Westminster Divines as to liberty, and as they read, let them remember that these words, in Chapter XX of the Confession of Faith, and not Assembly deliverances, are the law of the Church: "God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey

Servants of God or Servants of Men

Address to the Graduating Class at the Commencement of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Tuesday Evening, May 8, 1934

By J. Gresham Machen, Professor of New Testament



YOU will notice that I have written what I shall say to you upon these few sheets of paper that I hold in my hand. That does not mean that what I shall say does not come from the heart. It does not mean that when in deep affection I bid you Godspeed in my own name and in the name of my colleagues in the Faculty I desire to place any cold medium of a written page

between my heart and yours. But it means that I am conscious of standing here in a very great crisis in the history of the church to which many of us belong, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. On such an occasion it is incumbent upon a man to weigh his words, and to keep precise record of what he says. I am speaking, indeed, without consultation of my colleagues. I alone am responsible for what I shall say. But I am aware of the momentous issues involved; and I want, therefore, to have a copy of this little address, insignificant though it be in itself, in case there should be any inquiry as to what it contains.

You are seeking entrance into the Christian ministry. At such a time it is proper for you to count the cost; it is proper for you to ask just what being a Christian minister means. There is just one thing that I want to say to you in answer to that question. The thing that I want to say to you is that you cannot be a Christian minister if you proclaim the word of man; you can be a Christian minister only if you proclaim, without fear or favor, the Word of God.

In the twenty-second chapter of the First Book of Kings we read how the messenger who was sent to call the prophet Micaiah the son of Imlah coached the prophet as to what he should say. "Behold now," he said, "the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good." But Micaiah said: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

You, my brethren, must be like Micaiah the son of Imlah; you, too, must say: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me that will I speak." The Lord does not, indeed, speak to you in the manner in which He spoke to

Micaiah. He does not speak to you by direct supernatural revelation. You are not prophets. But He speaks to you through the supernatural Book. It is only when you proclaim the words of that Book that you are a true minister of Jesus Christ. Only then can you say: "Thus saith the Lord."

The congregations for which you labor may, as the world looks upon them, be but insignificant groups of humble people. But never forget that those insignificant and humble groups are the Church of the living God, and that you as their ministers must proclaim to them the awful and holy and blessed Word.

If you obtain your message from any other authority than the Word of God, the Bible, if you obtain it from the pronouncements of presbyteries or General Assemblies, then you may wear the garb of ministers, but you are not ministers in the sight of God. You are then disloyal to the Lord Jesus Christ; you have betrayed a precious trust.

The temptation to you to be disloyal is coming to you in insistent fashion just at the present moment. It is coming to you through the words of cultured and well-meaning gentlemen, and it is coming to you through the unwarranted acts of ecclesiastical councils and courts. In the Presbytery of Baltimore, at a meeting on April 17, 1934, the temptation came through the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

in the U. S. A. The following passage from a letter of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to the Stated Clerk of that Presbytery was read in open session:

If and when any students from Westminster Seminary come before your Presbytery, they should be informed that the Presbytery will neither license nor ordain them until they have given a written pledge that they will support the official agencies of the Church as a part of their pledge of loyalty to the government and discipline of the Church.

The Presbytery of New Brunswick, acting, earlier, on the same principle, and equally in contradiction to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., has placed in its manual, by an action taken September 26, 1933, a provision that no one shall be received into the Presbytery without being subjected to an examination as to his willingness to support the regularly appointed Boards and Agencies.



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

I feel compelled to say to you, my brethren, with the utmost plainness, that if you sign the pledge demanded of you in that letter of Dr. Lewis S. Mudge and practically implied in that action of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, if you obtain your licensure or ordination in that way, then, quite irrespective of the question whether the Boards and Agencies are or are not worthy of trust at this moment or at any particular moment, you have become servants of men and are not in the high Biblical sense servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you promise to adapt your message to shifting majorities in church councils or to the mandates of church officials, if you promise to commend one kind of missions this year and an opposite kind next year, as the General Assembly, newly elected every year, may direct, if you thus take the Bible from your pulpits and place the Minutes of the General Assembly in its place, if you thus abandon the Reformation and do despite to all the blood and tears that it cost, if you thus abandon the high liberty guaranteed you by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., and if (as, alas, you do if you abandon that liberty) you abandon also your allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ by putting fallible men into the place of authority that belongs only to Him, then the ministry has become, as far as you are concerned, merely a profession, and rather a contemptible profession too. You may, by taking such a step, obtain high ecclesiastical preferment; but never can you be ministers of the New Covenant, never can you be ambassadors of God.

If, on the other hand, you choose, as indeed you have already shown very nobly that you have chosen, to obey God rather than men, then you may look to the future with unconquerable joy. If any one door be closed to you by the usurped authority of human councils or officials, be assured that some other and greater door will be opened to you

in God's own way. But, above all, remember that that Captain is worthy whose service you are thus preferring to the favor of men. He is worthy because of His infinite power and glory. But He is also worthy because of something else. There are other things besides the effulgence of His royal majesty which mark Him as our Lord:

Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my Guide?
"In His feet and hands are wound-prints,
And His side."

Is there diadem, as Monarch,
That His brow adorns?
"Yea, a crown, in very surety,
But of thorns."

If I find Him, if I follow,
What His guerdon here?
"Many a sorrow, many a labor,
Many a tear."

If I still hold closely to Him,
What hath He at last?
"Sorrow vanquished, labor ended,
Jordan passed."

If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?
"Not till earth and not till heaven
Pass away."

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?
"Saints, apostles, phophets, martyrs,
Answer, 'Yes.'"

"Ye were bought with a price," my brethren; "be not ye the servants of men."

The Christian Assembly

A Christian Fellowship for "Continuing and Contending Christianity,
based on a Protestant Declaration and Purpose". (Seattle Chapter.)

WE BELIEVE:

1. That the only remedy for the present confused, distressed and changing world, is the Word of God, Scripture interpreted, believed, taught and lived.

2. That the threatened dissolution of our political, social, economic and Christian order is due to forces antagonistic to God, His Holy Word and our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. That these forces are headed toward anti-God communism; which, consciously or unconsciously, is supported by or allied with many schools of rationalistic thought, representing in varying degrees, forces antagonistic to God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

4. That the impact of these forces on the Christian Church has resulted:

(a) In the preaching and teaching of an impure and perverted Gospel, which has confused, perplexed, misled

and devitalized Christian testimony; discouraged sacrificial dedication, and has encouraged license rather than the service of love.

(b) In the questioning, disbelieving or declaring as an unnecessary doctrine, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, as God in the flesh.

(c) In the qualifying, doubting, and denying of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God.

(d) In the substituting of a legal, rational, ethical and non-supernatural Christianity, for Scripture interpreted Christianity, a substitution which the Apostle Paul declares as no Gospel at all.

WE BELIEVE:

1. That while the polity or government of the Presbyterian Church is mainly ministerial and declarative, its fun-