

The Real Issue

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Ahab and Elijah agreed that Israel was in trouble (I Kings 18), but from Ahab's viewpoint as a worshiper of Baal, he was quite sure that Elijah was the "troubler of Israel." Ahab's godly servant Obadiah was most unwilling to be embroiled in their controversy, and tried desperately to have himself excused.

I think I understand Obadiah, for it is with Obadiah's hesitant unwillingness that I respond to the requests that I give some statement about my withdrawal from the Presbyterian Church US and later from the school in which I have worked for the past 15 years. Like Obadiah, I would much prefer to evade the entire discussion, but the issues involved are far too basic for the conscience to permit this easier course.

I doubt that it would be helpful to recite details of the problems, however specific they were, which led to these separations. For one thing, the institution which I leave is far from being the chief offender in departing from the Christian faith and from Christian ethics. These details would present only the symptoms of the problem.

I am far more concerned about Protestantism's basic departures from historic Christianity, about the massive iceberg of unbelief (yes, I intended to imply that there is far

more of it than usually meets the eye) in so-called Christian education, and about modern humanism which in one way or another gets rid of the God of the Bible so that man may be his own master.

Read These If You Doubt

First let me suggest that those who simply cannot bring themselves to believe that American Protestantism has been infiltrated by apostasy in a major way should read the first chapters of *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* by Jeffrey K. Hadden.

Those still unwilling to accept the idea that there are members of both the PCUS and the UPUSA who favor, advocate and teach immorality in the name of the Church should read "Understanding Sex in the Age of the Pill" in the January 8, 1969 issue of the *Christian Century* or the March 1970 issue of *Colloquy*.

Especially they should read "A Letter to Your Daughter" in the Fall 1972 issue of *Faculty Forum* which was reproduced in the *Journal*. *Faculty Forum* is published jointly by the Division of Higher Education of The United Methodist Church, the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church US, and campus Christian foundations.

'Live and Let Live'

If these bald proposals of immorality do not convince, such people should find out what is being said in lectures and sermons on college campuses. One such example is "Love Makes It Right."

Now I understand full well that true Christians are scattered here and there at all levels in Church institutions. They are tolerated and sometimes even welcomed so long as

they make no serious protests against basic changes in doctrine or against complete reversals of moral standards.

The basic policy, as I see it, amounts to this: "You do your thing and let us do ours." For instance, in some quarters it is all right to hold and even teach the Westminster Standards and historic Christianity so long as others are free to reject these and to tear them apart in classes.

These people are willing for the doctrine of inspiration to be taught so long as others are free to emphasize the "glaring errors" in the Bible. These often turn out to be rehashed problems of bygone days which were long ago fully answered and which can now be held only by those whose positions W. F. Albright describes as being "pre-archaeological."

Pluralism Accepted

These devotees of the "big umbrella" approach have no particular objection to having faculty members or students believe in the actual resurrection of Christ, so long as liberals are permitted to give a major emphasis to Bultmannian theology and to have religious emphasis week speakers who advocate believing in the resurrection "on the day you die" and on the days you "die with somebody else" but not all of the time.

They are willing for a Bible professor to teach that immorality is wrong because of the commandments of God, if he does not create too much of a problem about open dormitories or "Love Makes It Right" chapel speakers.

While this kind of pluralism is readily accepted, this should be noted: When a conservative objects to textbooks which deny that one

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person could assume another's guilt (the atonement); deny the virgin birth; question the factuality of the miracles (Jesus walked beside the water, not on it, and quieted the storm in the hearts of the disciples, not the storm on Galilee); etc., he is immediately confronted with the cry, "censorship!" and the call for "academic freedom."

When the conservative objects to open dormitories, to the distribution of Presbyterian literature advocating immorality, proposals to merge Christianity and Communism, etc., he now knows to expect the standard response: "We don't necessarily believe all of this ourselves, but . . ."

The sad part of this is that many of these liberal churchmen really do not understand the problem because they are not at all conscious of how far they have deviated from everything that might properly be called historic Presbyterianism.

An example occurred when one of our PCUS colleges recently distributed in publicity material this statement: "All courses are taught in the context of Biblical Christian tradition." However, an article by a professor at the same college in the not

too distant past has this sentence: "Although not everyone on the faculty is a Christian. . . ."

There is not the slightest reason to think the first statement is deliberately false — not even after examining the textbooks used at this college — it is rather that humanism is now called Christianity by those who do not understand the difference between the two.

The defenders of the proposal that Christianity and Communism meet as "equals" and form a synthesis as described in *Faculty Forum* (Winter 1972) are genuinely puzzled when any objection is made. From their Hegelian view of Christianity, why not merge dialectical Christianity with dialectical materialism?

No Two Alike

It should be understood that generalizations may be misleading and that we seldom find two liberals, two conservatives or two fundamentalists who think exactly alike. Criticisms certainly do not apply to all PCUS or UPUSA leaders, but I am speaking of a group sufficiently large to make radical changes in almost everything except the vocabu-

lary of the Church.

To say it differently, the Sadducee thought of himself as a loyal Jew, but philosophy rather than the law of Moses molded his thinking. Many gnostics called themselves Christians, but they accepted only so much of Christianity as was compatible with their synthetic system of thought.

Faustus the Manichean proclaimed loudly that he worshiped only Christ, but he rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament. Rationalists in the 18th and 19th century Churches professed to be followers of Jesus, but in their thought and writings man became the source of truth — not God.

So today we have a host of Protestant theologians and educators who in all sincerity insist: "We believe everything you believe," but their existential philosophy, not the Word of God, is determinative for their theology and ethics.

No Real Absolutes

They insist that they are Christian believers — "I'm as orthodox as anybody else" — but they reject the Biblical doctrine of creation for macro-evolution; verbal, propositional revelation for subjective (individual) truth; and the God of the Bible for a home-made deity who can be adapted to anybody's likes or dislikes: "The god I worship wouldn't . . ." or "Now my idea about god is . . ." Such a god is never the Scripture's holy, sovereign, communicating Creator and Redeemer.

Since they have surrendered the Bible's doctrine of itself, they really do not understand why some people love God's book as did the psalmist of old or our Presbyterian ancestors. They call this love for the Bible bibliolatry, and since they have given up the doctrine of the absolute authority of the Word of God (and they have), they find it easy to minimize God's holiness and to dismiss the ideas of sin and judgment.

This in turn leads naturally to the rejection of atonement, it leads to situation ethics and to the view that historic Christianity is a religion based on the legalism of bygone days. The liberal theologians have no real absolutes on which to base faith or morals. Therefore, they cannot understand why those who still hold the Reformed faith are not free to compromise about the

Preachers and Roosters

An anonymous homiletical manuscript of the 13th century, produced at Bruges, offers a seven-point comparison between the preacher and a rooster: 1) The rooster beats his sides before crowing; the preacher must mortify himself before preaching. 2) The rooster stretches his neck to crow; the preacher must lift his attention to heavenly things. 3) The rooster crows at certain particular hours; the preacher likewise. 4) The rooster shares his grain with the hens; the preacher must be willing to communicate his truths to others.

5) The rooster attacks his rivals, the preacher must attack all heresies. 6) The rooster shuts his eyes before the sun; the preacher must close his eyes to the blandishments of success. 7) The rooster mounts his wooden roost at nightfall, coming down only at daybreak; amidst temptation, the preacher must fly

to the cross of Christ as his resting place.

The preacher-rooster comparison can be extended further (and not just to the painfully cocky mannerisms of some pulpiteers). As the rooster crowed three times to announce Peter's denial of his Lord, so contemporary preaching often manifests — wittingly or unwittingly — a denial of the inscriptured Word of God and the Christ on whom it centers.

Fulton Sheen, the retired Roman Catholic bishop of Rochester, observed in a recent address before the first National Congress on the Word of God: "People are not listening to us because we are often preaching sociological drivel instead of Christ crucified. We have a cross-less Christ and a Christ-less cross." — JOHN WARWICK MONTGOMERY in *Christianity Today*. ☐

teachings of Scripture.

Possibly the most deceptive feature of this modern theology now being taught in some Presbyterian schools in place of historic Christianity is that it uses all the old words of the Christian vocabulary. Poured into these good words are the content of naturalism, skepticism, existentialism and allied humanisms until only "god words" are left: the vocabulary of orthodox Christianity without orthodox meaning for these words.

As an insider in Presbyterian education for over a quarter of a century, let me suggest that, when compared with the unbelief in modern Church-related institutions, the issues faced by Luther and Calvin in the 16th century were relatively minor. The question in their time was: "Is there any final authority besides the Bible itself?" Now the question is whether or not there is any final revelation at all or only silence in the night.

Luther and Calvin faced problems of how man may come into God's presence. The question in 1973 is whether there is any being which may properly be called God. The 16th century Church was concerned with *how* man could be redeemed. Much 20th century "Christianity" isn't even sure that there is any salvation other than that which man provides for himself or even that man has a soul which needs salvation.

The Reformers and their opponents disagreed as to what eschatology included, whether or not purgatory preceded heaven. Today the issue is whether eschatology speaks of the real or merely about the mythological. For the Reformers, the problems were basically theological. For modern sophisticated religious man, there are only humanisms to be expressed in scientific language or in the "god-words" of modern theology.

'Body of Christ'?

Now I am well aware that many will think of such statements as being schismatic. This conclusion can be reached, I think, only by assuming that the denomination is the Church, the body of Christ mentioned in the New Testament. Is it too obvious to suggest that denominations came into existence following the Reformation and that

denominational structures and institutions are not identical with the New Testament body of Christ?

Of course, however, the two overlap. The Church as the body of Christ overlaps the local police force where I live, the freshman class and the faculty at V.P.I., but none of these can be called the Church.

We understand the pain, sorrow, grief, misunderstanding and tragedy of division or separation, but we do not agree that this is schism or fragmentation of the body of Christ.

The real question is not whether division brings pain and sorrow and tears. Of course it will. Who would understand that better than an

eighth generation Presbyterian who grew up in the Church, planned to spend his life as its servant, and then found that he was being forced to choose between the truly divine, sovereign, creating, miracle-working, redeeming, resurrected Christ of Scripture and the denomination?

The question is whether we will act on the basis of expediencies and pursue peace at any price or follow the teachings of Scripture about separation from apostasy (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; II Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1:8; II Tim. 3:5; II John 7-10). The real issue, as I see it, becomes whether or not we will say with Peter, "We must obey God rather than men." □

The prospect of division is not to be taken lightly—

From the Moderator

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The unrest in our Church is growing. There is grave danger that a division may arise which will jeopardize our witness and effectiveness for years to come.

I share with those who wish to depart and to start a new Church the deepest concern for our Church. I am unhappy because of many of the things which have taken place. And I am unhappy over the determination on the part of some to shift the emphasis of our witness from spiritual to secular and material concerns.

But there is already a bitterness abroad which will divide congregations and even families — a bitterness which may last for a generation or more. God's work cannot prosper in such an atmosphere. We may

differ, but it must be in love. But right now I sense a tension and an animosity which are dangerous to the very life of the Church. This animosity is expressed to me in letters from conservatives (with whom I unashamedly identify myself) and from radical liberals who seem obsessed with the organizational rather than the spiritual nature of the Church.

This is a plea to go slow. We are not letting God solve our problems. Like Uzzah of old, there is danger that we may use our own hands to steady the Ark of God, forgetting that this is His Church and that He has full knowledge of the hearts of every member.

This is a plea to prevent a schism which can grow and split, and then splinter, with resultant damage to our witness for the One who alone can solve our problems.

Ours is a time of extreme tension in the social, political and ecclesiastical realms. It is time for us as believers to have faith in God — that we may see His glory revealed to those who trust in Him.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ: Stop, pray and believe. God will surely honor our faith and our prayers. — L. NELSON BELL. □

The position of Moderator Dr. L. Nelson Bell is not the editorial position of the JOURNAL. We hold him, however, in highest esteem and respect, both for the depth of his Christian commitment and for the office he presently occupies. We welcome his participation in this issue which will be distributed to the Convocation of Sessions in Atlanta.