

# EDITORIAL

## THE MEANING OF THE PLEDGE

IN RECENT weeks much discussion has centered around the sense in which Article IV of the Constitution of the Covenant Union is to be understood. This is the "Covenant" which must be subscribed by all members. It reads:

"We, the members of this Covenant Union, are resolved, in accordance with God's Word, and in humble reliance upon His grace, to maintain the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., (1) making every effort to bring about a reform of the existing church organization, and to restore the Church's clear and glorious Christian testimony, which Modernism and indifferentism have now so grievously silenced, but (2) if such efforts fail and in particular if the tyrannical policy of the present majority triumphs, holding ourselves ready to perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., regardless of cost."

The governing idea of the Covenant is, quite clearly, that those subscribing to it desire to maintain the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The same thought is more fully expressed in Article III. The signers, are, therefore, not rebels against Presbyterian doctrine and order, both derived from the Word of God, but are pledged to defend them. This fact is the key to the rest of the Covenant.

To carry out that defense of the Constitution to which they have pledged themselves, members of the Covenant Union promise to make every effort to bring about a reform of the existing church organization. This is demanded not merely by expediency, but by every consideration of consistent loyalty to the Truth. A church whose constitution is good but which is controlled by those who trample upon that constitution ought not to be abandoned until it is clear that efforts to reform it are useless, or until it either (1) amends its constitution or (2) by judicial action, perverts the constitution, in either case so as to destroy its essential witness. When *either* of these things happens, Christian men and women are under a duty to separate. That duty is not laid upon them by men, but by God.

For example, if the 148th General Assembly should uphold the so-called "mandate" of the 146th Assembly, when the matter comes solemnly before it on appeal, it will destroy the essential witness of the church to the Gospel. That mandate will then have been approved by the supreme judicial tribunal of the church—and thus made official in a sense in which it is *not* official *now*. The "mandate" makes disobedience to its own utterly

unlawful order an offense, and attempts to bind the consciences of men by virtue of its own authority. In doing this it places the word of man above the Word of God and thus dethrones Christ as the only Head and King of His Church—at least in so far as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is concerned. If this is judicially confirmed, and if the Head is thus cast out, have His members no duty? Not that the "machine" will *profess* to have put the word of man above the Word of God. On the contrary, with many fair words it will deny it. So did the Church of Rome deny having placed the word of man above the Word of God, but our fathers left it anyway, because they believed the fact to be true in spite of the denial.

But who, ask some questioners, is to decide for the members of the Covenant Union when the time for reform has passed and the hour of separation has come? Are the members giving over that decision to the officers of the Covenant Union, to the Executive Committee, or to someone else who will, when deemed necessary, give an order which all must obey?

The answer is, emphatically, *no*. The members themselves must decide for themselves as to when the hour of separation has struck. The Covenant Union is organized to combat the idea of implicit obedience to human authority. Would it then be guilty of the folly of itself attempting to set up such an authority for its members? Never. Each individual, Bible in hand, facts in his mind, and prayer for light in his heart, must solemnly make that decision for himself. We do not believe that the decision will be difficult to make when the hour strikes, as long as the simple principles at stake are kept clearly in mind. Is the word of man, the command of man, to be put by official judicial action above (or made equal to) the command of God in His Word? If it *is*, no matter how the lips of men may kiss the face of the Christ they thus betray, the betrayal will have been accomplished. And true Christian, Presbyterian, Protestant men must then, if they are to be faithful to their heritage, go forth from courts of Christ that have degenerated into councils of men, appealing not to wisdom or numbers or expediency or learning but with these words upon their lips appealing to the highest court of all:

"The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." (Conf. Faith, Ch. I, Sec. X.)