

EDITORIAL

WHAT PRICE TREASON?

IT HAS recently been suggested that even if the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., sitting as a court, should in a particular case or cases render a decision that involves placing the word of man above the Word of God and the subordination of Christ Himself to human authority, it would not mean that the Church mentioned had officially apostatized. All that it would necessarily mean (this source declares) would be that an Assembly had erred and erred grievously in the decision of a particular case or cases. Only, it thinks, when such an action is taken by the General Assembly with the concurrence of at least a majority of the presbyteries (thus amending the Constitution) would it mean that the church had by official action apostatized. This source goes on to cite Dr. J. Gresham Machen to prove that the legal doctrine of *stare decisis* (that is, that the decisions of courts are binding in all subsequent cases) does not hold in the church. Therefore, the source mentioned comes to the implied conclusion that the church cannot ever become apostate by judicial decision, since later cases might be decided differently.

Of course the fallacy of this reasoning is so great as to be apparent to nearly everybody. It misses the whole point of what it is that actually makes a church apostate, or treasonable, to the Lord Jesus Christ. And in so doing it fails to understand that whether the doctrine of *stare decisis* holds in the church or not has nothing at all to do with the question.

First of all, when and if the General Assembly, sitting as the highest court of record and resort, makes a solemn interpretation of the Constitution of the church, its judgment in the case in question is humanly final. There is no ecclesiastical court before which any further adjudication can be asked. Now if this decision involves placing the word of man above the Word of God and the subordination of Christ Himself to human authority (as does the "mandate" of 1934) where does the blow fall? Against whom is the treason? The blow falls, visibly of course, upon the defendant or defendants. They suffer practically, and at once. But is that all? No. Their suffering is only incidental. *Christ* has been denied, the blow falls upon Him, His supremacy is flouted. This, to use a plain word, is treason to our only King. In that case, at

that time, Christ's rule is set aside, and the fiat of man put in its place. This, we repeat, is absolutely nothing less than treason. Any other word is pitifully inadequate. Even that word does not convey the full measure of the disloyalty and wrong done to our adorable Lord.

Now, how many times does a man need to commit treason in order to become a traitor? How many murders does a man need to commit to be a murderer? In each case even the simplest person knows the answer—only one. So with the church. If it assumes to topple the Lord Jesus Christ down from His throne, if it punishes His servants because they obey Him and not man, and does this by judicial decision from which there is no appeal save to God, is not this treason? Will the Lord Jesus come back as soon as the case is disposed of, to take up the throne from which He has been ejected, there to await other possible like ejections as the years go by? He *has* returned, graciously, to those who have been unfaithful. Peter, for example, denied his Lord and was forgiven. But his forgiveness came only after he had gone out and wept bitterly, after the iron had entered his soul, after deep and agonizing repentance.

But no, say our above-mentioned friends. A judicial decision is not binding. Perhaps the court which decided against Christ this year will vote for Him next year. Let us wait and see. Then, next year comes. Again the treason is repeated. And so on, down the years. Each year our friends hope the Assembly will not commit the old treason. Each year is the same story. But our friends do not rise up and shake the dust of the apostate church from their feet. Why not? Because, forsooth—and this from those who are supposed to love Christ above any earthly love!—because the Constitution of the church is not officially changed! In effect, say they: let the church buffet the face of its King, deny His authority, exalt its own, year after year. It will not be an apostate church, we will need to make no separation, until this treason is sanctified by incorporating it in the Constitution of the church.

Absurd? Palpably, tragically. But exactly the course that is suggested as Christian, as loyal to Christ!

Suppose a man is discovered in treason. He denies it, but the evidence is clear. Would you think of saying this: "Well, he is now 30 years of age. He