

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

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An Apostate Church?



Dr. Machen

THE covenant in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union plainly contemplates for the near future the possibility—to say the least—of separation from the present organization of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

Such separation is denounced by the opponents of the Covenant Union as involving the sin that is called the sin of schism—a sin that is plainly condemned in the Word of God.

But, as was pointed out on this page in the last number of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, not every separation from an existing church is schism. It was not schism when the early Protestants broke away from the Church of Rome.

Still less will it be schism if the members of the Covenant Union break away from the organization now known as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and if they continue the true spiritual succession of that church in the manner contemplated in the covenant.

The Meaning of the 1934 Mandate

It is not schism to break away from an apostate church. Indeed it is schism to remain in an apostate church, since to remain in an apostate church is to separate from the true Church of Jesus Christ.

Will, then, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. be shown to be an apostate church if the Mandate of the 1934 and 1935 General Assemblies is declared to be constitutional by the Permanent Judicial Commission and the judgment of the Commission is confirmed by the General Assembly convening in Syracuse on Thursday, May 28th?

Very deliberately, and with full consciousness of the seriousness of what I am saying, I say "Yes." The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. will plainly be shown to be an apostate church if that Mandate is de-

clared constitutional by the General Assembly sitting as a court.

The Mandate, by making the support of whatever program of boards and agencies is set up by shifting majority votes in the General Assembly a condition of ordination and of membership in the church, is placing the word of man above the Word of God and is dethroning Jesus Christ. A church that places the word of man above the Word of God and that dethrones Jesus Christ is an apostate church. It is the duty of all true Christians to separate from such a church.

The Meaning of a Judicial Decision

At present that Mandate, with its attack upon the lordship of Christ over His church is merely an administrative pronouncement. As such it is not an act of the church. Appeal is possible from such administrative actions to the courts of the church.

But if such an appeal has been taken and has gone up through the lower courts to the highest court—namely, the General Assembly sitting not as administrative body but as a court—and if the appeal against the Mandate has been lost, then the church itself will have acted in accordance with the Mandate. Such action is no longer just an action of the General Assembly of the church; it is an action of *the church*.

Can Christian people remain in a church which, acting not just by its General Assembly, but by its full judicial machinery, has engaged in such an apostate act?

The Editor of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, in his editorial of April 6th, says "No." I certainly hope that the words of the Editor may be—to say the least—earnestly pondered.

The Meaning of This Particular Decision

Even, however, if a man is not convinced that true Christians ought to withdraw from a church which has by *any* judicial decision dethroned Jesus Christ, they plainly ought to withdraw from a church which has

done so by *this particular* judicial decision.

This particular judicial decision is not an ordinary judicial decision. It is not an isolated matter about which the Permanent Judicial Commission might conceivably have slipped up without really exhibiting the mind and heart of the whole church. But it will mean the final endorsement of a fixed policy which is being applied with ever increasing rigor.

What is that policy? It is the policy of exclusion from the ministry of all who will not support the propaganda of the Modernist boards and agencies now functioning in the church and will not promise, for the future, a blanket allegiance to human programs as shifting majorities in future General Assemblies may set them up.

That policy has been favored by enormous majorities in two successive General Assemblies. It is being ruthlessly applied in presbytery after presbytery.

We ought to be under no delusions about this matter. If the 1936 General Assembly, sitting as a court, declares the 1934 and 1935 Mandate to be constitutional, then it will be practically impossible for any man upon whom Christ has laid His hands for His ministry to be ordained anywhere in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Only those who dethrone their Lord will be received. Those who bravely confess Christ will be rejected.

What are we going to do about these young men whom Christ has called and whom the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. rejects?

I will tell you what we ought to do about it if we are really in earnest about our allegiance to Jesus Christ. We ought to separate at once from an apostate church organization that systematically refuses to lay the hands of presbytery upon those men upon whom Christ has laid His hands, and ought to take steps to be members of a church that *will* lay hands upon them and that will thank God for having called them into the ministry of His Son.