

*"The Only Infallible Rule
of Faith and Practice"*

The Concerned Presbyterian

*True to God's Word and Loyal to Historic
Presbyterian Doctrine and Polity*

BULLETIN NUMBER 32

PAGE ONE

CONTINUATION OF THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CONFESSION OF FAITH

In our previous Bulletin No. 31, we examined very carefully the first four chapters of the proposed Confession of Faith which has been sent to the presbyteries for two years of study by the Louisville General Assembly.

Chapter Four somewhat condescendingly tries to harmonize the Jesus it presents with the Biblical idea that this Jesus is the promised Deliverer of the Old Testament now come in the flesh. But the real thrust of the Fourth Chapter is the humanity of Jesus. This emphasis is clearly expressed in the last part of Section 2 in which the new Confession would tell us that we recognize in Jesus what genuine humanity is and that He exposes our failure to be truly human. We need only to compare these thinly veiled humanistic statements with Chapter Eight of the Westminster Confession of Faith to see very quickly the direction in which this new Confession would take the Presbyterian Church U S. We need only to note the sharp contrast between this Confession and the magnificent pronouncements of historic Presbyterianism as we see it in the following:

"It pleased God, in His eternal purpose to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the mediator and king; the head and saviour of His church; the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom He did, from all eternity, give a people to be His seed and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter Eight, paragraph 1.)

The anemic character of the new Confession in regard to the deity of Christ is also sharply drawn if we contrast the third section of Chapter Four with the second paragraph of Chapter Eight of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The new Confession simply says that we recognize the work of God in Jesus' power and authority and in His lowliness, but the new Confession will not admit that HE is truly God and is content to assert that we see nothing more than the power of God in Christ's work on earth, although in lines 58 and 59 it seems to be on the verge of making such an admission.

These faltering affirmations of the new Confession pale into insignificance when they are compared with the affirmations of the Westminster Confession of the deity of our Lord and on the nature of His atoning work. The new Confession admits that Jesus in some sense died for sinners but again the real thrust of Section Four, at this point is basically existential with its reiteration of the theme of Alienation.

"We are so alienated from our true selves that the presence of a genuine human being threatens us beyond endurance."

What a blasphemous explanation of Calvary! Here is no Biblical insistence on a substitutionary atonement; here is no Biblical insistence of sin as the cause of our alienation from God and it would have us believe that Jesus was killed simply because He was a genuine human being who threatened us who are alienated from our true selves. What a mockery! What a travesty that the Louisville General Assembly would even consider sending to the presbyteries for study a Confession of Faith that subverts the Biblical

message almost in its entirety. This existentialist thrust removes the essence and meaning from the concluding lines of Section Three in Chapter Four which do, to a degree, present a doctrine of redemption.

But, in its discussion of the Resurrection it weakens the Biblical doctrine by emphasizing that the power of the Resurrection is derived from the fact that Christians are convinced that Jesus lives. In other words, the teaching of Scripture is not conclusive. It is the conviction of the church on which the truth of the Resurrection really rests.

Equally disappointing and equally sub-Biblical is Chapter Five of the new Confession which deals with God the Holy Spirit. The New Confession tends to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit without paying due attention to His deity. Even in its emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, the new Confession very carefully refrains from presenting the Holy Spirit as the only efficient Agent in the application of redemption and, in Part Three, Chapter Five very carefully diminishes the role of the Holy Spirit in convicting men of sin and of moving them to repentance and enabling them to accept Jesus Christ by faith so that there will be no possible room allowed for the doctrine of election and effectual calling. At this point the new Confession is very clearly a synergistic statement in an effort to avoid any possible acceptance of the sovereignty of God and His grace in our redemption.

In Chapter Six the new Confession offers a jumbled and very confusing presentation of the Word of God, confusing, because it seems to confuse Jesus Christ as the Living Word with the Holy Scriptures.

This portion of the new "Declaration" is perhaps the most deceptive of the sections which we have covered thus far. In regard to the Scriptures it presents a composite of contemporary, liberal views. It very clearly states that the Old Testament emerged out of the Jewish community and that the books of the Old Testament were shaped and reshaped by the uses to which the community put them. This chapter also states that by a similar process, the New Testament came into being. This section furthermore very clearly states that the Bible is the Word of God only for those who have had some sort of a confrontation with Him. At this point the Confession is obviously Barthian. The authority of the Word of God, the Scriptures, rests upon the conviction of the Church that it is the Word of God rather than upon any intrinsic quality in the Scriptures themselves. This section on the Scriptures very carefully refrains from committing the Presbyterian Church U S to any doctrine of inerrancy and therefore of any doctrine of Biblical infallibility. There is no authoritative interpretation of the Bible because, and we quote:

"We anticipate that Scripture will yield fresh insights in every situation because the living Lord speaks through it."

There is, then, in this new Declaration, no abiding authority in the Scriptures. They are most certainly not the infallible rule of faith and practice because the Lord may change His revelation in new situations as He speaks to His people. How far short of the Westminster standards the new Confession falls in its doctrine of Scripture becomes

very apparent when we contrast it with Chapter One of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church but wholly upon God (Who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."

For those who have been reared on the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism, these pallid statements concerning the nature and authority of the Scriptures must only be disappointing and for those who are seeking certainty in a world of uncertainty they can be nothing but frustrating.

We can only conclude that any denomination which accepts these statements about the Scriptures as a part of its Confession of Faith can do little more than add uncertainty in an age of uncertainty, confusion to an age of confusion and darkness to a world that is groping in darkness. Its pulpits can hardly be expected to utter anything more than feeble sounds.

By some strange logical process the framers of the new Confession decided to treat the sacraments in the same chapter in which they discuss revelation in the Scriptures. But is it as strange as it seems? A careful reading of Section Five which deals with the sacraments brings to light just why this was done. The new Confession makes the sacraments a part of the revelatory process rather than signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, because to admit that they are signs and seals of a Covenant is to necessarily acknowledge the doctrine of election. This the framers of the new Confession refuse to do. It can only be observed that the statements of the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper can hardly sustain the celebration of the sacraments, which is such an essential part of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the practices of historic Presbyterianism. Under this new Declaration of Faith, the sacramental acts can only be but pale reminders of the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the life of the church.

CHAPTER SEVEN--THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

This chapter opens with a determined effort on the part of the framers of this proposed Confession to deny any distinction between Christians and the Jews and insists that God has called the Christian and the Jew to engage in mutual dialogue and cooperation because "we are bound together with them in a single story of those chosen to serve and proclaim the living God." These assertions openly flaunt the whole of the New Testament and run distinctly contrary to Romans 9, 10 and 11. Although the framers were careful to admit that we could not cooperate with Jews in areas where real disagreements exist, the last statement in Section One virtually denies the possibility of any real disagreements since the framers would have us believe that both Christians and Jews are a part of a single story of those who were chosen to serve and proclaim the living God. Once again the framers of this new Confession have seen fit to modify the Biblical doctrine of the Church in such a way as to preclude any possibility, any connotation that it is the Body of the Elect. Even more damaging to the Presbyterian doctrine of the Church is the insistence in Section Four of this chapter that there has been, and is, a syncretistic influence at work in the church. In other words, the church has been influenced by other religions, secular faiths and ideologies. This proposed Confession accepts the intrusion of unbelief into the Church with a degree of equanimity which is truly amazing. This section of the Confession suggests that all faiths have something to contribute to the Church and we should listen with openness and respect to their words to us. We would agree that in dealing with unbelievers we should be loving and unafraid in our dealings with them, but this certainly does not mean that unbelief has a message for believers. Over 1700 years ago Tertullian raised a question for the church of his day, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" By this he meant: what can highly developed cultures such as the Athenian add to the Gospel? Syncretism has always been a danger to the Church, and it would seem that the

framers of this new Confession would allow this dangerous heresy to be enshrined and enthroned as a very part of the Confession. Certainly, this would silence the preaching of the Gospel in any authoritative way. It would mute the voice of the pulpit and reduce Biblical doctrine to a philosophical system. There can be no common cause with secular culture.

Chapter Seven of the proposed Confession contains two other articles, one dealing with the relationship between church and state; the other has no counterpart in the Westminster Confession of Faith and there is no justification for its inclusion in such a confession. The treatment which the proposed Confession gives to the problem of the relationship between the church and the state is little more than what might be expected from a high school student who has been given an assignment to write his first theme on this topic. This section is really hardly worthy of commentary. It is unbelievably deficient in its affirmations on the origin, the nature and the powers of the state. For this reason it has nothing to say about the relationship which should exist between the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ on the one hand, and civil government on the other. It is somewhat surprising that the Ad Hoc Committee would be willing to offer this kind of an affirmation to any General Assembly. It is characterized by a paucity of ideas and feebleness of presentation.

CHAPTER EIGHT--THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

In view of the nebulous theology which has undergirded the first seven chapters of this Declaration of Faith we should not be surprised that its description of the Christian Mission would be something less than Biblical. On the surface this nebulous quality is rather carefully concealed by a choice of words, which, on first glance, might easily win the approval of many evangelicals. Indeed, this is a characteristic which runs throughout much of this proposed Confession. It is not so much what this chapter says at many points, although there is a very important exception in Section Five, but it is what this chapter fails to say. It asserts that God has sent the Church into the world and this, of course, is true. But at the same time it presents a very subtle call for dedication to the Social Gospel and at one point very clearly limits the work of the Lord in His world in the following:

"We can affirm the Lord is at work in the world in many events and movements, especially these: the liberation of people by the Gospel and the advancement of justice, compassion and peace."

We meet in this chapter a definite subtlety in language which we previously noted in connection with the attempt to deal with the doctrine of creation. The concept of social reform and possibly of revolution is featured and the tone of this chapter is very definitely humanistic. There is a very definite call for the Church to enter into secular reforms and to allow secular humanists to determine what those reforms should be and how they should be achieved. This chapter would force the Presbyterian Church U S to surrender the heritage which it received from Thornwell, Dabney and Palmer in their emphasis on the spirituality of the Church. This is the heritage which made the Southern Presbyterian Church a beacon light in evangelical preaching and the defense of the Gospel throughout the greater part of the first one hundred years of its history.

Acceptance of Chapter Eight would demand that Southern Presbyterians abandon their spiritual heritage and allow the church to become a part of the radical and revolutionary protest which has brought this nation to the verge of destruction.

That this is the case becomes very evident in Section Five of Chapter Eight for this makes pacifism a part of its creedal statement. It stops short of condemning all war, and leaves the door open for engaging in what might well be called just wars, but there is no doubt of the direction which the framers have in mind for the Church in this section. This direction is a far cry from the Biblical view that war is the rightful activity of a ruler who must defend his people from external aggression.

CHAPTER NINE--THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Once again we meet in Chapter Nine, which deals with the Christian life, the deceptive use of language which at places is sufficiently Biblical to disarm the casual reader and lull his suspicions. But there lurks beneath this resort to Biblical phraseology a basic humanism. This basic humanism becomes apparent in the brief statement on the role of the law in the Christian life. The justification for law is based almost entirely upon the Christian's need for discipline. Now we admit that this is true, but this is not the reason that God gave the law. The law is the very expression of the character of God, of His holiness, His goodness and His justice. This section of the Declaration of Faith makes no mention of the law in this context. The change in emphasis in regard to the nature and necessity of the law becomes very apparent when we contrast it with the twenty-first Chapter in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The magnificence of the declarations of the Westminster Confession of Faith has completely disappeared in these hazy affirmations of Chapter Nine.

The rest of this chapter deals with topics, for the most part, which are not discussed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and certainly three of them; namely, Sections 3, 4, and 5 have absolutely no place in a Confession of Faith. Section Five which declares that we are to relish and pursue truth would be acceptable to many humanists and presents a view of truth which is a far cry from that which is everywhere present in the Scriptures. In the new Declaration of Faith the real emphasis is on the quest for truth rather than on Jesus Christ who IS the Way, the Truth and the Life.

CHAPTER TEN--THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

This chapter presents a watered-down eschatology and presents the Christian's hope in such a way that those who seek to understand the future will have very little hope and less understanding. This eschatology is delightfully vague and falls far short of the Biblical affirmations of the resurrection of the body as we find it so gloriously portrayed in I Corinthians, 15.

In Section Two in which believers are supposed to hope for a new world and a new humanity there is a thinly concealed universalism. The doctrine of the last judgement has been almost entirely removed.

Here again we are brought face to face with a thinly concealed humanism which centers in a social gospel. This chapter presents no catastrophic return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power, glory or judgement. Actually, instead in its concluding statements it invites Christians to a kind of frustrating pessimism when it declares that we know we cannot bring in God's Kingdom but hope plunges us into the struggle for victories over evil that are possible now. This is true even though the last two phrases in the Confession declare that a new world and a new humanity are surely coming. But this Declaration of Faith is strongly silent on any details concerning the new world or the new humanity.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is much more that can and should be said in this analysis of the proposed Declaration of Faith. In the first place it should be noted that nearly all of the distinctive doctrines of historic Presbyterianism are ignored or undermined with varying degrees of subtlety. This becomes apparent in every chapter and for this reason by no stretch of the imagination can the proposed Declaration of Faith be regarded as a restatement of the Westminster Confession of Faith in language which is more relevant to the 20th century mind. It is, on the other hand, a carefully designed repudiation of Presbyterian doctrine. There is no chapter dealing with God's eternal decrees, no chapter on the providence of God, no real treatment on the fall, or the nature of sin and its punishment. There is no chapter which deals with total depravity, effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, saving faith, repentance, good works, the perseverance of the saints and of the assurance of grace and salvation. What treatment the

proposed Confession of Faith gives to Christian liberty and liberty of conscience is a gross caricature of the Biblical position. Likewise, it is strangely silent on the need for worship and the Sabbath Day. In spite of the obvious existentialist overtones in this document, it fails miserably to present a view of the Church and of the communion of the saints which even faintly resembles either the Scriptures or the Westminster Confession of Faith. The document very carefully omits any listing of the sixty-six books on the Bible and carefully refrains from ascribing to them any kind of inspiration which serves as a foundation for believing in their infallibility and unique authority.

This proposed Declaration of Faith can only be regarded as a significant retreat from the theology of the Reformers and from that great group of Biblical scholars who in their devotion to the Lord of the Scriptures have provided the Presbyterians of the Old and New world with a glorious theological, religious and ecclesiastical heritage which has withstood the attacks of its many critics over the past four centuries. We would venture to say that this new Confession will be spared such attacks from unbelievers in the future for one reason: it is not worth attacking. It is so vapid and colorless, so unbiblical and anti-intellectual that neither scholars within the Church, or unbelievers without the Church, would feel any compulsion to rise to the occasion of a counter-attack. This Declaration of Faith reveals the complete theological bankruptcy and anti-intellectualism of the theological liberalism. IT IS A CONFESSION OF UNBELIEF.

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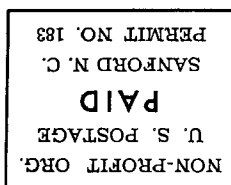
REPORT FROM CP HEADQUARTERS

The response to Bulletin No. 31 has been most gratifying. Although some negative remarks have been received, we are happy to report that they have been few. The encouraging replies and the generous contributions which undergird our program have far outnumbered the negative reactions.

The negative responses have been general in content; like "you are divisive; you are trying to tear my beloved Church apart; you are negative." Those who have pointed to our "negativism" have given us no Scripturally based criticism. This we would welcome. It appears from many negative remarks that someone is parroting that which someone has told them. We believe that every Christian should be a good Berean and search the Scriptures to see if those things they have been told are true.

We would ask those who say we are trying to destroy their beloved PCUS to stop and think for just one moment. The Presbyterian Church U. S. is planning to merge with the United Presbyterian Church USA. Do they not realize that when that merger is completed there will not be any PCUS? The UPUSA has a little less than three million members and losing members each year. The PCUS

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has a little less than nine hundred thousand members and losing members each year. Who will dominate the merged denomination?

Also, both Northern and Southern churches are committed to going into the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU). We do not believe that the world-wide apostate church of the last days could have a better chance of coming into being. When the COCU merger is completed, there will be no Northern or Southern Presbyterian Church.

To be sure all members of both denominations are aware that these merger plans have been made and studied for years. In addition to the New proposed Confession of Faith, which, if adopted, will make the PCUS a church with no definite confession--the "umbrella principle."

With further reference to the critical responses we have received from our bulletins, **NO ONE HAS ACCUSED US OF NOT TELLING THE TRUTH.** The cliché, "tell it like it is" seems to be popular now-a-days, but there are few people who want to be told "like it is" if it is contrary to what they want to hear.

Probably those who parrot the opinions of others are guilty of swallowing the "quoted out of context" alibi. Unless one knows the whole story and is familiar with all of the ramifications, this excuse is not clear. It is confusing and is calculated to be such in order to close the question.

We cannot afford to take a Pollyanna attitude or stick our heads in the sand like the ostrich when it comes to the integrity of God's Word.

We do not intend to be unloving toward those who are sincere in their belief even though we believe them to be in error. We pray that our Lord will grant them the grace to see the true light. We do believe that we will be held res-

ponsible for our neglect of the Scriptures. Do not be carried about by every wind of doctrine: search the Scriptures daily.

As for our being negative, if we are to reject all so-called negative pronouncements, we would have to take most of the writings of the Prophets out of our Bibles.

If there was nothing wrong with the directions that our PCUS Church is following in its teachings, the Concerned Presbyterians, Inc., would have no reason for staying in business. We could joyfully fold our operations and go fishing.

Granted, we do not seem to be able to change the direction of our church, but we can keep on trying. If it is our Lord's will to grant our prayers for a revival, it will be because He knows it will be best and according to His will. We feel that He has called us, as well as all Christians, to be "Watchmen in Israel". Our responsibility is to tell the events of "the night". The hearing and the doing will be His.

The change in direction from the human standpoint is for the grass roots membership of the PCUS to know the situation and demand a change. The good Ministers who are faithful to their ordination vows will have to play a large part in any change that takes place. They will have to ignore the intimidation of liberal leaders and give their loyalty to the Lord.

We pray that those leaders who are wrong but sincerely believe that they are doing His will, shall by His grace be shown the light. We pray that our Lord will deal with those who are willfully wrong, if there be such, with mercy.

We covet your prayers for us that we will be guided by His Holy Spirit to do His will.