

CONTACT

PRESBYTERIAN
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Ken Smartt looks ahead to . . .

The 112th General Assembly

What will be coming up at the General Assembly this Summer at Montreat? Are there going to be any momentous decisions made? What are the most important matters to face this assembly?

Let's begin to answer those questions by saying that most people are saying that this assembly is going to be a "quiet one." It is anticipated that there will be nothing more than progress reports from the committees working on a plan of union and a new confession, and every ostensible effort seems to be aimed for "reconciliation."

But this assembly could be a "sleeper." In past years it was the assemblies that were supposed to be the "quiet ones" that resulted in the passage of some of the most subtle and dangerous changes ever proposed to our Book of Church Order. (For instance: union presbyteries approved as an amendment to the Book of Church Order, requiring only a majority vote of the presbyteries.) So one needs to watch this assembly with an eye to catch the unusual or the unexpected. Areas in which these things might happen are: resolutions to increase the defacto union process with the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.; an overture or resolution speeding up the timetable for the restructuring of synods and presbyteries; or a motion or resolution to delay the first vote on the plan of union until sometime later than 1973.

All of these actions would be related. The plan of union is not accomplishing what had been hoped for it. Its goal was to bring about reunion with the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., but what it has succeeded in doing is to bring about deeper division in the P.C.U.S.. This deeper opposition to union has only been pacified by the inclusion of an escape clause which promises that no congregation is going to be "dragged kicking and screaming" into a denomination with which it wants to have no part. But liberal leadership in our denomination is now saying privately, "Why push the plan of union when defacto union is going so well at the level of boards and agencies, and also union presbyteries and congregations?" (Illegal though it is, defacto union also exists now in at least one synod.) Liberal leadership is willing to be patient until this kind of union is complete without ever having to fight a major battle through the presbyteries. So watch out for resolutions, motions, proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order, and the like that will hasten or implement defacto union, or will bring

about the restructuring of the synods (and changing the number of presbyteries) before the vote on union takes place.

A report that will rock this year's assembly will be the report proposing the restructure of the boards and agencies of the church. This report will make recommendations so sweeping that commissioners will have their breath taken away. It proposes that the program of the General Assembly be put in the hands of a General Executive Board (replacing the boards and agencies) made up of approximately 70 members elected by the General Assembly, 42 of which would be nominated by the synods, 20 by the assembly at large, and the rest serving by virtue of the office they hold. Opposition to this report will probably not reflect liberal-conservative lines. Privately, some of the strongest opposition is being expressed within the boards and agencies themselves.

The committee working on a new confession of faith plans to make a progress report only and then issue a study draft of its text later in the Summer in all probability. This will be a brilliant tactical move, since it will amount to heating the kettle slowly (nine months of study) rather than dropping the assembly into a boiling pot (the effect of introducing the text of a new confession of faith to a meeting of the general assembly).

The election of the moderator always draws a great deal of interest, and many people say they can predict what the rest of the assembly will do by judging the way the vote goes for that office. This year it is anticipated that the three major candidates for the office will be Dr. L. Nelson Bell, one of the church's best known laymen, a former missionary to China and founder of the Presbyterian Journal; Dr. David Stitt, the former President of Austin Seminary, and Dr. Joe Norton, a less known layman, a physician from Little Rock, Arkansas. Dr. Norton is being strongly supported by the liberal wing of the church, while it is anticipated that Dr. Bell will get the solid backing of the conservatives. In between them is a broad middle or moderate bloc, some leaning in a conservative direction, others in a liberal one. Dr. Stitt is expected to get most of his votes from this group, but these lines are not drawn hard and fast and Dr. Bell will probably win many of these votes also. One thing is certain — the man who is the first to receive a majority of the votes cast will be the next moderator.

The theme song of this assembly will be 'reconciliation' and it will be the sincere search for many of the older and more mature leaders, but there will be many young ministers at this assembly for their first time. For these it will be the first op-

portunity to express radical new ideas that they have just been taught in our colleges and seminaries. These men lack the maturity and judgment of the older men and feel they must change the world according to their radical schemes now, today, this minute. Tragically, they are usually so out of touch with the people who sit in the pew that there is no correlation between what they might succeed in getting the General Assembly to do and what is the conviction of "folks back home." This is where the division in the church has come from, and there may be even greater division this Summer at Montreal. If this group finds out that it can control the vote, then watch out!

A Session speaks out . . .

On Reconciliation in the Denomination

We believe that our basic problems in the denomination . . . stem from theological differences. We are a denomination without a functioning creed. All ruling and teaching elders . . . have taken a solemn vow before God that the Westminster standards contain "the system of doctrine taught in Scripture . . ." It seems obvious to us that these vows are being taken very lightly. A vague, subjective concept sometimes called "our understanding of the Reformed tradition" has been substituted for an honest creedal affirmation. Reformed theology has been reduced to a principle of "openness to change." It is openly denied even that there is a "system of doctrine taught in Scripture." Our seminaries, publications, and Christian education materials openly contradict the standards. Those of us who still hold to the Westminster theology are actually ridiculed for doing so.

Our objection is not only to what is said, but also to what is left **unsaid**. Much of the theological content of our publications is vague and nebulous.

Before reconciliation can take place, these theological issues must be openly discussed.

Theological differences are often denied or pushed aside. Many in places of authority try to make it appear that our "problem" is that we are segregationists or traditionalists who just don't want to change anything; that we are all old and irresponsible; that we have divorced faith from life. The assertions are simply not true.

We are convinced that if there is to be unity, it must be a theological unity. We are derisively called "congregationalists" but it is precisely because we are Presbyterians that we cannot agree to the current "umbrella" theory of allowing a wide range of theologies.

We see Presbyterianism in terms of a theology, whereas the majority in our denomination seem to see Presbyterianism in terms of a program.

Presbyterian Procedure

When there is a conflict between **constitutional** loyalty and **institutional** loyalty, which we feel is often the case, we will first be constitutionally loyal.

Our primary allegiance is to Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and then the Westminster Standards. Our primary allegiance can never be to an organization, a program, or the actions of a church court.

. . . we will not worship a denominational program. Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, not to an institution. If loyalty means the unquestioning acceptance of all the denomination's program, then we will have to be considered disloyal. But we sincerely believe that this kind of "absolute and blind obedience" is not required by the Scriptures or our standards.

We are often urged to "work through the channels" and are accused of "circumventing the channels" in our actions. We would answer that the denominational "channels" are not open to us. Our denomination expresses great concern for "disenfranchised minorities" . . . and rightly so. But it fails to show the same concern for another "minority" — the evangelicals among its own membership.

This "minority" is not represented on any board or agency of the Church, on any seminary faculty in our denomination, or among the authors of our official curriculum. The excuses which are made for this lack of representation are a "cop-out."

Yet we are called "disloyal" when we question any practices of our denominations institutions. It often seems to us that these institutions are considered above criticism. When we raise questions we are told that we are questioning the motives and integrity of men in authority. The terms "love" and reconciliation" are often simply a put-down which means "do things **our** way; be open to the changes **we** want."

We firmly believe that for reconciliation to take place there must be some basic agreement on just what "Presbyterian procedure" really is. At the present we are hopelessly divided over this question. It seems especially ironic to us that some of those who are most insistent on Presbyterian government are ready to throw out Presbyterian government altogether in COCU.

Evangelism and Social Action

The relationship between individual salvation and social action is another broad question in which we feel our position is misunderstood and misrepresented. We are criticized for denying the social dimension of the Gospel and for keeping faith unrelated to life. We are constantly reminded that it is not either/or Word and deed, but both/and; it is not either/or evangelism and social action, but both and. With that principle we agree completely. But we think the deeper and more important question is, What **kind** of word and what **kind** of deed? What is evangelism, and what is legitimate Christian social action?

The basic question is over the true nature of the Gospel itself. What "word" are we going to proclaim? We agree that it must be both/and — but we search the material produced by our denomination and we do not find both/and. We find only one side, and that is a particular brand of social action. **Show** us where the emphasis is in our publications on personal evangelism. We have not seen it.

We simple are not convinced that our denomination believes in individual personal salvation. It is not evidenced in what our denomination says and does and publishes.

The second half of the dilemma is that there is a basic disagreement over what **kind** of a deed must be done. No true Christian can deny that the Gospel applies to life. We readily acknowledge that this fact has been a blind spot for many evangelicals (but not all) . . . A real awakening is taking place among evangelicals in this area. . .

We are not against the application of the Gospel to contemporary life, but we do not **equate** the Gospel with social action. There is a great difference between the concept that the Gospel **has** social application and the concept that the Gospel **is** social application. We find no Scriptural mandate for the church to enter the political arena in an attempt to change the structures of society. . .

Conclusion

. . . we are not the schismatics we are often pictured to be. We are men who hold our convictions in sincerity, whose consciences are bound by the Word of God. We are men of loyalty — loyalty to the Scriptures and loyalty to the constitution of the denomination. Here we stand. We can do no other. God help us.

—These excerpts were taken from a communication to the Council of Louisiana Presbytery by the Session of the Jackson Street Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Louisiana.

The following Overture, which underscores the true, theological issue which is dividing our church, was approved by Augusta-Macon Presbytery, 42-37:

An Overture on the Holy Scripture

We respectfully overture the Presbytery of Augusta-Macon to overture the General Assembly as follows:

1. That the General Assembly reaffirm that Chapter I of the Confession of Faith on the Holy Scripture along with the parallel sections of the Shorter and Larger Catechisms do indeed teach the plenary verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture and call us to be in obedience to the Old and New Testaments as "The Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

2. That the General Assembly, reaffirm that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is Scripture itself"; and that the Scriptures, being self-attesting, are not subject to the criticism or preconceptions of unregenerate man, nor should they be interpreted to suit the situations and fancies of man.

3. That the General Assembly affirm that, not only are the Acts of God inspired, but that the very words that record and interpret these acts are in-

spired of God; and that the Bible is the verbalized communication of God to men (the Word of God written); and that the Assembly, therefore, reject as inadequate, the so-called "Witness and Instrument" theory of Scripture.

4. That the Assembly recognize that the Church can only be unified under the Doctrine of Scripture declared in the Westminster Standards, as we have taken our vows under these Standards; and that all Assembly boards, agencies, programs, literature and personnel shall be only those that willingly accept and follow the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture.
December 19, 1971.

The Session, First Presbyterian Church, Macon, Georgia.

"We have been sold out . . ."

Dis-Union in a Union Presbytery

I could write you a book on why the union presbytery has been very disappointing to me. Last year the UPUSA churches **decreased** their benevolence giving \$17,274.00, while the PCUS churches **increased** their benevolence giving \$26,114.00. The presbytery got its share, the Synod got its share, then the rest was split 75½% to the UPUSA Church and 24½% to PCUS!

To me we have been sold out.

Out of ten delegates to the two General Assemblies, nine were UPUSA delegates and only **one** was a PCUS man. We elected four delegates to the UPUSA General Assembly and six delegates to the PCUS Assembly. Out of five ministers **not even one** was a PCUS man. Of five ruling elders, only one was from a PCUS church. To me, this is not fair to the PCUS members in this presbytery.

Are we unequally yoked together? There are 90 ministers and 78 churches in the UPUSA section of presbytery, and 40 ministers and 36 churches in the PCUS section. But what has been the proportion of money that we have received? Let me give you the following figures:

	UPUSA	PCUS
1970 per capita total giving	\$114.68	\$141.76
1970 per capita benevolences	21.67	22.54
1971 per capita total giving	113.97	151.44
1971 per capita benevolences	21.31	25.59

There was a substantial increase in the giving of this union presbytery, but where did the increase come from? Under the present system of distribution of funds is the PCUS getting its fair share?

—Rev. Hugh Sanders

Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which is outside the will of God.

The Devil is willing to have a person confess Christianity, as long as he doesn't practice it.

FAITH AND PURPOSE
of
THE STEERING COMMITTEE
for
A CONTINUING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Scripture

We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and that the entire sixty-six books of the Bible were verbally inspired by God (Confession of Faith, Chapter 1).

Interpretation of Scripture

We believe that "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is Scripture itself" (C.O.F. 1:9). The Scriptures being self-attesting are not subject to the preconceptions or criticisms of man, nor should they be interpreted to suit the situations or fancies of man. The Supreme Judge of the controversies, opinions, doctrines and private spirits "can be no other than The Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture". (C.O.F., 1:10).

Reformed Faith

We believe and accept the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, and that these standards are the most acceptable expression of the Reformed Faith.

Mission of the Church

We believe "The functions (mission) of the Church are to proclaim, to administer and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in Scripture". (Book of Church Order, 1-3).

Church Power

We believe it is not given to individuals, boards, agencies, or judicatories to legislate taxes, programs, rules, inquiries, or demands upon members of the Courts or Churches. Christ is "the only lawgiver in Zion" (B.C.O., Preface). "The Power which Christ has given His Church is wholly moral and spiritual" (B.C.O., 1-2) and "the exercise of church power has divine sanction only when in conformity with The Word". (B.C.O., 1-3). Church officers ought to be in subjection to their brethren in the Lord [B.C.O., 27-6 (5) and 29-3 (6)] when such brethren are truly "in the Lord" through absolute conformity with the Word.

Church Union

We believe the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. may lawfully unite only with such "other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of this church" [B.C.O., 18-6 (17)]. Therefore the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. could not be constitutionally united with the United Presbyterian Church USA and the Church of Christ Uniting because of their doctrinal inclusiveness.

Apostasy

We believe that any Christian individual, institution, board, agency or judicatory that rejects the authority of Christ as He speaks in His Word is apostate from Him and in need of repentance. We believe that any minister, member or organization of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. who rejects the infallibility of Scripture and the Constitution of this Church is apostate from the Church (B.C.O. 27-6) and in need of repentance. We believe that many institutions, boards, and agencies of the Church are apostate and we see no significant sign of repentance and revival among them.

Reconciliation

Recognizing that even Christian brethren differ in degree upon various aspects of doctrine and polity, we would be reconciled in love to all Christians who share with us one faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. We would be reconciled in love to all persons who receive the Bible as the Word of God written and who submit obediently to the sole authority of Scripture. We would be reconciled in love to all those who purpose with us to reform the Church as far as possible toward doctrinal purity, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We would be neighbors and friends to all men, calling them to be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ.

Continuing Church

Under Christ, our Saviour and Great Head of the Church, it is our purpose to continue a Presbyterian Church faithful to Scripture and the Reformed faith and obedient to His Great Commission. We pray Him to lead us in this purpose.

Leon and Marvin mix it up . . .

The Great Umbrella Fracas

Officer Mulvaney stepped between the two scuffling youngsters, grabbed their collars and pulled them apart. "All right, now," he said menacingly, "what's the big fuss?"

The dark-haired boy clutched in his right hand looked up with glistening red face, "He tore up my umbrella!"

"Did not!" the other blurted, "it's not yours!"

Mulvaney surveyed the crumpled remains of what had been a large black umbrella which now lay twisted between the boys' bare feet. "Well, and it seems that **someone** has torn it up." He looked at the first youth, "And what might your name be, laddie?"

The boy pouted at the ground. "Leon Liberal," he muttered.

"And your's?" Mulvaney looked hard at the tow-headed youth in his left hand.

"Marvin Moderate . . . but I didn't do it!" He tried to twist from the policeman's grip. The officer grasped him more tightly, fought an impulse to grin, "Oh? Well, just who owned this umbrella?"

Each of the boys simultaneously pointed toward the other and said, "He did!"

The grin broke through. "All right, let us just sit over here and get this straightened out." He led them to a bench, sat them down and stood before them with his hands on his hips. "Now, tell me the truth," he said.

Marvin Moderate squirmed a bit, "It really wasn't ours—not either of us's . . ." He paused, glared at his erstwhile friend, "but he wouldn't let me hold it, he . . .!"

"Hold on, hold on," Mulvaney raised a pacifying hand, "if it did not belong to either of you, just whose was it? And how did you two pups get hold of it?"

Little Leon Liberal spoke up, "Awww, it belonged to Charlie Conservative." He cast his eyes downward, traced patterns in the dust with a big toe.

"Well?" Mulvaney urged him on.

"And we wanted under the umbrella when it rained."

Marvin chimed in, "Yeah, and he let us walk with him, but . . ."

"But what . . .?" Mulvaney sighed. "So it belonged to Charlie, he let you walk under it with him, and now you have it and have torn it up. I don't follow you."

"Wuhll . . ." Leon mumbled, "he wanted to go over on the east side . . ."

"And we wanted to come over here on the west side," Marvin said.

"And you took away his umbrella?" Mulvaney gaped. "You mean you two rascals stole it from him?"

They both stared at the ground, their lower lips protruding sullenly. "It was two against one," Leon muttered, "and besides, he was going the wrong way!"

Mulvaney shook his head. "You are quite a pair. The umbrella was his. He kindly let you under it. You pretended to be going his way, then forced the umbrella from him, left him in the rain, and ran off." He shrugged, lifted his hands to the skies, "Some pair, I'm thinkin' . . ." Abruptly he glared at them, "And now the thieves have fallen out. Is that it?"

"But Leon won't let me hold it!" Marvin began to cry. He twisted grimy fists into his eyes. "He said we could share it, but now he wants it all for himself!"

"So you fought over it," Mulvaney said. He looked up as a small figure under a huge umbrella rounded the corner and came toward them. "Well, will you look at this!"

It was Charlie Conservative. His umbrella was similar to the other, but much larger and nicer.

He smiled as he walked past, stepping over the remains of his former possession. "Hi fellas," he said.

They only glared.

Keeping Posted

● Searching for a good youth conference? Consider the event sponsored by the Reformed Youth Movement, Inc., to be held at King College, Bristol, Tennessee, July 24-29. Dr. O. Palmer Robertson, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary will speak, and class topics are: The Principles of the Reformed Faith, Sanctification, and the Christian and Evolution. Write the Rev. Wayne Herring, Box 1011, Rock Hill, S. C. 29730, for further information.

● Another great youth conference is sponsored by the Seminole Presbyterian Church, Tampa, Florida, and is scheduled for July. Write the Rev. Paul Kooistra, 6101 N. Habana St., Tampa, Fla. 33614. Dr. Norman Harper is the guest speaker.

● And, of course, there's always the fine Pensacola Youth Crusade, sponsored by the McIlwain Church in that city. Write the Rev. Don Dunkerley, 1220 E. Blount St., Pensacola, Fla. 32503. The speaker for the week is the Rev. John Oliver.

● Would you believe that Miss Marjorie Shuman, former nun, and one of the "Harrisburg Seven" who was indicted for conspiracy and co-conspiracy to destroy Selective Service files and to bomb and kidnap, was the featured speaker at a meeting at the **Westminster House**, the **Presbyterian** college student center at Winthrop College? Strangely, no one seems to know just how Miss Shuman was invited, who is responsible, whom she represented . . .

● STOP LOOKing, and LISTEN to tapes of PCU rallies! Just let us know when you want to play a tape for your officers, congregation, etc., etc., and we'll loan them to you free of charge.

Closet Call

"And when thou prayest, enter into thy closet . . ."

—Matthew 6:6

Pray for God's blessings upon the meetings of the Steering Committee, May 5-6.

Paul Settle has been asked to deliver the retiring Moderator's Sermon at Tuscaloosa Presbytery, May 9.

Keep the 112th General Assembly before the Lord. It convenes June 11 in Montreat.

Praise God for excellent rallies throughout Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi in April. Ken Keyes, Paul Settle, James Baird, and Morton Smith addressed more than 1500 persons in seven meetings.

And, give thanks for the success of the Christian Education Conference (April 20-22), attended by about 200 enthusiastic persons from nine States.

Remember to pray for the P. E. F. evangelists, and the increasing ministry of "The Presbyterian Journal."

"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth."

—Psalm 145:18

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Letters

It was an encouraging experience indeed to attend the Presbyterian Churchmen United rally. I had come expecting only a small number to be present. What a pleasant surprise to find a banquet room filled with ministers and laymen concerned about what is happening in the church.

Never have I heard the basic issues so clearly presented. I hope that many rallies such as this can be arranged across our church.

— Georgia

Thank you for a wonderful Christian Education Conference! I feel like I got a college education in two days.

— Louisiana

I feel the Conference was most successful. It made me again aware of the great heritage we share in the Reformed tradition . . .

— New Jersey

The Way the Lord Reconciles

“. . . the Lord has not promised His mercy save in the communion of saints. Therefore, our first entrance into the Church and the kingdom of God is by forgiveness of sins, without which we have no covenant nor union with God. For thus He speaks by the Prophet, 'In that day will I make a covenant for them . . . and I will break the bow, and the sword . . . And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies' (Hosea 2:18-19). We see in what way the Lord reconciles us to Himself by His mercy. So in another passage . . . 'I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me' (Jer. 33:8). Wherefore . . . we have no admission into the family of God, unless by His goodness our impurities are previously washed away." J. Calvin —Institutes, IV—1-20.

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