

Distinctives of the Reformed Faith

For a great many people even in the various Presbyterian and Reformed churches there is little difference between a generally evangelical position and the Reformed faith. And yet this lack of discrimination is true neither to history nor to the Scriptures.



Particularly now when the very real possibility exists of a continuing Presbyterian Church "loyal to Scripture and the Reformed faith," it is worth while to consider just what that Reformed faith is, and wherein it distinguishes itself from broad evangelicalism. Obviously, in an article

of this sort one cannot enter into every detail of the Reformed position, but a few points ought to be very clearly underscored.

1. Piety

First of all, the Reformed faith has always produced a distinctive and pre-eminently biblical form of piety. I do not, of course, suggest that all those who are not Reformed must be said on that account to be something other than pious and devout Christians. But I do say that there is a Reformed piety flowing forth from the Reformed faith, which in spirit and expression is identifiable as such.

It is a piety that centers upon the home and the family: that should be evident from the fact that the doctrine of the Covenant plays so important a part in our spiritual heritage. Hence, family worship has from the beginning been regarded as vital by Reformed Christians. Perhaps a large part of our difficulty today, our ignorance of spiritual things, our want of unity and harmony in family relationships, our alienated and indifferent children and young people, may be traced to negligence at this point. Evangelicals insist upon the value and importance of individual worship and private devotions. But it has been Reformed Christianity that has accented the indispensableness of worship as a family: prayer, the reading of Scripture, song, within the context of the home.

Then the Psalms have also been formative for the devotional life of Reformed Christians. At the Reformation the congregation, previously excluded from participation in worship, was taught to sing; and what it was taught to sing was the Psalter. Indeed, it was not until relatively recently that hymns ("human hymns," as they were called) were intro-

duced into the worship of God in Reformed churches. And what was true of the congregation was true also of the home, where, as part of family worship in the morning and at night, and sometimes at mid-day as well, the singing of Psalms was included, with the important result that the expression people gave to their faith was molded by the Scriptures, above all by the praise book of the Scriptures, the Psalms. One need not defend here the position that Psalms only are to be sung in the worship of God (as our fathers did) to insist that no excuse whatever may be found for the exclusion of the Psalms—the fountain of the church's praise and its inspiration — which is so widespread among us at the present time.

Further still, Reformed piety has grown up from the root of a clear apprehension of the majesty and greatness of God. No Reformed Christian can permit himself careless posture in prayer, or the use of language other than suited to the Being of the One to whom prayer is offered. Whether one stands or sits or kneels in prayer, it is always with awe and reverence that he enters into the presence of God; and the manner in which this takes place, the words which pass through one's lips, will never be thoughtless or excessively familiar. A Reformed believer cannot forget that his heavenly Father is just that: his **heavenly** Father, the holy and just and gracious God of heaven and earth, the Creator and Lord of all. This springs from the truth of the sovereignty of God, not only over all things generally, but in particular in the matter of our salvation. We have no claim on God, no right to approach him in ourselves, nothing by way of righteousness or goodness to offer him that may win his favor or incline him to us, but we go to him only for the sake of the merits and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, put down to our account in the fulfillment of his eternal purpose.

Reformed piety also exults in the Lordship and Kingship of Christ, over the individual and family, as well as over the church and the world. It knows no separation between his Saviourhood and Lordship, as though it were possible to know him as the one without the other. He is either both Saviour and Lord, or he is neither Saviour nor Lord. The Scriptures are very plain on this point: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth **Jesus as Lord**, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. 10:9, ASV) The implications of this truth are very wide, but it will be seen at once how directly Christ's Lordship bears upon the character of the Christian life as obedience to him. In the words of our Shorter Catechism: "Christ executeth the office of king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies." (26)

— John Richard de Witt

Biblical Radicalism

When the "New Barbarians" of theological and ecclesiastical Liberalism are not only hammering on the gates of the Presbyterian Church in the United



"There's no time to examine our tactics!"

Humbly, yet urgently, I disagree! The principles which bind us together in the fellowship of those preparing for a continuing Presbyterian Church demand a radical obedience and submission by each of us to the Bible. "Faithful to Scripture and the Reformed Faith and obedient to the Great Commission," is not merely a motto, but a precise definition of the principles for which we should be completely willing to suffer, if need be the loss of all things. We must guard not only our left flank against the onslaughts of the Liberals, but also our right flank against the dangers of an inclusive evangelicalism which is too shallow to be biblical and too broad to be Reformed. It is to these dangers on our right flank that I address our attention.

The most urgent need of this hour is Biblical radicalism! While we may properly describe the liberals whom we oppose in the Church as radicals because they favor revolutionary changes, another dictionary definition of the "radical," is based on its Latin derivation, **radix**, meaning "root." We must "go to the root or source" of our faith, the infallible Word of God. Thus while we abhor radicals who foment rebellion against morality and revolution against our Biblical heritage we, ourselves are radically obedient to the Bible. Here, like Martin Luther, we stand. Our consciences are held captive to the Word of God.

Biblical radicalism is the only consistent position to hold in these days as we do battle with the moral and theological revolutionists who seek to take over our churches. I offer you an ancient battle cry from the prophet Isaiah uttered in a time very like our own. The people of Israel were deliberately turning their backs on God and His will to find their security in confederacies with God's enemies and in their pagan deities. God's word to Isaiah was: "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in

them." (Isaiah 8:20) Christ's Church, then, is established and governed by the Word of God. Here is the ultimate weapon with which we defend ourselves on the right and on the left. "To the Law and to the Testimony," is our battle cry. We stand here or we shall most certainly fall!

Since the issues we face from the Liberal wing of the Church are so notorious that all are aware of them, at least in some measure, I direct your attention to **four dangers** facing us from the opposite direction. These dangers threaten to undermine our faithfulness to Scripture and the Reformed Faith. These dangers are testing and tempting each of us and all of us collectively. I am certain that the devil cares not at all whether we compromise with our enemies on the left, the Liberal establishment, or with those on our right, just so long as we shift our ground off the foundation of Scripture. Consider then, these four dangers confronting every Evangelical today.

I. **Materialism** is a special danger today. Not only is there the danger we have always faced of becoming slaves to statistics (numbers, nickels, and noise), that is measuring "success" just in terms of annual statistical increases, but we are now confronted with the real possibility of losing our church property or our retirement benefits if we stand uncompromisingly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. I ask you, which is more precious to church officers and members: the pure preaching of the Word of God or their church building? The day may come when they must decide. Which is more important to ministers: faithfulness to their ordination vows, or their retirement programs and their careers? The day is almost upon us when they may have to take one or the other. Dr. John R. W. Stott draws the issue clearly when he writes,

"Supposing we raised our standards and stopped our compromises. Supposing we proclaimed our message and tightened our discipline with love but without fear? I will tell you the result: the Church would suffer. There would be an outcry. We should be called puritanical, Victorian, old-fashioned, unpractical, rigid. Indeed, every imaginable derogatory epithet would be called into the service of the unbelieving world, and the Church would again find itself where it belongs — outside the gate, and in the wilderness!"

II. An **issue-oriented** ministry threatens to distort our witness as Conservatives. We are sometimes called "Fundamentalists" for a reason. In the twentieth century, the Liberals have denied one great Scripture truth after another and often we have met their heretical editing of the Christian faith with demands that certain fundamental doctrines be preserved and maintained. The issue for us today is not how we stand on the questions of war and peace, abortion for socio-economic reasons, ecumenism, or worship vs. celebration. The real **ISSUE** is — shall we subject ourselves to all of God's Word with its implications for every issue and all of life?

III. **Minimalism** has grown up among us as we have emphasized certain fundamental doctrines and ignored or minimized others considered as less vital.

At its worst this minimizing tendency has caused us to strip the Whole Counsel of God to five fundamentals which we have conceived as a sufficient doctrinal basis for joint evangelistic enterprises or for making accommodations with others in our denominations who hold reservations regarding certain parts of the Bible. In our feverish yearning for size and for numbers with which to impress the world and ourselves, we have often reduced the Christian faith to a pathetic residue which offends God, mutilates His Word and dooms our efforts to ultimate failure. Let us grant the principle that God has done His own editing and has given us in Scripture that which He knows is basic and necessary.

IV. **Success** has become the great American virtue. Success means bigness and must impress the world. The danger is that we Conservatives will so thirst for something which we can call success that we bend our convictions and stretch our principles to bring it about. God has more often than not used the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the mighty. We must bring priorities into radical, that is, basic, alignment with the Bible and leave the matter of success or failure to the perfect providence of the Lord of history or we shall most certainly taste the bitter fruits of eternal failure in that day when the only perfect determination of success or failure is made by Him who judges not as man judges. Of that day Jesus said,

“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

Matthew 7:21-23

— J. Gary Aitken

A Call To Prayer

Those of us who earnestly seek, for Christ’s sake, a continuing Church that will be truly biblical and Reformed, must ever remember that God’s ends are realized “not by might, nor by power,” but by the Spirit.”

The warfare is spiritual. Our efforts for a true Church are also, by necessity, efforts against error and unbelief in the existing church. Indeed, we fight against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places, against the prince of the power of the air — the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

For strength against such a foe and for devotion to God’s truth we must seek the face of the great Spirit who, by the Son is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Sovereign Lord of righteousness.

So we must pray. Prayer is the means we must use to plead for mercy and for guidance. Prayer to the God of exceeding great and precious promises is our hope. He who has promised to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus will hear us. He will not give us a stone, but bread. We shall not receive a serpent, but true nourishment. Yea, we who ask Him shall receive even of His Holy Spirit!

And that is our desire—that God the Holy Spirit will fill us and shape us after His own will. We want only to be instruments in His hands. We earnestly seek a continuing Church that will be **His** Church.

Will you pray with us to this end? Like Elijah, let us call upon God until the fire of His holy presence consumes for Himself our feeble offerings. Like Paul, let us plead truth and wisdom and love for the brethren until we all are united in Him who is the Head over all things. Like our Lord, let us yield to the Father in such sensitive obedience that His will shall be our will.

Then shall we experience “great and mighty things” which surpass our deepest longings.

Let us pray.

Keeping Posted

• In this issue, the Rev. Gary Aitken calls conservatives to a re-evaluation of priorities, and Dr. John Richard de Witt describes our Reformed heritage in terms of personal piety. Dr. de Witt’s article is the first of three parts to be published.

• A series of seven pamphlets, each treating briefly and clearly one of the critical issues dividing the denomination, is available for mailings, bulletin inserts, public distribution, etc., etc. You may order them from this office — \$1.00 per hundred — postpaid. Topics covered are: Scripture, Ordination of Women, Divorce, Church Government, Ecumenism, Abortion, Salvation. Each pamphlet contrasts the views of Radical Liberalism with Historic Presbyterianism.

• The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church has recommended the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of 1789 as the confessional documents for the continuing Church. Copies of this document may be secured from this office, or the office of the Steering Committee (Drawer 1024, Perry, Ga.) for .20c each, postpaid.

• The Steering Committee has also recommended the Book of Church Order of 1933 for consideration by the continuing Church. This study book may be ordered from this office or the Steering Committee’s office — .50c each, postpaid.

• Transylvania Presbytery (Union), in Kentucky, has adopted a resolution opposing an “Escape Clause” in the proposed Plan of Union. Opposition

(Continued on page 5)

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR A CONTINUING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

True to the Bible, the Reformed Faith and Obedient to the Great Commission

The Axes Hack Away!

The liberal axes keep hacking on our great old Presbyterian Church, U. S. (Southern). People have wondered if it could possibly survive such things as Union Presbyteries, restructured Boards and Agencies, concentration of power in the General Executive Board, union with the United Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. (Northern), the continued march towards the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU), and a proposed New Confession.

It now appears that the Church will indeed survive, and that it will, under God, flourish. This Church today may be illustrated as Job illustrated immortality: "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down that it will sprout again." So may it be with our Church. Already, out of the ashes of ecclesiastical apostasy, structures are arising in the name of Christ and to the glory of God. Old prophets look beyond the horizons and see the awakenings. Young men see visions, and accept the challenge of service to the King. Parents begin again to open their Bibles with their children. Along the byways and hedges, testimonies are made for the Savior. Gospel songs are heard again on college campuses.

Schools are being established on the educational principle of the whole world viewed under an All-Sovereign God. Teachers humble themselves under the Master Teacher of Galilee. A place has been made for the uninhibited, daily teaching of the Word of God to thousands of children and young people.

Already it is evident that there will be a rebirth of the denomination that is now being put to death. On the basis of present indications it is fair to believe that the reborn denomination will have at least these several characteristics:

FIRST — A commitment to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God written, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Other theories, old and new, when tried are found wanting. The Bible alone is the verbally inspired, God-breathed Word of Truth.

SECOND — A fresh commitment to Reformed Theology as declared in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Because truly Scriptural, this great system of doctrine is unsurpassed, ageless, and intensely challenging. A study of these Standards is more exciting than a reading of all of the modern "New" confessions.

THIRD — A re-enunciation of the true spirituality of the Church. Christ's Kingdom is not of this world. He works through His people in this world. The primary mission of His Church is not to estab-

lish states, societies, or economic orders. Though Christians as individuals and in organizations are to be obedient in bringing all social groupings, from family to the government, under God's Law-Word as far as they are able, the first mission of the Church is to win men to Christ and nurture them in Christian faith and life.

FOURTH — A renewed obedience to our Lord's Great Commission to make known to all men His saving grace. A church truly Reformed, truly evangelical, and earnestly evangelistic is greatly needed in the world. It is believed that God is already beginning to use the conservative movement in this way as individual ministers and churches are uniting even before the formal rebirth of a true church. Reformed preaching is sounding again from many pulpits. Evangelistic work is being done everywhere. Reformed theology and evangelistic zeal are not antagonists — they are true companions.

FIFTH — A faithful recognition of the true parity of the Eldership (Teaching and Ruling). There seems to be a desire in the pre-birth strugglings of the continuing Church to give due consideration to the positions of all officers whether lay or ministerial. We may even hope to return to the decentralized polity so wisely advocated by James H. Thornwell during the birth of the Southern church.

SIXTH — An openness towards all men who stand in the true Reformed tradition. Such fellowship would be developed on the firm basis of beliefs mutually accepted.

A Glance at the New Confession

I have been reading the study draft of the new Confession. Frankly, I am disappointed. The grandeur of the Westminster classic is gone. The theology (somewhat sparse) is vague because it is expressed in terms that are not defined. It is long on Sociology and short on Soteriology. It is difficult to find in it the attitude and tone of a **Confession of Faith**; rather it is more a **Pronouncement of a Social Program**. It appears to me as an effort to give creedal authority and status to a current humanism. One of my liberal friends sometimes jibes me about having a seventeenth century mentality. I would be proud to accept the description. Certainly a comparison of what the church fathers produced more than three hundred years ago, with this latest effort, only serves to enhance my respect for the stature of those who labored to give us the Westminster Confession.

C. Darby Fulton

(Continued from page 3)

to such a survival clause seems to be growing among liberals.

• Vanguard Presbytery has begun a home mission ministry in Fayetteville, Georgia. Faith Presbyterian Church was organized and chartered by the new Presbytery on December 3.

• Augusta-Macon Presbytery (Georgia) sponsored two information forums early in December, which presented speakers for the three viewpoints in the denomination in reference to the Plan of Union. In Augusta, the speakers were Hugh McClure, James Andrews, and James Patterson. In Macon, Clayton Bell, Wallace Alston, Jr., and Paul Settle debated the issues. More than 700 persons heard the discussions.

“It Seemed Good . . . To Write ”

I would like very much to obtain membership in Presbyterian Churchmen United. We pray for the rise of an organized Reformed testimony in the southern Church.

— Texas

There is no need to keep me on your mailing list. I do not intend to leave the Presbyterian Church US . . .

— Alabama

My earnest desire is that the Lord will lead the factions dividing the Church to agree to disagree peacefully, and separate and go our separate ways. No amount of coercion can force the conservatives to believe what the liberals are teaching so separation seems to be the necessary way to peace.

— Tennessee

I do not want my name associated with your outfit in any way, shape, form, or fashion.

— North Carolina

I do think that when you characterize Dr. Edingtons and my position as, ‘we do not always agree with the decision of the church courts. but in the Presbyterian Church they are the ruling bodies, and when they make a decision we should go along whether we agree or not,’ you do us an injustice. We both have repeatedly said that ‘no court of the church binds one’s conscience . . .’

— The Rev. W. Frank Harrington

(See “An Information Forum,” in the October “Contact”)

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, then I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him! Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle front besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

— Martin Luther

Over six-hundred ministers have signed . . .

The Declaration of Commitment

To the membership of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., in light of the questions and concerns being expressed in the Church as to the nature of our faith and order, we, the undersigned ministers declare our conviction:

— That the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ turns men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. By coming to faith in Him alone is there genuine reconciliation between man and God and man and man.

— That the Holy Scriptures are the infallible Word of God, and that these Scriptures commit the Church to a mission whose primary end is the salvation and nurture of souls.

— That Christian faith must bear fruit if it is to remain virile. These fruits vary from believer to believer, but common to them all are evidences of love, concern and neighborliness toward all races of men without partiality and without prejudice, especially to the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged. The man of faith views all men as neighbors and himself as debtor, for Christ’s sake.

— That, for the implementation of the above principles, in obedience to our ordination vows, we must strive to preserve a confessional Church, thoroughly Reformed and Presbyterian. Thus, our support of our opposition to any proposed union will be determined by these considerations.

— That, being fully committed by our ordination vows to the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, we must oppose all efforts to change in substance or otherwise debase our historic doctrinal commitment.

— That we are in the same context by vow committed to historic Presbyterian polity with its representative system and its parity among teaching and ruling elders. Thus, we are forced to oppose any effort to take our Church into the massive organization envisioned by COCU.

— That, should the basic theology or polity of the Church be altered or diluted, we shall be prepared to take such actions as may be necessary to fulfill the obligation imposed by our ordination vows, to maintain our Presbyterian faith.

Name _____

Position _____

Address _____

(We welcome new signers who wish to bear testimony to their Lord by standing with those who seek a truly Reformed and Presbyterian witness in our day. Complete the brief form and mail it to the P. C. U. office. Thank you!)

Closet Call

"And when thou prayest, enter into thy closet . . ." — Matthew 6:6

The Steering Committee meets in Atlanta on January 5-6. Pray for God's guidance.

Praise the Lord for His enabling and leading during the briefing sessions held this Fall in practically every presbytery.

The Committee preparing the proposed Plan of Union meets February 8, 9, 10. Pray that God, if it be His will, will direct the committee to bring the Plan for a vote this Summer and to leave in the escape clause.

Seek God's blessings on the Theological Institute sponsored by Reformed Seminary, February 5-7, in Jackson, Miss.

Conservative brethren need much prayer as they make critical decisions for the life of the continuing true Church. Hold them before the Lord in intercessory prayer.

Pray for brethren who live in cities where no truly Reformed worship is available.

"Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee . . ." — Job 22:27

Needed: Men of Prayer

We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the Gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the men, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.

What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use — men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men — men of prayer.

— E. M. Bounds

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