

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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What Should True Presbyterians Do at the 1936 General Assembly?

J. Gresham Machen

Editor's note: This essay originally appeared in The Presbyterian Guardian in mid-1936 as advice from Dr. J. Gresham Machen to "true Presbyterians" who were commissioners to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. We reprint the essay because it applies so well to today's situation in both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, whose 2007 General Assemblies will be held in June. For details of this parallel, see Paul Elliott's massively documented book, Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond.

This article is addressed to those commissioners to the 1936 General Assembly who represent the evangelical minority in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. It is not likely that they will be numerous. The Modernist-Indifferentist forces now dominating the Church have done their work well and have very effectually prevented the election of clear-sighted evangelical commissioners. But here and there a man has no doubt been allowed to slip by. There will probably be a little group of commissioners who know that all is not well with the Church and that the opponents of the Gospel and their associates are more or less in control. You who belong to that little group are asking what you ought to do during the days of this General Assembly. I am going to try to tell you to the very best of my ability, just in case I may be of any help to you at all. Whether you follow my suggestions or not, I do not think that you, at least, will object to my telling you just as briefly and plainly as possible what I think.

I. DO NOT BE DECEIVED

The whole program of the General Assembly is carefully planned in such a way as to conceal the real issues and give a false impression of faithfulness to the Word of God. I do not mean that the deceit is necessarily intentional. The men conducting the ecclesiastical machine are no doubt in many instances living in a region of thought and feeling so utterly remote from the great verities of the Christian Faith that they have no notion how completely they are diverting attention from those verities in their conduct of the Assembly. But the fact remains that the whole program, from whatever motives, is so constructed as to conceal the real condition of the Church.

1. Conference on Evangelism. One instrument of concealment is the program of the pre-Assembly Conference on Evangelism. That program is carefully planned. Its very name suggests to unwary persons that the Church is perfectly orthodox. "Evangelism" certainly has a reassuring sound. The contents of the program also often provides sops for the evangelical minority in the Church. There is nothing that Modernist ecclesiastics love quite so much as evangelical sermons that serve as the prelude to anti-evangelical action. They are such effective instruments in lulling Christian people to sleep.

2. The Lord's Supper. A second instrument of concealment is the celebration of the Lord's Supper which comes at the very beginning of the opening session. Ah, what an impression of unity and piety that celebration makes! Yet how utterly false is such an impression! Seated there at the table of the Lord are men who, in the Auburn Affirmation or otherwise, have publicly cast despite upon the blessed thing that the Supper commemorates, and are now engaged in excluding ruthlessly from the ministry young men upon whom Christ has laid his hands.

3. Prayer. A third agency of concealment is prayer. Public prayer is not a proper means of pushing measures through a deliberative body. When rightly practised it is one of the sweetest and most precious privileges of the Christian life. But when misused to shelve important issues or gain an unfair advantage over opponents in debate it is a very objectionable thing. Unfortunately it is sometimes misused in that way in the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

4. The Apostles' Creed. A fourth agency of concealment is the repetition of the Apostles' Creed. Someone has said, perhaps with a certain element of truth, that congregations begin to repeat the Apostles' Creed only after they have ceased to believe in it. Certain it is that the repetition of the creed has been practised at the General Assembly in the most misleading possible way. At the General Assembly of 1927 there was a particularly outrageous example of this device. The Assembly had decided in an administrative case, allegedly on technical grounds, to agree to the licensure of a man who would not affirm belief in the virgin birth. This had been accomplished only because the Moderator, Dr. Robert E. Speer, by a ruling which he himself was afterward obliged to admit to have been illegal, permitted the New York

commissioners to vote in a case in which they were parties. Had they not voted the result would have been reversed. A commissioner moved that the action of the Assembly should not be construed to weaken the testimony of the Church to its faith in the virgin birth (see *The Presbyterian* for June 9, 1927). Dr. Speer ruled this motion out of order as being new business, but then repeated the Apostles' Creed, or the part of it containing the mention of the virgin birth, and had the Assembly rise to express its agreement.

Such a procedure, or the mere ritualistic repetition of the creed is – be it plainly said – often little better than humbug. The question in the Church is not how many people are ready to express formal agreement with the Apostles' Creed or repeat it in ritualistic, parrot-like fashion, but how many are ready to *insist* upon the great verities that it contains when the thirteen hundred Auburn Affirmationists cast despite upon those verities or when candidates are examined before presbytery as to their qualifications for entering the ministry.

There will probably be such humbug at this Assembly, as there has been at so many other assemblies. You should not be deceived by it.

5. Singing. A fifth agency of concealment is the singing of "Blest be the tie that binds." That is a fine hymn, very sweet and precious when the love which it expresses is in the heart and not merely on the lips. But at the General Assembly, when it is dragged in at unexpected times, it often marks some particularly vicious and unbrotherly act. Loving words, especially when set to a familiar tune, are the most effective possible disguise for unloving deeds.

6. Moderatorial Bullying. A sixth agency of concealment is found in Moderatorial bullying and ridicule. Some humble commissioner, thinking in his naive ignorance that the Assembly is a deliberative body, and that one member has as much right as another, arises to speak. He is told to come to the platform.

Then ensues a contest between the Moderator and the humble commissioner. It is hardly a very sporting contest. The odds are too much on one side. The Moderator is clothed with the authority of a presiding officer. Back of him, on the platform, sits the customary company of admiring representatives of the Boards and of the rest of the ecclesiastical machine, ready to applaud or laugh at just the proper places. The humble commissioner, on the other hand, is abashed. His voice is quite untried. He is ignorant of the ropes.

Under such circumstances, what chance has the humble commissioner? Very little chance indeed. It is quite an easy thing to send him back to his seat amid jeers. The unequal contest is soon over. I pity anyone who can enjoy watching it. Bearbaiting was less cruel.

This Moderatorial weapon of ridicule was used with particular ruthlessness at the last General Assembly by Dr. Joseph A. Vance. On one occasion a commissioner came forward, apparently from a bad seat under the gallery to which he had been assigned, not by his own volition, but by the Clerk. What did the Moderator do? Did he try to equalize the disadvantages of the seating? Did he try to put the unknown commissioner at his ease? Not at all. "Here comes somebody from the catacombs," said he as the commissioner came from under the gallery.

I do not know who that commissioner was. I do not at all know whether he feels as I do about the treatment that was accorded him. But even if he does not feel so, I am obliged to stick to my

opinion. I am obliged to think that the remark of the Moderator on that occasion was typical of the whole spirit of the Assembly and of most Assemblies during the last ten years. "Thank you, Dr. So and So, for your splendid statement," says the Moderator when some prominent representative of the ecclesiastical machine has spoken. "Here comes somebody from the catacombs," says he contemptuously when some humble commissioner rises to speak.

Sometimes even Moderatorial bullying and the unchivalrous temper of the Assembly are unable to prevent a man from getting a hearing. The Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths at the 1934 Assembly, then unknown to most of the commissioners, was at first jeered in the customary way, but before the Assembly was over was listened to with respect. He *compelled* people to listen to him. Finally, at the 1935 Assembly the machine seemed to fear him so much that it deprived him of his seat. Regularly elected by his presbytery he was ousted by the Assembly without any slightest semblance of judicial process, at the instance of the Modernist party in the Presbytery of Philadelphia. I do not think that that act could possibly be surpassed for sheer lawlessness. But it was an eloquent tribute to the powers of Mr. Griffiths and his associates among the Philadelphia commissioners.

Of course the Moderator of this present Assembly, though no doubt he will represent the machine, *may* prove to be a fairer presiding officer than certain others. He *may* keep his personality out of his conduct of the Assembly, as every fair presiding officer ought to do. He *may* refrain from abusing his ecclesiastical opponents in speeches from the chair. He *may* give the humble commissioner something like a chance when he rises to speak. We hope that he will do these things. If he does, he will certainly be very different from many of the Moderators in recent years.

7. False Use of Sentiment. A seventh instrument of concealment is the false use of perfectly worthy sentiment for partisan ends.

In 1933 there was a contest regarding the Board of Foreign Missions. The Assembly's Committee on Foreign Missions brought in a majority report favoring the policy of the Board and a minority report opposing that policy. Now every year it is the custom to read the names of the missionaries who have died during the year. The Assembly rises in respect to the honored dead, and is led in prayer. It is a solemn moment.

Where do you suppose that solemn service was put in? Well, it was tagged on to the majority report from the Committee! Then, after the solemn hush of that scene, the minority report was heard! Could anything have been more utterly, unfair? The impression was inevitably made that the minority report was in some sort hostile to that honoring of the pious dead. The sacred memory of those missionaries was used to "put across" a highly partisan report whitewashing a Modernist program, which some of them might have thoroughly condemned. Unfortunately they were not there to defend themselves against that outrageous misuse of their names. There is urgent need of a reform of the Assembly's program at that point. The honor paid to departed missionaries should be completely divorced from the report of the Assembly's committee on the Boards. That is only one instance of the way in which, at the Assembly, legitimate sympathy is used to accomplish partisan ends. Very cruel and heartless measures are sometimes pushed through under cover of sympathetic tears.

8. Limitation of Debate. An eighth instrument of concealment is the limitation of debate. The Assembly is very prodigal of the commissioners' time – and, incidentally, of the Church's money.

It allows hour after hour for the presentation of reports. But there is one thing for which it has scarcely any time at all. That is the consideration of the great central question whether its agencies are or are not in accordance with the Word of God. If it considers that question at all, it is pretty sure to push it aside to the worst hours of the afternoon.

So I suppose this coming Assembly may devote some time to the question of the merger of the Boards of National Missions and of Christian Education. But I doubt whether it will allow any time at all to the incalculably more important question presented by the unfaithfulness of each of these boards. Keeping the commissioners occupied from morning till night about other things is the best possible way of diverting their attention from the doctrinal unsoundness in the life of the Church. Consideration of *methods of preaching* is a good way of avoiding attention to the far more fundamental question *what it is that is to be preached*.

II. WHAT SHOULD EVANGELICAL COMMISSIONERS DO?

In such a situation, and facing these obstacles, what should you evangelical commissioners do? I am going to try to tell you in a few words.

1. Pray. When I say you ought to pray, I do not mean bow your heads and go through the form of prayer. I do not mean that you should pray for the vague things that an unfaithful ecclesiastical machine wants you to pray for. But I mean *real* prayer. I mean the prayer in which a Christian man, in the way pointed out in God's Word, comes to God and asks him for things that are in accordance with his will. I mean more specifically the prayer which lays before God the present awful condition of the Church and asks God to give the answer. You ought to engage in such prayer during the period of the Assembly's sessions. You ought to engage in it in private. You also ought to engage in it with the little group of Christian men, sorrowing for the condition of the Church, who will no doubt meet for prayer somewhere in Syracuse during that week.

2. Read. When I say just in this particular place – after the mention of prayer – that you ought to read, I am not referring to the reading of God's Word. Doing that comes logically before prayer. But I am referring to reading things that are necessary for your information about the issues before the Church. Read the official "Blue Book." Read the official "White Book." Read all the reports presented to you for your consideration, and make up your own mind about them in the light of God's Word. Read also the present issue of *The Presbyterian Guardian*. It is only fair to read what both sides have to say.

3. Speak. If you speak before this hostile General Assembly you may be subjected to ridicule. Never mind! Your Saviour was subjected to ridicule too. If you really love him, you will not be ashamed to bear his reproach. Speak then before this hostile Assembly whenever the great issue comes up. You will not carry the Assembly with you, but you may save some soul by your testimony to your Saviour and Lord. In the face of an apostate General Assembly, do not be afraid to say a "good word for Jesus Christ." Be sure you speak to the specific point that is under discussion. Even if you do so you may be ruled out of order by the Moderator, who of course will represent the machine. But if you are ruled out of order, let it be unjustly and not justly.

4. Bring in Minority Reports. If, by some oversight of the machine, you are elected to one of the important committees, do

not sign on the dotted line. Bring in a minority report. A. Gordon MacLennan brought in a minority report at Indianapolis against all the other members of the Bills and Overtures Committee. To the amazement of everyone the minority report carried the Assembly and the great evangelical utterance of 1923 was the result. *Your* minority report will not carry this Assembly. The ecclesiastical machine has done its work too well and the apostasy of the Church has progressed too far since 1923. But it is your duty to bring in a minority report all the same. It is always a sin to put your name to what you know not to be true. So it is a very dreadful sin to join in with the customary whitewashing of these Modernist Boards. If you do so, God will require at your hands the souls that are being lost through the propaganda that these Boards are carrying on.

5. Vote. If you have not the ability to speak, surely you ought to pluck up courage to vote. When one of these great issues comes up, will you not at least say "No" in an audible voice whether you do or do not think that anyone else will say it with you? Surely that at least is not too much for you to do for the Saviour who bought you with his precious blood.

III. REPORT OF THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION

When the Permanent Judicial Commission brings in its report on the cases involving the issue between Christianity and Modernism – the judicial cases or complaints involving the members of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, the Rev. John J. De Waard, the Rev. Arthur F. Perkins, the matter of the licensure of John W. Fulton, the erasure of the name of the Rev. Henry W. Coray from the roll of the Presbytery of Lackawanna and the extra-constitutional questions asked by the Presbytery of Donegal – the Moderator will put the question:

"Shall the preliminary judgment of the Permanent Judicial Commission be made the final judgment of the General Assembly?"

If after hearing the judgment you are in agreement with it, you should vote for this motion. If you are not in agreement, it is your solemn duty to vote against it, even if you are the only person in the Assembly who so votes. If you do not discharge that duty you may regret it all the rest of your life. A commissioner must make a decision at that moment for or against the Bible and for or against the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

IV. OTHER ISSUES BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY

1. The Moderatorship. The first act of the Assembly is to elect a Moderator. One of you ought to nominate a Moderator who is opposed to the present Modernist and Indifferentist machine, and all of you ought to vote for him. There is not the slightest chance that any such Moderator will be elected, but that does not affect your duty in the slightest. The Moderator of the General Assembly is not just a presiding officer. He appoints the chairmen of all the Committees and has great power over the policy of the Church. It is not right for a Christian man to vote for a Moderator who will use that power for the continuance of the present anti-evangelical policy. Therefore a truly evangelical man ought to be nominated for the position, no matter how few votes he receives.

2. The Committees. The second act of the Assembly is the election of Committees by the "electing sections." Some of the Committees are important; others are unimportant. The Committee on "Bills and Overtures" is particularly important; but

others of the Committees are also important – notably those that make nominations for positions on the Boards and on the Permanent Judicial Commission. You ought to nominate really evangelical men for the important Committees. There is no chance that many such men will be elected. The machine will in most cases see to it that only "safe" men get into such positions. But you ought to do what you can to place a representative of the evangelical minority here and there.

There is not the slightest chance that such men can obtain a majority of any Committee, but they can bring in minority reports and thus serve to bring the great issue between Christianity and Modernism to the attention of the rank and file of the Church.

3. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. You should oppose in every possible way the continuance of the connection of our Church with this Modernist agency, which is doing such untold harm to the souls of men. Particularly bad is the "National Preaching Mission," which is mentioned on pages 30 and 52f. [of the "Blue Book"].

4. The Mission Study Textbooks. The General Council quotes with approval a "statement of principles" couched in the typically vague language so dear to the unbelief of our day, and squelches the whole effort to stop the flow of poison in the missionary textbooks by contenting itself with the ridiculously futile declaration "that only authors of known evangelical belief and evangelistic zeal should be selected by the Missionary Education Movement to write Mission Study textbooks." What is meant by "evangelical belief"? Something that Dr. E. Graham Wilson, for example, General Secretary of the Board of National Missions, member of the Committee representing the General Council, would regard as evangelical? Well, Dr. Wilson is a signer of the Modernist "Auburn Affirmation." How could anything that he and other Auburn Affirmationists would regard as evangelical possibly be regarded as evangelical by men and women who hold to the Word of God?

You should try in some way to express your dissatisfaction with this method of smoothing over the objection of evangelical people in the Church to the missionary textbooks.

5. Aid-Receiving Churches. The Manual for National Missions Churches, and the actions proposed for this General Assembly by the General Council and by the Special Committee on the Manual for National Missions Churches, simply wipe out the vestiges of real Presbyterianism so far as aid-receiving churches are concerned and provide for the tyrannical imposition upon those churches of the Modernist educational and missionary program of the central church organization. According to the plan proposed on pages 92ff. of the "Blue Book," a vacant church receiving aid even has to take the pastor imposed upon it by the synodical committee on National Missions.

You may call that form of church government what you will. But whatever it is, it is certainly not Presbyterianism.

Every real Presbyterian will oppose with might and main this anti-Presbyterian and anti-Christian program of tyranny and Modernism among the aid-receiving churches. How can any real Christian man possibly give his money to a Board of National Missions that favors a policy like that? You should oppose that policy at the General Assembly every time when it comes up, and you should formally register your solemn protest against it.

6. "The Years Ahead," etc. The pamphlet under this title, recommended for approval by the General Council, is not to be procured here in Philadelphia as yet. You should certainly vote against approval of it unless you have had time to study it

thoroughly, and it is difficult to see how you can study it thoroughly in the time at your disposal. In general, it is a good rule to vote against any proposal that you have not been given adequate opportunity to examine. The following of that rule might help put a stop to this whole business of adoption by the General Assembly of whole volumes that scarcely any commissioners have read. A similar remark is to be made about "Christ in the Community." The chances are at least a hundred to one that these programs are in accordance with the general current of the Church and opposed to the Gospel. The presumption is dead against them. You should act in accordance with that presumption until you are convinced, by careful study of the documents, that the presumption is wrong.

7. Report of the Bills and Overtures Committee. The Bills and Overtures Committee may report at any time. It "springs" its reports on the Assembly and thus often causes overtures looking to reform of the Church to be rejected before more than a corporal's card of commissioners have the slightest notion what is being done. You ought to be watchful and ask to be heard on overtures that are being treated in that way. At least you ought to vote against shoving them aside. Some of the reform overtures are referred by the General Council to other committees. They are then reported on when those other committees report.

8. Report of the Commission of Nine. At the last General Assembly the Modernists in the Presbyteries of Philadelphia and Chester secured the appointment of a commission to investigate those two presbyteries. It was of course a thoroughly partisan commission. Its report Hitlerizes the presbyteries in the most un-Presbyterian and un-Christian way. The sessions of the commission in Philadelphia were held in secret and no one who would not agree to that secrecy was heard. The Presbytery of Philadelphia has now been made quite safe for Modernism. The evangelicals have very little representation among the commissioners which it has sent to the General Assembly.

9. Merger of the Boards of National Missions and Christian Education. As I have already remarked, the question of the merger of these Boards is by no means so important as the doctrinal unsoundness of each of the Boards. Nevertheless, you should certainly vote against it. It is an extreme example of that centralization of bureaucratic power which is working so much harm in the Church.

10. Reports of the Committees on the Boards. These reports always consist of two parts: (1) the whitewashing of the Boards; (2) the presentation of the machine's slate for members.

You should vote both against the whitewashing and against the machine's slate. If any evangelical is on any one of these committees he should bring in a minority report. But whether such a minority report is or is not brought in, you should vote "No" on the whitewashing and on the slate.

V. CONTINUATION OF THE TRUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

If the great issue in the cases that are being considered by the Permanent Judicial Commission is decided as there is every prospect that it will be decided, you should register your protest at the Assembly, return home and make your report to your presbyteries, and then, as the covenant of the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union says, proceed to "perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., regardless of cost." May God richly bless you in that testimony to the honor of his name!

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Inquisitions, Confessionals, or Courts?

John W. Robbins

The abuse of church discipline and authority is a scandal that has hindered the preaching and belief of the Gospel for centuries. Church officers have frequently used force and the threat of force to silence their critics. The Roman Catholic Inquisition is the most infamous example of the use of threats of force and force by church officers,¹ but other church organizations, including Reformed churches, have resorted to force as well. Obviously they were not Reformed enough and retained some un-Biblical ideas and practices that they had learned from Rome and church tradition. The American Presbyterian churches developed the idea of the separation of church and state (please visit www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=92), which is based on the separation of force from church discipline, an idea commanded by Christ, endorsed by the early Luther, and characteristic of the early Reformation. But the notion of separation of church and state itself has come under increasing attack by the Romanists and Reconstructionists and their stepchildren, the Religious Right. They disagree with Luther, who wrote:

It is with the Word that we must fight, by the Word we must overthrow and destroy what has been set up by violence. I will not make use of force against the superstitious and unbelieving.... No one must be constrained. Liberty is the very essence of faith.... I will preach, discuss, and write; but I will constrain none, for faith is a voluntary act.... God's Word should be allowed to work alone, without our work or interference. Why? Because it is not in my power to fashion the hearts of men as the potter molds the clay.... I can get no further than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot put faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force anyone to have faith. That is God's work alone....

¹ Of course, the Roman Church State invented the legal fiction that it was not using force, but simply handing over heretics to the civil authorities who then did their duty by torturing, killing, or banishing the dissenters. Such transparent attempts to escape responsibility for their sins are endemic to the Romanist system.

We should preach the Word, but the result should be left solely to God's good pleasure.²

The use of force is a result of a larger problem in church discipline: the absence of justice. The two principal disciplinary institutions in Romanism – the Inquisition and the confessional – are both examples of the lack of justice in Romanist Church discipline. In one, the place of justice is usurped by tyranny and severity; in the other the place of justice is usurped by laxity and permissiveness. In both instances, church authority is exalted, and God's law is ignored. "Corban" is the password in Rome.

Presbyterian Government

Some Presbyterians take pride in their form of church government. There are good reasons to do so, for it is quite different from the Romanist system. It consists of a system of elected, not appointed, church courts, ranging from local to regional to national (it can also be international). The lowest court in the Presbyterian form of government is called the Session: It consists of the Ruling and Teaching Elders elected by the local congregation. The Elders sit together for a meeting, and hence are called a Session. (The distinction between Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder, which is a distinction made by more than Presbyterians, is foreign to Scripture: All Elders must be "able to teach," according to the Holy Spirit writing in Scripture. There are no separate qualifications given in Scripture for Teaching Elders, a/k/a preachers, pastors, or ministers.) The local Session, together with the elected Deacons, handles most of the business of the congregation, usually deferring to congregational wishes on major matters.

The appellate court in the Presbyterian form of government is called the Presbytery, which consists of all the Elders from all the congregations in a region, meeting

² Quoted in John W. Robbins, *Christ and Civilization*. The Trinity Foundation, 2003, 46.

together. (The Presbyterian practice of regarding Teaching Elders as members of only the Presbytery and not of the congregation, stemming from the un-Biblical distinction between Teaching and Ruling Elders, is also foreign to Scripture.) The Presbytery handles those matters that are common to the member congregations, and individual church members can appeal decisions made by their congregational officers (Sessions) to the Presbytery.

The supreme court in the Presbyterian form of government is the General Assembly, which is supposed to hear appeals from Presbyteries. (In the Presbyterian Church in America the General Assembly abdicated this role by creating a Standing Judicial Commission which decides such cases.) The General Assembly handles those matters common to the Presbyteries.

Despite its incorporation of some foreign elements, the Presbyterian system of church government is very close to the Biblical system. (See my book, *The Church Effeminate*, for details.) Neither the episcopal system (which is the form of government not only of the Episcopal Church, but also of the Roman Catholic Church-State, the Methodist Church, and many other organizations), with which the Presbyterian form is sometimes confused, nor the congregational system (which is the form of government not only of the Congregational churches, but also of most Baptist churches), is Biblical. The Presbyterian form of government, comprising elected local, regional, and national courts, is a federal system; and the U. S. Constitution is modeled after the Presbyterian form of government.

But many people – including many church members – do not respect church courts, and for good reason. Perhaps the principal reason for this lack of respect is the lack of justice, or to put it another way, the abuse of authority by church courts. The hierarchical system of episcopacy is a legalized or institutionalized abuse of church power, for it denies, on principle, congregations the right to elect all their officers. The continuing scandals in episcopal churches: the homosexual-child molester scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, involving thousands of priests and coverups by bishops and the Vatican itself, is an example of the inability of an episcopal organization to govern itself properly. Other episcopal churches, such as the Anglican, Episcopal, and Methodist, are rife with similar scandals, though on a smaller scale, since they are smaller organizations. And abuses of power are now becoming common in so-called conservative Presbyterian churches.

The Presbyterian Church in America

For a few years I was a Ruling Elder in the PCA, and I saw the abuse of authority up close and personal.

For example, the local Session of which I was a member (Midway Presbyterian Church in Jonesborough, Tennessee) decided that its meetings were no business of the congregation, and the majority voted to hold meetings in secret. They called it “permanent executive session.” This ecclesiastical arrogance, which included ushering at least

one peaceful church member out of the room so a secret meeting could proceed, continued for months, until a minority of Elders (routinely outvoted) drafted a written complaint against the Session for the Presbytery. At that point the petty tyrants backed down, but they never repented – that is, they never changed their minds about their “authority” to prevent ordinary church members from observing their meetings. Nor were those Elders ever rebuked by Presbytery (Westminster) for their abuse of authority. The Midway Session also defended the theology and persons of the leaders of the Federal Vision cult: Peter Leithart, Steve Schlissel, and Steve Wilkins. Their stubborn defense of the heretics led to the resignation of three Elders from the Session and congregation. The Midway Session has never been disciplined for or repented of its sins. Westminster Presbytery (PCA) of which the Midway Church was a part, though informed in writing and in detail of the problems at Midway, did nothing to correct them. In fact, the Presbytery made things worse by appointing a committee headed by a defender of Federal Vision theology to look into the matter (see www.trinityfoundation.org/midway.php).

At the Presbytery level, an outlandish and arrogant view of the church and church discipline – coupled, as it always is, with a cavalier and un-Biblical view of sin – thwarted discipline of a Teaching Elder who had abused members of his congregation. (This is similar to what happens in the Roman Church-State: Its exalted view of its authority causes a lack of discipline for moral infractions by priests; and fornicators, homosexuals, and child molesters in the Catholic priestly class have been protected for centuries while they prey on their spiritual subjects.) Well, the explanation in the PCA Presbytery (Westminster again) for its lack of discipline of a Teaching Elder was as follows: Yes, the Teaching Elder has sinned, and he requires correction. Therefore, we will give him some counseling. If we proceed to try him, convict him, and depose him from the ministry, we are consigning him to Hell, and what he did does not deserve Hell. As a result, no trial occurred.

Where this PCA Presbytery got the absurd notion that it had the power to send anyone to Hell is a good question. It did not come from Scripture, but most likely from Rome via Reconstructionist theology. This un-Biblical view of church authority is always coupled with an un-Biblical view of sin. Church authority is grossly exaggerated, and the seriousness of sin is deliberately minimized. Some sins do not deserve Hell. One finds the same attitude in Romanism, where some sins are venial, and some mortal, but the Holy Mother Church, outside of which there is no salvation, has the authority to send people to Hell by excommunicating them. This denigration of God’s holiness and law and the exaltation of church authority are thoroughly Antichristian. “Corban” is becoming the watchword in the PCA.

At the national level in the PCA, there are numerous separate corporations that operate under the large goal

umbrella of the PCA. One of these legally separate corporations, the PCA Foundation, disburses millions of dollars and refuses to tell PCA members, Elders, Sessions, and Presbyteries where that money goes. It claims that it is protecting the privacy of its donors. It actually operates in secret to protect the names of the organizations and persons to whom it gives millions of dollars. It does not want ordinary church members to know where the money goes. Now this is also similar to Rome, whose finances remain secret from its spiritual subjects.

Historically, Presbyterians have been leaders in defending religious, political, and economic freedom and the rights of ordinary Christians and citizens; but contemporary Presbyterian clerics have little understanding of or love for freedom. Rather, they are enamored of power. This is true not only of the Dominionists, Reconstructionists, Theonomists, Neo-Legalists, Federal Visionists, and Liberals, but also of many who have been influenced by them. In the past several decades an un-Biblical doctrine called the "involuntary church" has turned some nominally Presbyterian churches into virtual cults. The Reconstructionist church in Tyler, Texas, headed by Ray Sutton (now a bishop in the apostate Reformed Episcopal Church), James Jordan, a guru of the Federal Vision cult, and Gary North is a good example of this. (See the essay "Ecclesiastical Megalomania," in *The Trinity Review*, May 1994, for details. It is posted at our website.)

The "Involuntary Church"

The "involuntary church" doctrine holds that once a person joins a local church, he can leave that church only by excommunication, death, or transfer to another church approved by the church of which he is a member. He cannot simply resign. The most recent example of how this doctrine results in injustice through the abuse of power is St. Peter's Presbyterian Church of Abingdon, Virginia, headed by R. C. Sproul, Jr. St. Peter's Session refused to let a family who had come to disagree with the church on doctrinal matters to depart in peace, and the Session ordered everyone in the church to shun them, disrupting both personal and business relationships. After receiving many complaints about the tyranny of the Session of St. Peter's, Westminster Presbytery (of the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly) belatedly acted and deposed the entire Session from office, on the basis of sins already admitted by the Session, including Junior Sproul: So far so good. See [http://hushmoney.org/R.C. Sproul Jr. disclaimer.htm](http://hushmoney.org/R.C._Sproul_Jr._disclaimer.htm), [http://hushmoney.org/RC Sproul Jr-defrocking-docs.htm](http://hushmoney.org/RC_Sproul_Jr-defrocking-docs.htm).

Unfortunately, the story does not end there. The St. Peter's Session then wrote a letter of repentance and apology to the Presbytery, and the Presbytery absolved it of its sins (three times), and granted its request to leave the RPCGA in good standing, though not as officers. This despite the fact that a week earlier the Presbytery had announced its intention to proceed to trial of the four members of the Session on still more serious charges. But the tears of the Session caused the Presbytery to act like a

Roman Catholic confessional, not a church court, and the charges that warranted a trial a week earlier were now completely forgotten. Once again the church court failed. Justice was not done.

A more famous instance of a Presbyterian church court acting like a Roman Catholic confessional is the decision of the 2003 General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which overturned the conviction of Elder John Kinnaird. Kinnaird had been convicted by a church court for teaching a doctrine of salvation contrary to the Scriptures and the *Westminster Confession*. But when his appeal got to the OPC General Assembly, Kinnaird reportedly cried and said he was sorry, and the General Assembly overturned his conviction.

Were the civil courts to behave like church courts, no defendant would be convicted, for all he would need to do is to cry and to tell the judge he was sorry, and all would be forgiven. The Elders, mostly Teaching, who attend Presbytery and General Assembly meetings, at least in the two instances here cited, apparently do not know how a court is supposed to behave, so they are either lax or severe, both of which are abuses of power. In the Sproul and Kinnaird cases, both the RPCGA Presbytery and the OPC General Assembly acted like Roman Catholic confessionals, not like Biblical church courts.

This lack of justice in church courts seems to stem from a lack of understanding of and appreciation for rationality, law, and justice. The effeminate church has effeminate church courts, and they are moved by emotions and feelings, by anger, by weeping, by group hugs; they are not guided by principles of justice and due process. Rationality, with its attendant virtue justice, is an attribute of God. But these qualities are not part of contemporary theology and are despised by contemporary theologians; and the irrationality of modern theology expresses itself in the irrational judgments of church courts.

The same lack of respect for God's rationality and law is at the root of the Neo-legalism that controls so-called conservative Presbyterian churches.

The lack of justice is the principal reason many people do not respect church courts: They are either corrupt or incompetent, or both; they consist largely of good-ole-boy networks that crush ordinary church members and protect seminarians. If church courts want some respect, they should earn it by behaving as church courts ought to behave, not as Roman Catholic tyrants and confessors.

For Further Reading

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church
(www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=156)

Christ and Civilization

(www.trinitylectures.org/product_info.php?cPath=21&products_id=55&osCsid=fcb7c59b7bdeabeac10737bd135dde28)

The Church Effeminate

(www.trinitylectures.org/product_info.php?cPath=21&products_id=65)

Ecclesiastical Megalomania

(www.trinitylectures.org/product_info.php?cPath=21&products_id=73)

Ecclesiastical Megalomania

(www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=184)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ vs. Neo-Legalism

(www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=112)

The Relation of Church and State

(www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=92)

Why Heretics Win Battles

(www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=207)

Forthcoming Books: New Editions

Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church, John W. Robbins

Available April 2006. Trade paperback, \$19.95.

Predestination, Gordon H. Clark

Available June 2006. Trade paperback, \$12.95.

Without a Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System, John W. Robbins

Available April 2006. Trade paperback, \$19.95.

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THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Rethinking the Apostles' Creed

Clifton R. Loucks

The central message of the Bible is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Saviour from sin, and the only safety from God's righteous punishment of sin. The only way of salvation is through belief in the purpose of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (*1 Corinthians* 3:11). The Apostle Paul proclaims Christ crucified as the only antidote to the deadly venom within man, called sin. He wrote: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (*1 Corinthians* 2:2). The Apostle wrote of the importance of this Gospel:

I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures [*1 Corinthians* 15:1-4].

Evidently, the Apostle believed that the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ was of primary importance, a message to be understood by both those who have already trusted in Christ for their eternal state, and those who were yet to hear the Gospel. Notice from the text that Paul did not invent this Gospel. No, he received it, and he delivered it just as it was declared to him. He mentions the Gospel as the first and most important part of his preaching: "I delivered [the Gospel] unto you *first of all*;" that is, Paul taught the Gospel that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures first, and that Gospel is to be proclaimed first in proclaiming the Word of Life to others. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be central in the Christian's proclamation of whole counsel of God to the world*, for it is written,

[T]he Gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith [*Romans* 1:16-17].

Knowing what that Gospel is, and believing it, is of first importance for those who proclaim the Word of God. If it is not first in importance, but somewhere down the list of things to be taught, or absent from the list entirely, confusion (frequently fatal) results. How shall the justified live by faith, if the object

of that faith is unknown, or at best, obscured? If the professed Christian doesn't understand the meaning of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, how can he give a clarion call to those without hope and without God in the world? Our proclamation to others, as well our rehearsals of what we believe in our congregations, is vital: It is life-giving, or life-withholding, depending upon the content of the proclamation. When an unbeliever enters our assemblies of worship, does he hear this vital truth proclaimed clearly, or is the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection obscured? Our words are spiritual, and have spiritual effects upon the hearers: Death and life are in the power of the tongue, Solomon wrote; and John, guided by the Spirit, accurately wrote down Jesus' words: "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing: My words are Spirit, and they are Life" (*John* 6:63).

The Purpose of a Creed

Part of that vital proclamation of the Gospel is the practice of publicly reciting creeds and confessions. Public recitations of creeds should not be mindless rituals of repetition, like the chants and drones of unbelievers. Recitation, so it is said, aids in the understanding of Christian doctrine; but it may not do so, if the recitation is done or heard inattentively, or the creed itself is not faithful to the Gospel. Supposedly, the congregation's "one voice" in reciting a creed reflects its unity in one belief as well. Yet, what do individual minds (and there is no other kind) understand by what they say? Is there unity of thought and meaning of the particular words expressed? Or is the creed ambiguous or incomplete?

Creeds are expressions of what one believes to be truth. According to Philip Schaff, "The first object of creeds was to distinguish the Church from the world, from Jews and heathen, afterwards orthodoxy from heresy, and finally denomination from denomination" (*The Creeds of Christendom*, 1, 8). Creeds are important in that they "nail down" in writing what is believed to be true, never changing, and worthy of belief. ("Creed," of course, is from the Latin "credo," I believe.) But not all creeds are equally worthy of belief or expression.

The Apostles' Creed is a case in point. It has a long history behind it, and in its longevity, it is unchallenged as the Christian's creed; yet is it Christian? The apostles knew nothing of the Apostles' Creed, for it emerged some three centuries after their passing, its author(s) lost to history. It has the honorific label "Apostles" attached to it, as if they created it, recited it, and endorsed it; when they neither wrote, recited, nor endorsed the creed attributed to them. Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Anglicans, Liberals, and Protestants all recite

the Apostles' Creed, yet the Reformers thought rightly that the Roman Catholic Church with its papacy is Antichrist. How can this be? Rome has recently called Protestant dissenters to its hierarchy and doctrine, "separated brethren," and continues to attempt to end the separation by such means as ecumenical councils, documents, and creeds. The Apostles' Creed is one ecumenical bridge over the gap. The Apostles' Creed is a lowest-common denominator attempt at ecumenism.

The Apostles' Creed Examined

The Apostles' Creed does not perform the requisite functions of a creed: It does not accurately summarize the content of Christian belief; it omits essential Christian doctrines; it does not distinguish heterodoxy from orthodoxy; and it is ambiguous, rather than clear. Because of these defects, it cannot unify the hearts of God's people, for, as an ecumenical creed, it allows many who do not hold to the Gospel revealed by God to profess to be Christians.

It is not that creeds *per se* should be done away with, for creeds may be very useful; but rather that the content of a creed should reflect Scripture more accurately and completely. One may ask: How close must a creed come to Scripture? The answer is, Close enough so that Christian believers will find in it the truths they hold precious, and those who do not believe the Gospel will find the creed unacceptable. The Apostles' Creed does not meet Schaff's desideratum: "A Creed...is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church" (*Creeds*, 1,3-4).

God's revealed truth divides men; but it also is the only basis of Christian unity. As Christian believers, we are to confess the same things, to speak the same words, to believe the same propositions regarding God, man, and salvation. Further, those confessions are what set us apart from the world and the unorthodox. The Apostle Paul says in *1 Corinthians* 1:10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Among many other applications of this verse, it gives creeds and confessions credence. God's people, and only God's people, are "to join together in the same mind, in the same judgment, speaking the same thing, without division." Paul says Christians are to be unified in thought, not in organization; unified by the words of our great God of Truth. But if the words of a creed join together believer and unbeliever, Protestant, Roman, Anglican, Liberal, and Greek, then the creed has failed to achieve Christian unity, but has accomplished the purpose of the enemy, who sows tares among wheat.

The Apostles' Creed reads:

- (1) I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth.
- (2) And in Jesus Christ his only (begotten) Son our Lord;
- (3) who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
- (4) born of the Virgin Mary;
- (5) suffered under Pontius Pilate,
- (6) was crucified, dead, and buried;
- (7) he descended into Hell;
- (8) the third day he rose from the dead;
- (9) he ascended into Heaven;
- (10) and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
- (11) from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
- (12) I believe in the Holy Ghost;
- (13) the Holy Catholic Church;
- (14) the communion of saints;
- (15) the forgiveness of sins;

- (16) the resurrection of the body;
- (17) and the life everlasting. Amen.

Though I have here parsed the Creed into 17 phrases, it is usually parsed into 12, in accordance with the medieval legend that each of the apostles contributed one of the phrases to the Creed. This hoax—and the name "Apostles' Creed"—were perpetuated by the Roman Church-State, as were many other hoaxes. This hoax was first exposed by Lorenzo Valla, who also exposed the *Donation of Constantine* as a Romanist hoax.

Scripture Articles Not Found in Creed

After reviewing the 17 phrases of the Apostles' Creed, notice that the Apostles' Creed neither mentions essential articles of the faith nor defines the terms it uses. Thus it becomes, at best, a mere mentioning of terms, not a confession of well-defined truths revealed by God for our instruction. Is it any wonder that many in society misrepresent Christianity as superstitious in belief and practice? If words are left undefined, and spoken as ritual, then they are no more a confession of God's revealed truth than those spoken by a magician while performing his art.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* seems to say that the Apostles' Creed expresses the very things, termed "Articles of our catholic, undoubted faith," necessary for a Christian to believe: that is, it supposedly expresses that which a person must believe to be a Christian. A children's primer based upon the *Heidelberg Catechism* titled *A First Book of Christian Doctrine*, by Hylkema and Tuuk, tells us that we are to believe "Everything God tells us in the Holy Scriptures." Well and good. It goes on to ask: "Why must we believe all that the Bible contains?" It answers: "Because it is the Word of God himself." A very profound answer. Then it asks, "Where can we find a short statement of everything God commands us to believe?" (This question itself seems a bit contrived given the previous answer and command "to believe everything God tells us," does it not?) The primer answers: "In The Apostles' Creed." Now, does this Creed contain "everything God commands us to believe," even in summary? Does the Apostles' Creed express that which a person must believe to be a Christian? Is it the "litmus test" of one's Christian faith? Ponder these omissions of some of the articles of our Christian faith.

1. The Creed is silent on Christ's satisfaction of the Father's justice. The term and concept of propitiation are absent.

2. The Creed is silent on Christ's substitutionary death. The term and concept of Atonement are absent.

3. The Creed is silent on the purpose of Christ's death. His death is mentioned, but an historical event, without an explanation of its meaning, is not a Christian confession. The Pharisees also believed Christ died. Christians must confess, "Christ died for our sins."

4. The Creed is silent on Scripture. In his summary of the Gospel, Paul wrote: "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." How can a Creed derive its authority from Scripture if it does not even mention it? Perhaps this is one reason why the pope can confess the Apostles' Creed too: Belief in Scripture is omitted, but belief in the "Holy Catholic Church" is included.

5. The Creed is silent on the inspiration of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture, the necessity of Scripture, the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture, the power of Scripture, the coherence of Scripture, etc. The Apostles' Creed describes the "Catholic Church" as "Holy," but not the Word of God.

6. The Creed is silent on the Trinity. Although all three Persons are mentioned, the unity of the Godhead is not expressed, and only one Person is confessed as God. The Creed is so vague that its confessors may believe in three

gods, or that only God the Father is God, and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are lesser beings.

7. The Creed is silent on the Gospel. The term and concept are absent. It makes no reference to the method and means of salvation. Salvation by God's grace alone is not mentioned.

8. The Creed is silent on justification by faith in Christ alone. One would think a creed would say something about justification and faith. The Apostles' Creed does not.

9. The Creed is silent on predestination, and election. It contains not even a hint of an eternal divine plan for the salvation of God's people.

10. The Creed is silent on regeneration and sanctification—the new birth and the Christian life.

11. The Creed is silent on confession of sin to God, and offers no definition of sin.

12. The Creed mentions Pontius Pilate, but is silent on the Person of the Holy Spirit. "I believe in the Holy Ghost" does not express much of anything. Would any listener figure out who he is or what he does? The Apostles' Creed does not even say that the Holy Ghost is God. Amazing, isn't it? Did I say amazing? I meant appalling.

13. The Creed implies that only the Father is Creator. John says that "*All things were made by him [the Logos].*" Job and the *Psalms* proclaim that the Spirit "made the heavens and all the hosts of them."

So what kind of creedal expression is the Apostles' Creed? It is a lowest-common denominator ecumenical confession, apparently designed to please everyone in the churches, except the Christians. It is not, as Schaff believes, "the Creed of creeds." Nor does it "contain all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation" (*Creeds*, 1, 14).

Omission of these central truths leaves many doors open for cunning persons to bind unsuspecting souls in ecclesiastical chains. Without God's wrath fully appeased once for all by Christ's death, we must sacrifice Christ afresh every day and work for our own salvation. The Apostles' Creed does nothing to preclude or dispel damnable heresies such as the mass, taught by the largest religious organization on the planet. Schaff reports that "its [the Creed's] triumph over all the other forms in the Latin Church was not completed till the eighth century, or about the time when the bishops of Rome strenuously endeavored to conform the liturgies of the Western churches to the Roman order" (1,19).

Creed Articles Not Found in Scripture

These words of this ecumenical Creed—"He descended into Hell"—tend to confuse, not explain, the belief of the Christian. Must one believe that Christ went to Hell after his death and before he rose from the dead? (This is how the Apostles' Creed states it by its word order.) What is the basis for this belief? In his commentary on the *Heidelberg Catechism* Ursinus tried to explain this clause as Christ suffering the pains of Hell before he died. But that is not what the Apostles' Creed says. Then why do we continue to say this line publicly, in our congregations, if it isn't true? Why do we say what we do not mean? Why don't we say what we mean and mean what we say? Honesty requires that churches not continue to recite a confession that they do not believe. I suspect we continue to recite this creed because we've always done it that way. It is a church tradition, and church tradition has become more important than confessing Scriptural truth. Bad habits—especially bad ecclesiastical habits—are hard to break.

What do unbelievers think as they attend our assemblies and hear us say, "He [Jesus Christ] descended into Hell" after his death, and then try to explain away the obvious meaning of the words by saying that Christ really didn't go to Hell? Why should they believe anything else they hear in our assemblies? Perhaps we have an esoteric interpretation of other statements

as well. Intellectual dishonesty—or ecclesiastical dishonesty—will not persuade anyone to listen to the rest of our teaching.

Scripture, of course, describes the suffering of Christ. But unlike the ecumenical creed, the Scriptures also accurately reveal the meaning and time of his suffering. If one wishes to take a Biblical, rather than a traditional, approach, one could confess: "He suffered on the cross for our sins, according to the Scriptures." But even this is not quite complete: He suffered throughout his life: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted..." (*Isaiah* 53:3-4). He suffered in the garden of Gethsemane, as *Luke* 22:44 records: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He suffered in the trial: "And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium.... And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews. And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshiped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him" (*Mark* 15:15-20). He suffered in the wilderness, for 40 days and more. He was dragged by the devout congregation from the synagogue in Nazareth to the top of the hill to be murdered on the Sabbath. He was called a drunkard, a glutton, a demoniac, and insane. The epistles give further explanation of our Lord's suffering, and even an answer to his searching question ("My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?") upon the cross: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (*Galatians* 3:13-14).

But even in the Old Testament, in the very place where we find those vivid descriptions of Christ's sufferings, we also find the reason for His suffering: "Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.... [F]or the transgression of my people was he stricken."

One does not need to travel far from the Biblical descriptions of Christ's suffering to learn the meaning of it all: God's sufficient Word does not keep us hanging in suspense. But the Apostles' Creed does. Nowhere does it state the meaning of Christ's death; nowhere does it proclaim a finished Atonement, or for that matter, any Atonement at all. By its words, "He descended into Hell," confusion is bred and false doctrine—the doctrine of purgatory—is inculcated. It is an example of not saying what we mean, and saying what we do not mean. It is an example of ecclesiastical lying.

Another example of this—not saying what we mean, and saying what we don't mean—is found in the words: "I believe...in the Holy Catholic Church." This clause is such a source of confusion that disclaimers need to be made for it upon its every utterance, and it isn't the only one. Reformed churches, born out of the Protestant Reformation, do not mean the alleged "church" of Rome when reciting this creed. Commonly, Reformed and Protestant preachers will give a disclaimer immediately following the recitation of the Creed to the effect that the Creed is not to be construed as meaning the Roman Catholic Church, which calls itself "the Holy Catholic

Church." If Protestants mean "We believe that there is an elect people of God that the Lord Himself gave out of the whole of mankind to the Son, and this people is 'the church' in view, known in Scripture as *the very small remnant*, and *the only true children of Abraham*," then they should say so: "I believe that God has chosen and saved his own people out of every race and nation." This would maintain the antithesis between true and false, which distinction is blurred by the confusing term "Holy Catholic Church." When Rome decides to call "home" the "separated brethren" of the Protestant churches, she will no doubt use the ambiguous terminology of this very Creed to further her aim. The call will be legitimized by the gentle reminder that "we all believe in the one Holy Catholic Church, do we not? You've been confessing it in your churches for centuries; now come home, come home to the one place you've been confessing for all those generations. Mother Kirk has her arms spread wide to embrace you."

Protestant Reformers protested against that very institution, the organization calling itself the Holy Catholic Church, which is a governmental power, a nation unto itself, and not a church at all. Roman Catholics recite this Creed, using the same words, without disclaimers, and people know very well what they mean. Why adopt their confession? Why can we not frame the words of a true confession to reflect Scripture? Such a confession would be truly apostolic, for it would contain the apostolic doctrine. Of course, confessing that "God has chosen and saved his own people out of every race and nation" doesn't restrict the elect to an institutional church, which might be a stumblingblock to the traditionalists; but it was no problem for the apostle who penned a letter to "the strangers scattered throughout...Asia...elect, according to...God...the Spirit...and Jesus Christ..." The Elect of God were strangers in the world, and strangers to each other. That is why we are not to neglect entertaining strangers.

This clause, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" is followed by a confession of "the communion of saints," and then by "the forgiveness of sins," with no explanation given as to how one can have forgiveness. Out of all the things of importance in life, how one obtains forgiveness of sins is absolutely vital. Since it follows on the heels of "the Holy Catholic Church," would it not plausibly follow that forgiveness comes through and because of that Holy Catholic Church? It is strongly suggested by the word order of the Creed. But the truth is, of course, that forgiveness of sins neither comes through nor because of the church. Since the church consists of those who are already forgiven, why isn't forgiveness mentioned before the church? Forgiveness is based upon God justifying his people, which forgiven people are then called saints and form the church universal throughout time and throughout the world. One possible—and plausible—reason for the order in the Apostles' Creed is the false teaching that the dispenser of forgiveness is not God, but the Holy Catholic Church. That large and influential religious organization based in Rome teaches that very thing: Forgiveness comes from its authority, through its priests and sacraments. There is no ambiguity as to their teaching in this regard; the ambiguity lies in Protestants' using the same words to confess some different meaning. Christians are to proclaim clearly what they mean, and not speak in ambiguities that confuse others. A creed should declare truth plainly. Another problem is that the clause "I believe in...the communion of saints" follows "the Holy Catholic Church" clause, suggesting that that communion is within "the Holy Catholic Church."

Further, does the confession of a communion of saints, even properly defined, belong in a basic creed? That is, is it an essential point, without which we are not believers? Elijah didn't know that 7,000 were reserved by the Lord until the Lord told him so. Was Elijah not a believer before he was so

informed? Of course he was. Salvation is not corporate; it is individual. It is received from God immediately, not mediated through the church.

The Creed says, "I believe...in the Holy Ghost." Well, so do the Jehovah's Witnesses. The question is: What are you confessing when you say those words? Jehovah's Witnesses believe in the Holy Ghost as a "radar beam" of God's power (their words, at my door, many times) but not as a Person of the Trinity. They believe that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force used by God to direct people and things. The Apostles' Creed does not rule out such a notion. To say: "I believe in the Holy Ghost," is not to say very much. The clause is devoid of definition, of predication, and therefore of clarity. It does not distinguish between meanings that differ, for no meaning is given. The antithesis between false doctrine and true teaching is absent. The clause as it occurs in the ecumenical Apostles' Creed is devoid of the meaning that would make it Christian, *i.e.*, Scriptural. Some would say that the very structure of the creed lends itself to the idea of God being triune in nature. After all, it proclaims a sentence about the Father creating, several statements about the Son, historically speaking anyway, and then a brief mention of a Holy Ghost, which, it is claimed, all people must (somehow) understand to "complete the trio" of personalities within the Godhead. Three parts to the Creed must equal three Persons "in God," it is assumed.

Is the Apostles' Creed less than accurate? We have seen that it is. Is it less than Biblically sufficient? Absolutely. There are deficiencies in this Creed in that central doctrines are not expressed. This allows common confession of the Creed with Antichrist.

A Challenge

The Creed substitutes unexplained statements of historical events for the Gospel of an atoning Christ who is the perfect satisfaction of holy justice for his elect people. A new Christian creed is necessary to replace the truncated, misnamed, and misleading Apostles' Creed. But there will be opposition from traditionalists, unbelieving church members, and ecumenists. Christians who take Scripture and creeds seriously, desiring a creed that accurately summarizes Scripture, must resist them. The question is: Will the Reformed churches put away the so-called Apostles' Creed of the Roman Church-State, or will they continue to recite it, obscuring the Gospel and erasing the distinction between a true church and a false? Will they practice the first mark of a true church of Jesus Christ—as defined by Guido de Bres in the Belgic Confession, "the preaching of the pure Gospel"—or will they sink deeper into the mire of "unity first" thinking? Will the Gospel of justification by faith alone be clearly expressed to those whom God brings to their assemblies? Shall it contain *the evangel*, the Gospel of the *Christ who died for the sins of his people*, explained according to the authority of the *Scriptures*, or omit it for the sake of peace, unity, and tradition, as the Apostles' Creed has done for many centuries? Whether an individual like Guido de Bres, or sessions or synods, write a new creed—it must express the central doctrines of the faith accurately. What words will *form Christ's mind in us, the hope of glory*? His church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*. For no other foundation can be laid, nor should be laid, *than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos, the Word of God Himself*. As Paul gave good confession before the court, we are to *believe all that is written in the Law and in the Prophets*.

Announcement

The Trinity Foundation plans to release a new book in June: *The Current Justification Controversy* by O. Palmer Robertson.