

The Presbyterian Guardian

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The
Separateness
of the Church

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Book Brief

Your Mind Matters, JOHN R. W. STOTT. INTER-VARSITY PRESS. 95¢ REVIEWED BY WALT HIBBARD, WILMINGTON, DELAWARE.

Is it experience, and not doctrine, that really matters? When we come to church are we to unscrew our heads and place them on the seat beside us and allow ourselves to enter into a purely mystical experience devoid of all content and rationale? Is God bypassing the human mind today (as demonstrated in the current neo-pentecostal movement) to show his sheer displeasure in intellectual pride and knowledge of man?

Stott answers these questions from the Bible with clarity and certainty. Beginning with God's act in creation, he contrasts the lower forms of life with man and his mind, made in the image of God. From here he logically follows into God's revelation of himself throughout history as recorded in his Word as being intended to act upon man's mind and cause him to increase in knowledge and to think God's thoughts after him.

In the third chapter, Stott considers how God expects us as Christians to use our minds. Focusing on worship, faith, holiness, guidance, evangelism, and spiritual gifts, he waxes eloquent in showing how a "mindless Christianity" is totally incapable of coping with the biblical admonitions and directives that God has laid before us in his Word.

He writes that "in our evangelistic proclamation we must address the

whole person (mind, heart and will) with the whole gospel (Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning, coming again and much else besides). We shall argue with his mind and plead with his heart in order to move his will, and we shall put our trust in the Holy Spirit throughout. We have no liberty to present a partial Christ (man but not God, his life but not his death, his cross but not his resurrection, the Savior but not the Lord). Nor have we any liberty to ask for a partial response (mind but not heart, heart but not mind, or either without the will). No. Our objective is to win a total man for a total Christ and this will require the full consent of his mind and heart and will" (p. 52).

We all need to take these things seriously. Stott writes simply enough for young people to comprehend without difficulty. He challenges those of us who have been Christians for a long while to "be filled with the *knowledge* of his will in all spiritual *wisdom* and *understanding*, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the *knowledge* of God."

This is a very good book. It is brief and to the point; it is quite inexpensive. After you have read your copy thoughtfully, be sure to pass it on to a friend.

THIS AND THAT

There ought to be some major staff changes for the *Guardian*! Last month's issue set a record for typographical errors.

Then somebody botched it when picture captions were set. The former Miss Susan Truitt, who received her MAR degree from Westminster last June, became Mrs. Thomas A. Foh a few days later.

We'd be glad to fire somebody if we could figure out who should get the blame. The trouble is that our reporters, copyreaders, editors, etc., all have the same initials.

Now this month, someone is sure

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The *Presbyterian* Guardian

EDITOR
JOHN J. MITCHELL

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to want to know where the Letters and Here & There in the OPC have gotten to. Well, last minute stuff showed up that simply had to get printed this month, and something had to step aside.

A look at the

Larger Catechism

questions and answers 86-89

NORMAN SHEPHERD

Part II of the Proposed Plan of Union for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, describes the Constitution of the united denomination. The Constitution includes the doctrinal standards, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for Worship. All of these standards are called "subordinate" because they function under the Bible which is the "supreme standard."

The subordinate doctrinal standards proposed for the united church include the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The text of the Confession and Shorter Catechism will be identical with the text that is now authoritative in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The text of the Larger Catechism will also be that in use in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church except for one area of proposed revisions.

These proposed revisions are for Questions 86-89. They reflect the concerns of brethren who desire a more congenial confessional atmosphere for the premillennial view of our Lord's return, without creating a less congenial atmosphere for those with amillennial or postmillennial views.

The purpose of what follows is not so much to review and assess these proposed revisions as it is to look again at the language of the Larger Catechism, as it came from the Westminster Assembly, at those points where revision is desired.

The thesis to be developed is that the language of the Catechism is biblical in character and would provide the new denomination with the doctrinal scope envisioned when the Presbyterian Church of America (now the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) came into existence under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen. This language should therefore prove acceptable to all involved in the union of the Orthodox and Reformed Presbyterian Churches. It does not require either revision or the addition of a declaratory statement. Also, there are certain advantages to the original language that would be lost by adoption of the revisions.

Question and Answer 86

Answer 86 describes 'the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death.' Their souls are perfected and received into heaven; they await the full redemption of their bodies 'which even in death continue united to Christ.' Their full redemption is their resurrection from the dead in the body. They 'rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they again

be united to their souls.'

The revision proposes to substitute *till at the return of Christ* for the words *till at the last day*.

However, it is not without rather substantial biblical warrant that the Catechism employed the expression, "at the last day." In John 6:39 the words of our Lord are recorded: "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Further in the same chapter the expression appears three times (verses 40, 44, and 54), "I will raise him up at the last day." In John 11:24, Mary says of Lazarus who had died, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

The conclusion is inescapable that the resurrection of the just takes place at the last day, and this is precisely what the Catechism says. Objection to the Catechism at this point is more fundamentally objection to the language of the Bible. The Catechism has done nothing more or less than set out a biblical truth in biblical language.

The integrity and authority of the Bible as the primary standard is not an issue in the union discussions. Therefore there is no need for a revision of the Catechism at this point, however one may proceed to explain the truth set forth.

Question and Answer 87

There appear to be only two changes in the text of the answer to Question 87. The first statement reads, 'We are to believe, that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.' The expression *the last day* is altered to *the last time*, and the word *general* is omitted.

The first change relates to the same expression found in Answer 86 and changed there to *the return of Christ*. The same substitution was not made in Answer 87, presumably because the latter speaks not merely of the resurrection of the just but also of the resurrection of the unjust. And, according to premillennial teaching, the latter does not occur at the return of Christ but, indeed, at the last day. There is then no objection to speaking of the resurrection of the unjust at the last day.

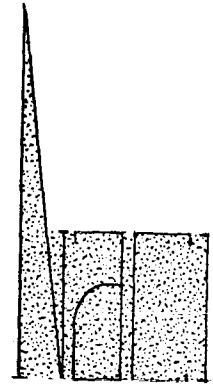
But as noted with reference to Answer 86, it is a perfectly biblical mode of expression to say that at the last day the just will also be raised. There is therefore no reason why this wording, *at the last day*, is not as acceptable in Answer 87 as it is in 86 when in 87 the reference is expanded to include the resur-

(Continued on page 124.)

The

Separateness

of the Church



J. GRESHAM MACHEN

This sermon was preached by Dr. Machen in the chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary on Sunday, March 8, 1925.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men (Matthew 5:13).

In these words our Lord established at the very beginning the distinctness and separateness of the church. If the sharp distinction is ever broken down between the church and the world, then the power of the church is gone. The church then becomes like salt that has lost its savor, and is fit only to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

It is a great principle, and there never has been a time in all the centuries of Christian history when it has not had to be taken to heart. The really serious attack upon Christianity has not been the attack carried on by fire and sword, by the threat of bonds or death, but it has been the more subtle attack that has been masked by friendly words; it has been not the attack from without but the attack from within. The enemy has done his deadliest work when he has come with words of love and compromise and peace. And how persistent the attack has been! Never in the centuries of the church's life has it been altogether relaxed; always there has been the deadly chemical process, by which, if it had been unchecked, the precious salt would have been merged with the insipidity of the world, and would have been thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

From the beginning of the church

The process began at the very beginning, in the days when our Lord still walked the Galilean hills. There were many in those days who heard him gladly; he enjoyed at first the favor of the people. But in that favor he saw a deadly peril; he would have nothing of a half-discipleship that meant the merging of the company of his disciples with the world. How ruthlessly he checked a sentimental enthu-

siasm! "Let the dead bury their dead," he told the enthusiast who came eagerly to him but was not willing at once to forsake all. "One thing thou lackest," he said to the rich young ruler, and the young man went sorrowful away. Truly Jesus did not make it easy to be a follower of him. "He that is not with me," he said, "is against me." "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children . . . , he cannot be my disciple." How serious a thing it was in those days to stand for Christ!

And it was a serious thing not only in the sphere of conduct but also in the sphere of thought. There could be no greater mistake than to suppose that a man in those days could think as he liked and still be a follower of Jesus. On the contrary the offence lay just as much in the sphere of doctrine as in the sphere of life. There were "hard sayings," then as now, to be accepted by the disciples of Jesus, as well as hard commands. "I am the bread which came down from heaven," said Jesus. It was indeed a hard saying. No wonder the Jews murmured at him. "Is not this Jesus," they said, "the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven." "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus did not make the thing easy for these murmurers. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." At that many even of his disciples were offended. "This is a hard saying," they said; "who can hear it?" And so they left him. "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him." Many of them went back—but not all. "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus was the precious salt preserved.

Then came the gathering clouds, and finally the cross. In the hour of his agony they all left him and fled;

apparently the movement that he had initiated was hopelessly dead. But such was not the will of God. The disciples were sifted, but there was still something left. Peter was forgiven; the disciples saw the risen Lord; the salt was still preserved.

One hundred and twenty persons were gathered in Jerusalem. It was not a large company; but salt, if it truly have its savor, can permeate the whole lump. The Spirit came in accordance with our Lord's promise, and Peter preached the first sermon in the Christian church. It was hardly a concessive sermon. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." How unkind Peter was! But by that merciful unkindness they were pricked in their hearts, and three thousand souls were saved.

In the midst of silent danger

So there stood the first Christian church in the midst of a hostile world. At first sight it might have seemed to be a mere Jewish sect; the disciples continued to attend the temple services and to lead the life of Jews. But in reality that little company was as separate as if it had been shut off by desert wastes or the wide reaches of the sea; an invisible barrier, to be crossed only by the wonder of the new birth, separated the disciples of Jesus from the surrounding world. "Of the rest," we are told, "durst no man join himself to them." "And fear came upon every soul."

So it will always be. When the disciples of Jesus are really faithful to their Lord, they inspire fear; even when Christians are despised and persecuted and harried, they have sometimes made their persecutors secretly afraid. It is not so, indeed, when there is compromise in the Christian camp; it is not so when those who minister in the name of Christ have "their ears to the ground." But it will be so whenever Christians have their ears, not to the ground, but open only to the voice of God, and when they say simply, in the face of opposition or flattery, as Peter said, "We must obey God rather than men."

But after those persecutions, there came in the early church a time of peace—deadly, menacing, deceptive peace, a peace more dangerous by far than the bitterest war. Many of the sect of the Pharisees came into the Church—false brethren privily brought in. They were not true Christians, because they trusted in their own works for salvation, and no man can be a Christian who does that. They were not even true adherents of the Old Covenant; for the Old Covenant, despite the law, was a preparation for the Savior's coming, and the law was a schoolmaster unto Christ. Yet they were Christians in name, and they tried to dominate the councils of the church.

It was a serious menace; for a moment it looked as though even Peter, true apostle though he was at heart, were being deceived. His principles were right, but by his actions his principles, at Antioch, for one fatal moment, were belied. But it was not God's will that the church should perish; and the man of the hour was there. There was one man who would not consider consequences where a great principle was at stake, who put all personal considerations resolutely aside, and refused to become unfaithful to Christ through any fear of "splitting the church." "When I saw that they walked not uprightly," said Paul, "according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all . . ." Thus was the precious salt preserved.

In danger of being swept away

But from another side also the church was menaced by the blandishments of the world; it was menaced not only by a false Judaism, which really meant opposition of man's self-righteousness to the mysterious grace of God, but also by the all-embracing paganism of that day. When the Pauline churches were planted in the cities of the Greco-Roman world, the battle was not ended but only begun. Would the little spark of new life be kept alive?

Certainly it might have seemed unlikely in the extreme. The converts were for the most part not men of independent position, but slaves and humble tradesmen; they were bound by a thousand ties to the paganism of their day. How could they possibly avoid being drawn away by the current of the time? The danger certainly was great; and when Paul left an infant church like that at Thessalonica his heart was full of dread.

But God was faithful to his promise, and the first word that came from that infant church was good. The wonder had actually been accomplished; the converts were standing firm; they were in the world but not of the world; their distinctness was kept. In the midst of pagan impurity they were living true Christian lives.

But why were they living true Christian lives? That is the really important question. And the answer is plain. They were living Christian lives because they were devoted to Christian truth. "Ye turned to God," says Paul, "from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." That was the secret of their Christian lives; their Christian lives were founded upon Christian doctrine—upon theism ("the living and true God"), upon Christology ("his Son . . . whom he raised from the dead"), and upon soteriology ("which delivered us from the wrath to come"). They kept the message intact, and hence they lived the life.

So it will always be. Lives apparently and superficially Christian can perhaps sometimes be lived by force of habit, without being based upon Christian truth; but that will never do when Christian living, as in pagan Thessalonica, goes against the grain. But in the case of the Thessalonian converts the message was kept intact, and with it the Christian life. Thus again was the precious salt preserved.

In conflict with the world

The same conflict is observed in more detail in the case of Corinth. What a city Corinth was to be sure, and how unlikely a place for a Christian church! The address of Paul's First Epistle is, as Bengel says, a mighty paradox. "To the church of God which is at Corinth"—that was a paradox indeed.

And in the First Epistle to the Corinthians we have attested in all its fullness the attempt of paganism, not to combat the church by a frontal attack, but to conquer it by the far deadlier method of merging it gradually and peacefully with the life of the world. Those Corinthian Christians were connected by many ties with the pagan life of their great city. What should they do about clubs and societies; what should they do about invitations to dinners where meat that had been offered to idols was set before the guests? What should they do about marriage and the like? These were practical questions, but they involved the great principle of the distinctness and exclusiveness of the

church. Certainly the danger was very great; the converts were in great danger, from the human point of view, of sinking back into the corrupt life of the world.

But the conflict was not merely in the sphere of conduct. More fundamentally it was in the sphere of thought. Paganism in Corinth was far too astute to think that Christian life could be attacked when Christian doctrine remained. And so pagan practice was promoted by an appeal to pagan theory; the enemy engaged in an attempt to sublimate or explain away the fundamental things of the Christian faith. Somewhat after the manner of the Auburn "Affirmationists" in our day,* paganism in the Corinthian church sought to substitute the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul for the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

But God had his witness; the apostle Paul was not deceived; and in a great passage—the most important words, historically, perhaps, that have ever been penned—he reviewed the sheer factual basis of the Christian faith. "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." There is the foundation of the Christian edifice. Paganism was gnawing away—not yet directly, but by ultimate implication—at that foundation in Corinth, as it has been doing so in one way or another ever since, and particularly in the Presbyterian Church in the United State of America just at the present time. But Paul was there, and many of the five hundred witnesses were still alive. The gospel message was kept distinct, in the Pauline churches, from the wisdom of the world; the precious salt was still preserved.

In danger in every age

Then, in the second century, there came another deadly conflict. It was again a conflict not with an enemy without, but with an enemy within. The Gnostics used the name of Christ; they tried to dominate the church; they appealed to the Epistles of Paul. But despite their use of Christian language they were pagan through and through. Modern scholarship, on this point, has tended to confirm the judgment of the great orthodox writers of that day; Gnosticism was at bottom no mere variety of Christianity, no mere heresy, but paganism masquerading in Christian dress. Many were deceived; the danger was very great. But it was not God's will that the church should perish. Ireneus was there, and Tertullian with his vehement defence. The church was saved—not by those who cried, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," but by zealous contenders for the faith. Again, out of a great danger, the precious salt was preserved.

Time would fail us to speak of Athanasius and of Augustine and the rest, but they too were God's instruments in the preservation of the precious salt. Certainly the attack in those days was subtle enough almost to deceive the very elect. Grant the Semi-Arians their one letter in *homoiousios*, the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, and Christ would have been degraded to the level of a creature, mythology would have been substituted for the living God, and the victory of paganism would have been complete. From the human point of view the life of the church was hanging by a hair. But God was watching over his own; Athanasius stood against the world; and the precious salt was preserved.

Then came the Middle Ages. How long, and how dark, in some respects, was the time! It is hard to realize that

eleven centuries elapsed between Augustine and Luther, yet such was the case. Never in the interval, indeed, was God altogether without his witnesses; the light still shone from the sacred page; but how dim, in that atmosphere, the light seemed to be! The gospel might have seemed to be buried forever.

Yet in God's good time it came forth again with new power—the same gospel that Augustine and Paul had proclaimed. What stronger proof could there be that that gospel had come from God? Where in the history of religion is there any parallel for such a revival, after such an interval, and with such a purity of faithfulness to what had formerly been believed? A gospel that survived the Middle Ages will probably, it may well be hoped, never perish from the earth, but will be the word of life unto the end of the world.

Yet in those early years of the sixteenth century how dark was the time! When Luther made his visit to Rome, what did he find—what did he find there in the center of the Christian world? He found paganism blatant and triumphant and unashamed; he found the glories of ancient Greece come to life in the Italian renaissance, but with those glories the self-sufficiency and the rebellion against God and the moral degradation of the natural man. Apparently paganism had at last won its age-long battle; apparently it had made a clean sweep over the people of God; apparently the church had at last become quite indistinguishable from the world.

But in the midst of the general wreck one thing at least was preserved. Many things were lost, but one thing was still left—the medieval church had never lost the Word of God. The Bible had indeed become a book with seven seals; it had been buried under a mass of misinterpretation never equalled perhaps until the absurdities indulged in by the Modernism of the present day—a mass of misinterpretation which seemed to hide it from the eyes of men. But at last an Augustinian monk penetrated beneath the mass of error, read the Scriptures with his own eyes; and the Reformation was born. Thus again was the precious salt preserved.

Against the spirit of the modern age

Then came Calvin and the great consistent system which he founded upon the Word of God. How glorious were even the by-products of that system of revealed truth; a great stream of liberty spread from Geneva throughout Europe and to America across the sea. But if the by-products were glorious, more glorious by far was the truth itself, and the life that it caused men to live. How sweet and beautiful a thing was the life of the Protestant Christian home, where the Bible was the sole guide and stay! Have we really devised a substitute for that life in these latter days? I think not, my friends. There was liberty there, and love, and peace with God.

But the church after the Reformation was not to have any permanent rest, as indeed it is probably not to have rest at any time in this evil world. Still the conflict of the ages went on, and paganism prepared for an assault greater and more insidious perhaps than any that had gone before. At first there was a frontal attack—Voltaire and Rousseau and the Goddess Reason and the terrors of the French Revolution and all that. As will always be the case, such an attack was bound to fail. But the enemy has now changed his method, and the attack is coming, not from without, but,

in far more dangerous fashion, from within. During the past one hundred years the Protestant churches of the world have gradually been becoming permeated by paganism in its most insidious form.

Sometimes paganism is blatant, as, for example, in a recent sermon in the First Presbyterian Church of New York, the burden of which was, "I Believe in Man." That was the very quintessence of the pagan spirit—confidence in human resources substituted for the Christian consciousness of sin. But what was there blatant is found in subtler forms in many places throughout the church.

The Bible, with a complete abandonment of all scientific historical method, and of all common sense, is made to say the exact opposite of what it means; no Gnostic, no medieval monk with his fourfold sense of Scripture, ever produced more absurd biblical interpretation than can be heard every Sunday in the pulpits of New York. Even prayer in many quarters is made a thinly disguised means of propaganda against the truth of the gospel; men pray that there may be peace, where peace means victory for the enemies of Christ.

Thus gradually the church is being permeated by the spirit of the world; it is becoming what the Auburn Affirmationists call an "inclusive" church; it is becoming salt that has lost its savor and is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

What should the true disciple do?

At such a time, what should be done by those who love Christ? I think, my friends, that they should at least face the facts; I do not believe that they should bury their heads like ostriches in the sand; I do not think that they should soothe themselves with the minutes of the General Assembly or the reports of the Boards or the imposing rows of figures which the church papers contain.

Last week it was reported that the churches of America increased their membership by 690,000. Are you encouraged by these figures? I for my part am not encouraged a bit. I have indeed my own grounds for encouragement, especially those which are found in the great and precious promises of God. But these figures have no place among them. How many of these 690,000 names do you think are really written in the Lamb's book of life? A small proportion, I fear.

Church membership today often means nothing more, as has well been said, than a vague admiration for the moral character of Jesus; the church in countless communities is little more than a Rotary Club. One day, as I was walking through a neighboring city, I saw, not an altar with an inscription to an unknown god, but something that filled me with far more sorrow than that could have done. I saw a church with a large sign on it, which read somewhat like this: "Not a member? Come in and help us make this a better community." Truly we have wandered far from the day when entrance into the church involved confession of faith in Christ as the Savior from sin.

The truth is that in these days the ecclesiastical currency has been sadly debased. Church membership, church office, the ministry, no longer mean what they ought to mean. But what shall we do? I think, my friends, that, cost what it may, we ought at least to face the facts. It will be hard; it will seem impious to timid souls; many will be hurt. But in God's name let us get rid of shams and have reality at least. Let us stop soothing ourselves with columns of statistics,

and face the spiritual facts; let us recall this paper currency and get back to a standard of gold.

When we do that, and when we come to God in prayer, with the real facts spread before him, as Hezekiah spread before him the letter of the enemy, there will be some things to cheer our hearts. God has not left himself altogether without his witnesses. Humble they may often be, and despised by the wisdom of the world; but they are not perhaps altogether without the favor of God. In China, in Great Britain, and in America there have been some who have raised their voices bravely for their Savior and Lord.

True, the forces of unbelief have not yet been checked, and none can say whether our own American Presbyterian Church, which we love so dearly, will be preserved. It may be that paganism will finally control, and that Christian men and women may have to withdraw from a church that has lost its distinctness from the world. Once in the course of history, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that method of withdrawal was God's method of preserving the precious salt. But it may be also that our church in its corporate capacity, in its historic grandeur, may yet stand for Christ. God grant that it may be so! The future at any rate is in God's hand, and in some way or other—let us learn that much from history—the salt will be preserved.

What are you going to do, my brothers, in this great time of crisis? What a time it is to be sure! What a time of glorious opportunity! Will you stand with the world, will you shrink from controversy, will you witness for Christ only where witnessing costs nothing, will you pass through these stirring days without coming to any real decision?

Or will you learn the lesson of Christian history; will you penetrate, by your study and your meditation, beneath the surface; will you recognize in that which prides itself on being modern an enemy that is as old as the hills; will you hope, and pray, not for a mere continuance of what now is, but for a rediscovery of the gospel that can make all things new; will you have recourse to the charter of Christian liberty in the Word of God?

God grant that some of you may do that! God grant that some of you, even though you be not now decided, may come to say, as you go forth into the world: "It is hard in these days to be a Christian; the adversaries are strong; I am weak; but thy Word is true and thy Spirit will be with me; here am I, Lord, send me."

*The Auburn Affirmation was circulated among the ministers of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., during 1923 and 1924, and was signed by nearly 1300 men. The document, in reaction to a deliverance of the 1923 General Assembly declaring certain "fundamentals" of Christianity to be "essential doctrines" of the church, openly asserted an inclusivist attitude. Among other points, the document insisted that the "theory" of Christ's death as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners was only one of several permissible "theories." No action was ever taken to discipline those who signed the Affirmation; rather, they became the leading forces in the Presbyterian Church from then on. Failure of the church's courts to deal with the Affirmationists' defiance of the General Assembly's declarations was a major factor in the eventual departure of Dr. Machen and others from the old Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. That church, now the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., has never repudiated the affirmation; it has rather adopted it as a whole and gone on much further from there.

Was Phoebe a Deacon - - - - Yes?

THE EDITOR

I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a deacon of the church that is at Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord, . . . and assist her in whatever thing she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of mine own self (Romans 16:1, 2, according to one possible translation).

Does it mean what it seems to say? Was this woman Phoebe an ordained deacon of the church? If she was, then that is reason enough to consider ordaining qualified women to that office today.

In its report to the Fortieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Committee on Revisions to the Form of Government expressed its opinion this way:

"The Committee wishes to inform the Assembly that in its study of the office of deacon it has concluded that such passages of Scripture as Phil. 4:2-3, Rom. 16:1-2, I Tim. 3:8ff. and I Tim. 5:9ff., indicate that in the New Testament women had a recognized work as deacons in the church. The Committee, therefore, is planning to make provision for this in the Form of Government. The Committee will, however, be glad to receive advice in this matter from the judicatories of the church during the year."

The report that follows is the *Guardian* editor's own reflections on the matter and does not represent the Committee in any way. I will attempt to give the argument in favor of ordaining women as deacons as fairly as possible, and then present the counter-argument as well.

The basis of church government

It should be noted at the outset that the question is simply and solely whether women may be ordained deacons. To answer that question affirmatively does not open the door to ordaining women as elders or ministers of the Word. Though several denominations now permit ordination of women to any office of the church, their reasons for doing so are not grounded in Scripture. Or, to put it more accurately, they have not made their case so as to convince this observer that Scripture supports it.

And that support of Scripture must be the basis for what we do in the Church of Jesus Christ. All true churches have sought to follow whatever Scripture teaches, both in matters of worship and in church organization. But, for example, churches in the Lutheran tradition have held that they are free to do whatever God has not forbidden. Churches in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition have held that not only must we do whatever God commands, refrain from doing whatever God has forbidden, but that we may not include in worship or church government anything except what God

has ordained for us in his Word. The church is God's temple, and he alone has the right to order its affairs.

So, in this matter of ordaining women as deacons, the question is not whether Scripture may give us a loophole for doing it, but whether God *intended* for us to do so. To be sure, there are those who feel that Scripture clearly forbids the church to ordain women to any office; if that can be shown, then the whole question is settled for those who submit to God's Word. At the same time, we need to realize that many sincere students of Scripture see the matter otherwise, and that is what we want to consider now.

Significant Scripture passages

To help the reader follow the argument, we give the crucial Scripture passages and emphasize those words or phrases that are most significant.

"I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for *they labored with me in the gospel, . . .*" (Philippians 4:2, 3).

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a *servant (or deaconness, or deacon) of the church* that is at Cenchrea. . . ." (Romans 16:1, 2).

"*Deacons* in like manner must be grave, . . . *Women* in like manner must be grave, . . . Let *deacons* be husbands of one wife, . . ." (1 Timothy 3:8-13, where the reference to "women" is included within remarks about the qualifications for the office of deacon).

"Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, . . ." (1 Timothy 5:9-16; cf. Titus 2:3-5).

(All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version.)

The place of women in the church

Interestingly enough, almost all that we have on women's role in the church comes from the writings of Paul. But that is to be expected since Paul was the one who gave us most of our instruction in matters of church order and government.

Since we "are all one in Christ Jesus," Paul says, "there can be no male and female" (Galatians 3:28). From this verse it has been argued that there can be no denial of church office to women. But what Paul says is that being a woman in the church means that she shares equally in the blessings promised to Abraham (verse 29). She is not inferior in spiritual blessings or gifts.

But this does not establish an absolute equality of sexes. Even in the early church there was a "women's liberation movement" that resulted in certain women attempting to run things in the church. This Paul condemns. "Let a woman

learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, . . ." (1 Timothy 2:11, 12).

Nor, as some have tried to suggest, were Paul's restrictions on women based on certain cultural patterns of his day. On the contrary, the apostle bases his case on creation's arrangements (1 Timothy 2:13; 1 Corinthians 11:8,9). The woman was created to be subject to the man, and that created order is to be observed in the church.

Suitability of women as deacons

It has long been recognized that women are eminently suited to do the sort of works of mercy that are the main task of the deacons. Dorcas is an excellent example of Christian love and mercy at work. Phoebe herself, whatever her official status, is plainly said to have been a help to many including Paul himself. Euodia and Syntyche did some sort of labor with Paul, a labor "in the gospel." And women ministered to Jesus during his earthly sojourn.

There is nothing, in other words, in the subordination of the woman to the man that rules out her doing works of mercy and love for others. She is, as most of us seem intuitively to realize, more likely to see a need and react to it. And to do a work of mercy is not at all to lord it over anyone; it is instead a putting of oneself into a subservient role.

To do the work of a deacon, the work of mercy in God's name, is to perform a work that is submissive by its very nature. There is nothing in such work itself that goes contrary to created subordination of the woman to the man. A woman may, in other words, be eminently qualified—as a woman and in her particular gifts—to do the work of deacons.

Women as church officers

All that has been said so far may be enough to show that the idea of women as deacons is not forbidden in the New Testament. Since deacons have no occasion to teach the church, or to lord it over others, then a woman deacon would not be acting contrary to Paul's word in 1 Timothy 2.

But this does not prove that women ought to be deacons, since it does not prove that God positively intended such a thing. In order to show God's intention for his church it would be necessary to find some clear order that women were to be ordained as deacons. But if there were such an order, we would have known it long ago and the question would be settled for all time. It remains to ask, then, whether there is some example in the New Testament church showing us that women were deacons in those days of the apostles.

The quotation above from 1 Timothy 5 suggests that some women, at least sixty years old and widowed, were on some official roll of the church. What did they do? It is not clear, but the references to her good works, her hospitality and service to other believers, her relief of the sick, all suggest that she did the sort of things that deacons are supposed to do.

Next, the reference to "women" in 1 Timothy 3 is striking. Paul is setting forth the qualifications for those who are to be deacons (verses 8-13). Then in the middle of this paragraph he makes reference to "women." What he seems to be doing is this: In verses 8-10 the apostle is stating certain general qualifications required of anyone who is being considered for the office of the deacon. In verse 11 he makes particular reference to women and the qualifications they

must meet. In verse 12 he adds the specific qualifications that men must meet. In verse 13 he is referring to all those who hold the office and the blessings that come from it.

In other words, Paul means us to understand that both men and women may become deacons, if they meet the requirements both in general and in particular as given here. That is certainly one way to understand the passage, an understanding that ties it together as a unified whole.

Phoebe, the deacon of Cenchrea

The reference (Philippians 4:2, 3) to Euodia and Syntyche does show that women did work "in the gospel" along with the apostle himself. That phrase "in the gospel" does suggest that their labor had some official character to it. But precisely what they did is not made clear.

The case of Phoebe is perhaps the clearest of all, and it is there that the final decision is likely to be made. Phoebe is called a *diakonos* of the church (Romans 16:1). This word is spelled in Greek as a masculine form, meaning "deacon" in the official sense, or "servant" in a general sense. Since there was a feminine form for "servant," the masculine spelling strongly suggests that Paul is calling Phoebe a "deacon" in the official sense, precisely as he refers to men as deacons (masculine plural) in 1 Timothy 3:12.

In other words, Paul is recognizing Phoebe not as a "deaconess" in some general recognition of her past services of love and mercy, or even as a member of a special office for women titled "deaconesses." Rather, a masculine spelling of the word would identify Phoebe as a "deacon" in the same sense that a man might be a deacon of the church.

Thus Paul the apostle, the source for most of our knowledge about how Christ's church is to be organized, singles out this woman as a *diakonos*, commends her past service in that capacity, and calls upon the Roman believers to assist her in her work in their midst. It is indeed a total endorsement of Phoebe as a *diakonos*.

The state of the question

Everything that has been said above, and we trust it is said in a way that makes the case as strongly as it can be made, points to the conclusion that women may be ordained as deacons in the church, ordained to the same office of deacon that men now hold. We have tried not to say anything more than the Scripture passages allow.

It is also possible to examine early church history to learn that women did exercise certain offices in the church, at least for a time. But, however illuminating that early history may be, it is still to the Scripture that we must go for our instructions.

It should be clear that the case for women as deacons depends a great deal on that word *diakonos* in Romans 16:1. Everything else that is said suggests the possibility that women were deacons, but it does not clearly demonstrate that they were.

In a concluding article, I will try to state the case that is made against ordaining women as deacons. To give both in one article would have made it rather long, and to present each separately may help make each case more clearly presented. In any event, all of God's people—men and women—should consider these things carefully. Our business in the church is to do the will of God, our Father and the Father of our Lord and Savior. Your reactions to what has been said are welcome.

— J. J. M.

GLORY DUE TO HIS NAME

*Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.*
— Psalm 96:8.

The Psalms are poetry, but not the poetry of rhyme and meter. Their poetry is mainly seen in the pairings of parallel thoughts. Psalm 96 shows this.

*O sing unto the Lord a new song;
sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
Sing unto the Lord, bless his name;
shew forth his salvation from day to day.*

In each of these verses, the first thought is repeated a second time. But the second line is not an identical duplicate. It will add some new thought—*all the earth* in the first verse, *his salvation* in the second. Or it may use a different verb to express a similar action—*sing* and then *shew forth*, both verbs of praise but not quite the same in meaning.

Then we come to verse 8. The first line repeats the theme of earlier verses—*Give glory to the Lord!* But how is the second line in any way parallel? How is bringing your offering to the church a matter of giving the Lord the glory due to him?

A thanksgiving glory

There is nothing that pleases God more than to receive the heartfelt thanks of his people. In fact, that is the purpose of God's saving work. He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus" *in order that* we might be "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Ephesians 1:3-6). We are saved by grace in order to praise the glory of grace in Christ.

To give glory to God is to say thanks to God for what he is—the almighty Creator—and for what he has done—saving us from sin and death through his Son, Christ Jesus. Why was the widow's mite of such significance? Because it spoke so clearly her total devotion to her Lord. It was her thanksgiving glory to God her Savior.

To bring an offering to God is an expression of gratitude to the Lord for all his blessings—his choosing us, adopting us as his children, redeeming us from the curse of sin, and preparing an inheritance yet to come. To give an offering in grateful praise for God's manifold grace is to give God his glory due.

So, when you bring your offering to church, let it be a gift of loving devotion and praise for the grace of God to you. Such an offering will be a true giving of glory due to the Name by which we are saved.

A missionary glory

But if God has indeed been gracious unto you, has showered you with those spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, you will be moved by the "earnest of the Spirit" within to long to see that grace shown to other poor sinners. So the psalmist continues, *Say among the heathen, The Lord reigneth* (Psalm 96:10). And this is cause for rejoicing throughout the whole of creation (verses 11, 12).

The Lord reigneth! His kingdom is established, and his reign is one of saving power. "All power is given unto me," says the Lord of Glory. That is the basis for sending forth the gospel unto the ends of the creation.

To bring an offering into the courts of God is to help in saying to all the earth, "The Lord reigneth!" Your offering of thanksgiving is rightly devoted to spreading the good news of God's glorious grace in Christ to needy sinners everywhere.

What a wonderful arrangement this is! But this is not really so surprising when we remember the kind of God we have. We can "shew forth his salvation from day to day" because he has shown it to us. And we can worship "in the beauty of holiness" because he has clothed us with Christ's righteousness. We can "rejoice in the Lord" because he has counted us as righteous and we have every reason to "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psalm 97:12).

Glory is due!

This is not to say that bringing money to put into the collection plate is the sum total of our duty to glorify God. But it is to say, with the psalmist, that bringing an offering of thanksgiving, an offering that will send forth the gospel of Christ's kingship, is indeed a giving of glory to God.

And glory is due unto that Name. For the name of Jehovah God, of Jesus the Lord, is the name given to men by which to be saved. Saved! That act of God's love that he owed to no one, least of all to rebellious mankind. Glory is due unto his name, for by that Name he has redeemed us and made us his own children.

Bring an offering, and come into his courts. And rejoice that this is giving glory to the name of God our Savior and Lord.

—John J. Mitchell

The graph compares Orthodox Presbyterian giving in 1972 and 1973 to the work of home and foreign missions and Christian education.

In 1972, a budget goal of \$450,000 was set; a total of \$441,000 was contributed. The budget goal for 1973 is \$500,000. Estimates based on past years' experience indicate that giving to this year's budget may total no more than \$450,000. A \$50,000 shortage would be a severe curtailment of the church's outreach.

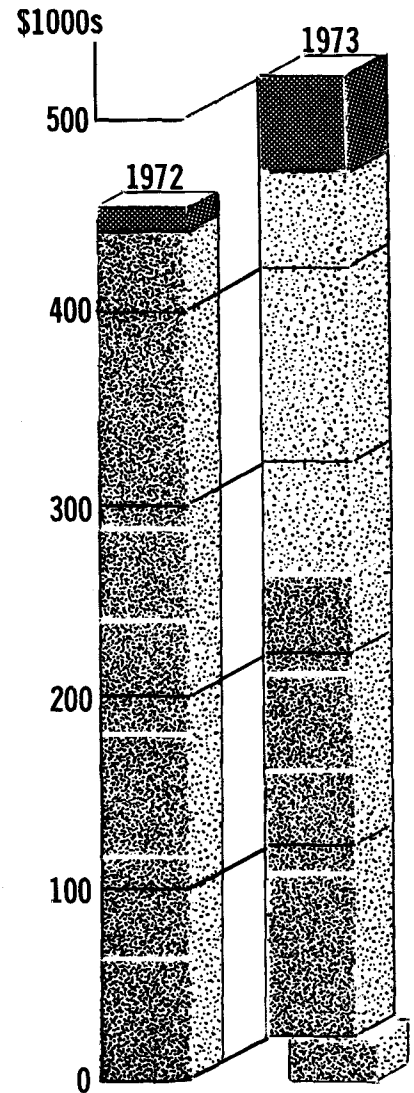
The blocks in the graphs indicate the giving in two-month periods. Though 1973 began considerably ahead of last

year, the rate of giving has slipped. By September 1, total contributions in 1973 barely exceeded those in 1972.

The small block at the base of the 1973 column represents the Devaluation Offering received in June. It is not a part of the Combined Budget, but was to offset the effects of devalued dollars in foreign missions.

The block representing November-December giving is much larger than any other two-month period. This is due to the annual Thank Offering. If 1973 is to come anywhere near its goal, giving to the Thank Offering will have to increase markedly.

OPC Combined Budget giving



thank offering 1973

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Thank Offering in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Over the years this November offering has provided as much as one-third of the funds for the church's efforts to send forth the gospel.

Last year Orthodox Presbyterians were asked to give \$100,000 in this annual appeal. To the grateful surprise of almost everyone, the total was over \$125,000. As a result, the gap between total contributions from OPC sources and the approved budget was fairly small. That response, in a time of inflation and increases in the cost of living, was truly encouraging.

This year Orthodox Presbyterians are being asked to give \$150,000 to the Thank Offering. That is a large increase—more of an increase than the average gain over the past few years. It is *less* of an increase than was registered by 1972 over 1971.

The record so far

Contributions so far in 1973 are not encouraging. Though a large amount was received in January, each month after that has slipped until the total through August 31 is only \$2000 more than at the same date a year ago. This is in the face of a \$50,000 budget increase for 1973. Even with a signifi-

cant gain in the Thank Offering, the total could fall short by \$50,000, or barely \$10,000 over last year.

On the other hand, an extra \$27,000 has been received to offset the effects of dollar devaluation in the work of foreign missions. This amount is not in the budget, but was a special effort for a special situation. If the Devaluation Offering were included, total giving for 1973 could reach \$475,000 by the end of the year.

The rest of the year

If we assume, consciously or not, that our giving to the Lord's work must be curtailed in view of rapidly rising living costs, then this could be a sad year for OPC outreach efforts. All of us are hurting at the supermarket and gas pump—you and I, our missionaries, at home and abroad, our writers, secretaries, clerks, and helpers.

But if we determine that the Lord's portion comes off the top, then this may be a year for rejoicing. We should have held a day of thanksgiving in gratitude for the spirit of giving shown in last year's Thank Offering. If God continues to give us this grace in 1973, enabling us to meet this year's goal, we should be especially and humbly grateful to our sovereign and gracious Lord.

The *Guardian* has compiled the in-

formation given here and in the graph so that Orthodox Presbyterians may give prayerful thought to their stewardship. Other readers should consider their own situations—there's nothing very isolated about the needs and the pressures of today.

When you pause to consider how the Lord has prospered you—not just in money, but in "all spiritual blessings" in Christ—then consider also the glory that will come to God's name through our home and foreign missions and the work of Christian education. Money matters are not grubby matters when they are matters to God's glory through faithful spreading of the gospel of his sovereign grace!

— J. J. M.

A look at the Larger Catechism

(Continued from page 115.)

rection of the unjust, which all are agreed occurs on the last day.

The second proposed change would omit *general* before the expression, 'resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.' Presumably the reason for the proposed omission lies in the assumption that *general* means 'simultaneous.'

The most relevant biblical text is Acts 24:15, where Paul confesses his hope of "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." *General* is not used here, but the word does make explicit for catechetical purposes what is implicit in Paul's words, that the resurrection extends to all men, for all are embraced in the expression, "the just and unjust."

Dictionary definitions confirm the import of the term. *General* means "pertaining to the whole," "pertaining to, affecting, or applicable to, each and all of a class, kind, or order," "pertaining to many persons, cases, or occasions." In none of these definitions is there the suggestion of a time reference.

The inclusion of *general* in Answer 87 should therefore constitute no problem since it denotes nothing that is not freely acknowledged by the various millennial persuasions.

Question and Answer 88

The proposed revision of this next question is the most extensive of the four. Not only is the question altered, but also the thrust of the answer.

The original form of the question, "What shall immediately follow after the resurrection?" is altered by omitting the word immediately. The answer is correspondingly altered by the omission of the same word.

Three other changes of substance are made in the answer. The first of these inserts *the coming of the Lord*, so that we learn what happens 'after the coming of the Lord and the resurrection.' The second change is the omission of *general* as descriptive of the final judgment. The third change shifts the reference of human ignorance of 'the day and hour' from the time of judgment to that of the coming of the Lord. To this extent the thrust of the answer is altered.

There does not appear to be any reason to necessitate a change in the form of the question. If we may inquire as to what will follow after the resurrection, we may also inquire as to what will follow *immediately* after it. Neither pre-, nor a-, nor postmillennialists plead ignorance on this score. If the word is retained in the question, it will be retained in the answer, for the answer must be relevant to what is asked.

Since our concern is with the original text of the Larger Catechism and its suitability, we omit consideration of the proposed addition to Answer 88.

With reference to *general*, the same considerations may be pleaded here that were set forth in connection with the previous answer. There can be no objection to describing the judgment as *general*, for all men without exception will be judged.

The original text of the Catechism asserts that no man knows the day and hour of the final judgment. Surely there can be no objection to a confession of

ignorance at this point. Not only premillennialists but also a- and postmillennialists are prepared to date the judgment with reference to the advent of Christ. But all are ignorant of the day and hour of both the advent and the judgment. For all, ignorance of the day and hour of judgment serves to accent the urgency of watchfulness, prayerfulness, and preparation for the Lord's return, as the language of the original form of the Catechism states it.

Question and Answer 89

As with 88, the proposed revision affects both the question and answer in 89. Instead of 'what shall be done to the wicked at the day of judgment?' the revised question asks what shall be done to them *when they are judged*. Similarly, the new answer is, "When they are judged (instead of *At the day of judgment*), the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand, . . ."

Speaking abstractly, there is no reason why inquiry cannot be made into the fate of the wicked at the day of judgment. There is, therefore, no reason why the question cannot be retained in its original form. However, the question is obviously altered for the sake of the doctrinal pronouncement in the answer.

The original answer states that 'at the day of judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand.' This language is clearly drawn from Matthew 25:33. Interestingly enough, the time reference in verse 31 is "when the Son of man shall come in his glory." Instead of appropriating this reference, the Assembly of Divines used the expression, 'at the day of judgment.' But they had clear biblical warrant from the context.

Other passages bear this out. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9). Similarly, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

It is clear as Answer 89 unfolds what is involved in being set at Christ's left hand, that what is in view is the "perdition of ungodly men." This is said expressly to be at the day of judgment in both the Bible and the Catechism.

In Answer 89, as in 86, the original text of the Larger Catechism is simply using biblical language to express biblical truth. Again, there can be no objection in principle to that procedure, whatever differences might arise in the course of further exposition of the truth.

Losses effected by revision

The preceding brief analysis has been designed to show that the proposed revisions of the Larger Catechism are not necessary to achieve a union between the Orthodox and Reformed Presbyterian Churches.

To refer the resurrection of the just to the last day, and to designate the occasion of the judgment of the wicked as the day of judgment, is simply to employ biblical language. The use of the words *immediately* and *general* adds nothing that is not already acknowledged by all parties. And to state that no one knows the day and hour of the judgment is to state an obviously biblical truth.

On the other hand, the revision of the language of the Larger Catechism would entail the loss of some-

Comparison of texts in the Larger Catechism

The original text

Q. 86. *What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?*

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. (Etc.)

Q. 87. *What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?*

A. We are to believe, that at the last day there shall be a general resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust: when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed; and the self-same bodies of the dead which were laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls for ever, shall be raised up by the power of Christ. (Etc.)

Q. 88. *What shall immediately follow after the resurrection?*

A. Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men; the day and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord.

Q. 89. *What shall be done to the wicked at the day of judgment?*

A. At the day of judgment, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand (etc.).

thing that, if not indispensable, is at least highly desirable for the new denomination.

First, the three documents comprising the subordinate doctrinal standards present us with an organic unity. They evidence painstaking care in their composition and enviable integrity in their exposition of biblical truth. Unlike the three forms of unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) of the continental Reformed churches, derived from three geographically and temporally separate sources, the Westminster standards have a single origin and represent an integrated whole.

The revisions would disturb that unity. For example, Answers 85 and 86 are related so that the former says the righteous shall be delivered from death itself *at the last day*; this is the resurrection deliverance that terminates the unnatural separation of body and soul. Answer 86 then says that the bodies are united to the souls of the just *at the last day*. If there is no need to alter the words of 85, there is no need to alter the words of 86.

Nor does the language of the Catechism go beyond that of the Confession itself: 'At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed; and the

Proposed revision

Q. 86. *What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?*

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the return of Christ they be again united to their souls. (Etc.)

Q. 87. *What are we to believe concerning the resurrection?*

A. We are to believe, that at the last time there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust: when they that are then found alive shall in a moment be changed; and the self-same bodies of the dead which were laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls for ever, shall be raised up by the power of Christ. (Etc.)

Q. 88. *What shall follow after the resurrection?*

A. After the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the just and the unjust shall follow the final judgment of angels and men. The day and hour of the coming of the Lord no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray and be ready.

Q. 89. *What shall be done to the wicked when they are judged?*

A. When they are judged, the wicked shall be set on Christ's left hand (etc.).

dead shall be raised up, with the selfsame bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever' (XXXII, II).

Similarly the language of Answer 88 presents no difficulties when it is correlated with the Confession. Christ would have the day of judgment 'unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen' (XXXIII, III). Revisions to the Larger Catechism of the kind proposed would disturb the unity and integrity of these documents.

Preserving the continuity

Second, it has been important for both Orthodox Presbyterians and Reformed Presbyterians to insist on the continuity of these churches with the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., as it was prior to 1936. This claim is obviously strengthened if the sons of the fathers serve together in one denomination, and it is further strengthened if they do so with as much of the old Catechism intact as possible.

(Continued on page 127.)

The Elders of the Church

. . . seeking the office and the man

LAWRENCE R. EYRES

At this point, I am beginning a new phase in dealing with the subject of the elders in Christ's church. I have tried to set down the biblical principles governing the eldership. These were summarized at the beginning of this study. And what was found to be biblical is now taken as normative for what is to follow.

This phase is intended to give guidelines to churches, sessions or consistories, prospective and existing elders, to show how these high principles may be put into practice to the edification of the churches. These principles are not for framing to the admiration of passers-by. They are for living. And these grand principles our sovereign God has given for the government of his church are to be practiced in the life of that church.

These are the practical areas I intend to deal with in this and later articles: (1) *Seeking the office and the man*; (2) *Screening procedures*; (3) *Between election and ordination*; (4) *Toward functioning elders*; and (5) *Divisions of labor within the one office*.

Finding the right men

Finding qualified rulers for the church has always been a difficult and serious business. Even the apostle Paul did not immediately ordain elders in the churches he established during his first missionary journey. Instead, he returned sometime later for the purpose of confirming the brethren and then ordaining elders in every church (Acts 14:21-23). Time and care were needed, even under apostolic rule.

How frequently new congregations are organized today before qualified men are found to bear rule in Christ's name. The results are sad — either unfit men chosen in haste, or outside rulers assigned to oversee the congregation without being able to live and worship among those they are to rule. Both expedients are just that — expedients. And the church of Christ suffers.

Yet there still stands this statement of simple fact upon which the church can rest in confidence: "And he [the ascended Lord] gave . . . some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Our Savior is still the giving Lord who continues to supply his church with pastor-teachers. We can depend upon him.

But it isn't as though these gifted men were dropped down into the lap of the church like bundles from heaven, fully prepared for their labors. Rather, in confident obedience the church must take up two lines of action that, under the blessing of God's Spirit, will result in this promised supply of God's men for God's work. Men must be encouraged to seek the office, and the church must be taught to seek the men of God's appointment.

Seeking the office

Paul writes, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop [elder], he desires a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1). That Paul calls this a true saying, or "faithful word," indicates that it was to be axiomatic in the church, a proposition beyond the need of proof or defense. And what is the proposition? It is that desiring the office of elder is both commendable on the part of the man and good for the church of Christ.

We have little difficulty with this saying as it applies to that aspect of the eldership we call the gospel ministry. Young men whose hearts burn to serve their Redeemer, men who appear to have the gifts, are encouraged to consider the ministry and often are substantially aided in their formal preparation for it. But strangely, it is different when we come to the aspect of this same office that we call the ruling eldership. It is tacitly assumed that any man who *wants* to be an elder is suspect from the start. In fact, if he really wants to serve, he'd be well advised to "play hard to get"!

This is all wrong! Scripture says that to desire the office is to desire to serve the Lord in a good work. Of course, wrong motivation is to be avoided. But when a man desires out of a pure heart to serve his Lord in this high office, the sooner he begins to think about it the better.

Every Christian man may well be encouraged to soliloquize after this fashion: *I have been bought with the precious blood of Christ; therefore, I am not my own. Since I have but one life to live for my Lord and Savior, I must invest it where it will bring him the highest return. And where is the highest place of usefulness in the cause of Christ's kingdom? Is it not in service as one of Christ's under-shepherds? I shall pray and prepare myself for this office if it shall please him to confirm his gifts in me. And when he calls me through the call of his church, I will follow him.*

To be sure, a man must examine his gifts. He may need to conclude on good grounds that he is not gifted to fulfill this high calling. But if he desires the office out of a heart burning with zeal and gratitude, woe to that pastor or adult Christian counsellor who may quench his zeal! In fact, the teaching ministry of the church would do well to encourage young men to think in these terms.

Young Christian men, on their part, ought to confide their thoughts to their elders so that the latter may encourage and instruct them in their early preparations for the office. Young men need guidance in the matters of lively devotional habits and solid Bible studies. They need to be given scope within the church to use and develop their gifts.

Having proved themselves in small matters, they should be given larger responsibilities. In other words, preparation for the eldership ought to begin long before a man is nominated to stand for election. It is thus that the Holy Spirit makes men bishops.

Seeking the man

Men ought to seek the office. But men must also be sought out for the office. Churches that stand in need of elders are not reluctant to do this. It seems to be quite natural to look around to see who might be available.

But churches are not always wise in the way they seek for men. Often the church settles for the best man available. Frequently they look toward men of means and prestige, supposing that if such men are made elders they will use their means and prestige to the advancement of the church. Or the members of the congregation, considering themselves unqualified to make significant choices, will simply rubber-stamp the selections of their session or official nominating committee. All these ways are wrong.

In selecting the seven men for service, the early church was told: "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3). Apparently the members of the congregation were perfectly able to judge who had a good name in the community, who was full of the Spirit, who had genuine wisdom. And the apostles were satisfied with the church's choice. (The number seven was apparently the number needed to do the work. How many men there ought to be on a session is a matter of judging the needs and of finding those qualified to fill them.)

Initiative needs to be taken by those who teach in the church to encourage men to seek the office. But the teaching ministry also needs to instruct congregations in the exercise of discrimination in their search for candidates. Then the church ought to seek and find those (*all* those and *only* those) whom the Lord, through the ministry of the Spirit, has equipped to serve in that particular congregation. This alone should determine the size of a given session. An alert congregation, properly instructed in the relevant Scriptures, will watch its young men as they mature, will pray for the Spirit's wisdom, will plead with the Head of the church to send them pastor-teachers. Then when such men appear and are ready, the congregation should choose them and put them into possession of the office.

Seeking, for the Lord's blessing

It is my firm belief that, if the churches of Christ that desire to be led of the Lord in these matters will follow through on these two lines of seeking, many of the problems that have deadened or shattered churches would be solved. The lessons from Old Testament Israel should make it clear that the church, when it exercises godly care in the selection of its rulers and teachers, is in the way of blessing, awakening, and revival.

A few questions for discussion are given below. I believe they are worthy of deep pondering in the light of this and prior studies of this high office of elder in Christ's church.

1. In the light of the principles we have seen and the discussion so far, which is more scriptural — term eldership (usually a three-year term) or life tenure? What are some of the implications to be drawn from the oneness of the office of minister and ruling elder for this question of the

length of time an elder should serve?

2. If men are to be publicly encouraged to desire the office of the elder, how are we to avoid causing that man to feel hurt if the church rejects him?

3. Term eldership is argued as a good means for avoiding (a) having to live for endless years with a bad choice, and (b) establishing a perpetual ruling clique in a congregation. Does term eldership really accomplish these goals? Is life tenure hopelessly subject to these dangers?

4. If the ultimate in usefulness in Christ's church be judged as that of ministering the gospel, is it therefore a matter of lesser honor and usefulness for a young man to aspire to be "just a ruling elder"? Does 1 Timothy 3 support such an attitude, or have we allowed it to develop from some source other than Scripture?

Having presented a study of Scripture and drawn forth certain basic principles that govern the office of elder, the Rev. Lawrence R. Eyres has now moved on to a more practical application of these principles in the life of the church.

(Continued from page 125.)

The proposed revisions are certainly a far cry from the total abandonment of the Larger Catechism by the old church's legal successor, the present United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. But the point is that not even these proposed revisions are necessary.

Third, concern extends not only back into history, but horizontally across denominational lines to Presbyterian churches of Scottish and Irish origin. Whether we think of the churches in Scotland and Ireland today together with the fruit of their mission effort, or nearer to home, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America or the emerging Continuing Presbyterian Church in the South, none of these denominations have the proposed revisions.

In the laudable effort to lower the walls of separation between two small Presbyterian bodies, it would seem unwise to erect new walls of separation on other fronts. This is an especially pressing consideration when some form of synodical contact across denominational lines still seems to be a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future.

A united denomination of Orthodox and Reformed Presbyterians should be conscious of its place in the mainstream of Presbyterianism; it should not allow itself to drift into a backwater.

It need only be added that these three considerations are not the private concerns of Orthodox Presbyterians. They are as much the concern of the Reformed Presbyterian brethren—and of Presbyterian brethren in other communions who long for a united and truly Presbyterian testimony in the land.

In the absence of pressing demands of principle for revision, these considerations should tip the balance in favor of a unanimous decision to retain the original language of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Professor Norman Shepherd of Westminster Theological Seminary is one of the Orthodox Presbyterian members of the (OP-RP) Joint Committee on a Plan of Union for these two denominations.

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The Flying Curse

EDWARDS E. ELLIOTT

A police helicopter hovers overhead, ready to spotlight and identify a suspected robber. Merchants, householders, and travellers all would cry, "Cursed be the thief!" In ancient times, outraged victims would place a curse on a suspected thief by writing it on a piece of paper and letting it float down-wind in hopes that it would somehow enter the suspect's home and work its intended woe. In China, a denunciatory poster called a *tiaza* may be posted on a suspect's gate.

God also would curse the thief. A trespasser against God's rightful possessions should be warned of what is in the air. The prophet Zechariah (in chapter 5) saw God's curse as floating overhead, a flying scroll. It was no mere slip of paper. Its dimensions were those of the holy place in God's temple. On it was room for the citation of many thieves and many false-swearers or perjurers.

The actions of men are to be measured by the dimensions of God's own house. Each man who would approach the Lord's dwelling place must measure his own life against the holiness of God that was shown in the blueprints of the temple (Ezekiel 43:10). Even the gift at the altar had to be cut to fit the altar of God.

Cursed for robbing God

Malachi warned Israel that withholding tithes and offerings was man's attempt to curse and destroy God's house. It was, quite simply, an attempt to rob God himself. "Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:9).

The flying scroll is pictured as having sharp edges. It not only could pronounce a curse, but it could detect those guilty and even execute the curse against them. It would cut off the covenant-breaker, and even reduce his house to stones and rubble.

God cursed for our sakes

The numbering of the Messiah among the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12) involved his being subjected to the wrath and curse of God. He was crucified as a common criminal, hung between two thieves. The charge nailed over his head implied that he would have fain stolen the crown of Israel, that as a false-swearer he had claimed to be the Christ.

But the true bill of indictment against the Lord Jesus was much more direct than the implication in Pilate's

handwriting. It was wide enough to blot out the sun, and black with the totality of enumerated curses. Its flying trajectory was to find its target in him who knew no sin, but who became a curse for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). His house of life would be reduced to rubble, and he would have nothing (Daniel 9:26). He would be cut off out of the land of the living, because it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief as one under the curse.

Redeemed from the curse

One of the thieves said to the other, "Dost thou not fear God?" But what a wonder, that this fearful thief, rightly cursed by the law, whose life was soon to disintegrate into rubble, would seek refuge with Jesus whose life also was soon to end. "Lord," he pleads, "remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom."

The sharp edges of the curse must complete the work of condemnation, must give full satisfaction to the justice of a righteous God. But in the person of our Savior the curse would be fulfilled. And so for the believer in Jesus there is no more curse. "The handwriting . . . that was against us, he took out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:14).

So, we are united to the accursed Christ by faith and joined to him in a circumcision made without hands, made at the cross. And we can rightly claim immunity from the cutting edges of the flying scroll. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

Though Christ's house, his life, was brought low, his promise held good: "In three days I will raise it up." The temple, the place where God meets man, is rebuilt. Here we find our refuge, by faith in Christ. And gladly we are conformed to the dimensions of this place, built up into it as living stones offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

Free from the curse. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Romans 8:33). Birds fly here and there for no discernible reason; but "the curse causeless shall not come" (Proverbs 26:2). The just curse of God has already come, but for those who believe in Christ Jesus it has come to him who received it in our place.

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