

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHMEN UNITED

Contact

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A COMMUNICATION

(NOTE: The following communication is from the Executive Committee of Presbyterian Churchmen United and was approved by the PCU meeting on August 6, 1970.)

●WE JOIN WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS in lamenting schism in any church, yet we are not unmindful that under the leadership of God there came a time when Abraham and Lot no longer walked together, so also Paul and Barnabas were for a time separated in their mission. Calvin and the other Reformers being faithful to the Word of God were alienated by the religious establishment; in the heritage of their separation we have been blessed.

●DURING THE PAST DECADE those who would dissolve the Presbyterian Church in the United States have driven the wedge deeper and deeper into the structure and fellowship of the church. Such a procedure has been effectively schismatic. The fact that de facto division had already been to an alarming degree achieved was apparent in comments and actions of the 110th General Assembly.

●IN SUCH AN ACTION as persisting in moving toward union with the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A., which does not hold a confessional posture, the Assembly showed its doctrinal indifference. By refusing to order discontinuation of our Board of Christian Education's connection with "Colloquy" the Assembly failed to face a demanding ethical issue. By continuing to participate in the Consultation on Church Union after a plan of union had come forth which departs from Presbyterian order, the Assembly showed its indifference to our historic Presbyterian polity.

●IN THE FACE OF SUCH ACTIONS, which seem to be destructive of our constitutional principles, it is now apparent that the lower courts (synods, presbyteries and sessions) must be exceedingly diligent to take the necessary steps to maintain our Reformed witness and our constitutional integrity. The unity and continuity of the Presbyterian Church U.S. may well come to best expression in lower courts, as loyal Presbyterians seek there to uphold Presbyterianism in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

●WE STAND READY to do whatever is necessary to fulfill the obligations imposed by our ordination vows to maintain our Reformed faith and order, particularly as we approach the final stages of the crisis in our Church. We call upon all the members of Presbyterian Churchmen United and all loyal Presbyterian churchmen to unite with us in the common cause. All member sessions of Presbyterian Churchmen United are urged to maintain their fellowship with us and with Presbytery. Let us all act in concert, prayerfully and courageously, with true Presbyterian awareness of each other and our mutual commitment.

●WE SALUTE OUR MANY BRETHEREN within the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and other similar denominations who share with us the struggles of today and the hopes of tomorrow. May God in His good pleasure give each of us a Church of pure Reformed doctrine and evangelistic fervor.

●WE DO EARNESTLY CALL UPON ALL SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF Commitment to appoint a special time on each Lord's Day, for specific prayer that Christ, the great Head of the Church, may lead us according to His plan and purpose.

THE CRISIS IN MISSIONS

(NOTE: An address delivered to Georgia Meetings of PCU by the Reverend Dwight Linton, Missionary.)

There is today in the Presbyterian Church, U.S., an extremely serious crisis in missions which is most evident in the areas of personnel and finances. As an active missionary I have been rather reticent to speak to the issue because it would appear to be disloyal to the Board of World Missions. Yet, having struggled within myself, I have concluded that I am a missionary called of God and sent by the Presbyterian Church and therefore my obligation goes beyond our Board. It is because of this deep conviction that I speak to the crisis.

PERSONNEL

The first area of crisis to which I speak regards personnel. It was reported at the April meeting of our Board of World Missions that on January 1, 1970, our missionary force totalled 467. The minutes of that meeting also reveal that the 1971 budget will require cutting that force to 353 by the end of 1971. The Board has stated that if we experience a "contemporary miracle" the cut will be only to 400. The 1971 budget of the Board will mean for Korea, where I serve, that one out of four missionaries will have to leave the field.

The statistics are especially alarming in light of the fact that five years ago we had 567 missionaries on the foreign field. Even in the 1920s we had at one

time over 500 missionaries in active service. In a time when the world is experiencing a population explosion, we are retrenching.

FINANCE

The second area of crisis in the area of finance. In its report to the 1970 General Assembly, the Board declared that there has been no budget increases in that agency for three years even though our nation and most countries where we minister are experiencing severe inflation. It has further been estimated that even the austerity budget of 1970 will not be met since the General Council of our Church feels that not more than 90% of the total benevolent budget of the denomination will be met. This means that not only will the missionary force be reduced, but that the work budgets in every field will be reduced by 15%. The headquarters of the Board in Nashville, it is reported, has had to make even more severe cuts in its staff and operations budget.

It is quite obvious, then, that in personnel and finances, the two things vitally necessary to operate a missionary program, we have a crisis on our hands. It is only natural and right for us to ask why this is happening and to search for solutions. Some feel that it is a difference of opinion as to how we go about the same task has brought on the crisis. Others feel that all share the same burden, but the emphasis is different in that some stress the social implication while others stress the spiritual. Some feel that the equalization of benevolences is the root of the problem.

MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM

I am convinced that the crisis is a result of a far deeper and more serious problem in our Church today. Our crisis will not be solved by superficial solutions such as restructuring or reorganization. It will not be solved by abolishing the equalization process. The crisis we face in missions today is basically theological.

Last Fall I enrolled at Columbia Seminary, from which I graduated 18 years ago, to study toward a ThM degree during my furlough year. I found that Columbia Seminary has radically changed during those 18 years. There is at that institution today a theological atmosphere of neo-orthodoxy and in many ways it points further "left". Interestingly enough, a staff member of the Board of World Missions, in a conversation with me last fall, expressed sympathy for me concerning this. This man is one for whom I have appreciation and who is theologically alert having done graduate work in theology. In our conversation he said to me: "Dwight, coming back to the States and finding that neo-

orthodoxy has swept the seminary you attended must cause you pain." Then he went on to state that he held that theological stance and that he thought the members of the staff at his level in Nashville did also. He assumes, he said, that the Executive Secretary of the Board, Dr. T. Watson Street, approves since he was asked to join the staff while knowing his theological stance. This conversation along with several other factors, has convinced me that the staff of our Board of World Missions stands theologically in the neo-orthodox camp or further to the left. My thesis is that this obvious shift in theology has produced our current crisis in missions.

RECRUITMENT

This, I believe can be illustrated in three areas. We see it, first of all, in the area of recruitment, Five years ago, while home on furlough, the candidate secretary, Mr. Coffin, told us at the missions conference at Montreat that we no longer as a Church are able to recruit full-time evangelistic missionaries. The seminary graduates, he said, will no longer "buy" that. This is the case while the national churches and the individual missions are pleading for evangelistic missionaries. During the last nine years the Presbyterian Church, U.S., has sent only two ordained men to Korea. In other words, our Church, in spite of the plea each year for evangelists, has been able to produce only two full-time evangelistic missionaries which history has proved to be the back bone of the mission movement.

It seems, that for some reason, our staff in Nashville is not able to communicate with the theologically conservative seminary student. I do not know why but many are suspicious that they are not sought. Many theologically conservative missionaries on the field are saying that the staff does not really want them any more. Whether this is true, of course, could not be proven by me.

NEO-ORTHODOX MOVEMENT

My experience at Columbia Seminary this year has given me an opportunity to study the theology of Karl Barth, the so called father of the neo-orthodox movement. After careful study I have discovered a latent universalism there. It alarms me that the brand of neo-orthodoxy in our country is more liberal than Barth. Will that type of theology which de-emphasizes the necessity of personal faith in Jesus Christ and holds open the possibility of all being saved produce men who are motivated to give their lives to missionary service?

The Presbyterian Church, U.S., must begin to be honest. Are we going to definitely commit ourselves to this theological stance which undercuts our confessional position and what we believe the Bible

teaches? If we are, then we must re-think our entire missionary program and prepare ourselves to throttle back to about 100 missionaries. The other main line denominations, such as the UPUSA and Methodists, have evidently faced the crisis and decided to commit themselves to a weak theological stance. The result has been a throttling down of their missionary program both in finances and personnel. We had better prepare ourselves to do the same because if we continue our present theological stance then, even if we had the finances, we could no longer find the missionaries. Neo-orthodoxy, or at least the liberal brand that is prevalent in our Church, simply will not produce missionaries.

CRISIS IN SUPPORT

The second area in which it can be illustrated that the Church's theology has contributed to the current crisis is in the area of support. If you were to check statistics you will find that, generally speaking, the conservative churches and individuals share the greater burden of financial support for our missionary work. I have gathered this definite impression from my itinerating in over 180 churches during my last two furloughs. The Board, however, seems to ignore or disregard the concern of this constituency in our Church. Evangelism is not emphasized in their publications or conferences and the result is that the Board has lost the confidence of those in the Church who feel strongly that this should be a primary emphasis. Five years ago, while on furlough, it was the local pastor who "put the screws" to me about this. This year the laymen give evidence of being deeply disturbed over this change in emphasis.

This kind of comment is difficult to document, but an illustration would be a report made at the April meeting of the Board of World Missions. In discussing the prospect of reducing our missionary forces it was also pointed out that the 1971 budget reduction will also mean that certain medical work in rural Brazil could not be continued and that providing high school education will be impossible in certain situations in Congo. Period!! The report never mentions that in Korea the budget reduction will mean that we will not be able to establish churches in the many areas we have found which have absolutely no Christian witness of any kind. Now, I'm not saying that the person who wrote the report has no interest in establishing pioneer churches or in evangelism. The point is that the emphasis is not evangelism. The result has been a serious loss of confidence in the staff and Board of World Missions.

COMMUNICATIONS GAP

The third area in which it can be illustrated that the Church's theology has negatively effected our

missionary program regards the personnel who currently serve on the field. We might call it the communications gap between the staff and the missionary. There are actually two aspects of this problem. One is theological and the other is administrative. I will speak only to the theological aspect since concerning the administrative I am not competent to speak.

There was a day when members of our mission in Korea would sit down and write a letter to the folks in Nashville and in a friendly way keep them abreast of what was going on and, in turn, receive informal advice and encouragement. This important "chit-chat" correspondence has ceased. In the last two years I have been appalled at the bitterness on the part of the missionary toward the staff. Faithful men who have served long years and some men even nearing retirement have begun to grow bitter and disenchanted and this is directed toward Nashville.

LACK OF EVANGELISM EMPHASIS

Why are many of the missionaries in this frame of mind and spirit? There are many reasons, perhaps, but I can definitely identify three. One is the lack of emphasis in evangelism. We feel like the staff is not really behind us in our concern for evangelism. The mission in Korea has made the matter of "planting" churches a number one priority and we have the impression that the staff in Nashville could care less.

MISSIONARIES' OPINIONS UNHEEDED

Then, there is a wide spread feeling that the missionaries' opinion doesn't amount to a "row of beans" almost 100% of the time regarding decisions made in Nashville. There is official communication, but our mission feels, almost to the man, that Nashville doesn't care what we think. A good illustration of this has to do with the Church World Service in Korea. Our mission has for several years pled with the Board to cut it off or to put pressure on the New York office to clean it up because it is a blot on our Christian testimony in Korea. The corruption that has grown up around it in Korea is abominable. We did not get to first base in our repeated requests. Now it has become a joke at mission meeting when it is brought up. We are convinced that they are not interested in our opinion. By the way, the Korean Church sent in a resolution to the Board and it had no effect.

ECUMENISM

The third thing that has contributed to the bitter, disenchanted spirit of the missionary is the tremendous emphasis the Board has placed on ecumenism. I have always personally had an interest in ecumenism, but have never felt that it should be a major emphasis. When you make ecumenism the gospel, which many of our missionaries feel that the

Board has done, then we have departed from our primary mission.

We have the impression that the watchword is that if it is ecumenical it must be okay. An illustration of this is our adoption of the National Council of Churches missions emphasis which links Red China with Reconciliation. Our Board is promoting this study of Red China when we know almost nothing about Red China and the Church there. As I look at this emphasis I cannot help but conclude that our Board has started beating the National Council of Churches drum for the recognition of Red China in the United Nations. In fact, the Board is offering a book written by six men on Red China for the Church to study. Five of these six men advocated this very thing. As a missionary to Korea, which is dreadfully close to Red China, I am deeply upset by this. In fact, I find myself unable to beat that drum which is being carried by our Board. This is the kind of thing that has embittered our missionaries.

CONCLUSION

There is no question that the crisis we face today in missions is theological. A solution cannot be easily found. There are several things that must be done, however. One is to recognize that there is a problem and to honestly express your concern to those in places of responsibility. I have expressed to the President of Columbia Seminary my concern and dismay at the shift in the theological stance of that institution. You can write to the Board and express your concern. You might have the opportunity to speak at Presbytery and call attention to our serious situation. Honestly speaking to the issue is important.

One long term solution that has occurred to me is to follow the lead of the Anglican Church. In that denomination there is no official Board of Missions,

but instead several missionary societies. Would it be possible for us to take a leaf from the Anglican book and establish, with sanction of the General Assembly, a missionary society as vehicle for an ongoing evangelical and thoroughly Reformed missionary endeavor within the Presbyterian Church, U.S.? We must be honest and admit diversity within the Church. Instead of forcing everyone into the same mold and giving them no choice but to support Presbyterian missionaries through the official Board, we could provide an outlet that conservative churches could support and through which conservative missionaries could serve. As the situation exists today, conservatives are withdrawing support of our Board and supporting independent efforts, if any missionary effort at all. A Presbyterian Missionary Society would allow Presbyterians to act together in supporting Presbyterian missionaries. What ever we do we must do quickly before the Presbyterian mission movement dries and shrivels up to nothing.

We stand in crisis days in missions, yet the Great Commission has not changed. Jesus' command is clear to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age." We cannot shun our responsibility. There are more people in the world today who do not know Christ as Lord and Saviour than there were 10 years ago. We have more of the means for supporting missions than ever before. We have greater advantage technologically than ever before. Yet, we are retrenching and consolidating instead of getting on with the task. Let us earnestly pray that God will work in our Church and hearts in such a way that the trend may be reversed.

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