

**Surveying ten years of regress
in the Presbyterian Church US —**

**HOW
WE GOT
WHERE
◦
WE ARE**

By G. Aiken Taylor

'We believe the New Morality is consonant with the Biblical witness.'—*Minority of Permanent Theological Committee in paper adopted by the 1968 Assembly.*

'Christianity can only live in the Church if the Church as we know it is completely destroyed.' — *Leader of Black Presbyterian Caucus following the 1966 Assembly.*

'If there is no other way to accomplish the reunification of the Churches, I will lead a separation in the denomination.' — *William A. Benfield Jr., in support of COCU.*

'In many areas of theological scholarship we need books written not only by Protestants but even by those entirely outside the Christian tradition.' — *Dr. John Leith, supporting successful motion in 1967 Assembly to change publishing policy of John Knox Press.*

'I have a concern for the entire family of God There are places in the world where families can be limited best, and perhaps only, through abortion.' — *Alex Booth Jr., supporting the 1970 Assembly's endorsement of abortion for 'economic reasons.'*

'There is hope in this age and in the age to come for those who will not have been acquainted with or recognized the Son of Man here below.'—*Layman's Bible Commentary on Matthew 12:31.*

How We Got Where We Are

Perhaps the most frequently asked question in Southern Presbyterian circles these days is, "What's happened to the Church?" The question is asked with the same astonishment one might reflect if told that one's mother has taken to running around at night.

It isn't a question easily answered because churchmen are very subtle and persuasive when they go about doing things that will have a long-range effect ten years later. For instance, who would have thought, when the Board of Church Extension (which had been the Committee on Home Missions) decided to change its name to the Board of National Ministries, that the effect would be to take money which (under Home Missions) would have gone to a home missionary working in a mountain cove; or which (under Church Extension) would have gone to building a new church; and send it (under National Ministries) to a non-church related civil rights group in Arkansas doing battle with the federal government over low-cost housing?

However, the depths to which the Church's testimony has sunk can be painted in the story of actions taken and events that have transpired in Church courts as well as in the content of literature and programs.

We've gone back through ten years of *Journals* and separated items that have appeared in this publication bearing upon the trends in the Church. These notices represent a very small fraction of actions taken or business transacted, of course. But they *do* mention matters that can be backed up with newspaper accounts, minutes of Church courts, tape recordings or authenticated letters.

Figures at the end of each notice refer to the date of the *Journal* in which it appeared.

General Assembly

No changes in the Confession of Faith have occurred in the past ten years. The 1961 Assembly, asked to revise the chapter on predestination, refused. However, it declared that, "in its judgment the doctrine of foreordination to everlasting death as formulated in the Confession is not an adequate statement of the Christian faith." (5/17/61).

The Winston-Salem Assembly, asked to improve future volumes of *Layman's Bible Commentary*, refuses. (6/13/62). Earlier, the commentary had been shown to say that much of the Old Testament consists of collections of folk tales; and to affirm that those who did not have faith in Christ in this life would be accepted in the next. (11/8/61).

Huntington Assembly commits the Church to making long-range plans in cooperation with other denominations under the National Council of Churches. (5/15/63).

1964 Assembly establishes a central treasury, providing for the equalization of all benevolence gifts. (5/6/64). Ordination of women as elders and ministers is formally enacted. (5/13/64).

1965 Assembly formally abolishes separate World Missions season, combines this emphasis with National Ministries into a single "witness" season; sets "poverty" as theme for study. (5/12/65).

1966 Assembly votes the Church into the Consultation on Church Union (COCU); appoints a "pastoral" committee to visit the Synod of Mississippi; condemns capital punishment; for the second time endorses civil disobedience; for the first time has a lady as chairman of a committee. (5/11/66).

Bristol Assembly approves union presbyteries in principle, directs that a new chapter be written for the Book of Church Order to be voted on in the next (1968) Assembly and sent down for a *three-fourths* vote of the presbyteries. (6/28/67).

1968 Assembly adopts a theological paper endorsing the "new morality." Over the objection of the Permanent Judicial Commission, the Assembly sends down proposal for union presbyteries specifying that only a *majority* of the presbyteries need approve. Committee is appointed to re-structure the whole Church. (6/19/68).

Grievance Committee of the Assembly, composed of Rev. Joseph B. Mullin, Rev. C. C. Benz and Prof. Worth McDougald, condemn the *Journal* and its editor by name. Without reading *Journal* reviews and without meeting with the editor, committee finds the editor guilty of "irresponsible criticism" of the Covenant Life Curriculum, declaring that "the Board of Christian Education has a proper grievance against the Rev. G. Aiken Taylor." (3/5/69). This was not sustained by the Assembly. (5/14/69).

Mobile Assembly commends Chairman William A. Benfield Jr. for the COCU plan of union drafted by his committee. Committee is authorized to draw up plan of union with UPUSA. Committee is authorized to draw up a new Confession of Faith. Union presbyteries are approved after only a majority of presbyteries concur. Concerned Presbyterians is mildly censured. Hunger is given "top priority" in the mission of the Church. Evolution is supported as compatible with Genesis. For the first time the Assembly conducts ordinary business on Sunday. (5/14/69).

Memphis Assembly favors abortion "for economic reasons" and others; supports *Colloquy* magazine; refuses to condemn the "Black Manifesto"; authorizes youth delegates to future Assemblies; approves social drinking; asks for study of "torture" in Brazil. (7/1/70).

Massanetta Springs Assembly reduces the number of synods from 15 to 7; continues support of *Colloquy*, *Church and Society*, *Focus*; tags the method of operation of the independent Executive Commission on Overseas Evangelism (ECOE) "a grave departure from orderly processes of the Church." (6/30/71).

More drinking at 1971 Assembly than ever observed before. Alcoholic beverages reportedly served youth delegates by Church leaders at nightly parties. Correspondents report seeing ministers "inebriated." (7/7/71).

Presbytery Actions

Presbytery formally lays claim to final and ultimate authority over all property belonging to congregations under its jurisdiction. (11/1/61). (Later set aside.)

Another presbytery accepts a minister who denies the virgin birth, bodily resurrection of Jesus, second coming of Christ. (11/1/61).

Another minister received by a presbytery after denying belief in virgin birth. (2/27/63).

Yet another presbytery receives a minister who makes fun of the virgin birth, denies the substitutionary atonement of Christ. (3/18/64).

Presbytery receives as a candidate for the ministry a university student who calls himself a "Christian socialist" and who was named in *Esquire* as one of five top student troublemakers in the whole country. (3/18/64).

First woman elder is elected, Mrs. C. E. Williams, Tuscaloosa, Ala. (5/27/64). First woman minister ordained, Dr. Rachel Henderlite. (5/26/65).

Presbytery votes down request that it endorse a full-time evangelist on the ground that it does not believe in "professional evangelists outside the pastorate." (10/7/64).

Presbytery accepts seminary professor on second examination, after turning him down in a first examination when his universalism came through clearly. (5/18/66).

Presbytery authorizes Roman Catholic priest to have an official part in the installation of a minister. (5/10/67).

Presbytery says it is *false* to hold a view of the atonement in which Jesus is seen as separated from His father and suffering punishment. (7/12/67).

Presbytery votes to make the future formation of new churches a joint effort with the local UPUSA presbytery and also the Episcopal Church. (6/12/68).

Presbytery hires a "community organizer" as part of its "mission." (7/24/68).

Presbytery forwards overture to the Assembly asking it to investigate the *Journal*. Board of Christian Education asks the Assembly "to put an end to the systematic effort of this teaching elder (the *Journal* editor) to impugn the integrity, reliability and soundness of this board." (1/8/69). (Turned down by the Assembly.)

Presbytery narrowly receives minister after he is subjected to abuse by seminary professor because he said he believed the Bible was infallible and Adam was a real person. (6/16/69).

Presbytery ordains a new minister (who earlier had flatly denied the resurrection of Christ) with the "lifting up of hands" — those participating put their hands under him and hoisted him high in the air. (6/24/70).

First of 16 presbyteries adopt resolutions saying they will tolerate no further irresponsible or unconstitutional acts by the Assembly. (10/14/70).

Presbytery "de-elects" a commissioner previously chosen to go to the Assembly after it was pointed out that he had sent the story of that unusual ordination service (above) to the *Journal*. (2/10/71).

Fourteenth and fifteenth presbyteries adopt resolution declaring their determination to stand for the Reformed faith and the constitution of the Church. (2/24/71).

Congregations, Too

North Carolina congregation invites TV audience to join in the Lord's Supper by going to the refrigerator and "get a beverage and a piece of bread and unite with those who partake in the sanctuary." (11/21/62).

Presbyterian pastor delivers an invocation at the ground-breaking for a new brewery. (2/20/63). (Earlier he had joined in petition to the state legislature for permit to erect the brewery. Later he was elected moderator of the synod.)

First mention is made of jazz "worship" ser-

vices in churches. (3/10/65).

Presbyterian congregations are using *Honest To God*, by England's A. T. Robinson, as textbook in "schools of theology." (3/24/65).

First mention is made of Fort Lauderdale's Coral Ridge church and its school of evangelism (which the denomination has steadfastly refused to recognize). The notice was this: "Last year a communicant membership (at Coral Ridge) of 426 was reported, of whom 125 had been added on profession of faith!" (4/7/65).

Prominent Washingtonian reports as commissioner to the Assembly in congregational newsletter: "Christianity can only live in the Church if the Church as we know it is completely destroyed." (4/13/66).

Two Savannah congregations withdrew from PCUS, starting chain of events which culminates in Supreme Court declaring that only "neutral principles of law" determine church property ownership. (4/27/66).

PCUS statistics reveal steady loss in membership gains and in Sunday School enrollment for the past ten years. Number of churches reporting no professions of faith at all continues to average over 1,100 per year. (2/15/67).

Denomination's first teenager elected to office, as high school junior becomes a deacon in a South Carolina congregation. (8/6/69).

Christian Education

Adult Uniform Lessons article advocates one-world government, unilateral disarmament and surrender of U. S. sovereignty. (8/30/61).

New view of Bible as "witness and instrument" of revelation is first mentioned. (As the authority of Scripture is at the heart of all Church controversy, the "witness and instrument" theory of Bible authority lies at the heart of the PCUS's troubles. The backbone of the Covenant Life Curriculum, "witness and instrument" was embraced by Dr. William Kadel when he accepted appointment as executive secretary of the Board of Christian Education before the Assembly. Said Dr. Kadel: "I acknowledge the holy Scrip-

tures as the written record of the witness God has given to His covenant people.”) (10/25/61).

Senior Bible Studies tell youth the Gospel writers never knew Jesus in person, that it isn't necessary to believe the miracles in the Bible to be a Christian. (4/25/62).

Adult Uniform Lessons quarterly says the basic economic theory of Marxism is also fundamental Christian economic theory. (1/23/63).

As principal speaker at Richmond Youth Quadrennial, Harvey Cox calls for secularization of the Church. The quadrennial also was challenged to “join the revolution.” (1/13/65). Quadrennial is commended by Assembly in the face of heavy criticism. (4/5/65).

John Knox Press makes major policy change with approval of the General Assembly given to publish books written by non-Christians. (7/5/67).

Board of Christian Education earmarks gift from its budget to Southern Christian Leadership Conference. (11/8/67).

John Knox Press publishes book to help churches use “adult” films in their education programs. (1/3/68).

John Knox Press publishes essays by Rudolph Bultmann; also a manual on revolution designed to “give some concrete indication of how the goals of revolution are to be reached.” (2/28/68).

Dr. William Kadel says in his opinion Church will split within two years. (11/27/68).

Atlanta Youth Quadrennial is marked by obscenity, leader's ridicule of students who asked for prayer. (1/22/69). Quadrennial is commended by the Assembly in the face of heavy criticism. (5/14/69).

Board of Christian Education announces its intention to go ahead with *de facto* merger with education board of UPUSA Church, at the initiative of the PCUS board. (11/5/69).

BCE suggests that congregations should invite emissaries of James Forman to read the “Black Manifesto” from their pulpits; adopts its own

version of "Project Equality," an economic pressure program against businesses. (6/11/69).

BCE approves participation by staff members in marches and demonstrations — in response to criticism from Charleston Presbytery following staffers' activities in Charleston in support of striking hospital workers. (7/30/69).

New Covenant Life Curriculum Book, *In Response to God*, makes "situational ethics" official for PCUS. (8/6/69).

Famous issue of *Colloquy* appears in which sex and marijuana for teenagers are endorsed. (4/15/70).

BCE drops financial support of IFCO (Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization) but votes to continue support of Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Southern Regional Council, Interreligious Board for Conscientious Objectors, Coalition on National Priorities and Military Policy. (5/13/70).

National Ministries

Board of Church Extension announces it thinks "National Ministries" is a better name to describe its idea of its mission, votes to adopt "bold new strategy." (11/23/66).

Board of National Ministries publishes paper in which "community organization" as a "power tool" to "effect social change" is called "an instrument of mission" or "evangelism." Board announces a 3-day seminar on "community organization." (1/11/67)

BNM puts on its first "way out" conference at Montreat. Many lapel buttons in evidence: "Stamp Out Church Extension." (8/23/67).

Three-year authorization of \$75,000 for Mississippi Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches voted by BNM. Board organizes its own economic pressure movement against businesses in the absence of a chapter of "Project Equality" in the Atlanta area. (8/30/67).

BNM wires all congressmen from states covered by PCUS urging support of anti-poverty bill. (11/22/67).

Report of special task force on evangelism

fails to include fundamental Christian affirmation. (11/29/67).

BNM earmarks a quarter million dollars to support National Council of Churches' "Crisis in the Cities" urban action program and related organizations such as Operation Connection, Joint Strategy in Action Committee (JSAC), Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) and Urban Coalition. (3/13/68).

BNM sends \$5,000 to striking garbage workers in Memphis. (4/17/68).

BNM "New Ways" conference shocks Montreal community with face masks at Sunday morning "experimental" worship service, and hand-clapping communion service at night. Five new "experimental" ministries are approved by the board. (8/21/68).

In the wake of mounting criticism, Dr. Ben L. Rose, chairman of BNM, announces the board "unanimously" supports its executive staff, deploring "misrepresentations." (11/20/68).

BNM authorizes six more "experimental" ministries. (3/12/69).

Executive secretary of BNM writes to firms with which the board has business dealings, asking an accounting of their employment practices. (5/6/70).

Graduate of Reformed Seminary, turned down by BNM for chaplaincy, has an outstanding record in Vietnam under another Church. (1/13/71).

Abortion counselors named for each synod; \$50,000 given by W. Va. layman to pay for abortions where girls cannot afford it. (3/3/71).

BNM is seeking additional gifts to supplement \$50,000 given to spend on abortions, half of which is already gone. (5/12/71).

World Missions

Board of World Missions lists among "summer opportunities" for youth service, rebuilding the controversial leftist Highlander School Camp near Knoxville, Tenn. (3/30/66).

BWM seasonal emphasis changed from traditional study of some mission field to study of poverty. (2/1/67).

Membership in "Project Equality," economic pressure movement against businesses, is voted by the staff of BWM. (5/10/67).

Executive Secretary of BWM becomes vice president of "Project Equality" for Tennessee. (8/9/67).

One of the study books offered for use during the "witness" season by BWM is on ways of coexistence of different faiths. One story has a Christian girl marrying a Hindu boy with a Unitarian minister and a Brahmin priest officiating. (1/10/68).

BWM issues statement critical of alleged persecution of South West Africans, is silent on persecution of Christians in Russia. (5/22/68).

BWM hires a staffer to promote person-to-person relations; asks the Assembly to do a study of the meaning of "salvation" (2/12/69).

BWM executive attacks ECOE, and *Journal* article written by a missionary who was critical of the board. (10/7/70).

'Church and Society'

Martin Luther King is announced as keynote speaker for the Montreat Christian Action Conference. (4/28/65).

Permanent Committee on Inter-church Relations urges endorsement of Mississippi "Delta Ministry" of the National Council of Churches and asks for \$25,000 in Church Extension funds in support. (2/8/67).

PCUS secretary in Division of Church and Society organizes anti-war demonstration. Board supports his freedom to do so. (5/24/67).

Chief executives of all four program boards of PCUS call on the Church to assist "Poor People's Campaign" march on Washington. Orange Presbytery rents Greensboro coliseum to house the marchers, plans mass rally in support. (5/15/68).

Declaring that "significant changes in our social structures" will be necessary for "social justice," the PCUS Council on Church and Society calls on the Church to take the "Black Manifesto" seriously; agrees with manifesto's demands for "reparations"; suggests membership in "Project Equality," economic pressure movement against businesses, for all courts and agencies. (7/9/69).

Moderator of 1969 Assembly joins in signing call for nationwide march on Washington to pressure Congress to stop the war in Indochina. (6/3/70).

Moderator of 1970 Assembly and other PCUS leaders help organize the "Set the Date Now" movement to get America out of Vietnam by end of 1971; make plans to visit Paris for consultation with Vietcong and North Vietnamese. Board of Christian Education contributes \$500 to "Set the Date Now" office in Washington. (3/17/71).

Moderator of 1970 Assembly calls for setting a firm date for Vietnam withdrawal; announces series of meetings in Washington to pressure Congressmen. (3/24/71).

Staffers from Richmond travel to Washington to lobby on behalf of welfare reform. (3/24/71).

Board of Christian Education executive says that participation in "Set the Date Now" and trip to Paris are part of board's Christian education job. (3/31/71).

Office of Church and Society appeals to all ministers of PCUS to write letters demanding an end to Vietnam war. Letters are to be collected and delivered in Washington on day set for massive Presbyterian demonstration in the capital. (4/21/71).

Office of Church and Society sends out mailing of materials helpful to young people trying to evade the draft. (6/2/71).

Some 100 Presbyterian ministers and laymen go to Washington to lobby against the Vietnam war. (6/23/71).

The Academic World

Professor in PCUS college declares he wants to stand publicly with a minister under fire for denying the virgin birth. (5/23/62).

Presbyterian seminary professor is asked to leave the campus of a nearby state university after his distribution of anti-war tracts threatens to start a riot. (11/21/62).

Four professors from the Church's four seminaries contribute articles to a symposium arguing that the Church does not have an infallible Bible, nor does it need one. (1/16/63).

Yet another PCUS college opens a coeducational dormitory. (6/26/63).

Avowed atheist speaks on PCUS college campus under sponsorship of YMCA. (2/12/64).

Leading PCUS college drops requirement that professors pledge belief in the fundamental teachings of Christianity. (3/4/64).

Seminary professor has high praise for UPUSA's proposed Confession of Faith, calling the Church's effort "a concern for authentic theological work that holds real promise for the future." (3/31/65).

First PCUS college accepts committee recommendation that men and women be allowed to visit in each other's dormitory rooms. (12/1/65).

Seminary professors pictured as they parade with signs in front of Navy recruiting office. (4/20/66).

"New morality" spokesman returns to PCUS college campus for second series of lectures on "sexual ethics." (This author's book was so controversial that the National Council of Churches, which published it, finally withdrew it from circulation.) (4/20/66).

PCUS seminary professor, jailed in demonstrations, is revealed as a board member of the Southern Conference Educational Fund. (5/31/67). A favorite on the campus, he is asked to deliver the Commencement "sermon," during which a group of local Presbyterian elders arise, read a protest, file from the service. (6/14/67).

"God is Dead" theologian William Hamilton presides at "worship" service held at PCUS college in support of William Sloane Coffin Jr. who was indicted for violating the Selective Service Act. (2/14/68).

PCUS college professor launches a personal statement of faith by saying: "God is dead, but don't worry, the Virgin is pregnant again . . . there is no such thing as a pure faith, a pure religion, a pure moral decision." (11/27/68).

Prestigious PCUS college inaugurates new president with changes in student code permitting drinking in certain places on campus and women in dormitories at greatly liberalized hours. (10/23/68).

Several PCUS colleges drop chapel attendance requirements. (4/2/69).

Professor of Bible at a PCUS college says Jesus was married and probably had children. (4/16/69).

Seminary professor joins Episcopal Church, announces his intention to retain dual membership. (11/12/69).

Two Presbyterian US seminaries host regional planning sessions in preparation for the March on Washington planned by the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. (10/8/69).

Leader of a student project sponsored by a Presbyterian US synod on a state university campus, calls for revolution to free the black man in America from "an oppressive and imperialistic government," urges his readers to arm themselves with guns. (5/13/70).

First notice appears, of a PCUS college professor who denies most of the essential Christian doctrines in circle Bible studies written for another publication. In this notice, the professor is said to deny the existence of the soul. (8/26/70).

Wall Street Journal calls "Project Equality," to which the staff of the Board of World Missions, several presbyteries, and at least one synod belong, a "boycott" movement against American businesses. (5/8/58).

Potpourri

Thirty-three top leaders of PCUS sign statement in support of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), saying that Presbyterianism, as such, must be done away, to be replaced with "a new creation that is truly new because it is of the Lord's making." (4/19/67).

UPUSA executive tells COCU press meeting that one aim is *de facto* union by bringing agencies of the Churches together before formal union has been voted. (5/17/67).

Chairman of PCUS delegation to COCU tells the General Assembly it is "false" to say that *de facto* union is progressing under the Consultation. (6/28/67).

Official UPUSA report enumerates "giant strides" taken by COCU towards *de facto* union through "joint mission" efforts. (3/20/68).

At last a secret newsletter circulated by the editor of the *Outlook* is disclosed to exist for the purpose of guiding strategy among the liberals. (12/16/70).

Liberals in the Church put a full-time man in the field on behalf of liberal objectives, disguising the move by announcing he is doing "graduate work" under a Texas foundation. (1/20/71). F

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