

*The
Continuing
Presbyterian
Church*

ADDRESSES

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Mr. Williamson is an attorney-at-law and a longtime ruling elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, Alabama. He was elected Commissioner from East Alabama Presbytery to the last five consecutive General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He frequently served on its committees and was a member of the Committee on Union with the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America until his resignation from that committee a year ago. The Convocation of Sessions held in Atlanta on May 18, 1973 elected Mr. Williamson as Chairman of the Convention for Organizing a Continuing Presbyterian Church. The Convention elected him Convener of the first General Assembly. Mr. Williamson is a member of the Presbytery of the Evangel of the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

The subject of Mr. Williamson's address will be "To God Be The Glory."

To God Be The Glory

On this historic occasion, we gather at the call of Almighty God. We gather in the providence of our Father who are in heaven. We gather to worship and honor our Creator. Our chief end is "to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever."

We gather to continue a true branch of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We reaffirm our allegiance to Him as the sole Head of the Church and the sole law giver in Zion. We remember His promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Let us immediately declare the purpose of this Church, our portion of which today becomes a formal ecclesiastical entity. This Church exists merely for the sake of God. Its purpose cannot be merely human or humanistic as though to prepare a believer for heaven. Its purpose does not lie in us, but in God, and in the glory of His name. The origin of this Church is in God, its form of manifestation is from God; and from beginning to end, its purpose is and shall be to magnify God's glory.

Let us further declare its nature. This Church is a spiritual organism, including heaven and earth, but having at present its center and the starting point for its action, not upon earth, but in heaven. We are in this world but not of this world. We declare our devotion to the Church as a spiritual institution knowing that the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is not of this world. Not until His second coming shall this organism manifest itself as the center of the cosmos. Now, here on earth, it is only as it were its silhouette that can be dimly discerned. In the future, this new Jerusalem shall descend from God, out of heaven, but at present it withdraws its beams from our sight in the mysteries of the invisible. And therefore the true sanctuary is now above. On high are both the Altar of Atonement, and the incense Altar of Prayer; and on high is Christ, as the only priest who, according to the ordinance of Melchizedek, ministers at the Altar, in the sanctuary, before God. We confess that Christ in human form, in our flesh, has entered into the invisible; and that with Him, around Him, and in Him, our Head, is the real Church, the real and essential sanctuary of our salvation.

But who are we who gather to form and continue on the earth a visible branch of the true invisible Church? We have been chosen, regenerated and called by God for this purpose. We are convinced and convicted of our calling and election by these words of the Apostle Paul:

"Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace: Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3-12)"

We are but a group of sinners saved by grace and sent out to be ambassadors for our Saviour Jesus Christ on this earth. We are a group of confessors who shall live in an ecclesiastical union in obedience to the ordinances of Christ Himself. This is no mystical, spiritual order gifted with mystical powers to operate with a magical influence on men. We are only regenerated and confessing individuals, who in accordance with scriptural command, are forming a society and therein shall endeavor to live in subordination to Christ our King. We are called to be a visible manifestation of the true Church on this earth. The Church of Jesus Christ is not a building, not an institution, not a spiritual order; but it is a group of living stones built on Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. We are then a group of regenerated and confessing individuals who have been united, not as we have seen fit, but according to the ordinances of Christ. We are a priesthood of believers. Do not misunderstand me. I do not say: This Church consists of a number of pious people united in groups for religious purposes. That in itself would have nothing in common with the true Church of Jesus Christ. It is true that the real, heavenly, invisible church must and will manifest itself in the earthly Church. If not, you have a society but not a church. But the real essential church is and remains the body of Christ which is composed of people who have been regenerated — "born again." Merely for pious, sincere people to get together in groups is not sufficient to form a true Church of Jesus Christ on earth. There you have a religious society but not a Christian Church. This is the great contradiction and danger of our generation in America. There are many religious societies in our land but far fewer real Christian churches. And Satan is using these religious societies to give a false sense of eternal security to their members. By them, many people are being misled into believing that to be "religious" is to be "Christian". People are being taught that to be "religious" and to be "Christian" are synonymous terms. We know this is tragic error. This is not to say that all these religious societies are bad. On the contrary, most of them are good. For the most part they are composed of sincere people who are in varying degrees committed to a cause. Some are totally dedicated and give their lives to such causes. They exhibit zeal and courage in support of their cause. They are sincerely convinced that they are right. They use "Christian" terminology in support of their cause. They are philanthropic and altruistic. The results of their efforts often bring good to many people. But their causes are always humanistic and secularistic. Whatever movement is the vogue of the day becomes the cause of the year for these religious societies. Many Americans become members of these religious societies as a fashionable facet of the good life. They call themselves "Christians". In this they may be absolutely sincere but are certainly wrong. As proof that religious piety, sincerity, and zeal do not make a person a "Christian", we recall the autobiographical account of the life of the Apostle Paul. As Saul of Tarsus, he was deeply and sincerely religious. He was a zealous leader in the leading religious society of his day. But he tells us

that he was certainly wrong. He did not become a "Christian" until the Living Lord Jesus encountered him on the road to Damascus. He was there "regenerated — born again"; and thereafter the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ became his only cause. Paul testified to his mission before King Agrippa, as Dr. Luke recorded, in Acts 26:15-18 as follows:

"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Paul became a "Christian" through the regenerative power of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ; and thereafter he was called and sent forth as an ambassador of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He went about the then known world and preached this gospel and formed many true branches of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth. This true church on earth then consists only of those who have been incorporated into Christ, who bow before Him, who live in His word, and who obey His ordinances. We do not claim to be perfect. Nor shall this Church be perfect. But we do assert that we have been chosen by His grace through faith to know Jesus the Christ as Saviour; that we have been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit; that we have been called to proclaim His Word on this earth, to administer His sacraments to believers, and to exercise discipline in the body to preserve the purity of His Truth. As we stand before the face of Almighty God and know our hearts and minds, this is the necessity that is laid upon us. It is not that we would. It is that we must. Today we raise a fresh, clear banner of the truth of our Living Lord Jesus Christ before this watching world. It shall stand out distinctive in contrast to many false religious societies which bear His Name. It shall not be conformed to this world. It shall be a standard to which the "wise and the just may repair". Following in true apostolic tradition, we are but continuing a true branch of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth. God being our helper, we can do no other.

But to understand this necessity which we feel God has laid upon us, one understands the principle that has motivated us. As an apologetic, we would lay this principle before the world. It is the practice of the principle of the purity of the visible church. In order that we might practice this principle, it has been necessary that we leave the visible church with which we have been associated. We have separated; but the principle is not separation. Separation is a negative idea. But our principle is a positive concept. Separation is merely the price we have had to pay for the principle. It has been a terrible price. Many have had to "let goods and kindred go". This separation has forced division among families, friends, and local congregations. It has been heartrending and with many tears. Separation from foes is not easy; but separation from fellow christian friends is traumatic. It was only after much prayer and with great sorrow

and mourning that we concluded that to practice the principle of purity in the visible church, we had to pay the price of separation. Before we came to the place where we had to make this horrible decision to separate from our mother church, we had to settle a prior issue. That issue was that the church we loved as an organization is not first; Christ is first. Therefore, once Christ is no longer King and Lord in a church, then that church cannot have our loyalty. Long ago faithful men saw our former church losing her first love. Liberalism and modernism were beginning to make significant inroads in the Presbyterian Church in the United States by the mid-1940s. We cannot possibly give credit to all who in the past three decades have fought so valiantly to return that beloved Church to her true mission. Such Christian soldiers are legion. But we must mention some of the major groups which have sought to defend the faith once delivered to the saints. Over 25 years ago a group of men from the Presbyterian Journal met at the Biltmore Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. We have recently read in the minutes of that body a list of the dangers they saw then before the Church. It was with prophetic insight that they wrote; for every danger they listed, save one, is now an accomplished fact in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Through these years the Presbyterian Journal has been the focal point of leadership for those who wished to preserve the historic witness of the Reformed Faith in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. We frankly admit today that we are a product of their original initiative. Most of us are novices in the battle compared to those veteran defenders of the faith. We honor and respect these men; and we give thanks to Almighty God for their gallant faithfulness. They have indeed led us to this place and this hour. Praise God for each of them.

Then in the early 1960s, one man was called by God to begin in faith an independent evangelistic organization. Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship was born. These men have fearlessly preached the whole counsel of God as revealed in His Word. Many souls have been saved; and many quickened and nurtured in the faith. Praise God for each of them.

Then in 1964, a group of laymen formed Concerned Presbyterians. This group was dedicated to return our beloved Church to its primary mission of winning souls to Jesus Christ and nurturing them in the faith. They sought to inform the church of the trends toward liquidation of her historic witness; and they sought to arrest such trends through constitutional process in the courts of the Church. Again God raised up one man to principally provide leadership for this group. He enlisted a number of full time field men who went over the length and breadth of the Church warning individuals and groups of these trends. Many of these soldiers of the cross are here today; but some have remained behind to conduct a rear guard action for the many uninformed sheep yet languishing in uncertainty or unconcern. The contribution of this group is incalculable. Praise God for each of them.

Then in the late 1960s, over 600 ministers formed Presbyterian Churchmen United. They subscribed to a document they entitled a "Declaration of Commitment" and published the same in full page advertisements in the leading newspapers in the South. They fearlessly took a stand for the faith. Many have suffered ecclesiastical persecution. The course any church takes is predominantly set by her ordained ministry. In spite of the human threat of ecclesiastical oblivion, most of these faithful serv-

ants have stood firm and out front in the vanguard. They too have led us to this place and this hour. Praise God for each of them.

Finally, let us not forget those faithful who laboured in lonely places — many times in almost total isolation. Let us pay tribute to those great prayer warriors in the homes across this land. Those women who prayed while we fought, who spent many lonely nights while we traveled, who gave up the best years of the lives of their men, who kept informed so that they could educate the men, who built fires under the session through their ruling elder husbands, and who deserve as much credit for this hour as any man here. Yes — “they also serve, who only stand and wait.” Praise God for each of them.

For at least three decades, these and many more have attempted to stop the trends in the Presbyterian Church in the United States toward humanism, secularism, and syncretism. But their efforts have failed. Our beloved former Church has continued the fetish for ecumenism so that the form of unity regardless of the faith has become its goal. She is already linked in constitutional principle with the UPCUSA through union Presbyteries; and thus she has given approval to the doctrinal position of her sister body as expressed in the Confession of 1967. But her greatest deviation from her historic witness has been in her attitude toward the Scriptures. The true Church of Jesus Christ belongs to those who by the grace of God are faithful to the Scriptures. The higher critical theories of Scripture and the neo-orthodox view of Scripture have become the dominate and official position of the PCUS today. To them, the Bible is not the Word of God written—it merely contains the Word of God. To them, it is not absolute objective truth. For them, truth is subjective to the discovery of the mind of man. I believe it correct to assert that there is not one single professor in the four PCUS seminaries who holds to the doctrine of Scripture of our founding fathers. Men are consistently being ordained in PCUS Presbyteries who deny cardinal doctrines of Scripture. Universalism is being openly defended in the courts of the PCUS. As a result ethics and morality are determined by permissive situationalism. In his recent book “How is the Gold become Dim,” Dr. Morton H. Smith has catalogued in over 200 pages this decline in the PCUS as reflected in its Assembly actions. It has been my observation that wherever and whenever the inspiration and authority of the Word Inscriptured is attacked, the person and the work of the Word Incarnated is demeaned. The work of Jesus Christ in the world becomes equated with all the other noble causes laid before society. The zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is lost and the temper of the times dictates the religious cause for the day. It appears to me that the PCUS is rapidly becoming such a religious society with tremendous potential for good community service but with only an incidental relationship to salvation of souls through faith in Jesus Christ.

But you ask, why did you not practice the principle of purity of the PCUS by disciplining those who deviated from the proper position in regard to the teaching of Scripture and to the creeds? The answer is that the denomination is now so much in the hands of the liberals that it is officially and formally no longer possible to have a discipline trial, ever—even in theory! As we have pointed out above, truth to the liberal is subjective and relative. Hence we have no standard of objective truth on which to make a

judgment. Since these men no longer believe in truth, any concept of discipline in regard to doctrine has been unthinkable. Instead of discipline, there has been submitted the policy of pluralism. It is the great umbrella principle of covering almost everybody regardless of belief. It is argued that the church is big enough to accommodate varying points of view. They say that in love we will tolerate each other. It is a live-and-let-live philosophy. Each position has to make some compromise and concession to exist with the other. It is a tendency toward a growing latitudinarianism. This always leads to a low view of Scripture. And it gives to the watching world a multi-shaded view of Christianity. These may still talk about truth but tend less and less to practice truth. They practice tolerance, concession, compromise and accommodation. The world gets no clear and distinctive view of Jesus Christ in His Church. It is to restore this clear, distinctive, historic witness to Jesus Christ that we have felt constrained to separate from the PCUS.

In a word, my reasoning is that my vows of ordination as a Ruling Elder, as I understand them, required me to separate from my beloved church. It is with genuine sadness, many tears, and much soul-searching that I came to thus see my duty before my God. On ordination, I promised to study the peace, unity, edification and purity of the Church. For a decade now I have diligently sought to fulfill this vow at various levels in the Church. I reluctantly concluded that I

- (a) Could find little **peace** in a structure that in its official acts and doings is constantly and consistently contradicting my faith.
- (b) Could find little **unity** in a structure that advocates a pluralism and diversity that tolerates unbelief — for me “two cannot walk together less they be agreed.”
- (c) Could find little **edification** in a structure that continues to embarrass me in its official acts and doings and forces me to spend most of my time in negative reaction and apology.
- (d) Could find little hope for **purity** in a structure that permits unbelief to run rampant and has lost its will and ability to discipline.

Thus as I saw my duty, it is not that I wished to go but that I must. Others may see their duty differently. We must respect their views as “God alone is Lord of the conscience”; and we ask them to respect ours. We have thus made our decision. We settled the prior issue — Christ, not Church is first. We tried to return the church to its true mission. We could not. After years of much intensive effort, it became obvious to us that hum-anly speaking it would be impossible to recapture our church. Instead of being able to stop these trends, they seemed to get worse as the liberals intensified their efforts in reaction to our opposition. Suffice it to say that several years ago it became the consensus of our leaders that the historic witness of our beloved Church was gradually being liquidated; and for those who felt a duty to preserve it, division became the only answer. From that point in time on the issue of division has been settled; and the only issue has been timing and procedure. It was then we sought a method of peaceful realignment hoping that men of good

will would prevail. Not the only but the best method for such peaceful realignment seemed to be an acceptable escape clause in the plan of union with the UPCUSA. Our liberal friends promised this method; and we accepted their promises in good faith. But in February this year, they succeeded in closing this door by discarding the draft on the Plan of Union which they had promised would be presented to the 1973 General Assemblies for vote; and thus they delayed presentation of any plan indefinitely. Thus this method for constitutional division became no longer a viable possibility for the foreseeable future. The abandonment of this method by the liberals was an act of pure ecclesiastical expediency. They broke faith with us and forced us to move to an alternative procedure. Once the battle for doctrinal purity was lost, we were forced to decide what price we were willing to pay to practice the principle of purity in the visible church. We found it necessary to leave the visible organization with which we had been associated to preserve the principle. Separation became the price we had to pay to maintain the principle. But note well: We did so with tears — not with drums playing and flags flying. We claim empathy with the Rev. Dr. Thornwell who addressed the first General Assembly of our separated forefathers in 1861 with these matchless words:

“We should be sorry to be regarded by our brethren in any part of the world as guilty of schism. We are not conscious of any purpose to rend the body of Christ. On the contrary, our aim has been to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. If we know our own hearts, and can form any just estimate of the motives which have governed us, we have been prompted by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God, and the efficiency, energy, harmony and zeal of His visible kingdom in the earth. We have separated from our brethren as Abraham separated from Lot, because we are persuaded that the interest of true religion will be more effectually subserved by two independent churches . . .

For the sake of peace, therefore, for Christian charity, for the honor of the Church, and for the glory of God, we have been constrained, as much as in us lies, to remove all occasion of offense. We have quietly separated, and we are grateful to God that, while leaving for the sake of peace, we leave it with the humble consciousness that we ourselves have never given occasion to break the peace.”

Now having declared our purpose and the nature of this church, and having explained who we believe we are and the principle which has motivated us, we would again state the commitment which binds us. We have committed ourselves to the rebirth and continuation of a Presbyterian Church loyal to Scripture, the Reformed Faith and committed to the spiritual mission of the Church as Christ commanded in the Great Commission. For us the Bible is both necessary and sufficient. Apart from Scripture man is hopelessly lost. Created in the image of God, man has fallen and darkness has engulfed him. Man in sin is not only spiritually ill, he is spiritually dead. He is not only confused in his pilgrimage through this world; he is lost. He is like a person in a forest, without a map, compass or guide and no idea which way to go. To be sure, there is revelation in creation. God continues to speak to all men in spite of their sin, but the consequences of sin are such that men cannot hear. Other sounds dis-

tract them and drown out the call of God. They hear His call but indistinctly. The calls of the world and self are too strong. Without some leading, they will never find their way to the Father's house. That is why salvation from God is necessary. Apart from it, the Apostle Paul declares in shocking language that men are "separated from Christ, alienated from the common wealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12). Thus we declare the necessity of Regeneration for real existence and of Revelation for clear consciousness. Thus we see the **Neccesitas Sola Scripturae**, i. e. the need of scriptural revelation. To abandon or depreciate Scripture is tantamount to abandonment or depreciation of Christianity itself. In paradise, in the Garden of Eden before the fall, there was no Bible; and there will be no Bible in the future Paradise of glory. But in our present condition our immediate communion with God is lost. When the sun shines in your house, bright and clear, you turn off the electric light; but when the sun sets, this artificial light is kindled in every dwelling. So it is in our religion. When there is no mists to hide the majesty of the divine light from our eyes, what need is there for a lamp unto our feet or a light upon our pathway? But when history, experience and consciousness all unite in stating the fact that the pure light of Heaven has disappeared, and that we are groping in the dark, then, a different, or if you will allow the analogy, an artificial light must be kindled for us. Such a light God has kindled for us in His Holy Word. God regenerates us — that is to say, He rekindles in our heart the lamp sin has blown out. The necessary consequence of this regeneration is an irreconcilable conflict between the inner world of our heart and the world outside. Now, in the Bible, God reveals, to the regenerate, a world of thought, a world of energies, a world of full and beautiful life, which stands in direct opposition to this ordinary world, but proves to agree in a wonderful way with the new life that has sprung up in our heart. It is our only infallible rule of faith and practice, in the accepted and ordinary meaning of these terms. We believe that the Holy Scriptures fully contain the will and word of God and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation and sanctification are taught therein. We shall not consider any other writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those of divine Scripture. Nor shall we consider custom, traditions, councils or decrees as of equal value with the truth of God as found in the Scripture, since that truth is above all. The Word of God written is without error and our final authority. We are committed to a church loyal to Scripture. We are committed to a church loyal to the Reformed Faith — *Ecclesia Reformata*. By this we mean a church that has been renewed according to the Word of God. We shall attempt to recover Christianity in its original purity and to remove from it the beliefs and practices that have become attached to it in our day and generation without foundation in the Word of God. We acknowledge that this can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God. So we pray that His Holy Spirit shall so fully indwell us that this church shall be a clear reflection of the body of Christ. We believe that this faith is clearly and comprehensively systematized in the subordinate standards which are the **Westminster Confession of Faith** and the **Larger and Shorter Catechisms**. We make no apology that this church will be thoroughly Calvinistic in doctrine and intensely Presbyterian in form of government. In the tradition of our forebears, we affirm with the Rev. Dr. Thornwell that

"the ends which we propose to accomplish as a church are the same as those which are proposed by every other church to proclaim God's truth as a witness to the nations; to gather His elect from the four corners of the earth, and through the Word, ministers and ordinances, to train them for eternal life."

We have heard the voice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ when he commissioned us for the primary mission of His Church, namely:

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Confident of the promise of His presence, we shall endeavor to strive for a new obedience to this great commission.

Having thus declared ourselves and our commitment, we would address specific groups of people with whom we shall have contact in our mission. For the purpose of illustration, we will liken our approach to five concentric circles. Each group shall be a different circle. From outside to inside, the circle of groups are:

- (1) All the people of the world.
- (2) All the churches of Jesus Christ throughout the earth.
- (3) The Reformed Family of Churches of Jesus Christ.
- (4) The Presbyterian Church in the United States.
- (5) Our Brethren in this Church.

For **all the people of the world**, we have this good news:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

God loves you. It is not his desire that any of you should perish. He sent Jesus Christ His Son to this earth that you might be reconciled to God through faith in His Son. Jesus gave his life on the cross as an atonement for sin. This sacrifice was sufficient for all of you. God calls you to repent and believe this gospel. There is no other way to heaven. No man can come to God the Father except through God the Son. The alternative is eternal damnation in hell separated from God. We shall and do proclaim God's truth to you regardless of your race, color, creed or national origin. Repent and believe this gospel.

To **all the churches of Jesus Christ throughout the earth**, we send greetings in the ties of Christian brotherhood and common mission. We desire to cultivate peace and charity with our fellow Christians throughout the world. We believe and profess one holy catholic and apostolic church. Our Westminster Confession beautifully sets forth this heavenly all-embracing nature of the church, when it says:

"The Catholic or Universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are or shall be, gathered into one, under Christ the Head, thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

Thus the church is **Catholic** or **Universal** because there is only one church; and it is **Apostolic** because it has direct continuity with the church of the first century. It is indeed built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Jesus Christ himself as its chief cornerstone. It is the view held by some zealous Christians that theirs is the only true church, or that their members are superior to Christians in other churches. We do not hold this narrow concept. We would distinguish between mere religious societies that often bear the name "Christian" and the true churches of Jesus Christ on the earth. But we declare that the visible unity of the true body of Christ, though obscured, is not destroyed by its division into different denominations of professing Christians; but all of these which maintain the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true branches of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth. In His matchless name we greet you as brothers in Christ.

To the Reformed Family of Churches of Jesus Christ, we extend special greetings. We share with you the sharp accent on Jesus Christ at the heart of our tradition and the foundation of our ecclesiology. We share the view that the church is not only an organism, a fellowship of believers united to Christ, but it is also an institution in society. Like other social institutions it has certain distinguishing characteristics.

These have been called "marks." Where these were in evidence the church was called a "true church" and where they were not it was called a "false church" or a "sect". We know you agree that these "marks" are

- (1) that the church must preach the gospel,
- (2) that the church must properly administer the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and
- (3) that the church must exercise discipline in order to preserve the honor of Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

Since you agree with us on the major points of doctrine and polity, we see great possibilities for closer ties in the future. We seek the "oneness" of which Jesus spoke in John Chapter 17. We are convinced that there must be a unity of faith before a unity of form. We appreciate the assistance and encouragement you have already given us. We look forward to a closer relationship with you. We see in our mutual relationship the seeds of true ecumenicity. May God hasten the day.

To the Presbyterian Church in the United States, we acknowledge our continued love and concern for you. You are our spiritual mother, in your arms we were nurtured, under your ordinances we were baptized, in your courts we were ordained to serve our Lord and King, and to your visible organization we thought we had committed our lives. We could sever these ties only with deepest regret. We have done what we think our duty demanded. We have done what we think the honor of Jesus Christ acquired. We sincerely hope that our going may in some way recall you to that historic witness which we cherish as our common heritage. It is our prayer that God will use these days for self-examination and reform. Any such separation is traumatic; but in word and deed, we have attempted to show Christian charity for the sake of peace, for the honor of the Church, and for the glory of God. Without question, the most painful aspect of this separation has been to leave the communion with

many fellow believers with whom we have stood shoulder to shoulder in the ecclesiastical battles of the last three decades. We believe we have moved as Christian statesmen with honor. We know you agree with us in principle but disagree as to procedure. We respect your right to your judgment before God. We would prefer that you were with us today. We feel that it is here that you belong. Your absence makes us feel incomplete. We covet your continued fellowship in all areas possible. There are so many times and places where we can continue our warm fellowship and friendship — both public and private; and for our part we shall continue to expedite and cultivate these opportunities. We now extend to you our hands of love and good will and our open invitation and plea to join us soon. May God hasten that day.

To our **Brethren in this Church**, we rejoice with you in praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God for bringing us to this hour. Surely His Providence has taught us that we are in His will, under His control, and led by His Spirit. I counsel you that our attitude toward others is most important. Regardless of the attitudes or actions of others, we will remember that we represent the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King and Head of the Church. As his ambassadors to the watching world, we must let this mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus. Let men everywhere notice in us the three effects of nearness to Jesus — humility, happiness and holiness. History teaches us that in prior church divisions, those who come out tend to become hard. They tend to become absolutists even in the lesser points of doctrine. Francis Schaeffer points out that

“One must realize that there is a great difference between believing in absolutes and having an absolutist mentality about everything.”

True humility is the answer to this problem — for it is caused by thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. Our Lord demonstrated the proper approach when he washed the disciples' feet on the night he was betrayed. Now I'm not advocating “foot-washing.” But I am suggesting that we need the Holy Spirit to help us discern the difference between those things that are revealed in Scripture and those things that are the product of our human pride and opinion. In the former, we must not compromise; but in the latter, we must learn true humility to be in subjection to our brethren in the Lord. We must put away our former mentality of being suspicious of our fellow churchmen; and we must trust and believe our brothers until and unless they prove otherwise. Our Lord came to minister; and so must we. The grace of humility should abound in us. Also happiness should pervade our existence. We should rejoice and be exceeding glad. God has given to this select group an opportunity to witness to His glory the likeness of which men have not had in many generations. What a privilege it is to have been born for such a time as this. We have the answer to life and death — Christ is the answer. He came to give us the truly abundant life. Yes, there shall be trials and tribulations. But we should be of good cheer for He has overcome the world. We serve a risen Saviour. He is in this world today. He walks with us and talks with us along life's weary way. We must be happy and glad. And we should seek to be holy even as God is holy. We have set ourselves as spectacles before this watching world. We bear the name of “Christian.” But we must realize that every moment of every day, we stand

in the presence of God. Luther used to represent his sense of standing in the presence of God with the latin expression **Coram Deo**. We have a living encounter with our Creator. Before Ahab and Jezebel, the lone prophet Elijah exclaimed "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand." As individuals this concept that our whole existence is lived before the Lord forms the foundation for our holiness. Remember that perhaps of Christ the world's only view shall be what they see of Him in you.

Then brethren, in conclusion we must undergird this Church with a great outgoing of prayer. We know it is far easier to fight than it is to pray. But our battle is "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world against spiritual wickedness in high places." Only fervent prayer will prevail.

We must work. Remember that the true war-cry of the church is Gideon's watch word — "The Sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." God must do it; but we are not to be idle. If we only cry "the Sword of the Lord", we shall be guilty of an idle presumption; and if we should cry "the Sword of Gideon" alone, we shall manifest an idle reliance on an arm of flesh. We must blend the two: We can do nothing ourselves, but we can do everything by the help of our God.

We must be confident of His promise. To the chosen children of Israel, the prophet Isaiah wrote the words of God that I believe apply to us, namely:

"You worry at being so small and few, but Abraham was only one when I called him. But I blessed him and he became a great nation." (Isaiah 51:2)

What a promise! What a God!

"And now we commend you to this God and the word of His grace. We devoutly pray that the whole Catholic Church may be afresh baptized with the Holy Ghost, and that she may be speedily stirred to give the Lord no rest until He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." "Even so, come Lord Jesus." "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: To whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36)



PROFESSOR O. PALMER ROBERTSON, B.A., B.D., Th.M., Th.D.

Dr. Robertson is a native of Mississippi and was reared in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He was ordained in June, 1965. He served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pica-yune, Mississippi and from 1967 to 1971 was Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He is now Associate Professor of Old Testament Theology and Dean of Students at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The subject of Dr. Robertson's address will be "The Continuing Presbyterian Church and the Faith Once Delivered."

The Continuing Presbyterian Church And The Faith Once Delivered

O. Palmer Robertson

Text: Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. — Jude 3 (NASV)

At this historic moment, it becomes imperative that the Continuing Presbyterian Church address itself to the world concerning its faith-commitment. Let the trumpet give a certain sound. Let no doubt linger. The Continuing Church commits itself unequivocally to the faith once delivered to the saints.

I. The Continuing Church Commits Itself To **The Faith**

It is a milk-toast Christianity which substitutes "faith" for "the faith," "believing" for "belief." Modern existentialist theology emphasizes **that** a person believe while minimizing **what** a person believe. That a man believes has significance; what a man believes must change with the times.

On a more popular level, a song of some years back epitomizes such an approach to Christianity: "I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows." To hear these words sung is to be convinced that the person singing has faith. But if the substance of the words of the song really were true, the planet would have been deluged by flower-power at least since the days of Noah. Sad to say, the faith-commitment of much of Christendom today goes no further than such shallow sentimentality.

No, the Continuing Church does not commit itself to a meaningless believism or a man-centered subjectivism when it binds itself to "the faith." Its commitment is to that solid substance of faith found in Holy Scripture.

Neither is the commitment of the Continuing Church to **a** faith, to one expression of trust toward a deity among many valid options. Not just any faith among the religions of the world will do. Commitment must be to the one and only body of eternal truths which is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe.

Ask today's modern missionary executives the hard questions. Ask them the ones that the young people of every generation inevitably formulate:

"Are the heathen lost?"

"Is there only one way to heaven?"

"Is there only one kind of saving faith?"

"How is Jesus' statement in John 14:6 to be understood: 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me'?"

"Are there many faiths that save, or one faith?"

From the older liberal pace-setting studies of the 1930's to the Bangkok conference on world missions of the 1970's, the answer has been the same. Under the editorship of William E. Hocking, the Layman's Foreign Missions Inquiry, representing seven major denominations, expressed its conclusion regarding the relation of Christianity to other religions in the following language:

The Christian will therefore regard himself a co-worker with the forces which are making for righteousness within every religious system. If he can in any way aid or encourage these forces, he will regard it as part of his Christian service to spend thought and energy in this way. (**Rethinking Missions**, Harper and Bros., 1932, p. 40)

From the more recent study papers approved by the Bangkok Conference, we read:

Our eyes will be keenly open to discover what **He** is doing among people of other faiths and ideologies . . . Other living faiths . . . have a mission . . . We shall rejoice in the common ground we discover. (quoted by Harold Lindsell, **Christianity Today**, March 30, 1973, p. 8)

In the judgment of the Continuing Church, there can be no doubt concerning the heretically erroneous character of this position. The Scriptures claim for the Christian faith an exclusiveness which will not allow for any other possible way of salvation. Jesus is not merely a son of God; he is the unique son of God. He is not merely a lord; but as the early church inscribed with its blood in the annals of history, Jesus is Lord. He is the one and only Lord. There is no other Savior. Apart from Him there is no salvation. The commitment of the Continuing Church is not to a faith, but to **the** faith. Jesus does not reign over a certain ethnic or geographical constituency. He is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, reigning over the course of all nations. From among every tribe and tongue and nation he sovereignly calls his people to himself. He is Lord. He alone is Lord. There is no salvation apart from faith-relationship to Jesus Christ.

Scripture makes it quite plain that there is a body of doctrine which may be designated as "the faith." Even the most radical modern scholarship recognizes the vital role of an authoritative body of doctrine dating from the earliest period of Christianity (cf. Rudolph Bultmann, **Theology of the New Testament**, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, II, 119f.) There is such a thing as right belief and wrong belief.

It is to the faith found in Scripture that the Continuing Church commits itself. By adopting the **Westminster Confession of Faith** as the basis for its fellowship and ministry, the Continuing Church takes its stand unequivocally for the faith once delivered to the saints.

By making such a commitment, the Continuing Church does not thereby subscribe to some dusty dated sectarian view of Christianity. At the heart and core of Christianity is a faith which does not change. Men may change. Churches may change. But the sovereign God does not change. The completed work of atonement by Christ for his people does not change. The effective working of God's sovereign Spirit in the heart of dead sinners does not change. The certainty of our salvation in Christ cannot

change. With good conscience before God and man, and with faith unfeigned, the Continuing Church commits itself to that which is the Christian faith, the biblical faith, the apostolic faith — nothing more and nothing less.

One further point should be noted regarding the Continuing Church's commitment to **the faith**. The Continuing Church commits itself to "the faith" as it affects the totality of man's existence. No narrowing fundamentalism is to mar the vision of this church as it searches out the implications of Scripture for the totality of human life. It is to the faith of Christianity in its fullness, as it relates to the whole of creation, that the Continuing Church commits itself. In humble dependence on the Holy Spirit to enlighten and empower, the Continuing Church commits itself to the Christian faith in its wholeness. May the hallmark of the life-style of its members be an awareness that Christ came preaching the kingdom of God. May guidelines found in Scripture for the whole of man's existence be the tenor of its proclamation. May the Lord of the kingdom himself be the Lord of every aspect of the life of the Continuing Church.

What is the Continuing Church to do with "the faith"?

With the help of God's spirit, the Continuing Church shall fulfill the admonition in the text of the day. It shall contend earnestly for the faith.

The word which the apostle uses in the text suggests an athletic contest. It speaks of the **agony** involved in contending for a prize.

Most of you are aware of the fact that we're in Crimson Tide territory. Bear Bryant has been in charge of the gridirons in this area for some time.

The story is told that once Coach Bryant was asked, "Coach, the secret of your success must be due to your effective recruitment program. How do you spot good material for the gridiron?"

Responded the Bear: "Simple. I just look for men who are mobile, agile and hostile."

Certainly an encouragement of hostility is not the intention of Jude when he urges his readers to "contend earnestly" for the faith. But he is urging that the intense concentration and devotion of the athlete mark their concern for the truth of Scripture.

See that fullback hit the scrimmage-line on fourth down when he's one foot from the goal? Look at the intensity of effort symbolized in those bulging neck-muscles.

With just such intensity the Continuing Church must contend earnestly for the faith. Heap agonizing effort on agonizing effort. God's kingdom and God's glory are at stake. Ungodly persons are turning the liberating freedom of God's gift of salvation into the debauchery of the new morality. Men — would you believe their audacity —are making mockery of the Lordship of God's son Jesus. Agonize for the faith! Don't just sit there when men speak untruth, or leave the truth unspoken. Agonize! The Continuing Church has been born out of a context of agonizing for the truth. The Continuing Church commits itself anew to this ministry of agony.

II. The Continuing Church Commits Itself To The Faith Which Has Been Delivered

A delivered faith suggests two things: it suggests one who delivers, and it suggests one who receives the delivery.

A. The One Who Delivers The Faith

When Jude suggests that someone has delivered the faith, he could be understood as referring to the apostles. They were commissioned by God officially to deliver the faith to the church. Or he could be referring to God himself as the ultimate source of the faith.

Most likely God is the one being considered as the deliverer of the faith in this context. In the final analysis, the apostles themselves must be included with the rest of the saints as the recipients of the faith. The faith did not originate with the apostles. It originated with God.

Scripture is uniform in its affirmation that the faith of Christianity originates in God, not in man. Who has delivered the faith that saves men from sin and death? The Almighty Creator-God. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is the source of the faith which we affirm.

The faith which we profess is not a faith invented of man. Take any of the cardinal truths of Christianity, and its source must be affirmed to be in God, not in man. "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (II Pet. 1:16).

See God's sovereign choice of a single man in the history of lost humanity? He chooses an idolator from Ur of the Chaldees, changes his name to Abraham, "father of a multitude," and promises that the seed-designate who is to bruise Satan's head will be the descendant of his barren wife. God alone stands as the author of this history of salvation. God's sovereignty alone explains the faith of every true believer who enters into this history.

See the finger of God carving in stone the revelation of his gracious law? These ten commandments are not the product of human evolutionary development. They have been delivered to man by God himself. Dare to treat them as originating from man, if you will. Flaunt his laws, embodying as they do the very structures of the created order. They will break you rather than your breaking them. God alone stands as author of the ethical norms of Scripture.

Feel the earth shaking as God's virgin-born son dies? The veil of the temple is torn from heaven to earth, from top to bottom, indicating that He is the one providing free access to Himself by the sacrificial blood of his son.

The faith of the Continuing Church is the faith delivered by God himself. We affirm without equivocation that the faith of genuine Christianity originates in God. He is the deliverer of the faith.

B. The Ones Receiving the Faith which is Delivered

Who should receive such a trust? Who is worthy of such things? To whom does God deliver "the faith"?

Jude is quite explicit. It is "the faith which has been delivered to the saints."

God does not entrust the treasure of his revelation to humanity in general. No man in his natural state is capable of receiving the treasure of the gospel.

Only the regenerate receive the trust of the gospel. Only men who have been born from above by the power of the sovereign Holy Spirit may possess the deposit of the faith.

To speak of "the saints" as the receivers of "the faith" clearly implies a priority of God's working in the re-creation of a man from within. If all are dead in trespasses and sins, then God first must operate with the same creative power which raised Christ from the dead before it will be possible for a man to receive "the faith." "Flesh and blood" did not reveal the equality of the incarnate Christ with the eternal God to the apostle Peter. The Father in heaven had to be the source of such a revelation (Matthew 16:16,17).

In this respect, the Continuing Church makes a firm commitment. Only the holy ones of God shall be adjudged worthy possessors of the treasure of the gospel. The Continuing Church commits itself to the task of contending earnestly for the purity of the church.

Too long the church has allowed aberrations from the faith in the name of charity. When true love would have admonished and disciplined a brother, the folly of man's wisdom has prevailed. The result has been the inclusion into the ordained status of the church individuals who openly have refused to repent of their denial of essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

Out of love and concern for the health of Christ's body, the Continuing Church commits itself to maintaining the purity of the church. This great faith, the trust of God himself, shall be delivered to the saints, and to the saints alone.

When Jude speaks of the faith being delivered, he refers to a transferral of trust. An invaluable item has been entrusted to an honored recipient.

See those proud, beaming parents? They have received a trust from God. A precious life has been placed in their hands for a time. Their privilege and responsibility is to raise their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Into your hands almighty God has placed the trust of the gospel. It has been delivered to you. What are you to do with that trust?

Not only are you to contend earnestly for the faith. You are to declare the faith. You are to communicate the faith to others.

What a thrill it is to see the banner of world missions unfurled once more as the Continuing Church is reborn: "A Continuing Presbyterian Church, loyal to Scripture, faithful to the Reformed Faith, and obedient to the Great Commission." The Continuing Church commits itself to the worldwide proclamation of the faith with which it has been entrusted.

III. The Continuing Church Commits Itself To The Faith **Once** Delivered

The commitment of the Continuing Church is not only to the faith; not only to the faith which has been delivered; but to the faith which has been **once** delivered.

It is a glad note to be sounded. It is a note which brings a sigh of satisfaction. God has revealed in his Word once and for all everything that a man needs to know for life and godliness.

Future shock is on us. The knowledge explosion has overtaken us. Before an engineer completes his university training, a discouragingly large percentage of his knowledge already has become **passee**.

How great it is to turn to the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture and to find certainty in its finalized form. God has completed the long historical process of his revelation to men. In the inscripturated word of God may be found the truth — unchanging, life-giving, understandable truth.

The Continuing Church is fully aware that everyone does not hold to the finality of the revelation found in Scripture. It knows full well of those who piously boast of a “living Christ” who continues to reveal himself in the assemblies of the church.

Far from denying the reality of the living Christ who rose in the body on the third day, the Continuing Church makes concrete its commitment to this Christ by submitting to his finalized revelation as it is found in Scripture. We affirm without equivocation that to Scripture “nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (**Westminster Confession of Faith, I, 6**). The faith has been “once” delivered. It stands complete. It lacks nothing.

In the current scene, additions to the once-for-all revelation of Scripture are being proposed by ecclesiastical hierarchists. These people propose to add to the revelation of God found in Scripture. They presume to suggest that the pronouncements of church courts may serve alongside Scripture as the word of God. They suggest that the temporal limitations of Scripture may be superseded by their contemporary additions to God’s revelation.

The Continuing Church affirms anew in this day of confusion that “the faith” has been delivered “once for all,” and that it stands complete and sufficient. While the church clearly has the task of promoting the submission of God’s people to Scripture, it never may assume to itself the responsibility of supplementing Scripture. Scripture is the completed revelation of God to his people, which needs no supplementary additions, and which is the “only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

In conclusion, the Continuing Church launches its existence into the mainstream of history by rejoicing in the wholeness it finds in “the faith once delivered to the saints.” Our newfound unity in the faith reflects our privileged position of being one with Christ as a part of his body. Knowing his body to be one, we rejoice in the oneness we now experience, with all who are committed to the same precious faith. May the Lord of his church be pleased to hasten the perfecting of that unity with himself and among us, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13 NASV).



THE REV. DONALD B. PATTERSON, B.A., B.D., D.D.

Dr. Patterson is a son of the manse, his father having served for many years as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He was graduated from Wheaton College and Columbia Theological Seminary. He served as pastor of the Commerce, Georgia Presbyterian Church, Perry, Georgia Presbyterian Church, West End Church of Hopewell, Virginia and the McIlwain Memorial Church of Pensacola, Florida and is now pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi. Mr. Patterson was Chairman of the Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church and is now Chairman of the provisional Committee for the Mission to the World. He is a member of the Mississippi Valley Presbytery of the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

The subject of Dr. Patterson's address will be "At the Crossroads."

At The Crossroads

Donald B. Patterson

No other figure of speech describes more adequately our situation tonight than does the one that states that we are "at the crossroads." Having come to this place because of a deep conviction we have been laughed at, criticized, maligned, made fun of and even harassed, yet we have come. Some of us face uncertain days, while others breathe more easily for their "lives have fallen in pleasant places."

None of us would deny that we are living in a new day with all kinds of exciting opportunities for Christian witness at home and overseas. The future is as bright as the promises of God. I am impressed by the fact that those giving thought to the formation of a new denomination are facing up to the principle that the primary purpose of Jesus Christ in the world must never become a secondary cause in His church.

As the Apostle Paul set out on his third missionary journey he carried with him the half-Jewish, half-Asian-Greek Timothy and the Gentile Titus. He was joined by others as they visited churches established earlier. In the spring of 54 A.D. they came to the strategic city of Ephesus. The story of the evangelization of that city is one of the outstanding missionary accomplishments of history. We do not have all the records, but two years later it was said "... all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10)

Since the beginning of the Christian Church, it has been at its best when it is militantly evangelistic. Refined by violent opposition, a fierce dedication to take the Gospel to every man at any cost characterized our predecessors.

Unfortunately, the Church has not been able to maintain its most dedicated missionary enthusiasm for very long, and having failed to polarize public opinion about Jesus Christ it has retreated from the arena of open evangelism. The Church has hidden behind symbols of strength and power — protected by its theological positions — while whole generations of unimpressed, uncommitted and unevangelized people go by outside.

I may have misunderstood the Scripture, but my impression of the Church was that it was never meant to be some kind of a fortress out of reach of the people. The Church was to be an outgoing, proclaiming, evangelistic body of believers dedicated to the passion for the world-wide evangelization of people.

As I understand the command of Jesus, we are to preach the Gospel to every person, but no generation of Christians has ever come close to fulfilling the Great Commission in its own times. The likelihood of our evangelizing the world seems so remote that few of us even think about it — much less pray about it.

In 1966 I attended the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin where a population clock clicked off the increase in the world's population while we sat in that meeting. Nothing made a more profound impression on me that week.

When Christ was on earth there were approximately 300 million people on earth. 1500 years later it is estimated that there were 500 million. 300 years later there were one billion. Then man doubled his number in the next **one hundred** years. In 1930 there were 2 billion people! Between 1930 and 1960 man added another billion. They are now estimating that by the year 2000 there will be 6.5 billion people.

There was a day when preachers were called the "prophets of doom," but the title now goes to the scientists. The scientist with his charts and carefully researched prognostications is in the limelight. It has become obvious that if the Church is ever to evangelize the world it must greatly increase its level of missionary activity, or it will be too late to fulfill the Great Commission.

Facing the command of our Saviour and with some knowledge of the work of various mission organizations down through the years, it is my opinion that our fledgling denomination must search for a workable plan for world-wide evangelization. We must go back to the New Testament and base our global ministry on apostolic patterns and standards. Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy: "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (I Timothy 1:16)

In that first century Paul provided a working model that we would do well to follow — "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 19:10). He reached the **whole** province — all the people! He effectively fulfilled the Great Commission for that time and place by carrying the Gospel to all the inhabitants of what is now Turkey.

You know the history of the church in that area. Luke wrote: "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." (Acts 19:20) Whatever Paul did at Ephesus needs to be repeated again throughout the whole 20th century world.

God's command to Adam was "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion." (Gen. 1:28). Man has done that. He is now walking on the moon, living at the bottom of the ocean, doubling his store of knowledge every few years and now he says that he is close to reproducing living matter in the laboratory. He has so thoroughly carried out his original assignment that he has now produced a terrifying ecological imbalance that threatens to destroy him.

With the coming of Jesus Christ a new commandment was given. He discussed it often with His disciples. Listen to it again:

Matthew 28:18-20 "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Mark 16:7 "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Luke 24:46-48 "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

John 20:21 "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Acts 1:7,8 "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Matthew 24:14 "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Obviously, the task of world evangelization is to continue until the end of the world. The obligation is still binding. The Great Commission has not expired and is applicable today.

We have taken a strong stand on some of the complicated facets of Christian theology, but in the Great Commission there is a wonderful simplicity. Jesus is calling for uniformity of action and singleness of purpose: Christians are to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every living person. It is a call to action — a command to total evangelization — a commitment to proclaim the Gospel to every person.

The message of that first century Church was uncomplicated. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified and buried, but on the third day He rose from the dead. Forty days later He ascended to the Father and He promised to return. The early declaration of faith did not reply to all the questions that men were asking, but it did give an understandable series of concepts for the evangelization of the people.

We must believe that we are justified in changing the religious beliefs and the moral behavior of the people. We must believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God and that all other religions, beautiful and presently helpful as they may appear, are inadequate. Man is separated from God by his sins and he will invent substitutes. Without a living knowledge of God, man has degenerated and developed his heathen religions and cultures. Underneath the surface there is still a hunger that is not satisfied apart from Christ.

The primary motivation for world evangelism is a love for our fellow men and a firm belief that all who do not accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ are hopelessly lost and condemned to eternal separation from God. If Jesus Christ is right, then all the world must be evangelized and we must make converts among all other religions.

The magnitude of the Great Commission is a frightening challenge to our embryonic denomination, especially in view of the lack of missionary vision in our time. We cannot answer for the ages that are past, but we are responsible for every man, woman and child in every community in every cultural group in our generation. It is for today that we must answer to God.

What we need today is a fresh look at what the Scriptures have to say about the sovereignty of God. He knows the end from the beginning and is working all things after the counsel

of His own will. He is able to make the wrath of man praise Him. No man can stay His hand or say to Him: "What doest thou?"

Anybody can believe in the sovereignty of God when the situation is under control, but when things get out of hand, when right is on the scaffold and wrong is on the throne, it is then that the purposes of God are being worked out according to His plan.

This is no time for retrenchment — no time for retreat. The doors ARE open. The fields ARE white. The laborers ARE few. The closed doors are God's responsibility while the open doors are ours! We are to pray the Lord of the harvest to send the laborers.

The success of world missions is not to be measured against past accomplishments or present gains, but by the realistic progress toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the response of the Church to pursue its task with faith and vision.

What will you do about it. As you stand at the crossroads, what will your decision be? I promise you difficulties and dangers. Messengers of the cross have been hunted and hounded, whipped and flogged. Some have given their lives. But the mandate has not been rescinded.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church and the Lord of history. Leaders come and go — nations rise and fall — civilizations wax and wane, but the worldwide mission of the Church will continue to the end of the age.



THE REV. C. DARBY FULTON, B.A., M.A., B.D., S.T.B., D.D., L.L.D.

Dr. Fulton was born in Japan of missionary parents. During his long service in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, he served as a missionary for 36 years, as Executive Secretary of the Board of World Missions, as Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, and as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He is an honorably retired minister of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The subject of Dr. Fulton's address will be "The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ."

The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

C. Darby Fulton

Text: Phil. 3:7-14

Every life has a key word. With some it is money; with others, pleasure; with still others, fame. With Alexander the Great it was conquest; with Napoleon, France; with Edison, science; with Paul, it was Christ.

Paul interpreted every phase of his life in its relation to Christ. When he rejoiced, it was in Christ; he gloried in Christ; he conquered in Christ; he was strong in Christ; and he took pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake. For him, to live was Christ.

But it hadn't always been so with Paul. There was a time when his all-consuming devotion to Christ had been unknown. His heart had been set on other things; for his was a rich and proud heritage. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, nurtured and trained in the speech, the spirit and the traditions of the Jewish people. He was of the stock of Israel, rightful heir to all the promises God had made to His chosen people. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the two favored sons of Jacob. Further, he was a Pharisee, a member of that strictest sect of religious aristocrats who had distinguished themselves by their zeal in persecuting the church. Thus Paul had position, power, popularity and prestige, and he gloried in these things.

Then came that marvelous experience on the way to Damascus when the light flashed from heaven and the voice had called to him from the skies; and Paul became a new man in Christ. The change that came over Paul was cataclysmic. Old things had passed away; behold, all things had become new. Let him tell it in his own words: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them as refuse, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him." All previous values were now inverted. The things he once loved, he now hated; and the Christ of his malice and envy became the Christ of his heart's desire. To gain Christ and be found in him became the controlling purpose of his life.

In this passage, Paul sets out three principles that guided him in the pursuit of his aim:

I. First, "I count not myself yet to have attained." That goal he now defines in detail:

"That I may know Him - - - . But didn't Paul know Christ? Undoubtedly there was a time when he didn't. When the voice had sounded on the road that day, he had asked in bewilderment, "Who art thou Lord?" The answer came back, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." But having thus been introduced to Christ, Paul never escaped the lure of His majestic personality. From that moment on, he was the captive of Christ, completely dominated by the mind and will of his Master.

"and the power of His resurrection" - - - . Didn't Paul know the power of the resurrection? He was the Apostle of the resurrection, the author of the grandest treatise ever written on this great hope of the Christian.

"and the fellowship of His sufferings" - - - . Didn't Paul know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ? What do you suppose he meant when he said, "For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"?

And what was his estimate of it all? "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have attained." These are words of rare humility, and they reveal how high was the standard of achievement Paul had set for himself. Whatever success the past might disclose, all seemed as yet incomplete in the light of that greater glory that would be revealed — "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."

The Olympic Games of 1908 were held in London, and a young Italian named Dorando had been established as the favorite to win that classic race, The Marathon. A hundred thousand people were gathered in the great stadium to witness the finish, and as the time drew near, one could feel the rising tension of expectation. Suddenly there was a flash of white under the arch. Someone shouted, "It's Dorando!", and immediately thousands of frenzied admirers were on their feet, cheering the young runner to the echo. Halfway around the stadium Dorando stumbled and fell. Friends rushed to his aid. He staggered on for a few more paces, then stretched his length on the ground. Dorando was finished. In another moment there was a second flash of white under the arch, and John G. Hayes, wearing the emblem of the United States, made that last lap steadily and surely and won the Marathon for his country.

No race is won until it's finished. This day does not mark the end. This is the beginning. You are toeing the mark for the great contest.

II. And now Paul announces the second principle in three inclusive little words: "I Press On." What magic words these are! Who can repeat them without feeling an impulse toward progress. They are suggestive of patience and perseverance in the pursuit of some high and ennobling aim.

It has been said that youth is prospective, while old age is retrospective. The young dream of the future and build castles in Spain; while the old revel in their memories of the days that are gone. And it is actually this difference in outlook, rather than any mathematical matter of years, that determines whether one be young or old. For that soul is already dead that has no vision for tomorrow, and greets the coming of the day with no new thrill of anticipation.

Paul here lays claim to the spirit of youth when he exclaims: "I Press On." It was not enough for him that he had run well in the past. That was too negative. A heavenly race had commanded his zeal. And so, with unrelenting determination he set his face forward. Numerous enemies conspired to win him away from his declared purpose and divert him from his task. Voices called to him from the byways and alleys of life. But Paul shouts defiantly, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor prin-

cialties, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is the spirit that makes for success. No man was ever born great; nor was greatness ever thrust upon anyone; true greatness is always achieved — achieved by dedicated men who have written "I Press On" over the portals of their lives.

III. There is a third principle. Let me attach it to the other two: "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have attained; I press on; if so be that I may lay hold on that for which I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus."

To discover and discharge in one's life the will and purpose of Christ for that life — this is the highest goal that any man can set before himself. This is to find in life its supreme dignity. It is to recognize that God in Christ one day laid hold on you and claimed you for His own, thus setting you apart as His chosen vessel. To Him be all glory and honor and praise!

If this be true, what could be more tragic than that a man should go through life without ever having discovered what it was that his Lord had planned for him. No man can afford to live his life without taking God into account.

The whole message of this passage can be conveyed, I think, by an illustration:

Sixty-seven years ago Mrs. Fulton and I sailed from Vancouver, B.C. for Yokohama aboard the Canadian Pacific freighter, *Monteagle*. She was built to carry missionaries and Oregon pine to the Far East. It was a dark and stormy day when the shores of North America dropped out of sight behind us, and for more than a week we were buffeted by adverse weather. The winds were contrary, the waves were high, the currents were strong, and we wallowed in heavy seas with no sight of sun or stars.

Seated at the Captain's table one evening at dinner, I hoped for some word that would reflect a brighter prospect for the days ahead. "Captain," I asked, "where are we now?" "I don't know," he said; "we've been sailing on dead reckoning. For eight days we haven't seen the sun or the stars. We've drifted some. Oh I know that we are within one or two hundred miles of the Aleutian Islands, but nearer than that I can't tell you."

The next afternoon four of us passengers were having a game of deck tennis between the boards that were piled on the well deck, just forward of the bridge. At almost exactly four o'clock there was a little rift in the clouds, and for a brief minute or two a bright shaft of sunlight fell on the deck. At that moment a man came running out of the deckhouse with an instrument in his hand. He peered into it intently for a minute, then disappeared inside. We all noticed it and commented on it.

That night I was seated again by the Captain. I turned to him now with more confidence. "Where are we now, Captain," I asked. "Sir," he replied, "we are sailing about twenty-five miles off the Aleutian Islands, close to shore." "How do you know, Captain," I asked. He answered, "We saw the sun today."

These have been trying days for many of us. God bless you all. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.



THE REV. HAROLD R. PATTESON, B.A., B.D.

Mr. Patteson is a native of Virginia and was graduated from King College and Columbia Theological Seminary. He has served pastorates in Appalachia, Virginia, Signal Mountain, Tennessee, Albertville, Alabama and Travelers Rest, South Carolina. Mr. Patteson is presently pastor of the Eau Claire Presbyterian Church of Columbia, South Carolina. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States and is now a member of Calvary Presbytery of the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

The subject of Mr. Patteson's address will be "Preaching and the New Church."

Preaching and the New Church

H. R. Patteson

Text: I Corinthians 1:10-25

The minister of the Word is the first office in the church both in dignity and usefulness. It carries with it many demands. The variety and weight of the responsibilities can be seen in the names given the Minister of the Word. He is Bishop, Pastor, Minister, Presbyter, Ambassador. In addition he may find himself serving as administrator, clerk-typist, welfare agent, parole officer, civic leader, construction engineer, common laborer, architect, and others.

During the past two decades that I have been in the ministry, in the growing number of roles a Minister must fill one has been diminishing in importance while others have been gaining in emphasis to the detriment of the Church. That one is the role of preacher. There has been a de-emphasis and even a down-grading of the role of preaching in popular circles of the Christian religion.

The passage we have read for our devotional lesson this morning has several things to suggest to us as we begin a new denomination, which we trust will be faithful to Scripture and the Reformed Faith.

1. Preaching is important. It is the first Business of the Church. The exposition and proclamation of the Word of God throughout the entire world is the mission the Church has been sent into the world to accomplish. To those who do not understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ, preaching may appear to be a foolish exercise. To those who look at the needs of mankind through compassionate yet unregenerate eyes, it may seem to be foolish to spend time and energy preaching when there is so much that needs to be done. But on the Church's work schedule the stamp of "First Priority" is placed upon the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

Preaching is important.

2. Preaching is important because it is the means which the Lord has chosen to convict the world of sin and to reach and to save His elect people. Though it appears foolish to the natural man, preaching is effective to the purpose for which it was ordained. Even the foolishness of God — if God could do anything foolish — is wiser than all the wisdom of men.

We are saved by faith. But faith is generated in the heart as the Holy Spirit takes the proclaimed Word of God — whether it be written or spoken — and applies it to the heart. And that faith is the gift of God. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

3. Preaching is important because of the message it intends to communicate. The message of the preacher as he expounds and explains Scripture is generally referred to in our passage as "The word of the cross."

Specifically, we preach "Christ crucified."

It is the message of salvation from sin through the atoning death of the Lamb of God.

The message is that He who was without sin became sin for us, bearing all the punishment due us, enduring the agonies of hell for us, that we might be righteous before God and might have eternal life.

The message is that the holy and righteous God has condescended to man and has offered salvation, that sinful man might walk in fellowship and communion with his Creator.

Of course, the Word of God, when rightly expounded and applied to individual lives, has much to say concerning the believer's walk and way in the world in civic, social, economic and political matters.

The preaching of the message of salvation is of great importance because man is a sinful creature.

And although he may be free from outward pressure to do wrong, he is never free from the control of his own sinful nature which causes him to do wrong. He may be surrounded with all the inducements to live a good, useful and upright life but because he is subject to his own degenerate nature he cannot live up to the right and the good and the honorable.

Preaching the message of salvation — the "word of the cross" — "Christ crucified" — is the means God has ordained to bring to rebirth those whom he has elected to be His own people before the foundation of the world.

However, this word of warning concerning our preaching of the Word of God: (it is very pointedly stated in the message Baalim sent to Balak, king of Moab in the twenty-second chapter of Numbers) "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."

We must always guard against imposing our own qualifications and conditions upon the message of God.

We must be careful that we do not make the door of entry into the kingdom of Christ more narrow or wider than the Lord Himself has made it.

4. Preaching the message of salvation is important because of the person who is behind that message.

Of course, the person behind the message is none other than the Lord, Jesus Christ.

All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Him. He is the Lord of the universe, the King of all the earth. Before Him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is the Lord of glory — Creator — Redeemer.

It is His message we are to proclaim.

We are His ambassadors, His stewards, and faithfulness is not only expected but it is required.

As we begin a new denomination, I would submit to you that preaching the message of Jesus Christ — the word of the cross —

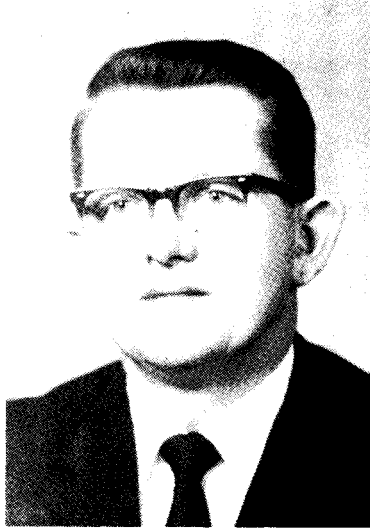
Christ crucified — is the most important work the Church has to do.

In 1923 at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia when delivering the James Sprunt Lectures, Dr. James I. Vance said:

“All that the Church has is a message. This is all that it had at first . . . “This is all the Church has ever had. It has sought much else, and often its search has been successful, but sooner or later it has discovered that what it sought outside of its message was fool’s gold. It has sought the patronage and protection of the state only to learn that a state-fed church cannot save a lost world. It has sought numbers and wealth and scholarship, only to discover that without the message these are mere straw assets. It has sought to build stately churches and imposing cathedrals, and it has seen them become the tombs of religion, without the Gospel.”

“All that the Church has today is its message. Silence that, and the Christian Church goes out of business. Let that ring clear and true, and you may burn down every church and wipe out all of the elaborate machinery that has been built around it, you may strip it of its wealth and numbers and influence, but if it still have left a voice to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love, it remains in possession of all that it ever had and of all that it needs to bring the lost world back to God.”

As we begin a new denomination, I would urge upon you this fact: The preaching of the message of Jesus Christ — the word of the cross — is the most important work the Church has to do.



THE REV. J. LEWIS BAKER, B.A., B.D.

Mr. Baker is a son of the manse. His father, The Rev. Richard Thomas Baker, served for many years as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Mr. Baker was graduated from Davidson College and Columbia Theological Seminary. He served as pastor of the Ebenezer Church of Hobbs Island, Alabama, of the Talucah Church in Valhermosa Springs, Alabama, of the George Kirby Memorial Church of Goldsboro, North Carolina and is now pastor of the Antioch and Progressive Presbyterian Churches of Goldsboro, North Carolina. Mr. Baker was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States and is now a member of the Vanguard Presbytery of the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

The subject of Mr. Baker's address will be "Paul's Message to the Ephesian Elders."

Paul's Message to the Ephesian Elders

J. Lewis Baker

Text: Acts 20: 28-32

If an archaeologist, digging in the ruins of ancient Ephesus, should happen to unearth the Sessional Record Book of the First century, A.D., I have no doubt that he would find inscribed upon several pages the minutes of the last meeting of that Session which was moderated by the Apostle Paul. And we can be forever grateful to the historian Luke for recording for us here in Acts 20 a summary of the minutes of that Session meeting. For this farewell address of Paul to the Ephesian elders reveals so vividly the heart of this great Christian, this great Apostle. It has been pointed out that this is the only record in the book of Acts of the content of Paul's message when addressing a Christian audience. Here is direct, practical instruction from the Holy Spirit for Christian ministers and elders as we seek to fulfill our ministry.

In his journey toward Jerusalem, Paul summoned the elders from Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, some 35 miles from the city where Paul had worked for three years. His purpose was to encourage these Christian leaders to be faithful in their care of the flock among which they served as overseers.

Paul's first exhortation is: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . ." Take heed, give attention to, be cautious about, give diligent care to, be on guard for, first of all, yourselves. Unless these men were serious about the welfare of their own souls, they would never be careful about the souls of others. In Christian service we experience tremendous blessings, but we also are exposed to special temptations. Unless we maintain a close fellowship with the Lord through regular, daily prayer and Bible study, we can become merely "professional," going through the motions, but without any power. We can come to the place where we deal so constantly with sacred things that we lose our appreciation and feeling for them. We can come to the place where God's grace does not appear as precious to us now as it did when we first believed. We today, as these Ephesians elders, must take heed to ourselves, and be on our guard against the dangers which beset us, lest in our eagerness to save others, we neglect our own close walk with the Lord. Paul said to the Corinthian church, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (I Cor. 9:27) Again the Scripture says. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

Now, in the second place, Paul exhorts these elders to "Take heed . . . to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers. . ." Having exhorted them to give attention to their own spiritual condition, he now exhorts them to give attention to the condition of the flock; to all the flock — young and old, rich and poor, each individual member, of whatever class or condition.

In I John we read, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him?" (I John 3:17) Christ told the rich young ruler to sell all that he had

and give to the poor. All we have has come to us through God's blessing. We cannot refuse to have compassion on those in need and still claim allegiance to Christ.

But far more important than physical and material needs, are, of course, spiritual needs. Though Christ came healing the sick and raising the dead and feeding the hungry, yet His real purpose in coming into the world was to meet our spiritual needs. As He Himself said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) Christ's Great Commission to His followers was to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel. And if we are Christians, then this is also our supreme responsibility — to minister to the spiritual needs of men by pointing them to the One who is mighty to save. If we are not concerned about the spiritual welfare of others, then we have no right to claim the name of Christ.

And so Paul is impressing upon these Ephesian elders the seriousness of their responsibility, not only as Christians, but especially as leaders in the flock, to "take heed . . . to all the flock, over the which," or rather "in which" or "among which," "the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." The best translation is not "over the which," but "in which" or "among which." They themselves are not above the flock, but a part of the flock, in the midst of which the Holy Spirit has given them a special responsibility as overseers or bishops. Not lords, but leaders; not above, but among the flock. The most saintly servant of God must remember all his life that he is but a saved sinner, needing the blood and righteousness of Christ as much as the weakest of the flock.

However these elders had been chosen, it was the Holy Spirit who had placed them as overseers in the flock. And so they were to fulfill their Spirit-appointed ministry to take heed to the flock: to instruct, to guide, to guard it from enemies, and to promote in every way its spiritual growth.

Note that in talking to these elders Paul refers to them as overseers or bishops. Elder and bishop, of course, being interchangeable terms; the word elder referring to their age and experience, and the word bishop referring to their office and function.

And their task in the flock was "to feed the church of God, . . ." And the word here translated "feed" is the word for "shepherd." It means "to act as or to do the duty of a shepherd." Christ said, "I am the good shepherd: . . ." (John 10-11) But to human beings He gives the responsibility of being His under-shepherds, to give tender care to His sheep; under Him to lead the sheep to green pastures and to still waters, to protect, and guide, and guard, and instruct, and govern His church — shepherds not only to gather the church by bringing in those that are without, but also to feed, to shepherd, the church by building up those that are within. Paul commits to these elders the responsibility which had been his: that of shepherding the flock.

Paul further impresses upon these elders their responsibility by describing the church which they are to shepherd as "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." What an amazing statement! The oneness of essence between the Father and the Son was manifested even in the work of redemption: ". . . God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself . . ." (II Cor. 5:19) The entire Godhead achieved man's redemption

in the offering on the cross. The blood was Christ's as Man, yet so close is the union between the divine and human nature, that it is here called the blood of God, for it was the blood of Him who is God. The value of the church is to be reckoned by the worth of the price paid for it. It has been bought with the highest price in the universe. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:" (I Peter 1:18-19) The word "purchased" here in verse 28 is not the usual word for buying. This word, we are told, means to acquire for one's self, to make what is bought peculiarly one's own. Christ, with His own blood, has purchased us for Himself, to be His precious possession, His peculiar people. ". . . We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." (Psalm 100:3) His by the Father's choice, by Christ's purchase, and by the drawing of the Holy Spirit.

The shepherd puts his life on the line in defending his sheep. He may actually give his life in fighting and killing the wild animals who are the enemies of the sheep. Our Lord put His life on the line in our defense. He took our place. He met our foe in conflict. He overcame sin and death. He died in the struggle, but He set us free. He paid the penalty for our sins. He purchased us with His own blood. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, . . ." (I Peter 2:24)

Paul emphasized these tremendous truths in order to impress more earnestly upon these elders the reasons why they must shepherd the flock. It is the church which our Master purchased with His own blood. It should be dear to us, for it was dear to Him. If Christ so loved the church, should not they, and we, be willing to deny ourselves, to watch and toil and pray that His church might be fed. This was not Paul's church, nor the elders' church, but God's church. And so they, and we, must feed — must shepherd — the church of God, because it was purchased at so great a price. If Christ laid down His life to purchase it, should not we be willing to go to any trouble to feed and care for it? To neglect the true welfare of the church, is to show contempt for His blood that purchased it. It is His church, and He expects that we show our love to Him by feeding His sheep and His lambs.

From Him we have received our commission and to Him we must give account. As the shepherd is responsible to his master for the care of the sheep, so the writer of Hebrews tells us that those who have the rule over the flock ". . . watch for your souls, as they that must give account, . . ." (Heb. 13:17) A young minister was complaining that his congregation was too small for his abilities. To which an older minister is said to have replied, "It's as large a congregation as you will want to give account of in the day of judgment." Are we shepherding the flock in which God has placed us as those who must give account to Him?

These elders were to take heed to themselves; and to take heed to the flock, to feed it, to shepherd it; but there was one thing more — they must watch, they must stand guard, they must defend the flock from those who were its enemies, for the flock was in danger of being made a prey to its adversaries. "For I know this," Paul said, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Wolves were the natural enemies of sheep, and so they stand here as a figure for those who would ravage or lay waste the church: grievous

wolves, cruel, destructive, savage, strong wolves. Up to this point Paul had been with them, and his presence had been the means of guarding the church and preserving it from these dangers. But now as he passed from the scene, the wolves would be waiting to ravage the flock, and these elders, these spiritual leaders, must be on their guard.

Now these enemies would come from two sources: from outside the flock, but also from within: "of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Later, in writing to Timothy, Paul said, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (II Tim. 4:3-4) In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ warned, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matt. 7:15-16) And so Paul warns these elders that wolves would come, wolves in sheep's clothing — perhaps even wolves in shepherd's clothing — seeking to turn away the sheep from the pure gospel of Christ.

And not only the church in Ephesus, but the church in every place and in every century has faced these wolves from without and from within. But surely the most dangerous enemies of the church have come from within. The church would have little to fear from enemies on the outside, if it had no enemies within its own ranks. And you and I, like these Ephesian elders, must be on guard against the enemies of the gospel within and without the church — but especially within.

And it is the experience of our own age that still these wolves are among us; the wolves of covetousness, of materialism, of worldliness, of compromise, of hypocrisy, but especially the wolves of unbelief. When there are church members whose lives show no evidence of having been born again; when self-indulgence replaces devotion and self-denial; when there are those in the church who make counterfeit godliness their way to worldly gain; when human organization is substituted for spiritual power; when expediency replaces truth; when worshippers seeking heavenly truths, find only earthly opinions; when sophisticated unbelief and so-called scholarship is substituted for faith in God's written Word; when those who openly deny the fundamentals of the faith are ordained to office in the church; when the question, "What has the General Assembly said?" — even the General Assembly of the Continuing Presbyterian Church — when that question becomes more important than the question, "What does the Scripture say?"; when any of these things are true, then the wolves are still among us, and we must take Paul's warning doubly to heart.

Paul's remedy for this dark prospect is threefold: First, he tells these elders to "watch;" be awake, be alert; in view of the prospects for the future, watch for the approach of danger and set yourselves against it. As shepherds keep watch over their flocks by night, and watch against everything that will be hurtful to the flock, you watch, be alert, he says, so that you are never taken by surprise. Many evils happen while men are asleep — so has it also been in the church.

Second, he exhorts them to "remember." "Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." What a pastor Paul was! How diligent he had been while in their midst. He had taught them publicly and from house to house. He had declared to them the whole counsel of God. Continually, day and night, with tears, he had warned them every one. So much so that he could look these elders in the face and say, as recorded in verse 26, ". . . I am pure from the blood of all men."

I have read of a Scottish minister of an earlier century than our own, who was leaving his parish and said from the pulpit in his farewell sermon, that he took all his people to witness that he had spoken, not only from the pulpit, but personally, and in private, to every single one of his people about the state of their souls. Such a pastor was Paul. And to strengthen these elders against the wolves that were coming, he counseled them to remember his ministry — his diligence among them — as an encouragement to them to follow his example.

Finally, he says, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, . . ." Literally he says, "I lay you down beside God!" — I place you in His hands and under his protection and commit you to His tender care. Paul is leaving, never to see in this world the flock which, for three years, he has fed with devoted care and loved with a fervent love. He was leaving them with a strong impression of the dangers to which they would be exposed. To whom could he entrust them? He charges these elders to be diligent in their shepherding of the flock. But finally, in the end, he commends them to God. He brings them to God in faith. He commits to God this precious deposit to be preserved safe unto the day of Christ.

Our Confession of Faith rightly says: "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to his will." (Chapter XXV, Par. V) And so in the knowledge that particular churches might be ravaged by these wolves, and pass from the scene; but in the confidence that the gates of hell would not prevail against Christ's true Church — that God would not leave Himself without a witness in the world, Paul commits this flock and these elders to the Sovereign God, and to the Word of His grace — His gracious Word, His gracious promises; the assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ, which has been conferred on us by God's grace. In the midst of deceivers and false prophets, there is one source of safety — the Word of God's grace. If they are kept in that Word of truth they will be safe. For, he says, "it is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

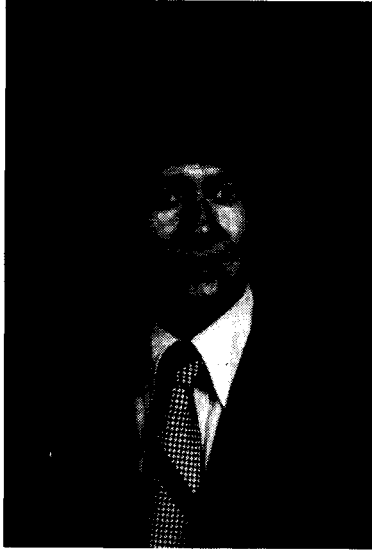
The gospel which he had preached would be their safety unto the end. It would build them up, establish them, make them firm and permanent on the one foundation which never can be moved; it would preserve them holy to take possession of the inheritance of the saints in light; to make them heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Paul knew that he would never again see their faces in this world, but he had the blessed joy of looking forward to that day when he and they would receive the inheritance that God has prepared for all them that love Him.

It is my prayer that when you and I come to the end of our time of service on this earth, we might be able to look back and say, as Paul said, to those who have been committed to our charge, "I . . . have taught you publicly, and from house to house, . . . repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ . . . I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God . . . I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now . . . I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." (Acts 20:20, 21 27, 31, 32)

It was in this same spirit that Paul said to Timothy: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Tim. 4:6-8)

Brethren, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28 New American Standard Bible)

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THE REV. HENRY M. HOPE, JR., B.F.A., B.D.

Mr. Hope is a native of Atlanta, Georgia and was reared in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, his father being a long-time elder of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Atlanta. He was graduated from the University of Georgia and Columbia Theological Seminary. He served the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi as an Assistant Pastor, as pastor of Pearl Church of Jackson, Mississippi and as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Brookhaven, Mississippi, and is now pastor of the Vineville Presbyterian Church, Macon, Georgia. Ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States he is now a member of the Central Georgia Presbytery of the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

The subject of Mr. Hope's address will be "A Continuing Church."

A Continuing Church

Henry M. Hope, Jr.

Text: Acts 2:42 — "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Pentecost was a fantastic experience for the early church!

This initial, great shaking that brought the church into being, was, of its very nature, something that could never be repeated. This was not the last time that the disciples would speak with unknown tongues, or witness, but the drama of Pentecost was nonetheless unique. And the church grew in that one day by 3,000 souls.

How exciting to make a brave start on a project of importance! Have we not been inwardly moved at this 1973 Assembly, through the formation of a great work for God? We have savored the agreement of kindred minds. We have breathed the rarefied air of high ideals. We have felt the exhilaration of a new freedom! Like removing an overcoat in August!

But, you know, the unfortunate thing is that, all too often in spiritual things, following a bold beginning, enthusiasm wanes. The memory of the stirring emotion fades. The precious ideals for which we were ready to risk everything, recede. The spiritual revival dies, our first love is lost, and we slump into apathy. This opens the way for quite unsanctified goings-on, like quarrels between brethren, or the eventual embracing of the very heresies we had sought to avoid, or their opposite extremes. O, that we might hold onto the joy and expectancy in the Lord that has been ours, as the Holy Spirit has worked to bring forth a re-born Presbyterian witness in this land! It is of keen interest, therefore, to note how the early church preserved and improved on Pentecost. They were not about to let this experience run away with the sands of the hour-glass.

These Christians had a basic outlook on life which was rooted in the fact that Jesus was alive, as many of them could testify. Also, they knew for a fact that His promised Strengtheners were with them. Therefore their lives assumed a definite pattern that they would not otherwise have followed. This pattern was one of **continuing** to seek the Lord faithfully after the Great Experience no less than they had sought Him before it. Before Pentecost, there had been ten days of concentrated prayer; after Pentecost, there was renewed prayer, plus other things. This was spiritual wisdom, inspired by love. Robert Raines has pointed out that, in conversion, the Holy Spirit comes unannounced and unsummoned, like the wind. And if we ask what we can do, except wait for the Spirit to come, the answer is that we know something about when and where the wind blows; and if we want to stand in the wind, we can go where we have observed it blowing in times past, and wait and pray.

Actually, the infant church continually practiced soul-renewing means of grace that built them up in the Lord, and put them in the way of blessing. If modern activists complain that by

stressing these things, we are "taking too much time in the huddle," I will be tempted to retort that perhaps a great fault of the modern church is that it has tried to run too many plays without first huddling with the Lord! But it would be more accurate to say that these means of grace are themselves of the very essence of the game that the church is in the world to play.

Verse 42 says that the Christians at Jerusalem "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." They attended to the preaching and teaching, studying more and more about the Gospel. They came to hear the Bible taught. There was no written New Testament, so they came to hear the Bible taught. There was no written New Testament, so they had to depend entirely on the Old Testament, plus the oral ministry of the greatest teachers of Christ in the world — the apostles.

To "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" is always to place ourselves in the path of blessing. In order to continue in this teaching, we have formed a Continuing Church. But more is suggested by this phrase. One thing is that we need to promote faithful Sunday School and Church attendance in our congregations, so that the apostles' teaching may be heard.

And preaching assumes supreme importance, in light of this verse. People will still come to hear good preaching! And the most important single thing that a minister does is done in that precious thirty minutes when he speaks forth God's Word over the pulpit. Preaching can never be omitted from the church's list of priorities, in any future restructuring of forms. For the fact is that the easiest way to get information over to people and impress it on them is just to bring them together into a room and tell them. "With its preaching, Christianity stands or falls." (Forsythe, Yale Lectures on **Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind**) So let's emphasize it! How terrible, those awful words of Longfellow, "A dull day, and a duller sermon." Or Spurgeon's remark that some ministers would make good martyrs — they were dry enough to burn **well**! We can sympathize with Samuel Johnson, who had to listen to a prosaic pulpiteer in the established church, and reported, "I withdrew my attention and thought about Tom Thumb."

Ministerial brethren, we must spend the time to work hard and pray hard in the study, and, outside it, make our "whole life run toward the pulpit" (Henry Ward Beecher). We are children of the Reformation, and have confidence in the Word of God proclaimed.

Lay brethren and sisters, your congregation cannot well be taught the fundamentals of the faith without a strong pulpit. Thus, you must pray for your minister and assist him in the preaching task. He is only one, so instead of tying him down with more extraneous details, you must do them yourself! Visitation and administration are two areas in which you are capable. Would that every preacher might be visited, as this preacher was, a few weeks ago, by one of his laymen, who said, "Put me to work, wherever I'm needed, or on whatever you think I can do."

We are told also, that the Church "continued steadfastly in fellowship and in breaking of bread." Thank God for our oneness of doctrine and sentiment, here! But that is not what this verse means. "Fellowship" here means certain definite habits of the saints in assembling together. Small groups for Bible study and

sharing are probably the nearest thing to this that we have. It's very hard for us Christians to talk to each other about the things of Christ. We meet one another and talk about everything except the deeper things of our spiritual lives. We must learn how to do this, and how to help one another by means of it.

"The breaking of bread" or "love feast" was a meal which expressed this fellowship. At first, it was eaten in connection with the Communion, then the two were separated. Since the Christians in these early days were enjoying the Lord's Supper with the love feast, we may note that one feature of the early Christians' fellowship was their great concentration on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross. They remembered Him, and that He had died for them.

Lastly, we read that "they continued steadfastly in prayers." Prayer-life is almost non-existent in the private lives of present-day Christians, says **Christianity Today**. Virginia Schmidt has been telling our Continuing Church ladies of a tape recording that she has of Al Martin, a "minister to ministers," wherein he relates that he has counseled thousands of ministers, but only twelve of those whom he counseled had a daily, systematic prayer-life! How is it with you, my brethren? What strength can we expect of the church, if her ministers do not pray?

But this verse speaks of systematic, definite, positive praying, not as individuals only, but in connection with one another. How healthy is your prayer meeting? Are you in attendance upon it, unless providentially hindered? Friends, this is serious! The strength of a church, the blessing of a church, will be measured in terms of its faithfulness in prayer.

The result of all of this to the early church was rich blessing. Hindrances were not eliminated — the Book of Acts is full of them. Neither will we escape testings if we are faithful in these things. But look what happened to the early church! There was a great sense of reverence: Verse 43 — "Fear came upon every soul." There were additional great works of the Spirit after Pentecost: "Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." There was complete unselfishness: Verse 44 — "—all that believed—had all things common." Verse 46: There was "gladness" and "singleness of heart". Is it any wonder, with all this going on, that they had "favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Beloved, the Continuing Church, as we have been known up to this assembly, will be blessed, if we, as the early church, continue to seek the Lord.