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Gospel, the faith which was once for  
all delivered unto the saints.*

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in prison." "Compelled, Sire," replied Palissy, "that is not spoken like a king."

When our churches submit to the "shall meet" and "shall permit" of Paragraph 76a, the kingly voice of congregational sovereignty in the calling of a pastor will no longer be heard.

Let it never be forgotten that the paramount duty of the presbyteries under our system is not to usurp from the congregations the right of seeking through their committees and calling their pastors, but to faithfully examine the pastors-elect in the open meetings of the presbyteries as to

whether they are true to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

With each functioning properly in its own sphere of authority, congregation and Presbytery will move as smoothly and harmoniously as the stars in their courses. When fundamental Presbyterianism is forsaken, as in the ecclesiastical legislation under discussion, "the bonds of Orion," so to speak, are soon entangled with "the sweet influences of the Pleiades."

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## The 1943 Plan Of Reunion

### COMMENTS & CRITICISMS

By R. B. Woodworth, D.Sc.\*

1. The New School Schism of 1838 gave rise to a thorough examination of the fundamentals of Scriptural Presbyterianism, particularly by the theologians of the Southern Church. The Southern Church in 1861 declared its intention to bring out the energies of the Presbyterian form of government as it had never yet been adequately done, and has made great strides in the development of a free, democratic, non-prelatic, Scriptural organization of its ministers, congregations, courts and agencies, while the Northern Church functions just about as it did at the time of the Schism. The plan of union discards all that the Southern Church has learned as to the spirituality of the Church and its institutions.

2. The plan was undoubtedly worked out by high priests of Presbyterian Prelacy and strong-armed methods against non-conformists, regardless of the protestations of the Southern members of the drafting committee that they had some small part therein. The plan still contains that view of church power that condones and sanctions the un-Christian attitude taken towards the founders of the Independent Board of Foreign Missions, and the Orthodox and Bible Presbyterian Churches.

3. That attitude is that church power flows from the General Assembly down to the lower courts, and through them to the individual members, so that the Assembly has the right, like the Sanhedrim of our Lord's day, to regulate the manners, and particularly the benevolences of the individual Christian; a position, while it may be true as to the Established Church of Scotland which had a General Assembly before it had presbyteries and synods, is certainly not true as regards American Presbyterianism. Here the presbytery grew out of the voluntary association of ruling and teaching elders representing the congregations of believers, the synods by the voluntary association of presbyteries, and the General Assembly out of the voluntary association of the synods. The Northern Church thus holds that power is delegated downward, and that view dominates the plan of union. The Southern Church holds that power resides in the body of believers and is delegated upwards.

It is not without significance that the drafting committee very much abbreviated Chapter II of

the Southern Book of Church Order and jumbled III, IV and other chapters, putting theory and practice together, and thus obscuring the force of the fundamental ideas. The presumption is that the drafting committee thought that Chapter I and the footnote on Page 82 were sufficient. It would have been better to have rewritten the matter as was done in the U. S. Book. As it is, the Form of Government part is patchwork, new cloth on an old garment.

4. This idea as to the source of church power undoubtedly lies back of the notion that somehow or other the property in a particular congregation does not belong to it but to the denomination as a whole. If the congregation secedes it loses its property. True the Concurrent Declaration says that if the merger goes through, the General Assembly will not intervene but will allow the Southern courts to deal with non-conforming congregations as to property according to their own rules and wisdom; but the point here is that the new Form of Government is for the future of the re-united Church. Christians associate themselves voluntarily into a church organization affiliated with a particular presbytery. If they are dissatisfied with that presbytery, they can, under certain conditions, be transferred to another without loss or damage. If there is no other presbytery near, why should not the principle of voluntary association allow a dissatisfied congregation to withdraw without loss of property? Why should the Church which is supposed to represent the spirit of the Christ act the dog in the manger for the sake of dollars?

5. The argument that many Churches started as home mission enterprises supported a while by the Church at large is not worth much. Most of them have long since paid large dividends on the investment in both money and men. Allegiance to an organization which has become disliked is not to be regained by a threat of property loss; the power of the purse is not the power of the keys.

All of which means that the plan of union is written from the standpoint of an ideology the Southern Church has repudiated, and contains elements of friction and strife if enforced against a minority. To have a real union the Northern Church should recede from its high-church views.



It should be at least as tolerant in the matter of administration as in the matter of doctrine.

6. The plan of union calls for the incorporation of Churches. Years ago the U. S. Church enacted some recommendations for that end. But the idea did not work, because in Virginia, West Virginia, and doubtless other Southern States, the incorporation of Churches as such is forbidden by law. Trustees may be incorporated by law to hold property for religious organizations, but not the organizations. The State has power over corporations. To incorporate Churches puts them theoretically under State control. When the Scott Scholarship Fund came to the Presbytery of Winchester about 1900, it had to get an act of the Virginia Legislature before it could hold it. This difference between Northern and Southern legislative customs has been neglected in the proposed Form of Government.

7. Ordination by the plan is a ministerial function in which the ruling elder has no part, even in the ordination of ruling elders and deacons. The plan therefore demotes the ruling elder, because the laying on of hands, as Thornwell pointed out 100 years ago, becomes the act of ministers only and not the act of the presbytery. The plan thus denies that the Session is a local presbytery; it also denies the full parity of the teaching and ruling eldership in the matter of government. It further demotes the office in that the plan permits the ordination of women as elders and deacons, contrary to the plain specifications laid down by the Apostle Paul and consistently followed by the Southern Church. If women can be ordained ruling elders, they can by the same logic be ordained teaching elders.

8. If the acts of a Session do not please the Presbytery it can by Page 90 abolish the Session chosen by the congregation and govern the local Church by a provisional session of its own appointment, no member of which need be a member of the congregation governed. This device has been very useful to the Northern Church in the recent secessions but is abhorrent to the ideals and practice of the Southern Church. The U. P. Church uses the method in the case of a disorganized Church. The same prelatial power can be used to dissolve a recalcitrant congregation and take its property.

9. The plan demotes the deacon. It takes away from him the management of the finances of the Church, and places that in the hands of the trustees, who in the Southern Church merely hold the naked title to the Churches' real estate. Under the plan the deacon goes back to where he was in 1788; and indeed the U.S.A. Book of Church Order in Chapter VI, Of Deacons, merely repeats the 1788 Book. When its six lines are compared with the three pages of the U. S. Book, it can easily be seen how little progress the U.S.A. Church has made in 156 years towards a Scriptural Presbyterianism. The deacon manages the poor fund, and takes up the collections, and acts as usher, may even promote benevolences, but not administer them. Administration of funds is placed in the hands of the trustees who are not ordained; and under the present U.S.A. Book one-third of them

need not be members of the Church. The U. S. practice is that holy funds must be administered by ordained men, under the control of the Session, but not even remotely under the control of the State. As the care of the poor has largely passed to the State, the U.S.A. deacon as such is mostly a bump on a log.

10. The plan further demotes the Session, in that it puts the trustees of a particular Church under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery as well as of the Session, and requires regular reports. The Session may be the trustees or the deacons, but if a member, not an officer, is elected a trustee, permission of the presbytery must be secured. These rules and regulations deny to the Session full control over the congregation and all its activities as guaranteed by Chapter 11, and vests in the presbytery a right of review and control which might entirely nullify the wishes of the particular congregation. The section (Page 140) is not clear; neither is it in the present U.S.A. Book of Church Order. It would appear that its insertion in the plan of union has grown out of the secessions, and particularly out of the organization of the Independent Board of Foreign Missions.

11. The provision that regional synods shall conform to State lines will disrupt the Presbyteries of Potomac, Winchester, and Lexington, and the whole Synod of Appalachia, and destroy relationships that have existed for 200 years. The sensible thing to do will be to respect existing presbyterial boundaries, also to recognize that West Virginia is, geographically and historically, a three-sectioned State.

12. The Commission on the Minister and His Work is changed to a Committee; which makes its actions subject to review and reversal by the presbytery. This provision makes it clear that the drafting committee, including the Southern members, did not understand or appreciate the distinctive features of administration as practiced by the Southern Church.

If the two Churches are to unite, let it be on a basis which will recognize the progress made by the Southern Church towards a more Scriptural and democratic Presbyterianism. That is what the Established Church of Scotland had to do when it merged with the United Free Church. There is no good reason under Heaven why the Churches should merge on what is substantially the 1788 Book of Church Order, and discards all the progress made since.

\*Ruling Elder in the Burlington (W. Va.) Presbyterian Church.

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“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” Psa. 37:3-5.