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## The Independent Board and Its Critics

By the Rev. David S. Clark, D.D.

“WHOM the gods would destroy they first make mad.” And we fear that the officialdom of the Presbyterian Church is mad in both senses of the word. *The Presbyterian*, while fair enough to include articles on both sides, takes occasion to say of the Fundamentalist: “We are not able to accept their *ipse dixit* as complete proof nor their assertion as a formal proved condemnation of the Assembly's Board.” Further: “It ought to be remembered that critics of the Board have as yet never brought into any Church court a definite process for judicial attention. They are the judges in their own case. On the other hand the Board . . . does not wish for safety and peace alone, but to prosecute the cause of preaching the shed blood of Christ all over the world, with the unswerving loyalty of all, and that, not because nothing has been proved against the Board, but because there is nothing that *can be proved* against the Board.” (Italics ours.) Shades of Blackstone ! ! ! What constitutes proof?

1. Has it ever been denied that some of Dr. Fosdick's books were translated by an agency with which the official Board works closely and sent to the mission field? Did not a secretary of the Board boast of this as one of the outstanding events of the year? Report has it that “The Modern Use of the Bible” by Dr. Fosdick is used as a textbook in Nanking University with which our official Board cooperates. Too much Fosdick influence in our official Board.

2. Pearl Buck. We hope that episode is over; but how did it happen that she could say: “It makes no difference if Jesus Christ never lived,” and remain a missionary of the Board till she voluntarily resigned?

3. We hope the Hadley episode is over, but how did it ever happen that an Auburn Affirmationist was made candidate secretary, and that prospective missionaries were advised to read modernist literature, as a preparation for their work? And now it is said that his resignation has been accepted with regret. Why not with thanksgiving?

4. “Unthinking Missions.” We never did like a diet of milk and water. The Board's reaction was too tame and complaisant. But since the pastor of a very rich church in New York City was a member of the Laymen's Commission, and also on nearly every important Committee of the General Assembly, even to making the new Hymnal, we figure that it seemed quite expedient for a money-seeking organization to try to please all sides.

5. James Speers, vice-president of the Board, advocates the Laymen's Report, and says: "Our earnest hope is that the Report will become more and more effective, as the inevitability of its major recommendations is recognized by an enlightened Christian public. The Committee perceives clearly the rising tide of interest in the new viewpoint of missions, and is profoundly grateful for the part the Report has played in arousing such interest . . . . The Committee wishes to express its deep conviction that the truth in the Report will ultimately prevail" *That* from the vice-president of the official Board, wishing that the Unitarian onslaught on evangelical missions might sweep the church!

6. Study-books, prepared by joint committees of various denominations, have been rather unsatisfactory to conservative Presbyterians, even the teen-age bearing witness to the paucity of religious material.

7. "No judicial process ever brought into a Church court for judicial attention." At least the Philadelphia Presbytery sent an overture to the 1933 Assembly, couched in respectful language, with not one disrespectful word in it, praying the Assembly to elect to the Board of Foreign Missions only such men as are true to our standards and awake to the dangers that are imminent. Even a liberal said: "Any Christian ought to vote for that." How was that overture treated? Absolutely rejected, its proponents labeled as trouble-makers, and stigmatized as "Guerrillas."

It makes no difference that the overture was administrative rather than "judicial," the temper of the Assembly was clearly against any reformation, or redress of grievances. It was because of positive refusal to remedy existing evils that the Independent Board came into existence. Dr. Machen and his friends are not to be blamed for the outcome; but the Assembly itself, and the official Board. They have George Thirded it so long and so arbitrarily that they have compelled a Declaration of Independence. Dr. Mark Matthews writes voluminously and thunders vociferously about proceeding by constitutional processes. It sounds big and means little. How can a Board be charged with heresy and brought to trial for deliberate and joint actions? And what would be the use if it could? The Assembly that whitewashes the Board would acquit it in a judicial process. The Conservatives might as well save their powder and shot. *The Presbyterian* says: "There is nothing that can be proved against the Board." Of course *not-if no proof is admitted*. But nonetheless that is a pretty sweeping statement.

In penalizing the independents the Assembly has acted *ultra vires*. After all the labor and bluster about a Constitutional Church, and Court of Highest Authority, and overwhelming majorities, the coercionists have not made out a case. A fraction of liberty still belongs to members of the Presbyterian Church.

The following has been cited so often that it is commonplace: Directory:-"The offerings may be apportioned among the Boards of the church, and among other benevolent and Christian objects, under

the supervision of the Session." The church Session has some liberties which the General Assembly cannot deny. The Assembly itself is subject to the Constitution.

A better declaration is found in the concurrent declarations of 1869, the force of which no Assembly can repeal: "There should be one set of Committees or Boards for Home and Foreign Missions, and the other religious enterprises of the church, which the churches should be encouraged to sustain, though free to cast their contributions into other channels if they desire to do so." That certainly establishes the right of any man to give his contributions to any cause he pleases, and if he chooses to give them to the Independent Board, he cannot be called to account.

8. Cleland B. McAfee, in the August number of *Women and Missions*, says: "The issue at Cleveland was not one of soundness in the faith, had nothing to do with 'modernism' or 'liberalism,' both of which had been disavowed in definite terms by the Board and the General Assembly in all their declarations." On the contrary, every one knows that the whole affair has grown out of the modernism of the official Board. If there had been no modernism in the official Board there never would have been an Independent Board. The facts penetrate any smoke screen that Dr. McAfee can throw around the official Board.

9. Dr. Covert in his letter to the pastors August 1, 1934, says: "These charges the General Assembly of 1933 heard at great length through its duly elected Standing Committee on Foreign Missions, which Standing Committee by a vote of 43 to 2, and the General Assembly, by an equally overwhelming vote, declared unfounded." If the General Assembly voted these charges unfounded it voted an egregious untruth. Was Mr. Hadley never Candidate Secretary? "Was he not a signer of the Auburn Affirmation? Did he never commend modernist books? Did James Speers never commend the Laymen's Report? Were the Fosdick books never translated and sent to the Mission field? Is it unfounded that the perfectly reasonable overture from the Philadelphia Presbytery received scant recognition in the Assembly? Is it unfounded that the Board has in its membership some very decided modernists? Dr. Covert further says: "The right to control the property of the members of the church or to prescribe how they shall dispose of their money is utterly foreign to the spirit of Presbyterianism." On reading this an acute Presbyterian asked the categorical question: "Then what is he kicking about?" He is "kicking" that there should be any organization to solicit and receive it and call itself Presbyterian. But the existence of the Independent Board enables the Presbyterians to support the kind of missions they prefer. Otherwise they could only support some unPresbyterian agency since they cannot support the official Board with its bias to modernism.

10. The official Board cannot deny nor escape the charges made against it. And it has manifested no change of heart nor mended its ways up to the present minute.

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### **The Independent Board and Its Critics**

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*The Presbyterian* is authority for saying that on July 5, 1934, Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Blank sailed under the auspices of the Board to spend two years teaching and preaching in our missionary stations. We are reliably informed that they are both modernists. How can the Church have confidence in a Board that promotes modernism so openly and flagrantly? Dr. McAfee's denial that modernism is the issue does not change the facts.

11. Nothing has brought more disrepute on the Assembly and the officialdom of the church than sundry attempts at coercion and persecution. The persistent attacks on Dr. Machen have become picayune, at once contemptible, and small business for grown-up men. The threats of the General Assembly have not increased respect for it. And certain letters sent by the Stated Clerk, and the actions of Baltimore Presbytery, and the Synod of Pennsylvania will go down into history as a disgrace to the Presbyterian Church. The young men who declined to say that they would support the Foreign Board were absolutely right in the stand they took. No Presbytery nor Synod has any right to make such a requirement a condition of ordination. It is clearly unconstitutional. And it is a sin to require a young man to forswear himself to any Board, when no one knows what that Board may do or become. Christ says: "Thou shalt not forswear thyself." Again I say that these attempts at coercion constitute a moral offense.

Why are not letters sent to the New York Presbyteries about the graduates of Union and Auburn? Why are Westminster graduates singled out for threats and persecution? Why are those who are true to the Scriptures and the Constitution of the Church discriminated against while Auburn Affirmationists, who repudiated the essence of Christianity, were never touched? Such persecution of sound and worthy young men will take money from the official Board and turn it into the treasury of the Independent Board. The conservatives would be most happy to support the official Board if there were any certainty that their money would not be used to propagate modernism. It is a shame, *Shame*, SHAME that they are driven to separation against their wish by conditions in the official Board. The Board would have no more enthusiastic supporters than the Conservatives if the Board itself were free from blame. In separating from the official Board they are obeying New Testament requirements: "Come out from among them and be ye separate." Dr. Covert calls it a "divisive movement." Well such movements become a duty when the purity of the Church is threatened. Paul says: "Withdraw thyself from every

brother that walketh disorderly." If the Independent Board is a rival to the official Board, as is stated, there are some who think it ought to be. Shall our money be used to translate and distribute Fosdick's books? There are some of us who will utter a decisive no; not one red copper. We dissent from any such use of our money. Let the official Board return from its modernistic meanderings, and the Independent Board will have no further reason to operate.

The charges against the official Board have been proved, in our estimation; and the pretended refutation has never come to notice. Where is the refutation of the things cited in this article? We would like to know.

A recent issue of the Presbyterian contains a "vicious attack" on Dr. Macartney from the pen of Dr. Wm. B. Pugh, in which Dr. Macartney is accused of using "incorrect statements," "unsupported assumptions," "unwarranted inferences," "serious discrepancies," and "false interpretations," and the accusations against the official Board from other sources are called "false charges."

Will Dr. Pugh kindly go over the charges one by one and vindicate the Board from all complicity in modernism? By so doing he will confer a great favor on the Board, and upon the Conservatives as well.

Briefly, it seems to us that Dr. Macartney stands for the authority of the Constitution; and Dr. Pugh assumes that unconstitutional deliverances of the General Assembly have the authority of the written Constitution; - The very thing that the liberals wrongly accused the Conservatives of doing in 1923. The deliverance of the General Assembly, though 1000 to 1 constitutes no constitutional law. Brethren, we live in free America not under Hitler nor the Bolsheviki.