

[From Christianity Today, August, 1935, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 60-61]

Disgraceful Doings

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: On June 17th the Presbytery of Philadelphia, urged on by Dr. J.B.C. Mackie of Northminster Church, refused ordination to Mr. Clark Evans, of the Grace Presbyterian Church, because he held unconstitutional the mandates of the General Assemblies of 1934, 1935, in re the Boards of Foreign Missions, and could not pledge conformity.

Has it come to this in the Presbyterian Church that a man is not allowed to have his own opinion?

Why should a good, capable Christian young man be shut out of the ministry because he believes, with many of us, that the General Assembly erred in its deliverances? Mr. Evans is a cultured, scholarly young man, consecrated to the work of preaching Jesus Christ and his salvation to a lost world, with a field in the west asking for his service, and he ready and willing to go and do a sacrificial work. He is sound in the faith, and accepts the Confession and Form of Government heartily. To refuse such a young man entrance into the ministry out of prejudice and bitterness is an act of shameful injustice, too shameful for language to express. The perpetration of such injustice will receive the condemnation of God and men. Satan must be highly pleased that the church itself shuts the mouths of its own witnesses.

No man is in duty bound to obey these mandates of the General Assembly, but rather ought to disobey them and oppose them, because there is not a syllable of constitutionality about them, and because they contravene the inalienable rights of humanity. Any man or set of men has a right to organize a Board of Missions ad libitum, and in free America no man or church has any right to interfere. All men are born with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Give an American his rights, and such a right is inalienable and indisputable.

Dred-Scott decisions that contravene human rights cannot be allowed by conscientious men and should be resisted. They may be exacted by brutal force and majorities, but that is tyranny and injustice, the method of the highwayman. The Supreme Court of the United States has just declared that the Congress has no right to violate the Constitution. The same is true of the General Assembly. It is itself bound by the Constitution of the Church and cannot make laws by arbitrary mandates. Every Presbyterian knows this to be true, and any such mandate is null and void.

If the Board of Foreign Missions wants the support of the church, all it has to do is to be worthy of it. Good men will always respond to a good cause. But when the General Assembly attempts coercive measures it only defeats its own cause. It is making a sorry mistake in adopting such tactics, and the world will never approve of its action.

Yes, be worthy of the confidence of the church. The grievances complained of have not been remedied. Contrary to much vociferation, constitutional methods have been tried, by overtures to the General Assembly, and they have been ignored. That is what gave rise to the Independent Board-refusal to redress evils. It is meaningless to say: Bring charges of heresy if there be such. How can a man bring charges of heresy against a man in another presbytery? And how can charges of heresy be brought against a whole board for its joint action?

The Moderator of the Assembly was unduly emphatic about what he called "unestablished charges." Is it an unestablished charge that the Assembly over which he presided re-elected to the Board of Foreign Missions some men who are advocates of "Rethinking Missions," and members of the Modern Missions Movement? We think that is established beyond doubt, and only affords another reason for the existence of the Independent Board. Let the official board wash its hands of such complicity if it wants the confidence of the church.

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