

April 8, 2009

**Dear Friends of the Foundation:**

As we continue to live through the decline of the church, or at least of many denominations of the church in this part of the world, we have occasion to reflect upon not only what the church is but also how the church exists. We, of course, are not the first to think about this.

Karl Barth writes: “The Word of God does not effect only the founding of the Church, but also its continual preservation. . . . Without Scripture it would inevitably dissolve at once into nothingness” (*Church Dogmatics*, I/2:688).

Note the change of wording in the second sentence. It is not the case that the church is sustained by the “Word of God” in the abstract (as if the Word of God ever would be abstract), but instead and especially that it is sustained by, specifically, the written Word of God, “the Scripture.”

Again, “Without Scripture it [the church] would inevitably dissolve at once into nothingness.” Could it be that this is what we see going on all around us? Have we who are responsible for serving the church so neglected the Scripture that the church is dying around us?

Without this Word and without its continuous attestation, human religions, philosophies and systems, and the human institutions and societies founded upon them, may well live, as in fact they do: on the basis of the universal divine maintenance of all created things. But they live in the shadow of death to which the whole created order is as such hastening. For the same reason, an erroneous and deformed Christianity, i.e., one which approximates to the form of these human systems, can also live without the Word. It can do so the more easily in proportion as, in virtue of this approximation, it is erroneous and deformed. It is the true Church which, as the sphere of revelation and faith, denies itself this purely natural vitality. Called into existence by the Word of rebirth and new creation, it cannot remain alive except by this Word. (CD I/2:689)

What does this mean, practically?

From a human standpoint the preservation of the Church depends, therefore, on the fact that Scripture is read, assimilated, expounded and applied in the Church, that this happens tirelessly and repeatedly, that the whole way of the Church consists in its striving to hear this concrete witness. (CD I/2:691)

Are there other things with which we have busied ourselves in the church?

Consider, also, the ways in which we attempt to govern the life of the church.

Although it consists entirely of human beings, the Church is not a human polity, monarchical, aristocratic or democratic, in which the discharge of the witness to Jesus Christ committed to it is left to the good pleasure of its members. The Church is

governed. And as it is created and maintained by the Word of God, it is also governed by the Word of God: by the Word of God in the form of the testimony to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ set down in Scripture. *To say that Jesus Christ rules the Church is equivalent to saying that Holy Scripture rules the church.* (CD I/2:693, emphasis added)

Again, note the specificity. We cannot pretend to know the will or mind of Christ apart from, and certainly not in contradiction of, the Scripture. It is in and by Scripture that Christ is known. It is in and by Scripture that Christ rules the church.

I want to thank my friend and a friend of the Foundation, Dr. Alexander J. McKelway, for calling these passages to my attention. Any fault in their interpretation is entirely mine.

That being said, let us read, assimilate, preach, and teach the Scripture. And may God have mercy on his church!

Grace and Peace,

*Jim*

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*

**The Foundation for Reformed Theology**

4103 Monument Avenue

Richmond, Virginia 23230

[www.foundationrt.org](http://www.foundationrt.org)

(804) 678-8352

*"Promoting the study of Reformed theology for the renewal of the church"*

The Foundation is exempt from Federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) and is not a private foundation as defined by Section 509(a) of the Internal Revenue Code.