

# Africo-American Presbyterian

"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE."—John viii, 32.

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## SOME NEEDS OF CATAWBA PRESBYTERY

By Rev. F. C. Shirley

(Sermon delivered as Retiring Moderator at the recent Fall meeting of Catawba Presbytery in the Church at Belmont.)

My Fellow Presbyters:

In St. Matthew's gospel, the 9th chapter and the 36th verse, we have these words: "But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." This 9th chapter tells about Jesus' busy ministry in Galilee. As He moved about from place to place His fame spread, the crowds surged around him and pressed in upon Him to hear His messages and to be healed of divers diseases. Jesus saw as He ministered to the multitudes that they were in great need both physically and spiritually. Their condition deeply affected Him and He was moved with compassion or pity for them and suggested to the disciples remedies to relieve the situation.

There are evidences of physical and spiritual needs in our Presbytery and it is to some of these needs that we want to direct your attention this evening.

In this discussion I wish to ask that you look at me not as a Sunday School Missionary laboring in your midst, but as a member of this Presbytery, who is vitally interested in its welfare, and who desires to see it take its rightful place of leadership among the 16 Presbyteries representing our group in the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.

Again, I would have you understand that my remarks are not based upon personal observations I have made during my 3 years as a member of this Presbytery; and in this effort I am simply trying to prescribe a remedy for a situation, which, to my mind, needs our serious consideration.

The first need of our Presbytery is a ministerial membership and eldership that is more informed and more deeply interested in the organization and program of the Church. On the surface it seems that the foregoing statement is superfluous, for are not the ministers and elders the "Keepers of the Records and Seals," as it were, of the Church institution? Are they not the leaders to whom the members in the pews look for guidance and instruction? Yet, in the face of this responsibility, the rank and file of the ministers and elders in our Presbytery are not informed as to the program of our Church. The Presbyterian Church is a progressive piece of machinery and to keep up with its program one must read and study. According to my observations we have not shown in our gatherings that we have been keeping abreast with the development of the Church's Program of Religious Education, Evangelism, Church Extension and of its Program of Missionary Activities. Of course if we have not a grasp of the program we can not take the proper interest in having the communicant members to put the program into execution.

What is the remedy for this lack of information and interest? I would like to call your attention to an article from the office of the General Assembly in the Presbyterian Magazine for June, calling church officers' attention to the necessary books that they should possess in order that they may keep informed as to the work of the Church. The first book that is listed is the Presbyterian Hand Book, a little yearly publication that sells for the small sum of 10c a copy and yet it is packed full of information. The next book mentioned is the Constitution, then the Law and Usage, and for one who desires to specialize in Presbyterian Law, the Digest is recommended. In ad-

dition to these books an up-to-date churchman should read regularly the Presbyterian Magazine, and, in addition to the Africo-American Presbyterian, he should read one of the standard weeklies. These periodicals will keep one in touch with current thought such as the meetings and findings of the General Council, the various staff council meetings of the Boards, the monthly letters from the Moderator and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly as well as the general work of promotion conducted by all the Boards. I think as ministers and elders we ought to provide ourselves with these sources of information so that we may properly interpret the will of our Church to our constituents. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Then we need to take a deeper interest in the routine work of our Presbytery. As I have viewed the situation, many of us are only interested in Presbytery to the extent of getting there long enough to get before the Committee on Supplies to get our application for stipend endorsed. At our last meeting I know of members who did not arrive until the morning after Presbytery convened and these same brethren departed for their homes before sunset of the first day of business. Elder after elder came to the Moderator with special request that they be excused from attending.

his church be called so that he could report and go home. As a result, when Presbytery adjourned there were scarcely enough members present to hear the reading and adoption of the minutes and to transact the several items of business incident to the closing of the meeting. Our Presbytery meets only twice a year and our ministers and elders should look upon these meetings as gatherings where, in addition to assembling for the purpose of reviewing and forecasting the year's work, we should value the meetings because of their opportunity for fellowship and spiritual retreat. But how can we get that fellowship and spiritual benefit unless all come with singleness of purpose to abide until all the work is done?

The second need of our Presbytery is a more business like grouping of the churches in our bounds. The present plan of grouping is, at best, haphazard and reflects very much upon the judgment of an intelligent group of Presbyters. I wonder if we have ever thought how ridiculously some of our churches are grouped. For instance, we have a minister living in a certain town 25 miles S. E. of Charlotte. He has one church about six miles from this particular town; his other church is at a distance of over 40 miles away. Another minister lives in a town in the western part of the Presbytery. He has one church in that city; his other church is about 60 miles away. A certain minister lives in Charlotte; one of his churches is seventeen miles north of the city, the other is 10 miles east. Still another lives in Charlotte with one church 10 miles north, the other 10 miles south. There are many other instances that are equally absurd.

Why do we have this situation? It is because the Presbytery as such has not asserted its rights and performed its duty. It has rather catered to the whims of local selfish interests. The Presbytery and not the local church is the one to decide how and with whom another church is to be grouped where a grouping is necessary. Furthermore, brethren, we

are trustees of certain sacred funds that are appropriated yearly for the maintenance of certain work in our bounds. These funds are dispensed by the Boards in most cases only upon the recommendation of this Presbytery. The Boards handling benevolent funds spent in our Presbytery last year over \$112,000; aside from the amount that was spent on the two educational institutions in our bounds the Presbytery of Catawba recommended the expenditure of the balance. Some day we are going to be called upon to give an account of our stewardship. Have we wisely supervised the expenditure of these sacred funds? In my judgment we have made poor administrators of these funds that have been given by consecrated men and women who are interested in the spread of the Kingdom of God, and will continue to be poor servants as long as we continue to allow such an unbusiness like grouping of our churches? There ought to be a regrouping of our churches:

1. For greater efficiency in service.
2. For larger cooperation on the part of the churches.
3. To establish pastoral units.
4. To show that we as Presbytery have the courage of our convictions to do the thing that is right.

Another need of our Presbytery is more pastoral oversight. The term shepherd or pastor is an oriental metaphor that carries with it the thought of abiding care, or a threefold service of tending sheep, feeding and guarding. What a lofty conception is given of the term in the 23rd Psalm, where David speaks of the Lord as "My Shepherd," and in the 10th chapter of the gospel of St. John where Christ speaks of Himself as "the Good Shepherd."

Many of our churches do not have the constant oversight of their ministers. The only contact some have is that which they experience from 10 A. M. to 4:30 P. M. two Sundays out of a month. Of the 48 churches in our Presbytery there are only 13 that have resident ministers. My friends, if the problems of the rural communities and the rural churches are to be solved they must be solved by changing the policy of our ministry in these groups. If it takes a city pastor seven days in the week throughout the year to carry out a program for a parish that is compact together, I do not see how we can expect to minister to the scattered rural groups on the basis of visiting them two Sundays a month for a sermon. We must work out a plan that will give a more adequate ministry to our rural churches. And it seems to me that the time is ripe for Catawba Presbytery to begin work on the problem of its rural churches.

Why not select two or three fields for an experiment; select them so the fields can unite jointly in the building of a manse. Get two or three ministers who will be willing to try the plan. When we have completed the arrangement so far as the Presbytery is concerned, submit the plan to the Division of Missions for Colored People as a project that Catawba Presbytery desires to try out as an experiment. Get the Division to give a large enough supplement to begin with to enable the minister to get a decent living by giving his full time to the development of the project. Try the plan for three years. If it works, then let the Presbytery adopt it as its standing policy towards its rural churches; if the plan fails, it can not be any more of a failure than the haphazard methods of the past 40 years.

I am aware of the objections that our ministers offer to living in the rural districts. One objection is that there is no so-

cial contact for the minister's family. I do not think that is a valid objection. The Negro minister and teacher set the minister and teacher set the minister and teacher set the minister to live in the community to set the standard of uplifting the home life among his people. The rural manse should be the center of the social life of the rural church and as the members come and go from the manse their visits should inspire them to model their homes and their surroundings after the manner of the manse. Furthermore, this is the age of the automobile, good roads, telephones and radio. With these modern improvements life in the rural sections can be made as inviting as in the city and through them we can keep up any social contact with our city friends that we desire.

A second objection is the poor educational facilities. I admit this is a strong objection, and yet it is a selfish one. Why are the conditions of the rural schools so deplorable? It is due in part to the fact that in the country districts we have no ministers living among the people to help look out for their interest along the line of better schools.

Another objection is that the people in the rurals are too backward and crude in their manner of living. This is the very reason we should be constrained to live among them to help in their cultural development. A minister who feels that he cannot live in the rural district certainly must not be called to minister to rural people and should cease crippling the rural churches by long-distance service. The itinerant preacher and school teacher are stumbling blocks to our rural communities and the sooner the country church and school wake up to a realization of this fact the better it will be for them.

I have been making a comparative study between Mecklenburg County in North Carolina and Mecklenburg and Brunswick Counties in Virginia. In the two Virginia counties one finds from 75 to 80 per cent of the Negro farmers owning their own farms. The prevailing type of farm house is from 5 to 7 rooms nicely painted, with barns and out houses nicely kept; yards symmetrical arranged with yard flowers and shrubs. In these counties the ministers and school teachers for the most part are resident. They have inspired many boys and girls to go to Hampton, St. Paul, Virginia Normal and other schools. These young people, in many instances, have returned to the old homestead and have become assets to the communities because of their superior advantages.

On the other hand, in Mecklenburg County in North Carolina barely 10 per cent of the Negro farmers own their farms, the prevailing type of house being a three-room shack, unpainted, with dilapidated out houses and barns. Eighty-five to ninety-five per cent of the teachers are hirelings who have no interest in the community aside from receiving their monthly pay check. Seventy-five per cent of the ministers who serve in the rural churches in this county only see their members once or twice a month; few of the boys and girls in this county go off to school and the few that do, as soon as they finish go to other localities where they have outlet for their training. Putting it in the words of Joseph T. Holleman, speaking on the problem of the tenant farmer in Mecklenburg County in North Carolina: "They build no homes, they live in rude huts, no flowers about their dwellings, no trees to shade them from the sun, consumed by summer's heat and chilled by winter's cold, no lawns about their houses, no garden fences; and with

## SWIFT MEMORIAL COLLEGE

Everything is bright, cheerful and encouraging in and about Swift Memorial College. Much has been spent and done to make it more attractive and to increase its comforts and conveniences.

Both buildings have been painted and otherwise improved, screens have been put on the doors and windows of the dining room and the kitchen. The dining room has been refreshed and many of the rooms throughout the buildings have been painted and calcimined. The bath rooms have been remodelled and the better heating of the buildings has been given attention. The music department has been made more efficient by the addition of two new pianos in the last two years. It now has five pianos.

Swift has this year an excellent and splendid body of students. Many of them have come from other States. The South has been the largest contributor. Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi have sent us a goodly number. The people in those States have learned that superior instruction and training can be had at Swift. That there, emphasis is put on what is real, thorough and essential; and that those who come under its care and tutelage are taught to live righteously and nobly and encouraged and inspired to seek after the best and the noblest ideals and to practice them in their daily lives and associations.

The students whose lives are touched, moulded and built up by such methods and principles and actuated by such ideals, advertise the school and extend its power and influence in ever-widening circles, wherever such students are seen and known. Swift has built up and sent out a constituency which is bound to increase in numbers and power. This constituency, by example and precept, is attracting attention and winning students for their Alma Mater.

A minister of the gospel and a man of ability who has had long experience as a missionary and educator in the South, said to me during our last commencement, "We have plenty of schools in the South, but the children of the South need the atmosphere, the ideals, and the inspiration of Swift. That is the reason that I am sending all I can to Swift."

A recent graduate of our Normal Department wrote me from Atlanta that he had spoken at a celebration in his home town along with others and he was besieged with inquiries asking him where he got his training and education.

Swift opened the first of October, and yet they have come in such numbers that they have about filled all of the space in the Girls' Dormitory. That dormitory is taxed to accommodate those who have already entered. Three and five are being put in one room. Our great and immediate need of another dormitory for girls is apparent.

It is interesting and significant for us to know that the students now coming to Swift enter the higher departments. The intermediate department is going begging for students.

If Swift continues it onward and upward course these things point out a great and remarkable future for her. It looks toward the realization of the high and noble end for which it was designed and established.

If the Synod of East Tennessee, the rich and powerful Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., and its great Board of National Missions get behind Swift, as they should do, it is destined to be an institution of learning that

will rank with the best institutions of the South. I believe that Swift Memorial College has the foundation, the reputation, and the location to be made one of the most potent and important factors for becoming such an institution, and that the Presbyterian Church has the ability and the resources to make it such. I also believe that they will act wisely and divinely follow the directing hand of Providence

W. H. F.  
Rogersville, Tenn.  
Oct., 1925.

## THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION

President Coolidge Designated November 26 Day of Thanks.

Washington, Oct. 27.—(AP)—President Coolidge today proclaimed Thursday, Nov. 26th, as Thanksgiving Day, when gratitude should be expressed for "many and great blessings" which have come to the people during the past year.

The nation has been brought with safety and honor through another year, the proclamation said, with peace at home and abroad, with the public health good, with harvests and industries productive and labor well pleased.

The Proclamation follows: By the President of the States of America,

A proclamation.  
"The season approaches when, in accordance with a long established and respected custom, a day is set apart to give thanks to Almighty God for the manifold blessings which His gracious and benevolent providence has bestowed upon us as a nation and individuals.

We have been brought with safety and honor through another year, and, through the generosity of nature, He has blessed us with resources whose potentiality in wealth is almost incalculable; we are at peace at home and abroad; the public health is good; we have been undisturbed by pestilence or great catastrophe; our harvests and our industries have been rich in productivity, and our commerce spreads over the whole world, and labor has been well rewarded for its remunerative service

"As we have grown and prospered in material things, so also should we progress in moral and spiritual things. We are a God-fearing people who should set ourselves against evil and strive for righteousness in living, and observing the Golden Rule we should from our abundance help and serve those less fortunately placed. We should bow in gratitude to God for His many favors.

"Now, therefore, I Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States, do hereby set apart Thursday, the twenty-sixth of November, next, as a day of general thanksgiving and prayer, and I recommend that on that day the people shall cease from their work and in their homes or in their accustomed places of worship, devoutly give thanks to the Almighty for the many blessings they have received and to seek his guidance that they may deserve a continuance of his favor.

"In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be fixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this twenty-sixth day of October, in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America, the One Hundred and Fiftieth.

CALVIN COOLIDGE.  
Seal:  
BY THE PRESIDENT,  
FRANK B. KELLOGG,  
Secretary of State.