

## **Welcome to a Work in Progress**

### **June, 2009**

*The following piece originally appeared in The California Covenant, November 25, 1965. It was later altered and republished in The Covenant Companion, January 1, 1983, and in Glad Hearts (Covenant Publications, 2003). Here, slightly altered once more, at yet another stage in my pilgrimage of faith and life, I reissue it boldly and with joy.*

### **I STAND BY MY CHURCH**

We are hearing a lot these days about the failure of the church. Some say it is doomed to die, because God is dead. Others predict its demise because of its lack of “relevance” to the modern day, whatever that means, and are trying in all kinds of ways to revive and contemporize it. Still others—perhaps the largest majority--see the church as a great waste of time, energy, and money, the type of thing a post-modern person no longer has need for in our kind of world. Such people are not so much against the church. They are simply ignoring it. It is no longer important to them one way or the other, no longer a thing to be reckoned with.

We dare no longer pretend that such voices are few and far between. One can hear them everywhere, even when there is no speech. The silent turning away of the multitudes from real and specific commitment is its own eloquent witness to their feelings about the church and its worth.

We are near enough to the roots of our own heritage as Covenanters to realize, almost instinctively, the danger of closing our ears to all this. We cannot afford to be caught napping, as the Catholics were in Reformation times or the State Church in 19<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavia. We do not want to be found defending something which God himself may have rejected. There is always a danger in being oblivious to God’s voice and he may well be speaking to us now!

Yet, because of the pressure--and perhaps at least in measure because of our own sense of inferiority--we are much too prone to lie down before it all and cry, rather hopelessly, “Well, maybe they are right; we had best be careful. Maybe we've been too sure of ourselves. After all, who are we?”

Thus the corrosion grows, fed by fear--like heat shed from a fire already begun. Our mouths are stopped by the roaring flames, and we retreat to wait and hope against hope for better days. Perhaps God himself will intervene. Soon it is no longer the Church in general that is questioned--that we could stand without too much strain--but our church and our faith and our ways.

Everyone has a word to add--more fuel for the fire--and each new spokesperson is sure beyond doubt that his or her word will settle the issue. Has not God himself sent them? The

old church staggers, but surely not only from crumbling mortar. We kick it and beat it and salt its wounds while the skeptics laugh in derision and unnerved friends chip away at the foundations.

Will no one stand to defend my church? Will all her friends be silent? Is criticism all we shall hear? Is none being redeemed? Are none being nurtured? Is there death only at the heart, and not life? Where are the patriot's voices? Where are the friends?

I will be a fool! I love her, the Church. I love my church. I love her institutions, though I am not unaware of their faults. I love her worship. I am revived daily by her quiet, yet constant fellowship. I love her hymns, and the Word she proclaims. I treasure her celebrations of the sacraments. I honor her teachers. I salute her servants. I stand behind her leaders. I laud her achievements and I love her aspirings.

She shall be judged, of course, and in many things found wanting. I know that, and I reserve the right to criticize her myself. She needs to be judged, and so do I. But we have been promised that not even the gates of hell will prevail against her, because she belongs to Christ and was built from the very beginning on that foundation. She cannot be destroyed from without or within--by us. We do not have the power to destroy her. Her parentage is divine and her foundations are secure. If the Lord tears her down it will only be to build something greater. And we must always be ready for that.

Yet for now, in this climate of unrest, when she suffers so much from foe and friend alike, let me raise her a song from the heart. I stand gladly in her battlements. I participate joyfully in her wider ministry, and in seeking with her the renewal we all so sorely need.

While many cry out the news of her irrelevance and even death, let me hail her life. For I believe in her and love her, and will stay by her with joy until the end.

(Signature)