

Getting to the heart of the matter

by Don Elliott

**F
R
O
M
T
H
E
P
R
E
S
I
D
E
N
T**



David Wells in his book *God in the Wasteland* writes,

Recent proposals for church reform have rarely amounted to anything more than diversions. They tend, in fact, to lead the church away from what it needs most to confront. They suggest that its weakness lies in the fact that its routines are too old, its music is too dull, its programs too few, its parking lots too small, its sermons too sermonic. They suggest that the problems are all administrative or organizational, matters of style or comfort....Real reform will have to look beneath the surface....God now rests too inconsequentially upon the church....It is God that the church needs most—God in his grace and truth, God in his awesome and holy presence, not a folder full of hot ideas for reviving the church's flagging programs. But this is what makes the reform of the church so profoundly difficult. Church facilities, landscaping, programs, and liturgies can all be changed—changed overnight and changed over

and over again. The human heart cannot be so easily changed.

I long for reform: reform of my life, reform of my own congregation, reform of my community, reform of the PCUSA, reform of the United States of America. I am convinced that a major area that needs reforming in our church and culture has to do with life issues. We are too calloused about life and too casual about our theology, and we fail to see the connection. I long for that day when what we know about God and what we know about ourselves are living in harmony within our individual and corporate hearts.

Too easily content

But even as I long for reform, I must admit that I am too easily content with what is superficial, personally satisfying, and downright silly. I settle for the actions or non-actions of the PCUSA General Assembly and think that the whole church has spoken. How superficial! I am happy with a pro-life presence in the church that is visible and articulate. How personally satisfying! I can even talk myself into being pleased with a four vote defeat at this year's General Assembly on late term abortion. How downright silly!

I am in danger of selling my birthright for red stew and becoming an Edomite (Genesis 25:29-34).

Real reform

Real reform will go deeper than actions of a General Assembly or personal satisfaction with activities or rationalizations about events. Real reform will go to the heart of the matter of who God is and what God has done and how that affects every one of us.

We must think about God more clearly and ourselves more deeply. We have got to have the mercy of God to connect the Savior with sinners. Instead, we have lost our humility in crying out for our own rights.

Let's get to the heart of the matter

I still long for reform as I always have,

but my thinking is a little clearer. It has nothing to do with another layer of frustration, or another level of accomplishment. It has everything to do with being focused on God in all of His glory and grace. It also has everything to do with God's love and mercy in the hearts of sinners—like me.

Let's get to the heart of the matter in regard to reform. This real reform will not come easily. It is not supposed to.

- *The Rev. Dr. Donald A. Elliott is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Corinth, MS and President of the PPL Board of Directors*

Resources from PPL

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday 2005

Each January our nation recognizes the value of each human life on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. Many churches observe Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on a Sunday in January. PPL has resources that can be used on any Sunday during the year, including a bulletin insert. This year's insert emphasizes baptism. (See article 8)

Discovering Grace

A packet offering helps and opportunities for congregations to minister to women and men affected by abortion decisions, and to any who have lost children before birth.

Contact PPL for these and other resources for your church.

703-569-9474 or ppl@ppl.org