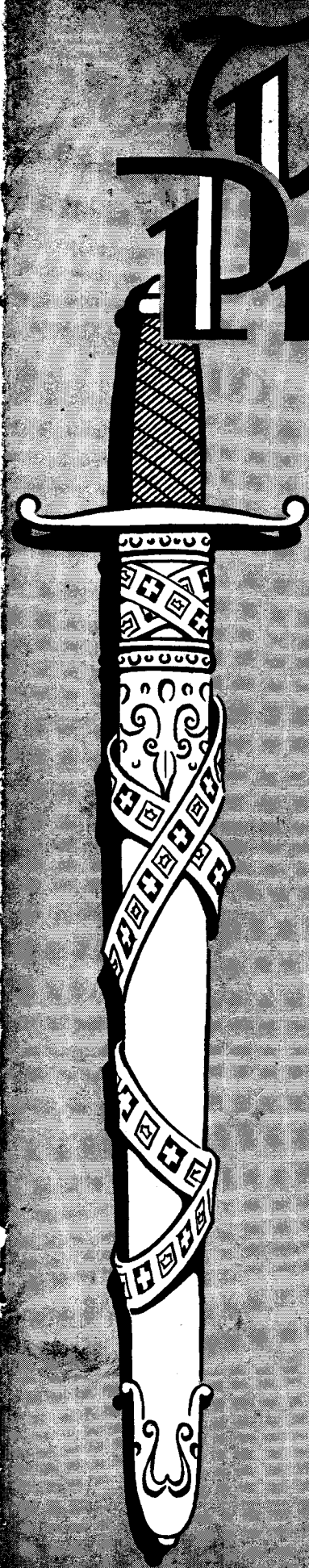


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THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD

The Presbyterian Guardian

From the Westminster Confession of Faith

"God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also."

—Chapter XX, Section II.

**THE PRESBYTERIAN
CONSTITUTIONAL
COVENANT UNION**

Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

PART IV

Sunday School Literature Published by the Board

By the REV. N. B. STONEHOUSE, Th.D., and the REV. JOHN J. DE WAARD



Dr. Stonehouse

THE Sunday School is one of the greatest missionary agencies in America. And to an alarming extent Christian parents are depending upon the Sunday School to supply the Christian nurture which was pledged at baptism. Consequently those who are in a position to influence the character of the Sunday School enjoy a unique opportunity of Christian service but also bear a terrible responsibility. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18: 6). How is the Board of Christian Education meeting the opportunity which it enjoys of influencing the relation of so many "little ones" to the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Person of Christ

There are many ways in which Christ may be denied. One is to deny openly His deity. But a far more dangerous method is the subtle method of ignoring the implications of His deity by interpreting His person and mission altogether in terms of human character and human activities. This latter method often employs traditional orthodox terminology in a sense that is quite the contrary of its historic meaning, with the result that the uninitiated are confused and led astray. In the words of Dr. Tillich, a lecturer at Union Theological Seminary, "Revelation has become another word for the development of religion, salvation another word for the assumed progress of human reason, God another word for the meaningful center and totality of the world" (*Christendom*, Autumn, 1935, p. 161).

Accordingly, the mere fact that the Sunday School literature includes at times orthodox affirmations may not be regarded as a sufficient proof of fidelity to the Christ of the Scriptures. One must inquire whether Christ is characteristically presented as the Bible presents Him, or in the typical modernist manner.

A series of recent lessons on the topic, "The Permanent Validity of Jesus' Teaching," contains the following passages:

"He assumed the existence of God. Jesus made no effort to prove God's existence. . . . He used no formal proofs of the reality of God but tried to persuade his hearers to make God real in their own experiences. His experience was immediate, spontaneous, organic, unquestioning, and he believed it could and should be so for others. 'Never in the life of any man was God such a reality as in the life of Jesus,' said Bousset, a great New Testament scholar" (*Young People's Quarterly, Students' Edition*, April-June, 1935, p. 46).

"Jesus was put to death for trying to build a more brotherly world. By accepting the traditional beliefs of his generation he might have lived out his normal expectancy in comfort and ease. . . . So from the outset it was inevitable that Jesus would pay a stiff price for trying to persuade the people to undertake to live on a new set of principles. Just when Jesus realized the inevitable outcome of his conflict with accepted beliefs we do not know. . . . The Jews finally put him to death by the customary method of disposing of dangerous criminals—crucifixion on the wooden cross. Such was the price Jesus paid for thinking creatively, living adventurously, and seeking social progress" (p. 46).

Thus Jesus is set forth as a man who was wonderfully religious and zealously devoted to high ethical principles. He is presented as our example in religion and morality. But this is done at the sacrifice of His consciousness of His unique relation to the Father, as the only one whose knowledge of the Father is as great as the Father's knowledge of Himself (Matt. 11:27). And this teaching goes directly counter to Jesus' teaching that His death upon the cross received its

ultimate explanation not in the fidelity of a martyr to principle but in His divine purpose to come into the world to redeem His people (Matt. 20:28).

The Way of Salvation

If the children in the Sunday Schools are to be taught that Jesus belongs to this world like the other sons of men, and that His death was the price that He paid for "thinking creatively, living adventurously, and seeking social progress," it will hardly be possible to present Jesus as the gift of the grace of God for their salvation. A naturalistic conception of Jesus does not go hand in hand with a supernaturalistic conception of salvation. If we can know God as immediately and spontaneously as Jesus did, it will not be necessary for us to turn to the new and living way "by the blood of Jesus." It is not a source of great surprise, therefore, to find substituted for the Christian way of salvation another approach to God. Nevertheless, the Christian who simply clings to the cross of Christ for salvation is bound to be shocked at the radical unbelief expressed in the following passages:

"Many of the older creeds of the church contained the doctrine of the total depravity of man. This has been interpreted as meaning that man is wholly defiled, incapable of any good, inclined wholly to evil, and unable in his own accord to better himself in any way. The Christian church has moved away from the belief, realizing that it is not in harmony with Jesus' teaching about the worth of man" (*Young People's Quarterly, Teachers' Edition*, April-June, 1935, p. 21).

"The person who has an adequate philosophy of life—and we believe this to be the Christian—believes with Jesus that God's love, God's care, and God's purpose surround every human life. As soon as a person begins to live at his best, he lines himself up with the divine purpose. The moment he begins living at his best his life and God's life begin to merge and, like a small stream joining a river, flow on together" (*Senior Pupils in Society and Club*, October-December, 1935, p. 50).

"It is well to bring out clearly here what Jesus says about the abundant and



Mr. De Waard

the shared life as being in harmony with the way of nature at its best; and what he demands of us as his followers is simply to be our best" (*Teachers and Leaders of Seniors, Shareholders in the Kingdom Enterprise*, April-June, 1934, p. 10).

This is unadulterated paganism. It is the religion of the natural man. It doesn't even remotely resemble historic Christianity, not to speak here of its break with the clear teaching of the creed to which the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is committed. No historian who prized his reputation at all would dare to affirm that these ideas of "the worth of man" and "living at his best" have anything to do with the gospel of historic Christianity. They are rather in the line of the "different gospel which is not another." Whatever one may wish to call the religion which teaches that by living at his best man may merge his life with God's, pantheizing mysticism or some other name, certainly it is not Christianity. For at the basis of the Christian conception of revelation and redemption is the consciousness of God as holy, undefiled and separate from sinners, and the consciousness that man may draw near unto God only as God Himself by infinite grace draws nearer to the sinner in Christ.

The Bible

Unbelief of the kind that has been outlined above is usually the fruit of a thoroughgoing rejection of the full truthfulness and authority of the Bible as the Word of God. The "Auburn Affirmation" is such an attack upon the Bible; it is also an attack upon central facts and doctrines which are clearly taught in the Bible. What conception of the Scriptures does the Board of Christian Education teach in its literature for the Sunday School? Does it teach the doctrine which is taught so explicitly in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., that by saving faith, "a Christian believeth to be true whatever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein" (*Confession of Faith*, xiv:2)?

Some of the most recent of the Board's publications provide an answer to this question. In two of the lesson helps prepared for the last quarter of 1935, as part of the Westminster Departmental Graded materials, *Teachers and Leaders of Intermediates and Intermediate Pupils in the Sunday School*, several lessons were devoted to the topic, "The Christian's Guide

Covenant Union Convention

FIRST annual convention of The Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union, which may possibly be an historic and important gathering, will be held in Philadelphia, at a place to be announced, beginning June 11th and probably ending June 14th with a great public meeting. Speakers will be announced later.

It is hoped that chapters will let the office of the Covenant Union know concerning the number of delegates they expect to send, and as soon as possible, the names of the delegates. Arrangements for hotel accommodations will upon request be made for the delegates by the central office.

Book." In one of these books the writer shows that he is aware of the modern minimizing conception of the Scriptures as well as of a higher view:

"Have you any hint that some of your pupils may think of the Bible as a book that has been miraculously dropped from heaven to effect the salvation of mankind? Or do they think of it as a record of the experiences of a religious people in their quest for God? Do they think of the Bible as spoken and written by some men, chosen messengers of God, who in an unusual degree guided them by his Spirit?" (*Teachers and Leaders*, p. 10).

No clear answer is forthcoming as to which is the correct view, but in the other publication the view that the Bible is primarily a record of religious experiences is stated: "I am your

Bible . . . My message is to yourself, for I grew out of the hot and difficult struggles of human life" (*Intermediate Pupils*, p. 4).

Perhaps the most common method of attacking the authority of the Bible in our times is to appeal from the Bible to Jesus Himself.

"Boys and girls of Junior High School age, in many cases, are no longer willing to act or refrain from acting merely on a 'Thus saith' from parents and teachers when no reasons are given. But they are searching, many of them, for some authoritative standard of right and wrong, according to which they may make their choices. To these boys and girls, the Bible in the example of the teaching of Jesus, furnishes a standard for living. The purpose of this lesson, therefore, is to make clear to the boys and girls that the Bible furnishes not only the records of the religious experiences of men and women to whom God was ever striving to make Himself known, but also a standard for those living today . . . In this connection, however, care should be taken that the pupils understand the fact that there are in the Bible different levels of religion and ethics, each of which should be measured by the spirit and teaching of Jesus, the story of whose life and message furnishes the climax of the Scriptures. This will safe-guard them from the difficulty of accepting pre-Christian concepts in the Old Testament for 'gospel truths'" (*Teachers and Leaders*, p. 29).

This subtle attack of Modernism upon the Bible, it should be observed, breaks down simply because Jesus' acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God will not allow a rejection of the Old Testament in favor of the authority of Jesus. Furthermore, the Jesus to whom the modernists appeal is not the Jesus of the New Testament, nor even the Jesus of the Gospels (for many of the teachings of the New Testament, and of the Gospels, are as unpalatable as the teachings of the Old Testament), but to a Jesus created in the image of modern thought.

The evidence which has been presented above comprises a very severe indictment of the Board of Christian Education as fostering Modernism rather than Christianity through the Sunday School. It cannot possibly shift its responsibility, for all of the evidence presented is found in publications of the Board. How long will Christian parents stand by in the face of these disclosures? Christian parents, to allow these influences to continue is to expose your children to a serpent when you have promised before God to supply them with bread!