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## REMEMBERING OUR SAVIOUR'S BIRTH

**W**HEN Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod, the King, certain things happened in honor of the event. Angels came from heaven to announce His arrival to the shepherds on the hillside. Wise men from the East brought precious and costly presents which they laid by the cradle. And devout saints, when they heard the news, lifted holy hands to the Father of Lights in praise and thanksgiving for His good and perfect Gift.

In these activities we have the only suggestions which Scripture contains as to means whereby we may commemorate the advent of Jesus. It is perfectly true that we do not know the exact date—except, perhaps, that it was not December 25th. Nor are we commanded to remember His birth, as we are His death. We have no indications in Scripture, other than those mentioned, that anyone, apostles or saints, in the early church remembered, by feasts or otherwise, His first day on earth.

If, therefore, we decide that we wish to hold in remembrance our Saviour's birth—and it is a matter of our own choosing—and if we decide that we shall do this at the time when multitudes the world around are celebrating Christmas (a present-day festival, largely pagan in character and Roman Catholic in origin), we have the suggestions which shall guide us in the things mentioned above.

Especially, our observance will be Christ-centered. Now the term "Christ," be it noted, is not a mere name, but a description. It means "anointed." It refers to Jesus as the one "anointed" of the Father as priest, who by the once offering of Himself a sacrifice for sins, secured forever the salvation of God's elect. And it refers to Him as the one anointed of God as King,

before whom all the nations of the earth shall be subdued and shall one day bow. However beneficial to us His birth may have been, it was for Him the beginning of an earthly life of deepest humiliation which ended in the accursed death at Calvary. It meant His leaving His heavenly home to stand, in human flesh, as representative of sinners before the judgment seat of God, and to undergo the punishment for our sins. Our remembrance of His birth, then, will be against this background. We will rejoice indeed, but not merely as over an infant who represents the mystery and beauty of human life. Our joy will be in the eternal Son of God, who was born in order that He might die for our sins.

In particular we will remember His birth by telling the good news of the meaning of His life—by evangelizing in the full sense of that word. Whether by card, letter, or word of mouth, we will proclaim Him to the world as the angels proclaimed Him: not as example, but as the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

And we will bring gifts—to Him. It is His birthday. Our presents should be first for Him. Indeed the celebration of His birth should bring a special outpouring, into His work, of our most precious and costly possessions. In that we give presents to our friends, it will be as unto Him—as a memorial to Him. We may be well assured that if our gifts to others are as memorials to Him, we will not only be more careful what we give, but also we will not be looking quite so hard for returns, and will not be so disappointed if they fail to arrive. Giving gifts in memory of the birth of our only Saviour is a sacred thing.

We will be lifting our hearts and our voices in praise and deep thanksgiving to the God of all grace, for His blessed "remembrance of mercies." He sent

# A False View of the Trinity

A Review by the REV. PROFESSOR CORNELIUS VAN TIL, Ph.D.

THE TRIUNE GOD, by C. Norman Bartlett, S.T.D., American Tract Society, New York, N. Y., \$1.50.



Dr. Van Til

IN HIS essay on "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity" (*Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 264ff.), B. B. Warfield points out that Arminians have usually held to a very low view of the Trin-

ity. This in an interesting point. It runs counter to our usual modes of thought. Ordinarily we say that all evangelical Christians agree on the basic doctrines of Christianity. We are accustomed to think of the differences between evangelicals, such as Calvinists and Arminians, as coming in only when such doctrines as election and free will are discussed. It would then seem as though Arminians and Calvinists could build their theological house together except for the top story.

If, however, Warfield is right it may be necessary for us to revise our usual way of thinking on these matters. If it be true that Arminians have usually held a low view of the Trinity it would seem that Calvinists must build the whole of their theological house by themselves. Perhaps we have still to learn the simple truth that if we wish to build the third story of a house aright we must see that the first story and even the foundation is built aright.

## The Reason Why

Now we shall not question the truthfulness of Warfield's statement that Arminianism and a low view of the Trinity have usually gone together. We believe he adduces sufficient evidence to prove his point. But we do wish to ask whether there is a reason for this.

Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to note the starting-point from which Arminians begin their reasoning about any doctrine and, therefore, about the doctrine of the Trinity. That starting-point is the "free will" of man. Arminians hold that man can initiate action in-

dependently of the plan or counsel of God. God must wait to see what man will do before He can make up His mind as to what He will do.

This being the starting-point of Arminianism, the whole of its theology becomes a theology of claims and counter-claims. The claims and counter-claims are made, to be sure, by an infinite God and finite man. Accordingly, God will no doubt have *larger* claims than man. Yet God will never have *more original* claims than man.

If Rockefeller wants to buy up a large area of ground, one acre of which is owned by me, I may frustrate his plans by simply refusing to sell him the one lonely acre I own. It is in some such way as this that the God of Arminianism can never quite do what He wants to do. He is *at every point* dependent upon man and the created universe.

This last sentence will seem to some to be an overstatement of the case. Even some who hold the Reformed system of doctrine may think that I am at this point too hard on the Arminians. "Do not Arminians hold to the creation doctrine?" they will ask. And is not God absolutely original when He creates man, even according to the Arminian? How could anyone hold to the creation doctrine and at the same time hold that God was at that point dependent on man? Surely you are unfair to the Arminian at this point. You cannot fairly say that the Arminian teaches error at every point of doctrine.

## Arminianism and the Creation Doctrine

In the book under review we have an illustration of the fact that when an Arminian thinks consistently he virtually denies the creation doctrine. No, the creation doctrine is not openly denied. Quite the contrary is true. Yet it might just as well have been openly denied. What is openly denied is the conception of a God who existed as a self-sufficient being apart from the universe. And what is openly affirmed is that God needed

the universe which He created. We quote Dr. Bartlett's words on this:

"Are we not warranted in thinking of creation—which is not static and complete, but dynamic and continuous—as the self-giving of God as energy? Whether the physical universe is eternal or temporal is a debatable question which we are not competent to solve. But it is at least conceivable that just as the physical life of man requires a body to indwell and animate, God as infinite energy may demand an eternal material universe as the only adequate field for His infinite physical creativity. The principle of reciprocal self-fulfillment through self-surrender on the part of both the infinite and the finite, to which we have previously alluded, may indicate that just as the finite requires the infinite as its ground of existence, so the infinite requires the finite as a field of expression" (p. 153).

The quotation we have given expresses the sentiment of the book throughout. There is a constant emphasis on the essential correlativity between God and His created universe. According to Dr. Bartlett, the universe not only needs God for its existence but God needs the universe for His existence.

## Arminianism and Sin

We do not need to be surprised therefore that when an Arminian argues consistently he will virtually deny the Biblical doctrine of sin as he virtually denies the Biblical doctrine of creation. We again quote Dr. Bartlett:

"Let us again pick up our favorite thread of reasoning from the human to the divine. Crises rouse the best within us. We do not really know what we can do until we are driven to the wall. Necessity wakens buried and unsuspected potentialities. Within the very essence of Deity may there not exist an analogous something subconsciously requiring a universe abounding in obstacles that nothing short of the exercise of His infinite powers can overcome and bring into line with His holy purposes? If this be so it has a most intimate bearing upon the existence of evil in a world subject to His rule" (p. 117).

On the following page, still speaking of God, the author continues this line of thought in these words:

"His subconscious perfections flower out into conscious self-recognition through

the activities involved in the shaping of more or less refractory material into an ever closer resemblance to the divine original" (p. 118).

### The Trinity

It would seem apparent from these quotations, which are but fair expressions of the thought of the book, that we face here a very serious compromise of Christianity with non-Christian thought. Scripture is sufficiently plain in its teaching of God's free creation of the universe. God did not need man or the universe. It is hard to conceive of a doctrine that has more far-reaching consequences than the doctrine of God's free creation of the universe and man in the universe. It is the first main mark of distinction between pagan and Christian thought. If one believes in a God who needs the universe one has no more than a finite God. Dr. Bartlett does not wish to have a finite God. Yet a finite God is all he makes provision for in his theology.

As to the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the particular doctrine discussed in the book now under review, we believe it to be basically erroneous. There are no doubt many fine passages in the book which, if taken by themselves, are true. But the value of the discussion of the Trinity is vitiated by the principle that God needs the universe. A truly Biblical discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity would require that we consider first what God is in Himself. Theologians speak of this as the ontological Trinity. It is only after we have discussed the Trinity as it exists in and for itself that we can turn to the question of how the trinitarian God stands in relation to the universe which He has freely created. This theologians speak of as the economical Trinity. Dr. Bartlett has failed to make the necessary distinction between these two.

### Arminian Reasoning

Dr. Bartlett would probably object to this interpretation of his views by saying that he has merely reasoned from the human to the divine and that no one can do anything else. He might say that he has merely used "the lamp of analogy" (p. 95). To this we would reply that if the "lamp of analogy" be placed under the bushel of correlativity it will shed no light. The author's Arminianism requires him to think of God as depend-

ent upon man much as man is dependent upon God. But this makes for an *identity* of conditions that control God and man. Arminianism snuffs out the lamp of analogy. For that reason it is unsound in its every doctrine and not merely on the doctrine of election and free will. There is a good logical reason why, as Warfield points out, Arminians have his-

torically held to a low view of the Trinity. It is the basic error in their mode of reasoning that accounts for all the errors they hold. We would that our Arminian brethren might see the error of their way and turn from it. It is in the hope of winning them to a more truly Biblical view that we must point out the seriousness of their mistake.

## Missionary Experiences in War-Stricken China

By MR. and MRS. RICHARD B. GAFFIN

Missionaries to China under The Committee on Foreign Missions of The Presbyterian Church of America

THROUGH the summer it was our plan to remain in Haichow until the "incident" quieted and then to move temporarily to Tsingtao, where we are now. We have been appointed by The Committee on Foreign Missions of The Presbyterian Church of America and have been instructed to open up a work in Shantung in a city about fifty miles south of Tsingtao called Shihchiuso. It is easily accessible from Tsingtao. Hence, we planned to make a temporary stay here where such supplies as we might need could be secured. But the Lord did not suffer us to stay in Haichow until things quieted. The "incident" assumed larger and larger proportions and there was more and more unrest. Around the fifteenth of August Japanese reconnoitering planes began daily appearing in the skies. On their third visit they dropped a bomb which landed in a field and killed an old farmer. This event caused us to seek shelter in the basement afterwards whenever the warning gong sounded. Nearly every day we were leaving our food on the table, taking Dickie out of his bath or both the children from their naps, to flee to the cellar. We soon lost our fear but it was far from satisfactory for study, which was our main occupation. Because the Japanese had made bombing the railroads, depots and even trains a most important feature of their war program the United States consul arranged to evacuate American citizens by water on September 19th. Word came that the nearby harbor had been blocked

to keep out the Japanese so we must go out at once by rail. After consultation with the local military authorities we found out that the harbor could be used so, after much telegraphing back and forth with Nanking and Tsingtao, we prepared to evacuate. We packed just about all our worldly goods and, on the 18th, sent all we could to the port of evacuation, which is about 25 miles from Haichow.

On the 19th we went to the station with light baggage to take a train scheduled to leave at 1 P. M. It was late, due to air raids along the line earlier in the day. As we sat there thinking of the friends we were leaving and anxious for the 15 Southern Presbyterian missionaries who were on the train we were to board a message came: 24 planes were coming from a Japanese planecarrier anchored off the coast. We hurried to a nearby bomb cellar. Soon we heard the roar of big bombers and a bit later saw twelve planes to the west but twelve more were heading right towards us. We promptly went inside but we heard that never-to-be-forgotten noise of the planes and the frightful roar of their power dives met by the fringing of anti-aircraft guns. We all four sat together not without fear for our lives, but sufficient faith was provided and we were comforted to think that the Heavenly Father would receive us.

After about a half an hour of this we came out to learn that three or four missiles had been dropped on the air field and not without some