

The Presbyterian Guardian

June, 1938

VOLUME 5, NO. 6

J. Gresham Machen
Editor 1936-1937

One Dollar a Year

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Are We Facing Governmental Regimentation of Religion?

AN EDITORIAL

ON the 31st of January of this year some two hundred members of the Ministerial Union of Washington, D. C., were invited to the office of Secretary of Commerce Roper, where they listened to an address by him on "The Church and Human Security." The address has since been printed and given a limited distribution by a "Committee of Twenty-One" of the Ministerial Union, appointed for the purpose of co-operating with the secretary in carrying out his suggestions. The full text of the address will be found on page 118 of this issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN.

The address of Secretary Roper is illuminating, in that it proposes the regimentation of the churches of America in a nation-wide organization co-operating with the government in a structure like the National Council of Defense set up during the world war. This organization is to labor "in finding work for the people and in the proper handling of relief."

The proposal includes specifically "an *all inclusive national conference*," the combined endeavor of which would be carried on more effectively "through central *national headquarters and laboratory study guidance*" (italics his). In this way there would be made available a trained leadership. What the church needs today, we are told, is a specially trained leadership, "surcharged

with the conviction of sound belief, inspired by power and vision." The "power" mentioned would probably be the power of a nation-wide organization with government sponsorship.

The address is characterized by the typical "totalitarian" procedure of taking over sacred traditions and recasting them into the mold desired by the government at the moment. Thus, since economic relief is the present need, we are told that "Moses is an outstanding character of ancient history because he lifted his people out of great economic distress." And "Jesus Christ taught the philosophy of ministering to the physical as well as the spiritual requirements of mankind." Since Moses "lifted his people out of economic distress" by leading them into the wilderness where they had to wait daily upon God for a miraculously provided bread, and since our Lord taught that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God," we cannot help a slight expression of surprise that Secretary Roper should expect his misinterpretations of Scripture to pass unchallenged. The doctrine of Scripture tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." If the government were more interested in acknowledging and serving God as He is

A Strange Debate About Brunner

By the Rev. Professor CORNELIUS VAN TIL, Ph.D.



Dr. Van Til

IN *The Presbyterian* of May 5, 1938, we find what amounts to a debate about Emil Brunner. Emil Brunner is to be guest professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary for the year 1938-1939. In view of this fact Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse asks certain questions of Brunner. But as Dr. Brunner is in Switzerland at this time Dr. John A. Mackay, the president of Princeton Seminary, undertakes to answer for him.

The questions asked by Dr. Barnhouse pertain chiefly to man's original estate. Were Adam and Eve real historical figures? Is paradise a describable state? Was there a real fall of man in the sense that the historical Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and were driven forth from paradise? Barnhouse quotes from Brunner to show that he rejects the Genesis narrative as an historical account of these matters. We give one of the quotations made by Dr. Barnhouse from Brunner's latest book, *Der Mensch im Widerspruch*. "The Fall is not an event in the evolutionary history of mankind; it is, just as little as the Creation as such, an empirical event; it lies behind or above the plane of empiricism. The contrast of 'created good' and 'fallen' has nothing whatsoever to do with the difference between 'earlier—later.' Abraham, just because he lived in an earlier age than I, is for this reason not nearer the good creation and event of the Fall than I am. The history of the evolution of mankind does not lead us as we trace back, to a Fall and a Creation . . ." (p. 413, translation by Dr. Barnhouse).

On the basis of this and other utterances of Brunner, Dr. Barnhouse remarks: "In fact, his latest book, not yet translated into English, appearing in the autumn of 1937, contains major denials of Christian doctrine, and places Dr. Brunner in a position absolutely at variance with the Word of God and Presbyterian Standards."

We can only rejoice in the fact that Dr. Barnhouse has raised a voice of

protest against the introduction of such theology as Brunner holds into Princeton Seminary. There has been very little protest indeed against the new theology that is being introduced at Princeton. But why does Dr. Barnhouse do nothing but raise a protest of this nature? There are many Modernists in the church of which Dr. Barnhouse is a minister. These Modernists must certainly be charged with "major denials of Christian doctrine." Why does not Dr. Barnhouse protest against their presence in the church? Or rather, why does not Dr. Barnhouse start proceedings against them? After all, to make a protest now and then helps very little. It produces at most a momentary stir. The "authorities" frown—and all is over. When the children are a bit unruly mother raises her finger and all is quiet again. Will the "fundamentalists" in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. continue to do nothing but grumble now and then? Are they not responsible for Christ's little ones who are being led astray? We sincerely hope and pray that they may undertake to bear the reproach of Christ in the courts of the church.

Barnhouse on Barth

We proceed now to note an inconsistency in the theological criticism of Dr. Barnhouse. Brunner rejects the Genesis account of the origin and fall of man. That is, he rejects this account as a simple historical narrative. He most emphatically claims not to reject the Genesis account as a symbolical picture of what is true of every man. For this substitution of symbol for historical fact Barnhouse rightly takes him to task. Dr. Barnhouse questions whether Brunner can have "a proper concept of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ after denying the Biblical concept of man in his original state, in his Fall and consequent necessity of redemption from original sin."

On the other hand, Dr. Barnhouse has very little criticism to offer on the position of Karl Barth. He makes a contrast between Barth and Brunner and thinks that the theology of the

former is far better than that of the latter. After quoting a passage from Barth he says: "That Karl Barth should consider Dr. Brunner a greater danger than the avowed Modernists is striking. Barth traveled the long road away from Modernism back to the simple Christian position, and while he still has some distance to go in certain lines, he sees clearly in all the great points involving man's complete ruin in sin and God's perfect remedy in Christ." This is strange indeed! Dr. Mackay quite rightly points out that the category of the "supra-historical" is as fundamental to the thinking of Barth as it is to the thinking of Brunner. This is true of Barth's recent writings no less than of his earlier writings. It has been pointed out fully in previous issues of *THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN* (Jan. 9, Feb. 27, July, 1937; Feb., Mar., May, 1938). We merely recall one or two matters. When Barth gave his lectures on the Apostles' Creed he was asked about the speaking serpent in paradise. He was asked whether he took the Genesis narrative literally or symbolically. In reply Barth said: "I would decidedly oppose characterising this incident as 'myth.' No more can I, on the other hand, characterise it, in the sense of historical science, as 'historical,' for a speaking serpent—now, indeed, I am as little able to imagine that (apart from everything else!) as anyone. But I should like to ask the dear friends of the speaking serpent whether it would not be better to hold fast to the fact that this 'is written' and to go on and interest themselves in *what* the serpent spoke?" (*Credo*, p. 190). Barth does not believe in the historicity of the Genesis account any more than Brunner does. How then can Dr. Barnhouse say of Barth that he has come back to "the simple Christian position"? Obviously, he has not.

Dr. Mackay's Reply

But while we note these inconsistencies in the questions of Dr. Barnhouse his point is in itself well taken. If anything is plain from the writings

of Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield and C. W. Hodge it is that they believed in Christianity as an historical religion. Following the examples of Christ and the Apostles they accepted the Genesis narrative at its face value. Now the chair of Systematic Theology at Princeton is going to be occupied by a man who feels free to substitute a symbolical for an historical interpretation of Genesis. More than that, for Brunner as for Barth the facts of history as spoken of in Scripture are nothing but "pointers" to some vague supra-historical realm. With their notion of history it makes little difference whether they do or do not take the Scripture narratives as historical. If they believe in the historical resurrection of Christ this historical resurrection is for them not the "real" resurrection. The "real" resurrection is supra-historical. There is, according to Barth and Brunner, no saving power in any of the historical events of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Herewith historical Christianity falls to the ground.

Yet in his reply to Dr. Barnhouse, Dr. Mackay ignores this basic fact. He is simply amazed that Dr. Barnhouse can ask such questions as he does. We quote a sentence from his article: "If Dr. Barnhouse had paid attention to the important category of the supra-historical, which is basic to the thought of Dr. Brunner, as it is to that of Barth, and plays a great part in the thought of Kierkegaard, the great master of both, as also in Julius Müller's 'Doctrine of Sin,' he would not have so easily succumbed to an unwitting travesty of Dr. Brunner's position."

There might be some point to this reply if Dr. Mackay could make plain to us what this "category of the supra-historical" means. He has not done so. We do not think he can do so. We do not think Barth and Brunner have done so. In short, we do not think it can be done even by the most brilliant of men.

There is one point, however, that seems to be sufficiently clear. The "category of the supra-historical" is offered as a substitute for the category of the historical. "Real" events, according to Dr. Mackay, do not take place in the realm of history but in the realm of the suprahistorical.

Orthodox Christians have constantly been amazed at the signers of

the "Auburn Affirmation." Affirmationists have stoutly maintained that they hold to the "facts" of the Christian religion. They claim to oppose merely the "interpretation" of those who take the facts of redemptive history as having a significance in themselves. Dr. Mackay does a similar sort of thing in his defense of Brunner. We quote one instance. "*Man fell from his first estate; he is as we know him, a fallen creature, a lost soul, utterly incapable of saving himself.*" This Biblical truth is never absent from Dr. Brunner's thought and is affirmed constantly in his writings. He insists, however, that in the story of the Fall, the ineffable mystery itself is clothed in symbolical language, as is the story of the Creation, and is, moreover, supra-historical in character."

When Modernists argue in this fashion we think of them as having unwittingly substituted a pagan ideational system of philosophy for the Christian faith. The burden of proof rests with Dr. Mackay that he has not fallen into the same error. By historical facts Christianity has meant historical facts and nothing else.

Dr. Mackay claims, to be sure, that Brunner is but following the method of interpretation employed by Charles Hodge. Hodge did not feel that he was doing injustice to Scripture when he accepted the Copernican instead of the Ptolemaic conception of the universe. So Brunner feels he is doing no injustice to Scripture when he introduces his "category of the supra-historical" in explanation of it. So runs the argument of Dr. Mackay.

This argument has no real validity. One man may look at a tree and call it an elm. Later he learns that it was a beech. But he always thinks of the tree he looks at as a real tree. Another man looks at the same tree and says it is but a "pointer to" or a "symbol of" a "real" tree in the "supra-historical" realm. For him the tree he looks at is not a real tree. Hodge may be compared to the first man and Brunner to the second. Hodge accepted historic Christianity; Brunner rejects it.

It were better if Dr. Mackay did not follow the Modernist policy of covering up basic issues, but told us simply that he means to have Princeton Seminary depart still further from its former adherence to historic Christianity and the Reformed Faith.

The Church Directory



CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
WORCESTER, NEW YORK

PASTOR: The Rev. John C. Rankin.

REGULAR SERVICES: *Sunday*: 10.30 A.M., morning worship; 11.45, Bible school; 2.30 P.M., afternoon worship and Bible school on "South Hill"; 6.30, young people's meeting. *Thursday*: 7.30 P.M., prayer meeting at the pastor's home.

CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH is made up of a small group of 35 persons who, on August 5, 1936, withdrew from the First Presbyterian Church of Worcester, and thus from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. They separated themselves from the apostate denomination in obedience to the call of God, and joined in the organization of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church of America. Services are now held in a hall and in the home of the pastor.

The effect on the community of Worcester has been to arouse a large measure of enmity, and the church has witnessed the town's three Protestant churches allied with the Roman Catholic church in hostility against it. Despite organized opposition the Calvary Church continues a vigorous Presbyterian and Reformed witness to the supremacy of God's Word.

"We incline more and more to the view that the secret of steadfastness in faith is to be fully informed and persuaded in respect to that faith, which for us means the Reformed Faith," said Mr. Rankin. "We are strong for the constitution of our church, and praise God for the opportunity of raising up the standard of the Reformed Faith—'regardless of cost.'"