

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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Editorial Notes and Comments

STATEMENTS BY DRS. STEVENSON AND McNAUGHER



WHILE reserving discussion of the proposed merger of the Presbyterian and the United Presbyterian Churches for future issues, a word should perhaps be said now about statements that have recently been issued by two of the most prominent members of the Joint Committee on Organic Union.

The significance of DR. McNAUGHER's statement—he is president of the Faculty of the United Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Pittsburgh—lies in the interpretation he places on the retention

in the Plan of Union of *The Confessional Statement* as "an historical interpretative" statement of the United Church. "Its clear recognition," he writes, "as having interpretative character scarcely lessens its influential value as an exponent of Reformed theology. . . . It will remain permanently in the foreground as a teaching symbol." This statement by DR. McNAUGHER, it will be seen, is in full harmony with the view expressed by DR. MACHEN in the last issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY as to the place that this far-from-sound Confessional Statement will have in the United Church, if the merger is accomplished.

DR. STEVENSON's statement, while informing, is characterized by a looseness of expression that is surprising on the part of the chairman of the Committee that represents the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. in this matter. We refer especially to what he writes about the "Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith," adopted by the General Assembly of 1902, and the Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church adopted by its presbyteries in 1925. His allusions to these are certainly confusing if not flatly misleading. After stating that the purpose of the United Presbyterians in adopting the "Confessional Statement" was the same as that which led our Church to adopt the "Brief Statement," viz., "to instruct the people and to give a better understanding of our doctrinal beliefs," he goes on to say that the difficulty occasioned by the fact that the "Confessional Statement" had been adopted by the presbyteries of the United Presbyterian Church "was happily solved by the willingness on the part of the United Presbyterian members to give to their Confessional Statement the same status as our Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith." Such is not the case. As a matter of fact, what the Plan of Union does is rather to give the "Brief Statement" the same status as the "Confessional Statement," i.e., the status of a document that has been adopted by the presbyteries. As matters now stand, the "Brief Statement" merely has the standing of a deliverance of the General Assembly. If, however, the Plan of Union goes through, it will have a status similar to the amend-

ments that were made to the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1903 and the Declaratory Statement adopted at the same time. In that case, both the "Confessional Statement" and the "Brief Statement" will have the status of "Historical Interpretative Statement," formally adopted as such by the presbyteries; and this will mean, if DRS. McNAUGHER and MACHEN are right—we think they are—that they will be more or less authoritative interpretations of the Westminster Standards in the United Church. Before we can judge as to the wisdom or unwisdom of the Plan of Union, it is imperative that we know what it involves. DR. STEVENSON's statement scarcely furthers such an understanding.

"A FRIENDLY STATEMENT"



THE Presbytery of Chester recently adopted, by a unanimous vote, what it terms "a friendly statement" to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. That statement may be found in our news columns.

While called a "friendly statement," we are not sure that the Board of Foreign Missions was particularly elated by its arrival. It proceeds throughout on the assumption that many have lost confidence in the Board's loyalty to the gospel and that it is imperative that the existing situation be remedied if there is to be that "restoration of confidence" that will lead "many" Presbyterians again to turn their missionary gifts into Presbyterian channels. The things which are mentioned as necessary before confidence can be restored to "the minds, the hearts and the purses" of many of the members of the churches of Chester Presbytery—no doubt the same holds good of most other presbyteries—are not things of minor importance; rather they are all things of major importance.

What we are at a loss to understand is how the members of Chester Presbytery can suppose that the mere removal of what it calls "the principal obstacles" in the way of restoring full confidence in the Board will accomplish that result as long as the present personnel of the Board is retained. In our judgment there must be a house-cleaning in the Board before anything like full confidence in the Board on the part of thousands of Presbyterians can be restored. A board under which the things complained of by Chester Presbytery could take place is hardly a Board that can be trusted to carry on the foreign missionary enterprise of the Church with clear and strong emphasis on "the final, all-sufficient, revealed, and exclusive Gospel of salvation through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Something more is needed than a mere acknowledgment of wrong in the past and a promise to be good in the future. Such proposal reminds us of a passage in the radio speech that MR. LAGUARDIA, Mayor of New York City, made on the evening of February 1st, to wit: "The head of

"Christianity—The Paradox of God"

By the Rev. Cornelius Van Til, Ph.D.

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THE James Sprunt Lectures for 1933 were delivered at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, by Professor Donald Mackenzie and have been published by the Fleming H. Revell Co., under the title "Christianity—The Paradox of God." Professor Mackenzie has succeeded Dr. Geerhardus Vos in the chair of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Since these lectures speak, as the title given above indicates, of Christianity as the paradox of God, they are of more than passing significance.

The term paradox, as quite commonly employed in recent times, fits into a non-Christian scheme of thought. The term paradox, more particularly, is easily made to bear the idea of modern Irrationalism.

Modern thought, generally speaking, says that Reality is ultimately mysterious. Facts, it is said, may fit about equally well into two apparently contradictory interpretations. According to this view it seems most reasonable that those who hold to such seemingly contradictory interpretations should humbly allow that it is likely they have each seen only one side of the truth. Together they should stand in reverent awe within the ultimate mystery that enshrouds both the interpreters and the facts they interpret. Paradox should end in praise.

Obviously, then, a Christian theologian, if he uses the term paradox with reference to Christianity at all, should wish to make it very clear that his usage of the term has nothing to do with modern evolutionism and Irrationalism. The paradox idea all too easily covers up the basic difference between the Christian concept of an absolutely rational God and the modern notion of a God who is Himself surrounded by mystery.

Unfortunately, Professor Mackenzie's book, so far from stressing the basic difference between the Christian position and modern Irrationalism, ignores this difference. The net result is that it appears as though Christianity and evolutionary Irrationalism are but opposite sides of the same truth.

"Chance and Grace"

So, for instance, Professor Mackenzie speaks as though "chance" were a simple fact which we must accept as such. He reasons as though Calvin's doctrine of secondary causes and the modern notion of "contingency" are interchangeable (p. 128). He even maintains that Jesus "admits the unexpected, the unpredictable and incalculable, the capricious and casual element in the life of the spirit" (p. 130). This, Jesus is alleged to teach in the parable of the hidden treasure.

Now the classical meaning of the word chance, to which Professor Mackenzie refers (p. 131), is derived from Aristotle. Aristotle's conception of "tuche" is the polar opposite of the Biblical doctrines of creation and providence. Jesus of course, built His redemptive work upon the Old Testament doctrine of creation. He was Himself the Mediator of creation, the Word through Whom the world was made. Jesus, to be sure, did allow that there is the unpredictable *for man*, but He never allowed that there is anything unpredictable *for God*. A world not created by God could not be redeemed by Christ, the Son of God.

But Professor Mackenzie seems to have the courage of his convictions on this point. He is even willing to change the meaning of "redemption" in order to make room for the chance idea. He reasons as though Christ's work consisted in doing something with a situa-

tion that, to some extent at least, existed independently of Himself and the Father. He says of Scripture that it "evangelizes the inevitable" (p. 132). He says we cannot ascribe our salvation "to chance alone" (p. 137). He says that our Lord appears at one time as "an evangelical Stoic," and at another as "an evangelical Sceptic" (p. 141). His whole attitude is summed up when he says: "Chance evangelized becomes grace and grace is the paradox of God" (p. 139).

That Professor Mackenzie has modified the New Testament doctrine of redemption appears most clearly from his notion of grace. To quote: "Perhaps the day may come also when the scientific view of natural selection and the New Testament doctrine of an election of grace may be



The Rev. Cornelius Van Til, Ph.D.

seen to be both sides of God's activity, and not the horns of an inescapable dilemma. Not 'either—or,' but 'both—and' (p. 80). Now he who says that "election of grace" and "natural selection" may some day be seen to be "both sides of God's activity," can as well say that both Christianity and paganism may yet be seen to be equally true. The New Testament doctrine of grace presupposes the fall of man and the creation of man in God's image, neither of which can be held if "natural selection" is to be maintained.

"Miracle"

Professor Mackenzie's remarks on the miracles of Scripture corroborate what we have said so far. He makes the general statement that: "Miracle in Scripture is a religious, not a scientific or anti-scientific concept" (p. 194). This statement means nothing less than that it is a matter of indifference whether Christ actually rose from the grave with the same body with which He suffered or not. But surely the bodily resurrection is a fact of history and he who deals with it certainly deals with a "scientific concept."

With respect to the Old Testament miracles Professor Mackenzie makes it very plain that, as far as he is concerned, they need not have happened as physical and historical events at all. He says: "Miracles in the Old Testament are not to be explained physically or historically at all; they are to be explained theologically and redemptively" (p. 194). A little later he adds: "A miracle or paradox, in the Biblical sense, therefore, may be as ordinary a thing as a harvest, if only we see God at work in it, and if it calls forth His praise, or it may be as startling as the raising of the dead" (p. 196).

Now if Christianity is true the contrasts made in these quotations are false. In all of his desire to reduce "either—or" contrasts to "both—and" supplementations, Professor Mackenzie has raised a false "either—or" after all. If Christianity is true the miracles of Scripture are physical and historical facts and *as such* can and must be interpreted "theologically and redemptively." If miracles were not physical and historical facts, they could have no redemptive significance. Only a happy,—and yet unhappy—inconsistency on this point can keep Professor Mackenzie from the ranks of the Auburn Affirmationists, who hold that we can get all the religious benefit we need from the *idea* of the resurrection of Christ, no matter what the *fact* may have been.

The Changing God

What is true of Professor Mackenzie's discussion of chance and miracle is once more true of his remarks about Christ and about God. To quote: "Above all, He changed for man the Unchangeable God, so that what sages would have died to learn is now known to cottage dames" (p. 57). One is at a loss to know what this may mean. We do not see how it can possibly be fitted into the Christian position. According to the Christian position, God remained changeless not only when He created the world, but also when the second Person of the Trinity became incarnate. The non-Christian position frankly denies the doctrine of a

changeless God. Professor Mackenzie seems to want both a changeless God and a God who has been changed.

We now understand more clearly how Professor Mackenzie could visualize the time when natural selection and grace should appear as aspects of the activity of the same God. In fact, if God has really been changed already we need not wait for a future union of grace and natural selection; in that case they have been joined long ago. If by the method of paradox we can believe both in a changeless and a changing God we may believe anything else that is flatly contradictory.

Still further, if Christ changed the "unchangeable God" He Himself is changeable, too, and that not only in His human nature but in His divine nature as well, for Christ is God. We, then, never know who Christ is. He becomes the "dear Anonymous" (p. 138). Then, too, we are sure of Christ "not in possession but in paradox" (p. 32). This Barthian distinction between possession and paradox employed by Professor Mackenzie implies that there is no system of Christian truth at all.

The Unknown God

Here we have the heart of the matter. Professor Mackenzie, intentionally or unintentionally, utterly confuses the church's doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God with the modern Mystery-religion which is hopelessly agnostic. Speaking of those who have in their "foible of pretended omniscience" attempted to exhaust the attributes of God he says that they ought to learn from the "chastened scientist" to "stand in awe before God, saying, 'O God of Israel, the Saviour! Thou art in very Truth the Mysterious God'" (p. 31).

But the "chastened scientist" does not worship the God of Israel. Neither does he worship the God of Christianity. He worships the *Mysterious Universe*. The Christian Church, to be sure, has embedded in the very heart of its confession the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God (Westminster Confession, Chapter II, 1). But to say that God is incomprehensible is not to say that God is wholly unknowable; it is only to say that God is not comprehensively knowable.

Professor Mackenzie has *equated* the Christian conception of God as absolute rationality with the modern non-Christian concept of absolute irrationality. To say that absolute rationality and absolute irrationality are equally ultimate is to say that human language has ceased to have any meaning. It is to say that the changeless and the changing, the eternal and the temporal are but aspects of the same Universe. It is possible to "roll Huxley and Wordsworth into one" and to "add the psalmist" (p. 18); it is possible to bring Spencer and Paul into harmony by saying that Paul was sure of "God the unknowable" (p. 28), but it is possible to do these things only if one has first forsaken the Scriptural doctrine of God and embraced modern agnosticism.

Reverence

Finally, we note that Professor Mackenzie expects a return of the spirit of reverence if only we think of God as equally unknown and known (p. 36). There is a constant

emphasis in the book on the contention that paradox must end in praise. Dr. Hugh Thomson Kerr, in his review of Professor Mackenzie's book (*The Presbyterian Banner*, January 4, 1934), rejoices in this victorious spirit. He says: "The same note is struck in each of the eight all-too-short chapters and when one comes to the end he finds his heart echoing the words 'Sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously.'" In a similar spirit, Professor Wieman, the Chicago pragmatic theologian, insists that we can be reverent no matter what our disbeliefs may be. He seeks to have us bow in reverence before the Mysterious aspect of the Universe. We should remember, however, that if two enemies are at war they cannot very well both be victorious. We cannot be sure from Professor Mackenzie's book whether he would worship a mysterious aspect of the Universe with Professor Wieman, the pragmatist, or the God of Christianity with the people of God.

So far, then, from agreeing with the judgment of Dr. Kerr that Professor Mackenzie is "following in the footsteps of Doctors Hodge, Warfield and Purves," we hold that he has departed far from what these men have taught. These men taught Reformed theology. Professor Mackenzie has, as far as his published writings show, always been an opponent of Reformed theology. Even a single quotation proves this. In an article on "Free Will" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, he says: "The defect of Augustinianism and Calvinism is that they start from a

knowledge of God's absoluteness above experience, deduce logically from this eternal decrees, and so explain individual experience. We must start from experience, however, and, doing so, the problem is to reconcile God's absoluteness in grace with man's freedom." This experience-theology has now, we believe, led Professor Mackenzie far beyond Arminianism. Professor Mackenzie is now ready to modify the Biblical conception of the changeless God till it be but a correlative of the non-Christian conception of a changing God. His earlier Arminianism seems to have been the bridge by which he has arrived at his present paradox-theology.

Naturally we must disagree with Dr. Samuel M. Zwemer's contention that Professor Mackenzie "leaves no doubt regarding his Pauline and Augustinian views of sin and salvation" (*The Presbyterian*, January 11, 1934). So also we cannot agree with Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer when he says: "The one chapter on *The Chief Evangelical Paradox* presents a burst of evangelical truth and depth of appreciation of the plan of salvation by and through Christ alone, which surpasses any statement we have seen in modern literature" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, January, 1934, p. 101). Augustinianism and Calvinism have never given Professor Mackenzie sufficient elbow-room; his paradox-theology seems now to be bursting the very bonds of evangelicalism.

Sunday School Lessons for March

(International Uniform Series)

Lesson for March 4, 1934

JESUS' TESTIMONY CONCERNING HIMSELF
(Lesson Text—Matt. 11:2 to 12:50. Also study Isaiah 53:1-6. Golden Text—Matt. 11:28.)

HERE we are come to a consideration of what is the very crux of the history of our Lord's ministry. What did he claim for Himself? His self-disclosures were made upon many other occasions than the one treated in the text, yet the incidents recorded in Matthew 11 are clearly outstanding as showing Jesus' lofty claims. John the Baptist was in prison. He sent to Jesus to find out surely whether the One whom he had baptized at the Jordan were really the promised Messiah. To some it appears strange that John should seem to need confirmation of his faith after the great confession of Jesus as the Lamb of God. But poor John was human. Doubtless the tides of faith in his heart both ebbed and flowed. Perhaps he took this means of calling Jesus' attention to his lot in prison, hoping for the early establishment of an order in which his persecutors should occupy their own jails.

John's disciples arrived just while Jesus was in the midst of one of His great periods of miracle-working. They were no doubt already overwhelmed by what Jesus was doing before they received His reply to John. In that reply he simply pointed to what

they themselves had seen. "Tell John," He said. But let us note particularly that Jesus did not appeal to signs and wonders simply as such, but as signs which were, according to prophecy of long before, to be marks of the Messiah, God's Anointed One. (Look up Isaiah 35:5, 6; 42:6, 7; 61:1-3.) His own claim was presented as grounded upon and one with the Word of God written. And that involved not merely a claim of Jesus to be a meek master, or a perfect teacher or a spotless example, but it meant that Jesus presented Himself to men as the eternal Son of the Father, come to be the Lamb of God who should wash the sins of time away in His precious blood. How can Modernists praise the character of Jesus and yet ignore His solemn central claim about Himself and the purpose of His incarnation?

Lesson for March 11, 1934

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM
(Lesson Text—Matt. 13:1-52. Study also Isaiah 60. Golden Text—Isaiah 9:7.)

It should be confessed at once that it is hard for us to understand exactly *why* our Lord spoke His parables. If we read the text carefully we find that in each case the parable was spoken to the multitude and the explanation was given later in private to the disciples. Why? The disciples them-

selves wondered why and the answer of Our Lord is recorded. To the disciples it was given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, but not to the others. A parable is more literally a "dark saying," that is, a saying or story whose meaning is veiled. The multitude evidently was not prepared for teaching because it was not prepared to receive. Yet Jesus did not cease to speak to them in parables. And they listened. Why? Perhaps it was because the parables were bound to make them try to think. Doubtless the disciples themselves were more anxious to hear the interpretation simply because the meaning was first veiled.

Passing over the content of each of these parables, to which far more space would be necessary than can be taken here, we see that our Lord ended with a parable-like injunction to the disciples themselves. Doubtless He left this one to them to think out for themselves. To us as we read the New Testament the meaning seems clear. God had given the truth of the Gospel to the disciples. They were thus possessed of a treasure. That treasure was not to hoard, but to use. The well-instructed man will want to impart what he knows to others who are capable of receiving it.

The story of the Gospel is always a "dark saying" to those who *will not see*.

Lesson for March 18, 1934

JESUS RESPONDS TO FAITH
(Lesson Text—Matt. 15:53 to 16:12. Also