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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

A WORD OF APPRECIATION



WE have been greatly cheered and encouraged by the expressions of approval we have received relative to our November issue, if for no other reason than that they evidence not only a widespread interest in Westminster Seminary but widespread opposition to the basis of the proposed union with the United Presbyterian Church. We regret that our facilities do not permit us to make individual acknowledgment of all these and other expressions of sympathy and good will. We therefore take this means of

expressing our appreciation.

REORGANIZATION OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL



THE long awaited quadrennial meeting of the Federal Council of Churches has come and gone. At this writing information is not yet definite and explicit as to the completed details of the promised "reorganization." Regardless, however, of the mechanics of the reorganization we wish to make it clear that the council needs more than a coat of reorganizational whitewash. No matter how its structure may be modified, we are more concerned with the question of who shall dominate its policies

and pronouncements,—whether these shall be in the interest of modernism as heretofore, or of Evangelical Christianity. The selection of Dr. ALBERT W. BEAVEN, President of the modernist Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, to be President of the Council, the appearance of modernist speakers and emphases on the program are hardly calculated to assure us that the modernist leopard has now shed its spots.

THE "MARRIAGE OVERTURE"



THE overture now before the Presbyteries, relating to a change in Chapter XII of the Directory for Worship is unnecessary, concessive to a modernist view of human nature, and should be defeated. The Church has suffered long enough from the activities of those who continually itch to write new laws. Chapter XII as it stands is perfectly intelligible, and is consistent with the other standards, notably the Confession of Faith. If the new overture is adopted, as seems likely unless sensible

people bestir themselves and vote it down in the Presbyteries, the church will offer the spectacle to the world of possessing standards which contradict each other in letter and in spirit.

THE PASSING OF DR. PATTON



THE death of FRANCIS LANDEY PATTON, at his home in Bermuda, on November 25th, marked the passing of one of the most notable figures of recent times. Distinguished alike as a theologian, philosopher, educator and preacher, he would have been ninety years of age had he lived until January 22nd.

Dr. PATTON first came into national prominence in connection with the prosecution of Dr. DAVID SWING for heresy in 1874. Though Dr. SWING was acquitted, Dr. PATTON was elected Moderator of the General Assembly in 1878—a fact that bears witness to the change in temper that has come over the church since that day. In fact it would appear that his connection with a heresy trial not only led to his election to the moderatorship but to the establishment by ROBERT L. STUART of a chair at Princeton Seminary devoted to the study of the relation of philosophy and science to Christianity in order that Dr. PATTON's gifts might be employed in that connection. Dr. PATTON assumed this professorship in 1881 and held it until 1888 when he was elected to the presidency of Princeton University. In 1902 Dr. PATTON resigned as President of the University and shortly after was chosen to fill the newly created office of President of Princeton Theological Seminary—an office from which he resigned in 1913. Since that date—apart from occasional trips to this country to deliver lectures in exposition and defense of the Christian religion—he has been living in retirement in Bermuda.

While Dr. PATTON was not a great theologian in the sense in which his long-time colleague, the late Professor B. B. WARFIELD, was a great theologian; yet with no small theological learning he combined keenness of insight, philosophic grasp and a remarkable facility for expressing abstruse subject in language understandable of the people in a manner that made him the outstanding theologian-preacher of his generation. Dr. PATTON left relatively little in the way of writing, his most considerable writing being the publication of his lectures on "Fundamental Christianity" in 1926. He, like so many great men, had the defects of his virtues, in the sphere both of thought and action, but that he was a truly great man and that his influence was overwhelmingly on the side of the angels is beyond question.

Dr. PATTON's predominantly apologetical approach to his subjects led him at time to use language that was eagerly seized upon by the liberals to make it appear that he was in sympathy with their group. Nothing could be more absurd. Dr. PATTON remained to the last, as far as we have knowledge—and we think we have read all his writings—a firm believer not only in the Bible as the infallible Word of God but in the Westminster Confession of Faith as setting forth the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture.

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For What Are We Contending?

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

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IN the *Christian Century* of June 14, 1928, appeared a brief article on "German Fundamentalism" by Professor A. C. Knudson. The writer instituted an interesting comparison between "American" and "German" fundamentalism. In this comparison "German" fundamentalism is presented as dwelling on a much higher intellectual plane than "American" fundamentalism. A pathetic picture is drawn of an "American" fundamentalist seeking in vain to fathom something of the great work of the "German" fundamentalists. Says Knudson, speaking of Barth and others, "They certainly are not fundamentalists in the ordinary American sense of the term. What they at times say about errors in the Bible would shock the average American fundamentalist; and not only that. Their general theological independence would baffle him, their intellectual subtlety would dismay him, and their paradoxes would bewilder him. These German theologians move on a quite different level from that of the American fundamentalist movement. The latter is not devoid of intellectual vigor. Professor Machen and others who represent it have stated their case clearly and effectively. They know what they are driving at, and have argued their cause with skill and ability. But it would hardly be claimed for them that they are creative thinkers. They have shown considerable acumen in their criticism of current liberalism; but they have no new organizing principle under which they are rethinking the Christian faith." Still further Knudson tells us that the German fundamentalists do not "single out a number of specific doctrines . . . and make them tests of theological soundness." And finally they do not, with patent allusion to American fundamentalists, offer a "mere echo of the past."

We use these statements of Knudson as typical of a general attitude that seems to prevail with respect to American fundamentalism.

In the first place it is confusing to speak of American fundamentalism and include in that phrase the Reformed Faith as maintained by the Presbyterian and other churches. Reformed theologians are interested in the propagation of the Calvinistic life and world view, while



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many other "fundamentalists" are not. But we pass this by.

More important it is to note that every American fundamentalist entitled to a hearing believes in simple historical Christianity as a system of truth. The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., for example, asks of all its candidates for the ministry that they pledge themselves to a belief in the system of doctrine of the Westminster Confession of faith.

This Confession of faith contains a definitely Christian-theistic theory of knowledge. In this Confession God is thought of as the creator of the universe. Hence man's thought is derivative. It is primarily receptive. It is reconstructive of God's thought. This is the "organizing principle" under which the theologians and philosophers of the church have sought constantly to "rethink" the Christian faith.

This "organizing principle" satisfied St. Augustine. It satisfied Calvin. It satisfied Jonathan Edwards. These men met the "theological independence," the "intellectual subtleties" and the "paradoxes" of their day fearlessly. They disclaimed any "theological independence" that was out of harmony with their "organizing principle." What else could they do if as thinking men they had once adopted that "organizing principle" selfconsciously? If one could be called a "creative thinker" only if one adopted a new "organizing principle" they did not wish to be called creative thinkers. They did not wish to take for granted that a new "organizing principle" must be accepted merely because it is new. Hence they were not "shocked" at the "intellectual subtleties" of the heretics. These "subtleties" grew out of a non-Christian principle. They had been met and conquered before. And as for the "paradoxes" they appeared to resemble the paradox that Satan offered Eve when he said that man could become as God. Such is a simple reading of history.

All that the "American fundamentalist" claims for himself then is sufficient intelligence in order to adopt selfconsciously the "organizing principle" of St. Augustine. This comes to him first to be sure, as an "echo" of the past. Is there any one who does *not* as a child live by the "echo" of the past? Do men still spring full-grown from the

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Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever," and find in Him the everlasting Rock of Ages to which, amid the ebb and flow of man's fluctuating hopes and delusions, you can cling with unending and undying assurance. Friends and their favors may change; your hopes and plans may be shattered and crushed, but here in this Child is God's answer to your search for eternity, the solution of the mystery of the grave, the promise of Him who says, "Because I live, ye shall live also," whose eternity is the unailing pledge of our life after death.

Think of the other word, "Father," and remember that behind all the love that this word expresses and the confidence that it inspires, leading us to come to Christ as loving children come to their loving father, there is the majesty of power, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the very revelation of God to mankind. When Christ complied with Philip's request, "Lord, show us the Father," He answered, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." My friends, I pause to ask you on this Christmas Day, Have you seen the Father in Christ? Remember, if you think you have seen God in any other way; if you think you can accept God without accepting Jesus Christ; if you try to stifle the appeal of the Bible by asserting that you believe in a "Supreme Being" or in "the great Creator" or in "the Father of us all," and exclude Christ from all this, then you do not know the meaning of Christmas, and you do not know God.

"THE PRINCE OF PEACE."

But the sweetest note of the Christmas-message comes in Isaiah's last name for the Christ-child, "The Prince of Peace." Above all the hatred of a war-torn world the Christmas anthem "Peace on earth" goes out into the world to-night to tell men that the only way to establish peace with our God and peace with our conscience is to come to Christ and to believe that He has effectually and forever removed the discord that exists between the holiness of God and the unholiness of men; that He by His incarnation, by the poverty and suffering to which He as the Lord of lords and the King of kings subjected Himself, satisfied the claims of divine justice and offers to all the benefits of that momentous peace treaty between heaven and earth that has been signed and sealed by His very blood.

What more wonderful privilege could there be on the birthday of this *Prince of Peace* than to offer in His name, by His command, and with His promise the surpassing gift of this inner, spiritual peace of God? And what greater cause of rejoicing, even in heaven, than this, that some of you within the reach of my voice this evening who are still at war with God, who are still allied with the forces of sin and hell, come to accept peace—not the peace of the world, but the peace of the soul that Christ Himself, our Shiloh, offers, the peace which, because it transforms our inner life, is reechoed in our outer existence. I appeal to you who have never learned the marvelous joy of life that comes when the benediction of Christ's peace is pronounced upon

your sin-free soul; to you who do not know this peace because you do not show it; to you who, although you may to all appearances kneel at the manger this night, nevertheless harbor thoughts of hatred and envy against your fellow-men; to you young people who live in strife and discord with your own fathers and mothers; to you husbands and wives who are permitting the rancor of selfishness and dissatisfaction to mar the beauty of a happy Christian home; to you who professionally promote misunderstanding and bigotry in the lives of men,—I appeal to you and beseech you in the name of the Lord Jesus: Do not let this night draw to its completion without coming to the Christ-child in spirit and in truth, without asking Him for the forgiveness of these sore and besetting evils, and without receiving from Him this priceless, peerless peace of soul and mind. Thus, and thus alone, can Christmas be to you what it should be and what, pray God, it will be—the birthday of Christ, *The Prince of Peace*, not only in Bethlehem, but also in your innermost heart. Amen.

For What are We Contending?—Continued

foreheads of the gods? The point is that the "organizing principle" does not petrify as a mere echo of the past but is adopted with a full realization of all that this implies.

It is for this reason then that at least certain "American fundamentalists" who call themselves Reformed do not want the new "organizing principle" of the "German fundamentalists." The "organizing principle" of the "German fundamentalists" appears to be identical with the "organizing principle" of the American modernist; both deny the receptively reconstructive nature of human thought. Accordingly Reformed theologians disown the "theological independence," the "intellectual subtleties" and the "paradoxes" of both the American modernists and the "German fundamentalists" because they are satisfied that the adoption of all these tit-bits would be the death of their own "organizing principle." They will not accept these things even though they are new. They will not accept them even if such an acceptance would make "creative thinkers" of them. They would rather not create than create falsely.

We may add to this that Reformed theologians are satisfied that the "organizing principle" of American modernists and the "German fundamentalists" is not new at all. There always have been two and only two "organizing principles." The one is that of Christianity, namely the idea of God as self-sufficient; the other is that of non-Christian thought which at best believes in God as a correlative to man. All the "professional" theologies with all the "theological subtleties" cannot add to these two.

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We have seen that orthodox theologians who, for example, accept the "organizing principle" of the Westminster standards are not for that reason thoughtless traditional-

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stitute for them anything else, can never have understanding. Even a slight measure of departure from the truth as given on the sacred page, and at once the soul's vision is dimmed, and the position becomes that of error. For it is only by the entrance and acceptance of the very words of God, that light and understanding can ever be ours."

Does it matter what a man believes? The Communist's beliefs turn him into a raging demon filled with class hatred and the urge for violence. Bolshevism, with its career of blood and destruction, affords a contemporary, and undeniable illustration, of the far-reaching, revolutionary effects of the propagation of a vicious and destructive doctrine. In the early Christian centuries, the effect of the teaching of Romanism was to pervert and degrade the whole of Europe and the Eastern countries adjacent to the Mediterranean, under a bastard form of Christianity, into a gibbering, grovelling mass of humanity that writhed its way futilely up towards the throne of God by a broken ladder of incantations and incense and penances. That spiritual and intellectual degradation, held the minds and souls of men in its deadly grip till the glorious light of the blessed Gospel shone forth in undimmed splendour once again, with the arising of that God-inspired man, Martin Luther, who gave to the emancipated world Protestantism, with its pure ethic, its intellectual triumphs, its sturdy morality, and vitalizing spiritual dynamic. It was doctrine, the one false and the other true, that made the basic, revolutionary difference between the two. It is not criminal tendency, but the direct effect of the teaching of his peculiar creed that turns the Indian Thug into a murderer; or impels the crazy anarchist to hurl the deadly bomb at royalty. Strangest of all, is that amazing moral and intellectual aberration so widely held in America, which transforms otherwise reasonable and cultured men and women into fanatics that deny the intrinsic literalness of such palpable realities as matter, sin, pain, and death.

Today we have the movement called Buchmanism, with its airy statement that it does not matter what a man believes—whether he is a Fundamentalist or a Modernist—so long as he surrenders to Christ. Here is yet another sign of an age which would evade all intellectual effort necessary to set forth in dogmatic terms its spiritual convictions, which wants to blink all definite ethical responsibilities, and would throw all creeds into the waste-paper basket and live in a mush of sentiment. But every religious movement: whether Christian or non-Christian; whether of the East or of the West; must sooner or later be known by its creed. *The creed is the movement.* If Buchmanism has no creed other than the one so lightly offered us it brands itself as a thinly disguised Pelagianism which will disappear before the first sturdy enunciation of Christian doctrine and salvation by the Grace of God. And the devotees of Buchmanism, if they will be logical, must either be false to that Lord to whom they profess to surrender in so light-hearted a fashion, or else become believers-in and subscribers-to everything which His Spirit has written in the Book that bears His Name.

(Part Two will appear in the next issue)

For What Are We Contending?—Concluded

ists, as Knudson implies that they are. Similarly we can show that those who accept the system of truth of the Westminster standards are not for that reason mere traditionalists. As every minister in the Presbyterian Church accepts a theory of knowledge so every minister accepts a theory of reality when he pledges faith in the standards of his church. These standards present a logically coherent and consistent complex of ideas about God, man and the world. And all this comes, once more, as an echo but not as a mere echo from the past. If a theological student has been fortunate enough not to have had his curriculum cluttered with the non-sense syllables of "religious education" and the like he will have learned to accept or reject selfconsciously the "system" expressed in the standards of his church. And what he has accepted he has accepted as a *system* of truth, a system in which all the parts mutually depend upon one another.

It is this fact that Christian truth presents itself as a system that is forgotten by Knudson when he criticises the "American fundamentalists" for singling out a number of specific doctrines as tests for theological soundness. Knudson ought to know right well that the specific doctrines mentioned e. g., by the Auburn Affirmation are nothing but points of present attack on the part of modernists. Is it any wonder that the "fundamentalists" marshal their forces to those spots on the battle-line that receive most of the bombardment? Or does any one suppose that when Dr. Machen defends the "virgin birth" he could be quite indifferent about the Christian doctrine of God? On the contrary he defends one doctrine in detail in order thus to defend the "system" of Christian truth as a whole. So too, orthodox ministers make the "substitutionary theory of atonement" a test of orthodoxy when candidates for the ministry are examined because they are convinced that no one who denies that theory can help but eventually deny the Christian idea of God.

What ought to be plain is that the opponents of orthodoxy have sinned against the idea of a "system" of truth. They have torn out bits of flesh here and threads of tissue there. So Dr. J. I. Vance e. g. thinks he can reject several individual doctrines of the Westminster standards without injuring its idea of God. All this should cause the orthodox to be alert. They cannot afford to "fall" for the new because it is new and in fashion.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (I Cor. 1:20-24.)