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## Presbyterianism in Canada Today

By the REV. W. D. REID, D.D., of Westmount, P. Q., Canada

**P**RIOR to 1925 the Presbyterian Church was for many years by far the strongest Protestant church in the Dominion of Canada. For over twenty years, however, the question of union between the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches had been discussed in all the various conferences, councils and assemblies.

The Methodists and the smaller Congregational Church were wholeheartedly in favor of the union, but whenever the subject was broached in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church there developed a strong opposition. At last the proponents of union drove it to a final issue in the 1922 General Assembly, where their proposals were accepted by a considerable majority. In 1925 the union was consummated with a great fanfare of trumpets. At the same time the Presbyterians, rallied from all parts of the Dominion, reconstituted their shattered ranks and carried on. Out of a total membership of a little over 300,000, about 155,000 remained Presbyterian.

The United Church, claiming that the Presbyterian Church had gone into the union, determined to deprive the continuing church of the name, and laid claim to all the liquid assets of the church, including all the theological colleges and any future legacies. They failed to gain all they wanted in the matter of the colleges, and in regard to legacies there have been many lawsuits during the last 13 years, some cases even going to the Privy

Council in England. Most of these cases were won by the continuing Presbyterian Church.

Even the federal parliament recognized the church by inviting its moderator, along with representatives of other denominations, to take part in the opening of parliament. After 13 years of this contention the United Church has "magnanimously" allowed the Presbyterians to keep their name, and a bill was passed this spring allowing the church to retain the title of "The Presbyterian Church in Canada."

In spite of this opposition, however, the church prospered wonderfully until 1930. Many Presbyterians who had grown careless and indifferent, warmed up by the fight over union came back to the church and worked most enthusiastically for its welfare. Since that time, however, there has been a general slackening and many have fallen back into their original indifference. During the five years from 1925 to 1930, 30,000 members were added to the church; but since that time it has practically stood still, and may even have somewhat receded.

One of the peculiarities of the so-called union was that it was a ministers', rather than a people's, union. Over 200 ministers went into the union, while their congregations remained Presbyterian. Because of this, there was a tremendous number of vacant pulpits in the church. Word went out to all the English-speaking Protestant world that the Presbyterian Church in Canada needed ministers very badly. Any man who had

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## EDITORIAL

### Homrighausen Approved

THE recent General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. has approved the appointment of Dr. Elmer George Homrighausen as Thomas Synott Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. This action of the assembly is of special interest inasmuch as Dr. Homrighausen had published a book, *Christianity in America* (1936), in which he showed himself to be sympathetic to the theology of Crisis, that is, Barthianism. In that book Dr. Homrighausen reveals the usual Barthian attitude toward Scripture, as may be learned from the following words: "Few intelligent Protestants can still hold to the idea that the Bible is an infallible book; that it contains no linguistic errors, no historical discrepancies, no antiquated scientific assumptions, not even bad ethical standards" (p. 121). Has Dr. Homrighausen now changed his views on Scripture? Has he now rejected the dialectical theology? Has he now adopted the Reformed Faith that he should be confirmed as a professor at Princeton Seminary?

In *The Presbyterian* of March 24, 1938, there appeared an article by Dr. Homrighausen in which he speaks of a change of view in his doctrine of Scripture. In this article he speaks more conservatively of the Bible than he did in his book. However, as Professor John Murray has shown in *THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN* of May, 1938, Dr. Homrighausen's more conservative mode of speech does not btoken a real change of view on Scripture. In this article Dr. Homrighausen speaks of the Bible as a witness to the revelation of God; he does not speak of the Bible as being itself the revelation of God. In adopting this distinction, Dr. Homrighausen has followed the dialectical theologians and with them has forsaken the historic Christian conception of the Bible.

We shall have to turn, therefore,

to more recent writings of Dr. Homrighausen for evidence of a change of view on his part. In *The Christian Century* of April 12, 1939, he writes an article entitled *Calm After Storm*. In this article he gives an account of his theological career. "My boyhood religion," he says, "was a matter of dread at the thought of God's judgment." He soon left behind this religion of his childhood. When he graduated from the seminary he held to what he calls "a consistent theologico-philosophical intellectualism." After that he became a liberal. The liberal spirit soon began to thaw his "legalism" and "intellectualism" into a "glorious spring-time." After that he was "headed for Damascus" and was soon enveloped by the superior light of the dialectical theology. And it is largely by this light that Homrighausen has seen the problems of our day. He did finally reach an independent position, he tells us, but even after he had reached that independent position he had no doubt that the foundations of Barthianism were true. "To this day," he says, "I agree with the main tenets of the dialectical theology, and regard them as essential to evangelicalism if it is to revive and meet the issues of the age."

So far as this article of April 12, 1939, is concerned, we may, therefore, conclude that there is in it no more evidence of a real change of opinion than there was in the article of March 24, 1938.

We turn then to the last article that appeared from the pen of Dr. Homrighausen prior to the assembly of 1939, namely the article on *Convictions* which appeared in *The Presbyterian* of May 11, 1939. This article was evidently solicited by the editor of that journal with a view to the on-coming assembly. The editor says that the article of Dr. Homrighausen "ought to be a valuable document for commissioners at the assembly who have the decision to make regarding his eligibility to become a professor at Princeton."

The basis for this judgment is found primarily, we believe, in the fact that Dr. Homrighausen has in this article expressed himself still more conservatively on the doctrine of Scripture. We quote his words fully: "As for the Scriptures, I believe they are the only and infallible rule of faith and practice. The Scrip-

tures contain, present and convey the redemptive Word of God authoritatively, truthfully and accurately. The Scriptures give us saving knowledge of God's redemption. Their presentation of God and His will for our salvation is infallible and authoritative. We know the authority of the Scriptures by faith and the power of the Holy Ghost. . . . Any criticism that impairs the infallibility of the Scriptures as God's Word is to be repudiated. Further, I believe that the Bible has definite implications for science. Revelation does deal with the world and man, their creation, nature and purpose. We must be careful not to relegate the substance of revelation to a type of allegorical truth."

If now for a moment we take this statement of Dr. Homrighausen as a satisfactory formulation of the church's doctrine of Scripture, let us see what follows. By the acceptance of the orthodox doctrine of Scripture, Dr. Homrighausen is placed before a choice that he cannot escape. Assuming that he wishes to be consistent in his thinking he will have to give up his adherence to every form of dialectical theology or his adherence to the orthodox doctrine of Scripture. It is of the essence of the dialectical theology that Scripture cannot be the infallible Word of God. For dialectical theology Scripture can at best contain the Word of God as a vessel contains what is in it.

Now in the article of April 12th in *The Christian Century*, Dr. Homrighausen speaks of his attitude toward the dialectical theology and says of it that "its foundations were true," and that he still agrees "with the main tenets" of this theology. His criticism of the dialectical theology in this article seems to be summed up in the idea that this theology is "incomplete." Though incomplete, so the argument seems to run, the Barthian theology has done good work. What Dr. Homrighausen proposes is a supplementation rather than a radical rejection of the dialectical theology.

In the article of May 11th in *The Presbyterian* his attitude toward Barthianism is very similar to that expressed in the article just discussed. Dr. Homrighausen wants "to emphasize the reality of the Holy Spirit more than 'Barthianism' does." He says he is "more insistent" upon the historical nature of revelation than

some of the Barthian school. In this, too, there is no rejection but only an expressed desire for supplementation.

To be sure, in speaking of Barthianism Dr. Homrighausen does say: "Yet, I have my criticism of its persistent use of dialectic which seems never to come to a definite position." This might conceivably be taken as a rejection of the dialectical principle as such. Yet, to give it this interpretation would require us to throw out all that he has said about the true foundations and the sound tenets of Barthianism, and all that he has said about his desire to supplement it. You cannot remodel a house on a foundation which you know and affirm to be crumbling.

Someone might still argue, however, that the main contention of Dr. Homrighausen is to show that, though the dialectical principle as a method of theology be mistaken, it has done him the service of leading him to the truth. If this should possibly be his main point, why did he not tell us this without confusion?

The truth of the matter is, we believe, that the dialectical principle as a method has produced the "tenets" of Barthianism as a result. The two are inseparable. One should, to be consistent, accept both or reject both. If one has been brought by a wrong method to a right conclusion, it would be possible to state this fact in some clear-cut way. If Dr. Homrighausen now wants us to understand his doctrine of Scripture to be such that he no longer makes the dialectical distinction between the vessel and the content of the vessel, if he wants us to believe that his position is virtually identical, for example, with that of the late Dr. B. B. Warfield, he should tell us in plain language that he has done with the dialectical principle as such. If he does not do this we can only conclude that he is clinging to truth and to heresy at the same time.

Thus the latest pronouncements of Dr. Homrighausen are at best hopelessly confusing. His trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound. It is difficult to see how anyone so confused on the fundamental issues of theological thought can with clarity and conviction present the Reformed Faith to his students.

Let us look, however, at the statement itself. It speaks of Scripture as having implications for science. But any Modernist could say that much.

He adds that the Bible "does deal with the world and man, their creation, nature and purpose." Any Barthian could say that much. What does Dr. Homrighausen mean by creation? Does he hold to an actual temporal creation of this universe and of man? Does he believe in an actual historical Adam and Eve and in an actual historical fall of man? He tells us in another part of the article that he "is more insistent upon the historical nature of revelation" than are some of the Barthians. But this says nothing at all as long as he does not tell us what he means by history. Does he still cling to the Barthian notion that there is a revelation history which is essentially distinct from that which transpires in calendar time?

Dr. Homrighausen says of the Scriptures that "their presentation of God and His will for our salvation is infallible." Does he wish to introduce something here of the older liberal idea that Scripture is authoritative in religious matters but not in secular matters? If he does not, why the apparently studied distinction between the Scripture being infallible on matters of salvation and merely *dealing* with matters of science? With little or no additional space Dr. Homrighausen could have made himself clear on these points. He could have told us simply and plainly, by setting off his position from current heresies, that he has really returned to the orthodox position. As it is, a couple of isolated assertions with respect to belief in an infallible Scripture stand in the midst of other material that can and naturally must, in the light of his past, and in the light of his repeated insistence that he has even now not forsaken the dialectical principle of theological interpretation, be interpreted in an unorthodox way.

But granted we could overlook his Barthianism—which is absolutely destructive of the notion of an infallible Bible—where is the evidence that Dr. Homrighausen has now adopted the Reformed Faith? It is not to be found in the article on *Convictions* which the editor of *The Presbyterian* commended to the commissioners of the assembly as evidence on the basis of which they might judge whether Dr. Homrighausen was a fit candidate for a professorship at Princeton Seminary. Has it been wholly forgotten that Princeton Seminary is

historically committed not merely to a broad evangelicalism but to the Reformed Faith?

We do most heartily rejoice in the fact that Dr. Homrighausen has become somewhat more conservative in his theological position than he formerly was, but even his present position is at best vacillating and confused. It has not been customary in the past to appoint professors at Princeton who are merely "on the way" to becoming Reformed; of Dr. Homrighausen it cannot even be shown that he is "on the way."

—C. VAN TIL

## U.S.A. CHURCH OBJECTS TO CHARTER OF ORTHODOX GROUP

NOT content with the conclusion of the legal battle over the name of the denomination now known as The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has once more sought in court to bring pressure to bear on The Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

When the Kirkwood Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood, Penna., filed its application for a charter under that name, the matter was brought to the immediate attention of Stated Clerk William Barrow Pugh, who promptly set legal machinery in motion. Walter Lee Sheppard, Esq., attorney for the plaintiffs in the famous name case, directed a local attorney to file objections to the granting of the charter to the Kirkwood Church. These objections seemed to members of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church to raise the fundamental question of freedom of conscience and religious liberty in a very direct way.

Particular attention is called to objections 1, 3, and 4, which seem to indicate that the real nature of the objections is that, since the name of the proposed corporation includes the word "Presbyterian," it might lead persons to believe that that congregation is connected with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In other words, the objections involve the proposition that a Presbyterian congregation is not entitled to call itself such unless it is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The full text of the objections is as follows: