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GODLINESS AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

QUESTIONS like those as to the propriety of a Christian's use of tobacco or of wine have often been raised by Christians in America, and, as only a little knowledge of church history shows, the answers have been far from unanimous. Notably in the tradition of Methodism the answers have been in the negative while Presbyterians have generally recognized that such practices are permissible. Among Presbyterians, even where there has been a strong inclination, for one reason or another, to the practice of total abstinence, commonly there has been a free recognition of the rights of other Christians to follow the dictates of their own consciences in matters where the Bible has not pronounced judgment.

In recent months our attention has been attracted to a number of utterances, both public and private, which, appealing for "the separated life," seem to advocate the historic position of Methodism rather than that of Presbyterianism. One may recognize in these statements, and be enthusiastically thankful for, a zeal for holiness and godly living. If there is one matter on which we ought to be agreed, it is that there shall be an earnest concern for purity of life as well as of doctrine. No one can exaggerate the importance of adorning our confession of Christ with a life which shall not dishonor Him. Moreover, there is cause for rejoicing in the evidence of a recognition of the fact that the Scriptures are a rule of life as well as of faith, and that, consequently, no one may profess to love the Word who does not love its precepts and warnings as well as its promises and manifestations of grace. Nevertheless, it is our conviction that in some very important particulars the plea for a "separated life" errs seriously in its understanding and application of the Word of God. The purpose of this editorial is not to

discuss or criticize any one of the utterances which have been referred to, nor to review them as a whole, but only to set forth some of the principles of the Bible which, in our opinion, seem to be widely neglected or misunderstood.

OUR STANDARD OF APPEAL

The only standard of our judgment in these matters must be the Holy Scriptures. Not by way of appeal to tradition, whether to Pietism or Methodism, nor to the particular characteristics of any temporary situation, but only by appeal to the unchanging truth of God's Word can one hope to arrive at the correct view. As Protestants we have gloried in the liberty from the doctrines and commandments of men which is grounded in recognition of and obedience to the unique authority of the Bible. At the very heart of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, as of every true reformation, there has been the recognition of the supreme authority of the Bible:

The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (*Confession of Faith*, I: 10).

On some matters the Bible is very plain. No one can have any doubts as to the terrible implications of the following characteristic statement of the Bible:

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6: 9f.).

Other judgments, or positive calls to duty, while not expressed in a "Thus saith the Lord," may be deduced "by good and necessary consequence" from the Scriptures, and we insist that such principles of conduct are

the use which a Christian makes of his rights belongs not to the church nor to any other person but only to himself. Otherwise, love for one's neighbor loses its essential character through the introduction of the element of compulsion.

The burden of our plea then is not for an indiscriminate assertion of one's rights nor for any one particular course of action rather than another. Let love prevail! Through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the light of the Word love will dictate what use shall be made of

one's liberty. Oftentimes, the situation will demand that we refrain from the exercise of our rights. At other times, it may call for immediate instruction of our brother in the truth in order that his conscience may be informed and strengthened. In every instance we must keep before us the goal of the salvation and the edification of men's souls through our testimony to Christ. And let us take care that our testimony to Christ be to the Christ of the Bible. Jesus said, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Luke 7:23).

Karl Barth on Creation

By the REV. CORNELIUS VAN TIL, Ph.D.



Dr. Van Til

WE have seen in a previous issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN (Jan. 9, 1937), that though Karl Barth calls men back to the *Word of God*, he does not call men back to the Bible as Protestants are wont to think of the Bible. In the present article we shall see that Barth cannot believe in the Bible as the completed revelation of God because he cannot fully believe the doctrine of creation.

The story has frequently been told how the philosophy of Hegel and the theology of Schleiermacher has largely controlled the modern church. The sovereign God of the Reformers was eclipsed by a God who is *necessarily* instead of *freely* related to the universe. God was well-nigh identified with ideal principles in the universe. The immanence of God within the universe was stressed at the expense of His transcendence above the universe.

Now Barth launched a fearless attack on this immanentistic theology which we usually speak of as Modernism. He set fire to the whole structure of modern theology. He called upon men to return to the transcendent God, to the sovereign Lord, to God as the "absolutely Other." He called upon men to forget their pride, to cast away their schemes of interpretation, and to fall prostrate before the face of the "Lord of life and death."

Shall we not rejoice in this work of Barth? We certainly shall. We do not seek to save even the least bit of the house of Modernism. Yet we are once

more afraid that Barth thinks he cannot burn down the house of Modernism unless he also burns down the house of orthodoxy.

The Importance of the Creation Doctrine

It requires little argument to show that without such a doctrine as creation the house of Protestant theology falls to the ground. Man is dependent upon and responsible to God just because God has created all things and by His providence controls all things. If there is any ultimate power or principle beside God, man's final responsibility is no longer to God alone. If there is any ultimate power or principle beside God, the definition of sin can no longer be "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." If there is any ultimate power or principle beside God, Christ cannot execute His office as a prophet because in that case He does not know all things; He cannot execute His office of a priest because, even if He reconciled us to God, there would be other powers to be reconciled; and He cannot perform His office of a King because He does not control all things. In short, historic Christianity falls to the ground without the doctrine of creation.

What Barth Says About Creation

Yet Barth virtually rejects the Biblical doctrine of creation. In saying this we are aware of the fact that it is quite possible to quote Barth to the effect that he believes in creation. If we should go to Barth, notebook in hand, and ask him whether he believes in creation he might say, "Certainly I do." He could quote from one of his latest books saying: "Again heaven

and earth are not God's work in the sense that God created them according to some *ideas* in themselves given and true, or out of some *material* already existing, or by means of some *instrument* apt in itself for that purpose. Creation in the Bible sense means: Creation solely on the basis of God's own wisdom. It means, *creatio ex nihilo* (Rom. 4:17)." Or again: "The world having once been created by God (apart from sin!) cannot obviously cease to be determined by this decisive act" (*Credo*, pp. 32, 33).

Limitations on the Doctrine of Creation

Now these quotations would seem to indicate plainly that Barth is thoroughly Biblical, as far as the creation doctrine is concerned. How then dare we say that Barth has virtually rejected the Biblical doctrine of creation? The answer is that we are compelled to do so because Barth, by certain qualifications that he makes, in effect takes back everything that we have just heard him say. "But," says Barth, "the doctrine of Creation has its definite *limits* which have got to be known if that doctrine is to be rightly understood" (*Credo*, p. 35). A little further he adds: "There are definite and necessary *questions* of faith which are not to be answered from the doctrine of creation, or at least not unequivocally and completely" (*Credo*, p. 36). These "questions of faith" include "the possibility of" sin, evil and death. Barth concludes this section by saying: "In order to keep true to the facts, Dogmatics has here, as in other places, to be logically inconsequent. Therefore in spite of the *omnipotence* of God—or rather on the score of the

rightly understood omnipotence of God, Dogmatics must not at this place carry the Creation-thought right to the end of the line. It must rather explain these possibilities as being such that we have indeed to reckon most definitely with their reality, but are unable better to describe their real nature and character than by forbearing to ask for their *raison d'être* either in the will of God the Creator or even with Marcion and the Manicheans in the will of a wicked Anti-God. These possibilities are to be taken seriously as the *mysterium iniquitatis*" (*Credo*, p. 37). To this we must add Barth's words: "Projecting our thought 'consequently' along the line of the creation dogma, we should have in one way or another to deny the Incarnation, Miracle, prayer, the Church" (*Credo*, p. 38).

The Significance of These Limitations

From these quotations it appears that Barth, in order to protect God from being the author of sin, thinks it necessary to *limit* the creation doctrine. He says not merely that we, as human beings, cannot *understand* how a creature of God, wholly dependent upon God, can become a sinner, without God being involved in sin, but he says definitely that the idea of sin is *in reality* inconsistent with the idea of creation. So too he does not hesitate to say that the Incarnation is *inconsistent* with the idea of creation. Orthodox theology says that a creature became a sinner, without God becoming involved in sin. Barth says, in effect, that this is not possible and therefore we must hold that there is an original evil independent of God.

The Paradox-concept

At this point some one may object by saying that though Barth considers "creation" and "incarnation" inconsistent with one another, he can and does believe both because he thinks it quite possible to believe the inconsistent as the "paradoxical." But this escape, granted it were an escape, is not open to Barth since he himself says we must *limit* the creation doctrine in order to believe in the Incarnation. Often enough Barth says you can both have your cake and eat it, but at this point he says you *cannot* have your cake and eat it. If you wish to believe in the Incarnation, says Barth, you must *limit* your creation doctrine. We are compelled to affirm therefore that Barth has virtually rejected the doctrine of creation.

Other Emphases in Barth

This interpretation of Barth is in accord with the fact that Barth constantly connects the "Lordship" of God with redemption. Apparently Barth thinks that God was not "Lord" of man by virtue of creation.

In accord with this interpretation, too, is Barth's constant insistence, par-

ticularly in *Romans*, that the world as such is inherently evil. Barth refuses to take the Genesis account of an originally perfect creation and of the fall of man as being simple narration of fact (*Credo*, p. 190). Orthodox theology holds that man as such, and the whole of the universe as such, was originally made perfect but that sin entered as the willful disobedience of man. In opposition to this Barth holds that no one historical event can be of basic importance for all following historical events, and therefore, in effect, denies the fall. For the fall he substitutes some original "mystery of iniquity."

It will readily be seen now why Barth cannot accept the Protestant doctrine of Scripture. According to his philosophy man was not originally created perfect. Man and the universe that surrounds him are, for Barth, inherently evil. Accordingly, even God Himself, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could not use the human mind as a medium for the expression of His truth. The "human factor" in the Bible must always and of necessity indicate error and sin. There could never be a completed revelation of God to man.

And this leads us in conclusion to observe that with all of Barth's best intentions to call men back to the sovereign God of the Reformers he has in reality no "sovereign" God to offer us. Barth's "sovereign" God is severely limited by an original something that exists independently of Him, and works independently of Him. Barth frequently appeals to the Reformers and to such Reformation documents as the Heidelberg Catechism. But Barth could not preach, for example, on the first question of the Lord's day of that catechism without twisting it completely out of its natural and historical meaning. If his sermons do not flagrantly depart from the Reformed Faith, it is because, by a happy inconsistency, they do not reflect and apply Barth's theological principles fully. Only Reformed theology, based upon the doctrine of a really sovereign God, creator of heaven and earth, whose decrees include "whatsoever comes to pass," can bring men to a real *Entscheidung* (decision). Against Barth, as against modern theology which he seeks to oppose, we must once more raise the banner of a sovereign God and of His complete revelation in Scripture.

The Machen Memorial Fund

ON TUESDAY, February 16th, the Machen Memorial Fund Committee set as its goal the sum of at least one million dollars, to be used to provide funds for buildings and endowment for Westminster Theological Seminary.

The committee elected the following officers: Chairman, the Rev. Edwin H. Rian, President of the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary; and Secretary, the Rev. A. K. Davison, Pastor of the Covenant Presbyterian Church, Vineland, N. J., and alumnus of the class of 1931. The chairman was given power to appoint a sub-committee of three to five members, of which he himself should be one, to prepare plans for raising this fund and to report to the committee at its next meeting on Monday, March 8th.

The faculty, the Board of Trustees, the alumni, the student body and the friends of the seminary are represented on the Machen Memorial Fund Committee.

Said Mr. Rian: "The Machen Memorial Committee is appealing to everyone who believes in the Bible as the Word of God to help to establish an enduring memorial to Dr. Machen and to the gospel which he preached, defended and loved."