

The Presbyterian Guardian

January 9, 1937

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 7

One Dollar a Year

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Published semi-monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

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SHALL WE HAVE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS?

AS HAS been indicated elsewhere in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, a meeting is to be held at the Whittier Hotel in Philadelphia on the evening of January 11th to consider the question of the forming of Christian schools. We regard that question as a very momentous question indeed, and bespeak a very earnest attention to it on the part of all our readers.

If one looks out upon the condition of the world today, one has to be very blind not to see that something is radically wrong. Of course something has always been radically wrong ever since the fall of man. But when we say that something is radically wrong with the age in which we are now living, we are referring to something more specific than that great central fact of the presence of sin in the world. What we mean is that the deadly evil of sin is becoming particularly blatant in the present age, and that the sweet and gentle influences of the gospel of Christ somehow *seem* for the time to be stayed in their working.

Compare the state of public opinion today with that which prevailed forty or fifty years ago, and you will see that something little short of a moral revolution has come about. Forty or fifty years ago public opinion, at least in Great Britain and America, was in the main favorable to decency and to liberty. Today it is increasingly unfavorable to both of these things.

It is true, there are here and there indications that the sense of decency is not altogether dead. Even the enormous prestige of custom could not quite enable the King of England to remain on the throne when he contemplated marrying Mrs. Simpson. The abdication of King Edward was certainly a victory for Christian morality.

But the king who has thus abdicated has unquestionably great hosts of sympathizers, and unquestionably the trend of the times is in favor of toleration for the sin which he is contemplating.

As for liberty, that is almost everywhere prostrate. Fascism and communism, superficially opposed to each other but really twin sisters, are threatening to divide the world between them; and it seems doubtful whether persons who believe in civil and religious liberty will very long be allowed anywhere a place in the sun.

Underlying this widespread decadence in the field of conduct is a decadence in the field of thought. The licentiousness of the age is not due merely to a disregard of recognized moral standards; it is due rather to the fact that there are no recognized moral standards. Immoral conduct is quite generally defended by immoral doctrine. The existence of the law of God is denied. Men no longer believe that there is any very profound difference between right and wrong.

In the midst of such a world stands the Christian Church. We are not referring to the merely nominal Christian Church; we are not referring to ecclesiastical bodies like the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. that have officially dethroned Jesus Christ and that refuse to tolerate real Christian testimony within their membership or within their ministry; we are not referring to the Federal Council of Churches with its pseudo-Christian, Modernist preaching mission under the leadership of those who do not believe in the truth of God's Word. But we are referring to the *real* Christian Church. We are referring to those ecclesiastical bodies that really do endeavor with some sort of faithfulness to obey the commands which are found in the Word of God. We are referring to those groups of Christian

Karl Barth on Scripture

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



Dr. Van Til

IN order to appreciate the work of the great German theologian, Karl Barth, we must realize that he is seeking to burn the house of modern theology to the ground.

For this we are very thankful. The house of Modernism must be burned; it gives no shelter for eternity.

But Barth is also seeking to burn the house of orthodox theology to the ground. He has not merely started a fire that has gotten out of control. He holds definitely that our house keeps the wind from blowing on the fire he has started in our neighbor's house. He holds that both houses must be burned or neither will be burned. We can see something of this in his attack on the orthodox doctrine of Scripture.

Barth's view of Scripture may be summed up in the following words taken from his book, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*:

"The Bible is a literary monument of an ancient racial religion and of a Hellenistic cultus religion of the Near East. A human document like any other, it can lay no *a priori* dogmatic claim to special attention or consideration. This judgment, being announced by every tongue and believed in every territory, we may take for granted today. We need not continue trying to break through an open door. And when now we turn our serious though somewhat dispassionate attention to the objective content of the Bible, we shall not do so in a way to provoke religious enthusiasm and scientific indignation to another battle against 'stark orthodoxy' and 'dead belief in the letter.' For it is too clear that intelligent and fruitful discussion of the Bible begins when the judgment as to its human, its historical and psychological character has been made and put behind us. Would that the teachers of our high and lower schools, and with them the progressive element among the clergy of our established churches, would forthwith resolve to have done with

a battle that once had its time but has now *had* it (p. 60)."

Is the Bible the Word of God?

Can one read this quotation and doubt whether Barth is seeking to burn down the orthodox doctrine of Scripture?

But someone will say: "I interviewed Barth myself and I know that he believes in the Bible as the Word of God. I asked him whether the Word of God is *in* the Bible as the Modernist says, or whether the Word of God *is* the Bible as the Orthodox say, and Barth said the Bible *is* the Word of God. What more can you ask?"

Our reply is that we need something more than the sound of words. If we are to think of Barth as a man who has reasonably thought through his position, his contention that he believes in the Bible as the Word of God must be viewed in the light of his wholehearted acceptance of the principles of modern negative criticism and reconstruction. Whatever Barth may mean by saying that the Bible is the Word of God it is plain that for him this means something quite different from what it means to the orthodox Christian.

Does Barth Hold the View of Luther and Calvin?

A second objector may say: "You are right. The Fundamentalist cannot claim Barth as a friend. Barth is no servant of the letter. He believes no such foolish theories as those of verbal or plenary inspiration. Barth's Fundamentalism is quite different from American Fundamentalism."

"But, you see, Fundamentalism is a child of the scholastic era of Lutheran and Reformed theology. Luther and Calvin were no literalists, though they truly believed the Bible as the Word of God. And Barth's views are 'fundamentally in accord with early Reformation conceptions' (*The Presbyterian Student*, Nov., 1936, p. 8)."

In our reply to this contention we need not argue whether the "early Reformation conception" of Scripture involved the notion of plenary

inspiration. Even if we grant, for argument's sake, that Luther and Calvin held merely to the substantial correctness instead of the plenary inspiration of the Bible, Barth's views would still be utterly opposed to theirs. For Barth no book that is in any sense a product of history and the human mind can be substantially correct as *the Word of God*. Such a book may be substantially correct as a record of what man has thought but the Word of God, according to Barth, can never appear in anything like permanent form among men. Barth's activist conception of revelation makes anything like an orthodox view of Scripture impossible.

That Barth wants to ruin the orthodox house of Scripture completely may be seen still further if we think of what Protestant theology has often spoken of as the perfections of Scripture. Protestantism speaks of the authority, the necessity, the perspicuity and the sufficiency of Scripture. Does Barth hold to any one or all of these in the Protestant sense of the term? We believe not.

The Authority of Scripture

But is not Barth the great prophet of the Word of God today? Is it not he that is calling men back from the word of man to the Word of God? And is not he asking unqualified obedience to the Word of God?

We answer that he is in a sense, but not in the orthodox Protestant sense. Barth has told us with a thousand voices at every period of his development that Scripture authority is not and cannot be that of a once-for-all revelation of God. At times he even identifies the Word of God with conscience. He speaks of conscience as "the perfect interpreter of life" (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 9). His views lend themselves readily to Buchmanism and other subjectivist movements. Nor does Barth feel the least bit of obligation to accept as history that which Scripture presents as history (*Credo*, p. 190). Barth's activist conception of revelation denies the Protestant doctrine of Scripture authority.

The Necessity of Scripture

Next to the authority of Scripture the Protestant Reformers maintained the necessity of Scripture. "They considered Scripture to be necessary in virtue of the good pleasure of God to make the Word the seed of the Church" (L. Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Introductory Volume, p. 175). This doctrine of the necessity of Scripture was opposed to the idea of the *living voice* of God as maintained by Rome and the Anabaptists.

Now on this point Barth's position is much closer to that of Rome, the Anabaptists and the views of Schleiermacher, than to that of the Protestant Reformers. Barth makes it as plain as he can that Christian preaching must be preaching not of a Word that is ready to hand in Scripture. To think of the Bible as anything like a complete expression of God's will for man is, according to Barth, to limit the sovereignty of God. Barth's enthusiastic defense of the "Sovereignty" or "free grace" of God makes him a bitter enemy of the Protestant doctrine of the necessity of Scripture (*Dogmatik*, p. 37ff. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, p. 94). If Barth is opposed to "the modern use of the Bible" he is far more bitterly opposed to the generic Protestant use of the Bible.

The Perspicuity of Scripture

Protestant theology has in addition to the authority and the necessity of Scripture also maintained its perspicuity. The plain man can know what he needs to know by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If he compares Scripture with Scripture, and the less plain with the more plain he need not fear that he has missed the central meaning of it all. No *living voice* such as the Church of Rome is indispensable as an interpreter of Scripture.

On this point, too, Barth is opposed to the Protestant principle. Since for Barth no human language can possibly be the medium by which the Word of God may come to us directly, the Bible, written by human agents, presents a great heap of rubbish which must be removed before we find the Word of God. The actual words of Scriptures are but pointers indicating the direction in which the "Form" (*Gestalt*) of the Word of God may be found (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, p. 182). "Only God understands Himself,

also in His Word" (*op. cit.* p. 170). Moreover, we cannot even recognize our own act of faith by which we accept the Scriptures as the Word of God for what it is (*op. cit.* p. 234). The prophets and the apostles are so many people pointing their fingers upward, urging us to look upward, too, so that perhaps we may hear something of God's Word in the distance. For Barth it is of the essence of pride to think that we possess any plain words in Scripture that come to us and are recognizable by us as the Word of God. Rome took the Bible away from the common man before the Reformation; Barth is trying to do this same thing after the Reformation.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Finally we observe that Protestantism has asserted the sufficiency of Scripture. "The Reformers merely intended to deny that there is alongside of Scripture an unwritten word of God" (Berkhof, *op. cit.* p. 179).

With respect to this point, too, it cannot be denied that Barth has denied the Protestant doctrine. Speaking of the fact that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, Barth says: "The *oracles of God*, of which they are the possessors and guardians, are the comprehensible signs of the incomprehensible truth that, though the world is incapable of redemption, yet there is a redemption for the world. It is irrelevant whether they possess and are concerned to guard Moses or John the Baptist, Plato or Socialism, or that moral perception which dwells in all its simplicity in the midst of the rough and tumble of human life" (*Romans*, p. 79). And if one should think that this does not really represent Barth he may turn to the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Barth's most recent major work, and find essentially the same point of view. In this more recent work Barth is, to be sure, not so rash and outspoken in his rejection of the canon of Scripture. At points he even seems to plead for the necessity of a canon (p. 110). Even so, the canon is after all nothing but the precipitate of the Christian consciousness. The Scripture must never be taken as a completed historical document. The canon is but the starting point of the revelation of God and the preaching is the continuation of that same revelation (p. 104). The Reformers regarded the written word as the high-water-mark of the revelation of God; Barth regards the written Word as the unavoidable petrification of the living word.

Thus we see that Barth's doctrine of Scripture cannot by any stretch of the imagination be made to appear similar to the generic Protestant view. Is this a small matter? Can we overlook this as a detail? Can Barth be essentially sound on other doctrines if he is essentially unsound on the doctrine of Scripture? This could be only if the doctrine of Scripture were a subordinate doctrine for Protestantism. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of Scripture is one of the most basic doctrines in Protestant and especially in Reformed theology.

The Need of Christian Schools



CHRISTIAN parents and their friends are cordially urged to attend an important meeting in the interest of a proposed society for Christian schools, to be held on Monday evening, January 11th, in the Whittier Hotel, 140 North Fifteenth Street, Philadelphia. The speaker of the evening will be the Rev. Professor Cornelius Van Til, Ph.D., of Westminster Theological Seminary. At the conclusion of his address Dr. Van Til will answer questions on all phases of the Christian School system.

This tremendously important and timely question is of peculiar significance to all members of The Presbyterian Church of America, and it is earnestly hoped that a large number will attend.