

The Presbyterian



Edmund P. Clowney (left) was named Acting President of Westminster Theological Seminary at the May meeting of its Board of Trustees. He is shown receiving the congratulations of the Board's President, the Rev. LeRoy B. Oliver, during the Thirty-sixth Commencement exercises of the Seminary.

An alumnus of Westminster, Professor Clowney became a member of its faculty in 1952 following ten years in the Orthodox Presbyterian pastorate. He served as Dean of Academic Affairs beginning in 1962 and a year later was appointed Professor of Practical Theology.

MESSIAHSHIP MAINTAINED
Edward Wybenga

MINISTRY OF THE WORD TODAY
James Packer

WHY WE ARE SAD
Edward J. Young

STAND TRUE
Edward Kellogg

KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS
C. Van Til

SPECTATORS
Louis Voskuil

MORNING BY MORNING
Three Mothers of Ten

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Keep Yourselves from Idols

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

Little, children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (I John 2:18). It was with these and similar words that the last of the apostles wrote to the early followers of Jesus the Christ.

"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (I John 4:14).

How simple then the task that now awaits you who are called to be God's servants. It is the message of God's saving love in Jesus Christ with which you must go into the world. And the whole world lieth in wickedness. As for his own, to whom Jesus came, they received him not. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-12).

By grace you are saved. You were not wiser than other men. It is not you that have chosen Christ to be your Savior; it is Christ the Savior who has chosen you to be his witnesses. It is not you who by depth psychology have discovered the true need of man; it is Christ who through his servant John tells you that the whole world lieth in wickedness. It is not you — when you speak of *homo sapiens*, of 'organization' man or of 'irrational' man — who understand the nature of man. It is Christ who alone knows what is in the heart of man.

It is he who through Paul tells you that men walk "in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:17-18). It is the Son of God that "hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (I John 5:20, 21).

How Hard It Will Be

How difficult it will be to keep yourselves from idols! How hard it will be to discern the spirit of antichrist. If it were possible Satan would deceive the very elect of God. The antichrist appears as an angel of light. He enthrones himself in the place of Christ. He uses the words of Christ. He speaks even of the cross of Christ as that by means of which men must be saved. He speaks of the resurrection of Christ as the victory by which men have been and are being saved. He speaks of the kingdom of God in which all sin and unrighteousness shall be done away and men shall forever praise the Christ.

How often in the past has the church failed to discern the spirit of antichrist and therefore how often has it failed to keep itself from idols. How often the church has yielded to the idea that Christ has not come into the world, that he has not finished his work of redemption for his own in the world, but that he is identical with the ideals of sinful men as they would reform themselves and thus escape whatever punishment the gods may have for them.

It was thus in Luther's time. A great amalgamation had taken place. With pomp and circumstance the church of Rome was seemingly preaching the Christ of the Scriptures, but was in reality mostly preaching a Christ of its own construction. In Luther's time the church refused to stand on the gospel which Paul preached. Said that apostle: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . ." (I Corinthians 15:3). It was this gospel of the finished work of Christ for the salvation of men that the official church had toned down till little was to be found of it in its teaching.

Then Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Then Calvin came and,



"Discern the spirits and proclaim the Christ of God so long as your Maker and Redeemer gives you breath."

following Paul, urged men to turn away from idols, both physical and spiritual. All is idolatry that springs from the heart of the natural man, and a gospel that seeks for the cooperation of the natural man with the grace of God is not the true gospel at all, he insisted. Then did the churches prosper and "the Lord added daily such as should be saved." A great era of creed-making followed, finding its climax in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and the Shorter Catechisms.

The Broadening Church

In this country too the church made profession of its faith in the grace of God, but it was not to be for long. Soon the amalgamation process that had proved fatal to the spread of the gospel in the pre-Reformation church was to start anew, and with faster speed in the very churches of the Reformation. Dr. Lefferts A. Loetscher wrote of the *broadening church*, referring primarily to the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., but what he said applies pretty much to the decline of the Protestant church in general.

The broadening church has now become so broad that its leadership wants to have it adopt a new confession. In the Confession of 1967 proposed for the United Presbyterian Church a greater amalgamation between belief and unbelief speaks forth than the Roman Catholic Church has ever offered.

Paul asked the church at Corinth to stand on the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ "according to the Scriptures." The church is now

no longer to stand on this. Oh yes, it must still use these words. The Introduction tells us that "the Confession is intended to be Biblical throughout" (*Blue Book of the 177th General Assembly*, p. 29). The church must continue to speak much of Scripture. It must speak of Scripture as the witness, even as the "normative witness" to the Christ.

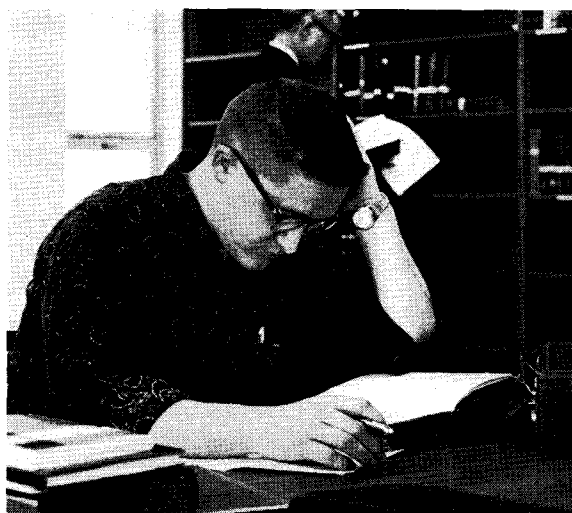
But who is the Christ of this new Confession to which the Scripture is said to bear witness? It is not the self-testifying Christ. That could not be. For it is assumed that if Christ is really incarnate in this world, then he must be thought of as participating in all the relativity of this world.

The Ancient Creeds

The new Confession, moreover, seems to speak with great respect of the creeds of the past. "In the ancient church," we are told, "salvation needed creedal definition in terms of the deity of the Redeemer. Later, the work of the Redeemer came to the fore, then the means of redemption" (*Blue Book*, p. 27). Do the 1960's no longer need a creedal statement on the deity of the Redeemer? Yes, we are told in effect, this decade needs this as information about what the church fathers used to believe and about what men in the first century used to think about Christ.

The church today, in genuine respect for the forefathers, carefully preserves the memory of what they thought about what men, living still earlier, thought about Christ. Not only the Westminster Confession, but other, and earlier confessions are to be included in a "Book of Confessions." All these creeds are to "stand in their original form and in historical sequence." A new Smithsonian Institute of Creeds will be erected, so that we and our children's children can see what our fathers actually believed about Christ.

What heroism it was for Charles Lindberg to venture across the waters of the broad Atlantic. What great faith in that feeble instrument of flight that carried him across the waters. But how much greater faith it was when our fathers ventured to lay out in neat conceptual arrangements the various relations within the three persons of the one God; or the relation of the divine and human natures of Christ. How did they dare thus to enter upon that which is inherently unknowable to man by means of con-



Said Dr. Van Til to the Westminster graduates: "Your whole training has centered about the Christ who died and rose again according to the Scriptures."

As the picture shows, that training requires diligent study!

cepts they themselves had to produce as finite and fallible men?

Unbelievable as it is to us today, they did so because they thought they had in the Scripture the very words of God. They "equated the Biblical canon directly with the Word of God" (*Blue Book*, p. 29). But now, those who introduce the new Confession argue, we are set free from the "doctrine of inerrancy which placed the older Reformed theology at odds with advances in historical and scientific studies" (*Ibid.*, p. 29).

The Westminster Confession "derives from an age of scholastic theology, of preoccupation with authority, and law, of churchly and political absolutism," it is stated (p. 20). We are free from all this. "The Confession of 1967 is not designed to define the faith of Presbyterians. The central elements of the faith of Presbyterians are all shared as well by other Christians" (p. 29). The Confession must set the pace in leading all Christians in taking advantage "of the remarkable advances in the doctrine of revelation in the twentieth century" (*Ibid.*, p. 42).

The New Man

This modern advance in "the doctrine of revelation"—on what does it rest? It rests on the new doctrine of man. Let Dr. James I. McCord, the President of Princeton Seminary, tell you in his own words: "Actually, the Reformers could not ask, 'What is man?' They did not have the tools and background to raise this question. They could only ask, 'What is man as sinner?' But the nineteenth century produced a revolution in biology with Darwin and his discoveries, to be fol-

lowed by a revolution in the social sciences and psychology" (*Theology Today*, Vol. XVII, 3, p. 294).

Unable to ask the question, 'What is man?' the Reformers were bound to have a mistaken view of Christ as man in relation to Christ as God. They could do nothing better than simply repeat the creed of Chalcedon with respect to the relation of the two natures of Christ to one another. "But with the coming of the nineteenth century there were new factors unknown to the Chalcedonians. One was the new critical philosophy of Kant, with its emphasis on the subjective limitations of human knowledge." Another was the "replacement of the old ontological categories with psychological categories, while a third was a new understanding and mastery of historical tools. Basically, therefore, the Christological question remains undealt with in our time in the terms that are now available to us" (*Ibid.*, p. 298).

In more pointed form Dr. George S. Hendry, also of Princeton Seminary, tells us about the new view of man that underlies the new view of revelation. Modern philosophy, he argues, has shown us, chiefly through Kant, that man is spirit. And spirit is free. God too is spirit. God too is free.

At one stroke this insight relieves us, says Dr. Hendry, of such difficulties as the Westminster divines had in relating the all-inclusive plan of God to the responsibility of man. The whole relation between God and man is now for the first time seen to be exhaustively personal. Science is now seen to deal with the world of impersonal relations, and religion speaks

of that area where man stands face to face with God.

The New Christ

It is thus that a new theology — a theology in which man is no longer a creature, no longer a sinner, a theology in which man first tells himself who he is — then makes a Christ in man's image. Having made a Christ in the image of man, the proposed Confession now asks all men everywhere to bow to this Christ. The new creed thinks of the apostles as making a Christ in their image.

If the Reformers, if the writers of the Westminster Confession, could not even ask the question, 'What is man?' then they could not but find wrong answers for the question, *What is Christ?* Surely, then, those twelve innocent fishermen of Galilee, far more ignorant of Immanuel Kant, cannot claim to offer a Christ that is better than our own! Away then with Paul's Christ who died according to the Scriptures and who rose according to the Scriptures. Let us worship the Christ that we ourselves have made and are remolding every day.

How sad, how inexpressibly sad this spectacle! The church of the Reformation is not merely returning to Rome. If it were only that! But it is far worse than that. If the Roman church sought to amalgamate the teaching of the ancient Greeks, and notably that of Aristotle, with the truth of God as it is in Christ, there might be said to be some excuse for it. It had not yet been clearly pointed out that Greek philosophy is an apostate philosophy, a philosophy by means of which the natural man sought to suppress the truth about himself as a sinner in need of grace.

There is no excuse for the modern Protestant church. The Reformers themselves and many a son of the Reformers have clearly shown that if men are to be saved from sin they must allow the Great Physician to diagnose their sickness and give them healing. He alone knows the heart of man.

Your whole training has centered about the Christ who died and rose according to the Scriptures. The whole world lieth in wickedness and is without hope unless you and many others with you bring this Christ to men. The spirit of antichrist is now welcomed into much of the Protestant church by those who ought to be the first to banish it. No longer will many

preach the Christ who died for men to set them free from the wrath to come. No longer will they preach Christ as risen from the dead.

But discern ye the spirits and proclaim the Christ of God "according to the Scriptures" so long as your Maker and Redeemer gives you breath. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Spectators

Louis J. Voskuil

Spectator sports are exceedingly popular in America today. The World Series even touches the lives of people not ordinarily baseball fans. Saturday afternoon finds millions of people around their television sets or in the football stands. But after all, why shouldn't spectator sports be popular? It is so much more comfortable to wrap oneself in a heavy plaid blanket at the 50-yard line than to feel bone and flesh crunch together on the field. How much more pleasant it is to boo a fumble than to be the player and watch the ball squirt away because of the hard knock of an opposing tackler. When it is all over, as the heater in the '65 Compact is turned on, one can lay the blame for the loss on the quarterback or the coach. After all, we paid for our tickets; that gives us the right to be grandstand critics.

One of the paradoxes in the history of the church is the fact that often, just when it attained a hard-won success, at that moment it had already begun to decline. Certainly it must have been a great moment for the harried, persecuted Christians in A.D. 313 to find out that the emperor Constantine had officially sanctioned the existence of the church with the now famous Edict of Milan. No more confiscation of church property! No more executions of leaders! No more imprisonment or tortures!

A new day had dawned. Soon the emperor was to honor the church with favorable legislation. But surely some of the faithful must have regretted that premature rejoicing. For although peace was certainly welcome, much

Mr. Voskuil teaches history in Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois, where this message was first given as a chapel talk.

came with it that was not. The church became identified with the status quo. It wasn't too hard to change from a veneration of pagan idols to a veneration of saint's relics; from the celebration of pagan festivals to the celebration of religious holi-days. The day of the spectator church had dawned.

Complacency

If one paid for his ticket, what more could be expected? The clergy were beginning to put on a pretty good show for the money. If one didn't like it, there was always the option of calling in a different team. The benches were comfortable, the building spacious and pleasant. Certainly this was involvement enough. It hurts too much to get on the field. The struggle is too rough, the opponent too powerful; besides, they play for keeps. I would rather be a spectator and look on, wouldn't you?

There is much in the contemporary ecclesiastical scene that lends itself to the sort of non-involvement that characterized the church from time to time. American society has been molded and formed to a considerable degree by Christian principles operative within the various churches of her past. Much of the spirit is gone but the form remains. It is therefore quite possible to live according to a certain pattern acceptable to the church, to confess an intellectual or historical faith in Christ and yet never really make that final commitment to Christ which the Bible has always insisted on as necessary to true faith.

One feels a bit uneasy about the role of the church in society today. Somehow it all too often seems a bit insignificant or irrelevant. Whatever one might say about the medieval church, it could not be ignored. Even kings quailed before her pronouncements. But no more. It is rather comfortable to sit there on a Sunday morning with the sunlight filtering through the colored glass windows. Then home to the Sunday paper and a meal of steak and baked potatoes. I wonder whether this insignificance of the church isn't due to the fact that the church today, perhaps even the churches in the Reformed tradition, is made up largely of spectators. The clergy in turn are touched by professionalism. The greater pity of this is that the rising generation, sensing something wrong but unable to make proper distinctions, may well reject the