

# The Presbyterian Guardian

February, 1938

VOLUME 5, NO. 2

J. Gresham Machen  
Editor 1936-1937

One Dollar a Year

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## A Christian's Plea in the Southern Church

### AN EDITORIAL

**W**HEN the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. (Southern Church) meets next May in Columbus, Mississippi, several matters of far-reaching significance will come before it: the proposed changes in the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the question of the re-entrance of the Southern Presbyterian Church into the modernist-dominated Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and an appeal to discontinue union services between a Southern and a Northern church in Baltimore. This last case was brought to the attention of readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN in the issue of April 24, 1937, page 33. Since then, it has passed through the Presbytery of Potomac, and the Synod of Virginia, and is now to come before the General Assembly.

#### THE FACTS OF THE CASE

Briefly, the history of the case is as follows: In March of 1937 Mr. Arthur W. Machen, a member of the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church (South) of Baltimore, on behalf of himself, his wife, and his son, sent a letter to the session asking that they refrain from the customary summer union services with the Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church, both of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

His reasons for the request were: the prevailing Modernism in the Northern Church, its corporate apostasy in the rulings of the General Assemblies of 1934 and 1936, the Auburn Affirmationist pastor of Brown Memorial Church, and the preaching of an unconverted Jewish rabbi in the pulpit of the Brown Memorial Church. The session according to its reply "after a thorough discussion, declined to make any change" in its customary summer union services. The complaint was then filed with the Presbytery of Potomac in the name of three members in good standing of the Franklin Street congregation. When that presbytery met in April to hear the case it voted, upon motion of Dr. J. H. Taylor of Washington, D. C., to go into executive session. The public having been excluded, the presbytery then passed a motion, again proposed by Dr. J. H. Taylor, that all references to persons in the Northern Church be eliminated from the complaint. Since the plaintiffs had chosen to present their own case through one of their number, the presbytery, after questioning this, passed a motion to give this complainant the right to speak. Mr. Machen then argued the complaint, carefully omitting any reference to persons in the Northern Church as presbytery had directed. He brought out clearly the heresy of the Auburn Affirmation, showing that the religion of that document is diametrically opposed to Christianity and the standards of the church,

tion to the task which God placed upon the Son of Man is a burden outweighing a thousand times the enmity to Him and the Father breathed out by the Demon of the pit. Hearing His *bride* speak and act satanically, seeing a human being, one of those for whom He is giving his life, become an instrument of Satan, observing the flesh in Simon Peter assert itself to take exception to heaven's law of atonement through fulfillment, and all that, mark well, at the moment of Christ's prophesying—that must have been Jesus' severest suffering up to this time. For He knows all the while that this same rebellion of flesh against spirit will presently nail Him to the cross.

Hence we do not wonder and we do not take issue with Him as Jesus curtly declares, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Silence is the response befitting this spectacle of the terrible grief which the Son of Man, as a true, complete, and sinless human being, felt at this time. Silence, and an offer of thanksgiving as we notice that the pure and perfect Mediator takes uncompromising issue with as little even as the mere idea that God's counsel shall not be fulfilled in Him, or that the heavenly plan of redemption, bearing with it the gift of eternal peace, shall not accrue to Peter and to us.

Tremulously we place our fingers upon our lips at seeing this consuming fire of holiness, these flames of love, the quick lighting of this prophecy, which leaps out at the slightest contact with satanic will and spirit, and which by that very spontaneity of its reflex action proclaims the immutable law of, and wonderful fidelity to, God's determinate counsel. We worship and praise the quick response which sensitively obeys God's justice and promise of faithfulness; we bow before the perfection which never profanes the flawless round of God's righteousness and truth.

What besides? Well, you and I are standing at the entrance to the temple of suffering. What if we should sometime be told: Behind me, Satan?

The question strikes us dumb. Full well we know that we, too, have earned that black and ugly epithet. As often as we fail to believe, to serve the Prophet, Priest, and King, we are satans to Him. O yes, He is no more with us as He once walked beside Simon Barjona, but His Spirit, we know, has returned to dwell with us; and as often as we do not believe

Him, as frequently as our hearts ponder some other way of redemption, we grieve that Spirit. And that familiar phrase, "grieving the Spirit," is the New Testament term for what before the day of Pentecost was called "being a satan to Jesus."

Yes, in us, too, flesh wars against spirit. For us also the entrance to the temple of passion is a place of amazement. There the Spirit of God begins battle against the flesh. There the atmosphere is oppressive. Fortunately, if we are really troubled, if we grow awfully tense within, the Worker of our salvation reprimands us for our overbearing impatience.

We shall have to make amends for such conduct long. It will be so throughout life. Even though we love the Lord our experience will be that of Simon Barjona, who was sent back into the place of instruction one moment and who the next minute again spoke satanically upon the mountain of transfiguration.

Our course, then? Shall we turn back, depending upon our inadequate selves?

By no means. You remember that we pointed out two high spots. The one was a ledge on the slope of the subjective life of grace, of the experience of faith, of apprenticeship with Jesus. On that level we, like Simon Barjona, have spoiled everything.

But when the vapors of hell have lifted, when the wrath of Christ's words has dispelled the nebulosity of Peter's misconception, we look up to that other height. There on that second summit, on the mountain of objective grace, Jesus still stands untainted by our pollution, Prophet, Priest, and King in purity and virtue.

To us, here at the beginning of the passion history, it is incomparable comfort to know that He stands so adamant on the threshold of the temple of suffering that not even the violent gusts of hell can cause Him to waver.

## More Barthianism in Princeton

A Review by the REV. CORNELIUS VAN TIL, Ph.D.

CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA: A CRISIS, E. G. Homrighausen. The Abingdon Press, 1936.



Dr. Van Til

DR. HOMRIGHAUSEN is Professor-elect of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is to begin his work at that institution in the second semester of

this year. It is therefore of interest to all Presbyterians to know what the beliefs of Dr. Homrighausen are.

Broadly speaking, we may say that Homrighausen is a Barthian. He resembles Barth in his vigorous attack on the Bible as the completed revelation of God to man. One quotation may suffice to prove this point:

I am not a Fundamentalist. I realize that there are abiding truths in that camp. But we have outgrown it. We cannot accept its literalism, its alliance with antiquated science. It is too static. It seeks to define too much, forgetting that all human definitions are only relative and tentative. It makes God too fixed a Being. It inclines to arrogance and pride. It also

tends to dry scholasticism. It is the ghost of the past trying to live in another day (p. 13).

This passage, besides giving us an insight into the author's conception of Scripture, tells us what he thinks of several other matters. Moreover, it is typical of the teaching of the book as a whole.

It is apparent from the passage quoted that Homrighausen does not merely withdraw from the position of holding to the plenary inspiration of the Bible to the position of believing in its general trustworthiness. He says Fundamentalism holds to an "antiquated science." Elsewhere he says that the Bible does not offer us a "theory of the world's origin" (p. 55). Or again: "The message of the gospel does not teach men something they do not know in the realm of agriculture, physics, or history" (p. 77).

All this is plain enough. Homrighausen does not feel bound to accept as a true record of history what the Bible teaches in the first chapters of Genesis about the origin and the fall

of man. He feels free to accept some other view, for instance, the evolutionary theory of the origin of the universe and man. In this way the author insists on the independence of the mind of man with respect to the Bible. The mind of man is not to be made captive to the obedience of God's will as expressed in the Scriptures.

We would call especial attention to this point. There are those who defend the policy of the reorganized seminary at Princeton. They reason that the appointment of Barthian theologians at Princeton need not be a matter of great concern. These Barthian theologians, we are told, have usually come from the modernist camp. They are on the way to the orthodox position. If only they keep on going they will sooner or later accept the orthodox doctrine of Scripture. It is too much to expect that "at the end of the day" they should be ready to accept the Bible as infallible.

### Revelation

On the contrary we believe there is no basis in fact for such an optimistic view of the tendency of Barthian theologians. There is, for instance, no reason to hold that the Barthian conception of revelation is more sound than the Barthian conception of inspiration. Together with Modernists the Barthians have to a large extent been influenced by Immanuel Kant's activist conception of the human mind. Accordingly the Barthians, together with the Modernists, hold to an activist conception of revelation.

The activism of Homrighausen's conception of revelation comes to expression in such phraseology as we find in the quotation given above to the effect that Fundamentalism "seeks to define too much, forgetting that all human definitions are only relative and tentative." This means that the author is opposed to the notion that a creed can be an essentially correct statement of the system of truth found in the Bible. He tells us that: "Denominational thinking is our curse, and our insufficiency. It is too provincial. It lacks wholeness" (p. 25).

It is in this way that Barthianism prepares the way for church-unionism. If the various denominations could only break the chains by which they are now held down to the rock they could together soar to heights as yet unknown. Homrighausen has great

expectations for good from the movement for church-union that gave vent to itself in the recent Oxford meetings (see *The Review of Religion*, Jan., 1938). It must be a source of great satisfaction to Dr. J. Ross Stevenson, retired president of Princeton Seminary and a leading exponent of church-unionism, that his successor, Dr. Mackay, is walking in his ways. Dr. Mackay, as his writings show, is himself Barthian in spirit. He invites one Barthian theologian after another to teach at Princeton. And Barthianism, by teaching that no church can rightfully hold to a creed, prepares the way for church-union.

### Relativism

But we cannot stop here. The relative and tentative character of all human definitions applies, according to Homrighausen, to the Bible as well as to the Confessions. We could give several quotations, besides the one given above, to prove this point. We call attention to the following: "Surely, there are many things about the Bible and Christian history that we cannot hold today. Surely, the clothing in which the gospel was dressed needs to be replaced with modern thought-forms" (p. 49). We have grown familiar with this type of argument from the writings of Barth. The contention is that God's Word, simply because it expresses itself in human thought forms and in human language, becomes for that very reason tainted with incompleteness and falsehood.

Could anything be more definitely opposed to the Biblical idea of revelation? That idea of revelation contemplates the mind of man as made in the image of God and as therefore a fit medium for the expression of the will of God. To be sure, the mind of man has been vitiated by sin through the fall of man. Even so the Holy Spirit can guide the mind of sinful man and use it as the medium for the infallible expression of His will. By the use of a simple illustration we can perhaps indicate something of the difference between the Barthian and the Biblical view of the human mind. The Biblical view says that the mind of sinful man is like a knife that has dropped into the mire. The Holy Spirit washes the knife and then uses it to cut the bread of life. The Barthian view says that even if the Holy Spirit washes the

knife it is still unfit as a tool with which to cut the bread of life.

The result is that the bread of life really cannot be cut. The human mind which is thus seemingly reduced to a very humble station is nevertheless given such power as to be able to keep God from revealing Himself clearly anywhere. All the human minds have banded together and are engaged in a sit-down strike on the property of God. They have spread the tear-gas of relativity everywhere.

We see, then, that there seems to be no justification for optimism in regard to Princeton Seminary. Princeton Seminary is supposed to be a Reformed institution. But now President Mackay virtually identifies Barthianism with the Reformed Faith, as the following quotation shows: "It is the Reformed theologians like Barth and Brunner who have smashed the presuppositions of the theology of modernism and rekindled faith in the Scripture and historic Christianity" (*Bulletin of Princeton Theological Seminary*, November, 1937). But we have seen in this review of the book of Homrighausen, and in previous articles on Barth in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, that Barthian theology is destructive of the Bible and of historic Christianity. Ministers and elders of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. ought to realize that if they allow Barthianism to reign in their chief citadel of theological learning they may be asked to scrap the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Bible as the infallible Word of God and even historic Christianity. Dr. Mackay apparently hopes to make Barth the rallying point for believers in historic Christianity. But Barth, the destroyer of historic Christianity, can never be made the rallying-point for the defenders of historic Christianity.

### Erratum

THROUGH a typographical error the poem on page 16, column two, of the January number was incorrectly quoted. The correct rendering is as follows:

"Yea thro' life, death, thro' sorrow  
and thro' sinning  
He shall suffice me, for he hath  
sufficed:  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the  
beginning,  
Christ the beginning, for the end  
is Christ."