

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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Editorial Notes and Comments

ASSOCIATION FOR THE REEMPHASIS OF NEW TESTAMENT MISSIONS

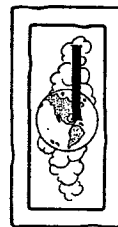


THE formation of an organization to oppose the adoption of the recommendations of the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry to be known as "The Association for the Reemphasis of New Testament Missions" has been announced. This association, according to newspaper reports, is the result of a series of luncheon conferences that have been held in the Calvary Baptist Church of New York City and will be headed by the Rev. Dr. JOHN W. BRADBURY, pastor of the Wadsworth Avenue Baptist Church of that city. Its executive committee includes prominent ministers and laymen from various evangelical denominations. A mass meeting in its interest has been announced to be held Monday evening, March 20, in Calvary Baptist Church of New York City of which the Rev. Dr. WILL H. HOUGHTON is pastor—a meeting that will have been held before this issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY reaches its readers.

That there is need of such an organization is unquestionable. It is heartening to read the statement attributed to Dr. BRADBURY, to wit: "The authoritative nature of the appraisal report has seriously disturbed the confidence of many in the whole missionary enterprise. At a time of deep religious depression, it comes to dampen ardor and to discourage faith. Realizing the need of facing the distinct modernism of the report and the dire need of repudiating its misinterpretation of missions as a human enterprise, we have formed a group of representatives of many denominations and assemblies to reaffirm our faith in and support of Christian missions." God grant that this association may realize its aim "to rally to the standard of Christian missions every loyal Christian in the land."

But while we rejoiced when we learned that an association had been formed to oppose the so-called Laymen's report this rejoicing waned considerably when the newspapers reported that Dr. BRADBURY had declared that this particular association "marked a cleavage between humanism and evangelism rather than between modernism and fundamentalism." If this means that the association is going to oppose humanism on the mission field but that it is not going to oppose modernism we think that the sooner it is disbanded the better. It is difficult to believe that such is the case, in view of the make-up of its executive committee, but such a statement on the part of its president is certainly disturbing. No doubt the aims and purposes of the association will find full statement in connection with the mass meeting on the 20th of March. In the meantime we view its formation with hope mingled with dread.

CANDIDATES IN AND OUT



IN our January issue we noted the fact that Dr. WILLIAM HIRAM FOULKES had been put forward as a Candidate for Moderator of the forthcoming Assembly. Inasmuch as Dr. FOULKES represents a point of view in the Church with which we are not in agreement, we expressed ourselves as not being in favor of his candidacy. The "organization" has apparently decided to back someone else, for Dr. FOULKES has now of his own motion taken himself out of the running.

The latest name to be mentioned is that of Dr. JOHN McDOWELL, a Secretary of the Board of National Missions. That Dr. McDOWELL has great abilities no one can deny, but that these abilities have been directed to the maintenance and defense of the faith, no one would have the *naivete* to affirm. Dr. McDOWELL'S election would please many,—particularly those whose chief interest is in the Church as a piece of machinery, and advocates of the so-called "social gospel." But it would not please those who want to get back to the power of the Gospel of the Blood, and away from Modernism in thought and emphasis. The Church should look further.

DR. VAN TIL'S INDICTMENT OF BUCHMANISM



THE BANNER, the organ of the Christian Reformed Church, in its issue of February 10th, contains an extended review and criticism of A. J. RUSSELL'S book *For Sinners Only* "a book written by a Buchmanite about Buchmanism"—by Professor CORNELIUS VAN TIL of Westminster Seminary. Dr. VAN TIL'S competency for this task cannot be successfully challenged. We content ourselves with citing certain passages indicative of his main criticisms together with the "summing up" with which he concludes. Some of the more significant passages follow:

"Buchmanism is typically modern because a typically modernist movement. This may be seen from the method it employs in the spreading of its principles as well as from these principles themselves."

"Christianity is the truth and truth cannot even be brought to the threshold of one's mind except by conceptual presentation. You cannot 'intrigue' the imagination of an audience with the real person and work of CHRIST unless you tell people plainly and simply what the person and work of CHRIST is. Add to this that there are several 'CHRIS'S' today with which Modernists are seeking to 'intrigue' men's imaginations and it becomes apparent how utterly unsound, both theologically and psychologically, Buchmanism is. The whole movement fits in with the anti-intellectualism of our day."

New, Significant Books

Vance, Brightman, Nelson, Price, Bird, von Maltzahn

WORSHIP GOD. By James I. Vance, D.D., LL.D., Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, London and Edinburgh.

THIS book of Dr. Vance tends greatly to confuse the reader. On the one hand Dr. Vance quotes the Westminster Catechism definition of God (p. 39) and speaks of it very highly and on the other hand it appears that he does not believe in the God of the Westminster standards at all. If Dr. Vance really believed the Westminster definition of God he would have upheld the "system of doctrine" of the confession as a whole. The Westminster Confession presents a carefully elaborated and logically coherent system of truth. We cannot believe parts of it without believing the whole. Yet it is this that Dr. Vance tries to do. He definitely rejects the Westminster doctrine of Scripture when he says that he believes Scripture because it inspires him (p. 78). That is placing the subjective prior to the objective while the Confession places the objective prior to the subjective. Dr. Vance definitely rejects the Westminster view of eternal punishment. He even ridicules the idea and says it is one of the causes of Atheism. Speaking of people who have a tendency to disbelieve in God he says, "They think of God as a monster, a cruel despot, a vengeful Deity, the creator of an endless hell, flaming with unspeakable torments, Who gets His fun in life by making bonfires of the wicked." People who have this idea of God cannot be blamed for wanting to get rid of Him (p. 24). Dr. Vance will not blame us then if we do not take his statements about belief in the God of the Westminster standards seriously. If he wanted us to take him seriously at this point he should have tried to prove that the Westminster standards do not present a system of doctrine but that one can pick out what he pleases and deny or ignore what he pleases.

But we are not left to infer that Dr. Vance does not believe in the God of the orthodox church. He tells us frankly in other sections of the book that he does not believe in Him. He speaks of the traditional concept of God as a "static Deity" in which it is quite absurd to believe. (p. 46.) And when we then ask him what sort of a progressive Deity he would substitute for the "static" one he answers that it is a deity that is subject to time. Dr. Vance does away at one stroke with the qualitative difference between the eternity of God and the temporal limitations of man when he

says "Time is a part of eternity" (p. 49). On this point Dr. Vance is in perfect agreement with the pragmatic philosophers.

Yet it is amusing to note that Dr. Vance thinks his complete rejection of our God as being a matter of detail. Says he at another point, "This may not be your idea of God. Yours may be different. We will not quarrel about our differences. We will not destroy the canvas because we fail to see the same thing in the picture. We will think of the great Father, and draw closer together as we fare on toward our long home" (p. 37). All this is in the interest of church union since "sectarianism is dying." (p. 12). But if Dr. Vance expects us to worship his God with him he ought to have given us some reasons for rejecting our God. He cannot expect us to worship our God and our devil at the same time.

But suppose that for the moment we absolve Dr. Vance from the duty of close reasoning on this question and try to worship his God with him. We would soon discover that our worship would return to our bosoms. The worship of the God of Modernism, the worship of the God of Pragmatism is the worship of man. The religion of Modernism is the "Religion without God" so well described by Paul Sheen. Dr. Vance should have changed the title of his book into "Worship Man" or better still, "The Death of Worship."

C. VAN TIL.

IS GOD A PERSON. By Edgar Sheffield Brightman, Borden Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy in Boston University. Association Press, 1932. New York: 347 Madison Avenue.

IN this small book of Professor Brightman we are on a much higher intellectual plane than we were in the book of Dr. Vance. There is close reasoning in this book. And the reasoning is in the interest of the same sort of God as the one Dr. Vance believes in. Both men are opposed to the traditional view of God. Both men speak of the traditional idea of God as being the idea of a "static" God. Says Brightman, "There are at least two possible ways of looking at the divine perfection. It may be regarded as absolutely complete and so as incapable of being improved in any way whatever. While this is the traditional and hence 'natural' view of most Christians, it has serious consequences. If the divine perfection is absolutely complete and static, then there is no motive for God's ever doing

anything, for he could not become better and any change from perfection would inevitably make him worse." (p. 63.) Because of this difficulty Brightman believes in a God "whose perfection consists in his eternal perfectibility." (p. 64.)

We notice then that the God of Brightman as well as the God of Vance is the God of ordinary philosophical pragmatism. It is well to remember this in view of the fact that there seem to be not a few. Christian theologians who think that in the Boston school of personalism one can find a fairly good foundation for orthodox Christianity. The plausibility of this contention is due to the fact that the Boston personalists make a great deal of the distinction of their position from that of pragmatism and other types of philosophy. Yet it is not difficult to see that any philosophy that does away with the qualitative difference between God and man by bringing God into the temporal flux stands by virtue of that fact in radical opposition to Christianity.

Yet strange to say Brightman thinks that he is interpreting the really Christian idea of God. Says he, "The God of Christianity is a suffering, dying and rising God. Shall the Father be exempt from the experiences which faith has freely ascribed to the Son? Just as Jesus reveals the love of God, so also he reveals his suffering." (p. 66.) Now surely Professor Brightman knows that faith has never ascribed suffering to any of the persons of the trinity. On the contrary the church has guarded against that idea most carefully by teaching that the divine person of Christ assumed a human nature and suffered in his human nature only. The whole of the Chalcedon creed was formulated in order to keep out the heresy that Brightman is asking us to accept as a matter of course. The Chalcedon creed was formulated in order to guard against the mixture of time and eternity in the idea of the incarnation. It were better then if the Boston personalists would simply say that they are breaking off all connections with traditional Christianity. They ought to do this in pity on the poorly indoctrinated ministers who once "had" church history and who once upon a time studied "Hodge" but who are now too busy to trouble with such "details."

With respect to the argument against the traditional conception of God as voiced by Brightman we would say that it is only the traditional God that gives any meaning to history at all. Without the traditional God human experience rests upon chaos and operates in a void. It is one thing to accept a belief that has difficulties; it is quite another to accept a belief that reduces experience to nonsense. We believe not in a personal God *within* the Universe but in *the* personal God as the presupposition of the universe.

C. VAN TIL.