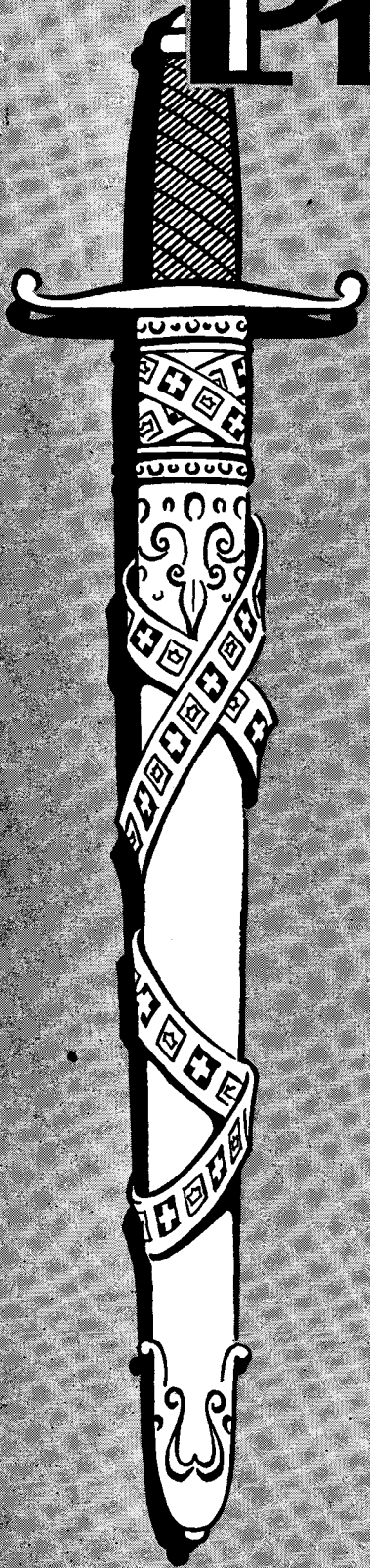


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THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD



THE PRESBYTERIAN
CONSTITUTIONAL
COVENANT UNION

Books

"A Christian Manifesto," by Edwin Lewis, D.D., Professor of Theology in Drew Theological Seminary (The Abingdon Press, New York, \$2.00).



Dr. Van Til

PROFESSOR EDWIN LEWIS, of Drew Theological Seminary tells us in the foreword of his book that he has been asked if he has "slipped back into orthodoxy." Many of his former Modernist friends and many of his new conservative friends seem to think that he has. We cannot agree with this opinion.

Naturally we do believe that Dr. Lewis deserves a good deal of credit for turning away to an extent from an outspoken Modernism. Then too there are many points in the book, which, if taken by themselves, are praiseworthy. But this by no means signifies that Dr. Lewis is now orthodox.

In proof of our contention we need not stop to discuss Dr. Lewis' low view of the Old Testament and his belief in evolution. We can pass on at once to his rejection of several New Testament doctrines.

Discussing Paul's Epistle to the Colossians Dr. Lewis says: "For the modern scholar, there are problems a-plenty connected with the Epistle, as you may discover for yourself by reading a good commentary—say that of Ernest F. Scott. One of these has to do with what might be called 'the world-view' of the Epistle, with its inclusion of 'discarnate intelligences' that range some of them above the human level and some of them below. Paul apparently takes for granted the actuality of these intelligences. The universe he believes in is inhabited to the farthest bounds. The modern man is skeptical at this point: for him angels and demons and the like belong in the realm of exploded myths, and an argument for anything, even for so exalted a claim as is here made for Christ, leaves him cold, if the argument assumes that such beings actually exist. So Colossians, with the daring flight of

its thought which advances by bold and ever-increasing circles until it arrives at last at the Great White Throne and the transcendent Lord, even Jesus Christ, 'pre-eminent over all,' must be brushed aside. Once it may have meant something, but it means nothing today. There is, indeed, an 'ethical section' in the latter half of the Epistle, as is so often the case in Paul's writings, and this still carries an appeal, but as for the rest of it—no! But here again we need our distinction between the peripheral and the central. The only reason why Paul brings in his angelic lords and celestial powers is to affirm their complete subordination to One in whom dwells 'all the Fullness of God.'" (p. 60.)

A little further Dr. Lewis adds: "You say you cannot believe all this fantastic speculation about intermediate beings. You say you cannot visualize such a universe as Paul here assumes. Nobody is asking you to do so. That is not the point of the Epistle at all. The message is what counts, not its wrapping. If you wish you may criticize and even, I suppose, reject the cosmology of Colossians as you may criticize and reject the philosophy of the law in Romans." Comment on this passage is really superfluous.

The "cosmology" of Colossians includes, e.g., the doctrines of creation (Chap. 1:16) and of providence (Chap. 1:17). The whole of the Christian conception of redemption is built upon these doctrines. Are the "powers of darkness" of which Paul says Christ delivered us created powers? If so, Christ can save us from them; if not, if they exist by their own power, even the "pre-eminence of Christ" will be helpless against them. The meaning of the phrase "the pre-eminence of Christ" is one thing when brought into relation with the doctrine of creation and quite the reverse when taken in connection with the doctrine of evolution as Dr. Lewis takes it.

It is plain not only from the passages quoted but from the argument

of the whole book that Dr. Lewis does not believe in any thing like a system of truth. All the labour of the church in searching out a system of truth from the Scriptures, has according to Dr. Lewis, really been in vain. Truth is relative. Says Dr. Lewis: "Augustine affirming man's moral incompetency and Pelagius affirming man's moral competency may both be right." (p. 107.) This amounts to saying that man can be a sinner and yet not a sinner at the same time and in the same sense. Thus the death of Christ was both necessary and unnecessary. All this fits in well with modern Irrationalism but is quite the opposite from the system of truth found in Scripture.

But can Dr. Lewis really mean that truth is relative? Does he not merely wish to intimate that we as human beings cannot comprehensively understand the system of truth as it is presented to us in Scripture? Would he go so far as to say that God has no comprehensive plan? There can alas be no doubt as to the answer. We again give Dr. Lewis' own words on this point: "Because of man's sin, something happened to God's plan. Because of God's grace, something happened to God himself. If one dare write such words, God admitted into his being an alien element, with the ensuing necessity of undergoing structural reorganization. The claim that there has been such a structural change in God must be true, and it must be a revelation, because nobody could have had the audacity to imagine it, and because the statement of it, with the reasons that made the change necessary, has such an overpowering influence on the mind that accepts it. For evermore the God of the Christian bears a scar, and the scar is not a birthmark he could not help but a wound received in a freely chosen cause." (p. 170.)

It is clear from such passages as these, which but represent the main argument of the book, that Dr. Lewis has not "slipped back into orthodoxy." We should certainly rejoice if he had; as it is we can only be sorry that he has not.

Dr. Lewis has not really offended the modern mind as he seems to think he has. Very little remains of the gospel if it is handled as Dr. Lewis has handled it.

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