

**October 15, 1957**

**Vol. 26, No. 9**

*The Presbyterian*

**G U A R D I A N**

**CONTENTS**

*New Evangelicalism*

*By C. Van Til*

*Peace and Conscience*

*By Lawrence R. Eyres*

*Injury to the Profession*

*By Henry Fikkert*

**Editorials — News**

# The New Evangelicalism

Address of Welcome to Students

Entering Westminster Seminary

By CORNELIUS VAN TIL

FOR THE FACULTY and for the student body I now desire to welcome all those students who have come to us for the first time.

You have come, no doubt, to prepare yourselves further for the teaching or the preaching of the Word of God. With Paul, the apostle, you wish to know nothing among men save Christ and him crucified. You desire to tell men "how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

In this your determination we rejoice. It is our duty as well as our joy to help you prepare yourselves for this task. We are here to help you in class and out of class in the period of your preparation.

You will, we trust, find great joy and peace of mind as you pursue the study of the scriptures day by day. A man working his way to the top of Mt. Olympus sees his vision broaden as he goes, and never ceases to marvel at the panoramic view as he approaches the peak. So you will be elated as you see man and his doings, even the whole world and its history, in the light of Christ who is the truth. Your desire to bring the Christ who is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption to all men everywhere will increase in intensity as you see him through his Spirit translate them from darkness into light, and from death unto life. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Christ nor destroy the kingdom he has come into the world to establish.

And when you see the opposition of the world in its effort to swallow up and thus neutralize the work of the Christ, you will turn to the words of Paul the Apostle: "where are the wise; where are the scribes; where are the disputers of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not

God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

\* \* \*

Does all this mean that as a faculty we promise to take you to the top of Mt. Olympus on a four-lane highway by means of a high-powered modern automobile? Not at all. Every one of you must struggle upward on his own feet. We are at most your guides. Neither we nor you are in ourselves beyond the danger of falling into the crevice below. Only by much prayer and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit can you expect to make progress at all.

And there will be those who meet you on the upward way seeking to dissuade you from going on. And these, strange to say, are ministers in the church. They are teachers of the Christian religion. They even profess to do the proper work of the ministry, namely, bring Christ, the Christ of the scriptures, to men.

These men will take you aside and seek to persuade you that you must, to be sure, bring men the Christ of the scriptures but not the Christ of an *inerrant* Scripture. The assumptions underlying the historic view of the inerrancy of Scripture, they will tell you, "are not examined and cannot be substantiated" (Marcius E. Taber in *The Christian Century*, July 3, 1957). It is not possible, they will argue, that human language should "formulate precise and completely adequate statements concerning the moral, spiritual and metaphysical verities of our universe not only for our contemporaries but for future generations as well" (*Idem*). And if the Bible were "an infallibly verbally inspired document of some sort" how could one prove this to men "by Biblical texts without simply arguing in a circle. He would be using the authority of the very document whose authority he was seeking to substantiate before he had proved its authority." And in any case, how would man be

able to "understand precisely and exactly this language that differs so radically from the language of everyday?" (*Idem*)

"It is clear," they will say, "that God has not made an infallible revelation of himself and his purposes until he has found a human person who has an infallible understanding of its meaning" (*Idem*). If you are to be a Protestant minister, so runs the argument, you cannot claim infallibility of interpretation and so you must reject infallibility of revelation on the part of God.

And when you drop the idea of an infallible Bible you naturally drop also the idea of an infallible Christ. For we learn all that we know about Christ from the Bible. If there can be no infallible Bible it is *because* there is no infallibly speaking Christ.

So, then what will you be advised to do? You will be told to follow the advice of Samuel Alexander and find "a religious mythology which is not in complete contradiction of all our ordinary knowledge" (W. Norman Pittenger in *The Christian Century*, September 11, 1957). The "story which a religion tells must not be so at variance with the common experience and the accepted patterns of thought of a given age that it seems to the hearer nonsensical or unintelligible" (*Idem*). "The demand of men everywhere is for a real unity of thought and experience" (*Idem*). As "children of the dawn and of Christ's ampler day" you are asked to think of the "story" of Christianity as of a myth or a saga and to present it as such to men. You may believe in man's original creation in the image of God. You may believe in his fall into sin. But you must not think of these as historical events. You may believe in the Virgin Birth of Christ and in his resurrection from the dead in the same body with which he was buried. But you must not think of these as having taken place in history. You may believe in the return of Christ. But you must not think of this as going to take place at the consummation of history.

If you did take any of these teachings as historical they would be "at variance with the common experience and the accepted patterns of thought" of our age. By holding to the "story" of Christianity as historical you would be holding to an "unevangelical creed"

(*The Christian Century*, June 19, 1957, "Fundamentalist Revival"). You are therefore asked to "push the location and interpretation of fundamentals in breadth and depth" (*Idem*). That is to say, you are asked, in effect, to deny them as historical and to take them as mythological.

Taken as mythological the "story" of Christianity fits in nicely with the accepted thought-patterns of modern man. Thus taken the story offers no offence to man. For then the story becomes truly "evangelical" because the evangel is then inherently "universal." There is then no God whose laws man has ever broken, and whose punishment he therefore needs to fear. "The very idea of eternal everlasting punishment is unjust to the nature of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (H. B. Walker — "What's Happened to Hell?" in *Presbyterian Life*, Sept. 7, 1957, p. 38). The Christ of this new evangelicalism is not identical with Jesus of Nazareth; the Christ of this new evangelicalism is inherent in every man. Every man everywhere participates in him. If there be any men who are not Christians it is because they are not really and fully men.

Preaching and teaching the Christ of this new evangelicalism amounts to telling men that they must be in reality what they already potentially are.

\* \* \*

In looking soberly at this new evangelicalism we note:

(a) that it has nothing basically in common with historic Christianity.

In historic Christianity God has spoken to man in Christ and Christ has spoken through his servants the prophets and apostles, through his Word. In this case God speaks as God alone can speak. He speaks the truth and nothing but the truth and that constitutes infallibility.

(b) In the new "evangelicalism" man's ability to comprehend what God says is made his standard of what God can say. It is asserted that since man is not infallible God cannot be. And this virtually ascribes omniscience to man.

Historic Christianity asks man to interpret himself in terms of God, of God as he has spoken in Scripture. The new evangelicalism interprets God in terms of man.

(c) Accordingly, the new evangelicalism has no help to offer to modern

man in his hopelessness and loneliness. Modern man in a sense knows he is lost. Roaming about as it were in the limitless miles of snow he looks in vain for some mark that is not another speck of snow.

And now the new evangelicalism tells this hopeless snow-enveloped man that he knows where he is and knows where he is going. The new evangelicalism offers this modern man a Christ who is himself a man of snow, and the product of the winds that blow.

It is therefore not because we are infallible interpreters but rather because by the grace of God we have renounced every claim of being such that we submit to the Word of God. We make no claim that what we say or what the church has set forth in its creeds is infallible. We only hold, and hold by faith, that God in Christ has

spoken, that his Spirit enables us to receive the truth about ourselves and about all men.

Without fear, therefore, we ask you to continue to say with Paul, "Where are the wise, where are the scribes, where are the disputers of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

We are not wiser than other men. But by the grace of God we would ask men to turn to the wisdom of God lest they perish in their folly.

Surely the sense of victory may be yours as well as ours as we labor in the name and in the strength of the Christ. For we know that his kingdom cannot fail.

### Talks About the Conscience (1)

## Peace and Conscience

By LAWRENCE R. EYRES

IT WAS ON THE EVENING of April 17th in the year 1521. Martin Luther stood before the imperial diet composed of princes and prelates and Charles V. Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. While All-Saints Day, three and a half years before, stands out in popular thinking as the most dramatic event in Luther's stormy life, still this was his finest hour. He had been ordered to retract all of his writings up to this time—those writings which had kindled Reformation fires all over Europe. The Emperor's tone was weighted with ominous warning. It was in effect, "Recant or else—!"

Luther's studied answer still makes one's blood tingle. "Since your most Serene Majesty and High Mightiness require of me a simple, clear, and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this:—I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the councils—because it is as clear as noon-day that they have often fallen into error, and even into glaring inconsistency with themselves. If then I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture or by cogent reasons; if I am not satisfied by the very texts I have cited; and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God's word, I

neither can nor will retract anything: for it cannot be right for a Christian to speak against his own conscience. I stand here, and can say no more:—God help me. Amen."

Luther had rediscovered that great Christian and apostolical truth, nearly buried under the weight of a doctrine which had dethroned Christ, that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men. . ." And it is the biblical doctrine of the conscience that we wish to discuss in this series of talks—your conscience and mine: what it was in sinless man, what it is in fallen humanity, how it is enlightened and set free in the Gospel that it may be in bondage to Christ alone. We want to see that the true glory and dignity of man largely consists in that which in man is "likeliest God," that noble monitor of the soul, the conscience.

#### *What Is Conscience?*

It is easier to describe its activity than to define it precisely. From the sheepish dropping of the school-boys eyes before his teacher's accusing gaze to prayers of the atheist who fancies that he is dying, the conscience makes men do the strangest things. He surely