

The Presbyterian
GUARDIAN

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C ALVARY Church adjacent to the campus was packed for the 32nd annual opening exercises of Westminster Theological Seminary on September 14. It was a beautiful clear day, with broken branches from some of the trees as the only reminders of hurricane Donna's passing 48 hours earlier. The student body of about one hundred is the largest in the history of the institution and numbers 20 from outside the United States.

The invocation was offered by the Rev. Edwin A. Bustard, pastor of Grace Reformed Episcopal Church of Collingdale, Pa. The Rev. Sidney Draayer, pastor of Trinity Christian Reformed Chapel, Broomall, Pa. read the Scripture, and the Rev. Arthur B. Spooner, Orthodox Presbyterian missionary to Korea, led in prayer.

The address of the day was delivered by the Rev. G. Aiken Taylor, Ph.D., editor of *The Presbyterian Journal*, on the important subject of "Communicating the Gospel Today." (We expect to give the text of his message in a forthcoming issue dealing with that topic.) "Whether in evangelism, in missions, or in education, the problem of the day is the problem of communication," Dr. Taylor stated.

It was again the task of Professor Cornelius Van Til, Chairman of the Faculty, to bring greetings to the 38 new students, 25 of whom are enrolled in the entering class. With his characteristic incisiveness and force he related their entrance upon a seminary career to the issues of the day. His remarks were as follows:

VAN TIL GREETING

It goes without saying that we bid you who are here for the first time welcome as fellow-Christians. But more specifically we bid you welcome as fellow-workers in the kingdom of Christ.

Paul calls the Corinthian Christians *his beloved brethren*. For Paul they are such because by the power of that Lord who is the Spirit they have learned to believe in Jesus and the resurrection—"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" (I Cor. 15:3-4).

Paul says that these "beloved brethren" are his work in the Lord. Accordingly they are now also his fellow-workers. They must, with him,

Van Til Welcomes Students

Westminster's 32nd Opening

tell the world of Jesus' death and resurrection as the one and only remedy for man in his lost estate. The risen Christ, it must be told to all men, "must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" and "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25-26).

We therefore bid you welcome as those who with us believe that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

Those who have learned to believe in Jesus and the resurrection also know that all things have been created by him and that in him all things consist. They know that in saving his people Christ *has saved* the world. He *has saved* and therefore *will save* it. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22). "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him . . . that God may be all in all" (vs. 28).

Here then we have both the true universalism and the true uniqueness of the gospel. It is truly the *whole* world that not only will be but *has been* saved. That constitutes the true universalism of Christianity. But the world has been saved by Christ, by Christ alone, and according to the Scriptures. And this constitutes the true uniqueness of Christianity.

All this would seem to be plain and even simple. But a cloud of confusion surrounds you as you enter upon the task of training for your life-work of preaching this gospel today. For there are spokesmen in the church today both for a false universalism and for a false uniqueness.

False Universalism

An ardent advocate of a false universalism is to be found, e.g., in the person of Dr. Deane W. Ferm. In an article entitled "The Road Ahead in Religion" Ferm expresses this false universalism in plainest terms (Cf. the *Christian Century*, May 25, 1960). Ferm speaks of the necessity of preaching a "vital universalism." Says Dr. Ferm: "This is a time for prophets,

not priests." "The prophet is the liberal who looks to the future for his answers. His emphasis is on present experience. He sees himself as a searcher for the pattern of divinity inherent in all creation." Moses, Jesus, Muhammed and Martin Luther were prophets. The "road ahead in religion" is being constructed by such prophets. "The road ahead in religion will have its detours and its road-blocks." But "it will continue to march on and on, as it seeks to unite men of all traditions in that common destiny which God wills for all his children."

We do, to be sure, says Ferm, need "particular elements in our religion" for "we cannot be religious in a vacuum. Religions, like flowers, need roots. But the roots of all religions are nourished by the same life-giving and life-sustaining elements." "Harry Emerson Fosdick, the great prophet of our generation" urges all the great religions to "focus attention on their major agreements" and to make the Golden Rule which, in one form or another, all of them teach "a working principle and not merely a pious sentiment."

What then is there, on this basis, that is unique about Christ and Christianity? Nothing at all. At least nothing permanent. "Time has a way of blurring manmade distinctions. It has a therapeutic power. In religion this usually means the gradual dying out of the historical, particularistic elements that have divided men and the coming to the fore of the universal teachings common to all men," Ferm continues. "This can be noted, for example, in the founders of the religions. The founder of Hinduism has already been lost in antiquity, but his teachings go on. The founder of Buddhism is shrouded in legend, but his message continues. Christianity and Islam, the younger major religions, continue to stress the particularistic elements of their founders despite the protestations of their founders. 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' (Mark 10:18). Time makes a powerful contribution to the

destiny of man despite man himself."

Why then on the view above should you prepare yourself to preach Christ, that he died and rose again, according to the Scriptures? The only good reason for this would be that by the accident of fate you have been born and reared in a Christian community. According to Ferm, you must by all means visualize the future as the day in which the message of Christ will be entirely identical with the message of Hinduism, Buddhism and other "great religions." You must "de-emphasize" the particular claim of Christianity "in favor of a vital universalism." Every man can save himself where he is and by means of his own powers.

When a moment ago I said that you are to preach Christ as the one through whom God may be all in all it was not the "vital universalism" of Ferm and others that I was thinking of. This "vital universalism" is as abstract and empty as was the idea of older liberalism when it spoke of the universal fatherhood God and the universal brotherhood of man. In the scheme of this false universalism Jesus Christ is nothing and does nothing special for any man. In the scheme of this false universalism man need not and cannot be saved by Christ. For on this scheme man is not a sinner; he naturally has the spirit of true love for all men latent in him. Christ, like other prophets, could at most be another Socrates to help men bring to expression that which is latent in them.

False Uniqueness

But if Ferm and Fosdick with their many associates want you to prepare yourself to preach Christianity as an empty universalism, there are many others who, in effect, ask you to prepare yourself to preach a meaningless uniqueness. Says Ferm, "The trend today among Protestant writers is to stress the particularity of the faith." He refers to Hendrick Kraemer as saying that Christ "is God's decisive and final act of self-disclosure or revelation." In Christ, says Kraemer, "All divine revelation, past, present, and future, has its proper criterion." Ferm also refers to William Hordern's book, *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* and quotes from him as follows: "In its evangelical work, the church has one primary task—to confront the unbeliever with the claims of God in Christ. And this means that it must tell the Christian

story—the historical events on which the faith is built."

But if we were to accept Kraemer's or Hordern's view of theology the *Christian story* could never be told. There would be no Christian story to tell. For Kraemer and Hordern represent the modern dialectical view of Christ. And the Christ of this dialectical view is *wholly hidden*. He is the Christ nobody knows or ever can know. Anything that the apostles said about him reduces his uniqueness. Any "propositional statement" about the person of this Christ depersonalizes him and thereby takes away his uniqueness. The confrontation of men with this Christ therefore would have to take place in a vacuum.

But if, per accident, man should meet with this Christ it could only be by means of man's absorption into him. Human faith in this Christ is participation in Christ's faith in himself. And this participation involves virtual identification with Christ.

The Christ in whose act of salvation men must thus participate may be found anywhere. This Christ is, in fact, everywhere. All men are men because they are in Christ. And therewith we are back to the "vital universalism" of Ferm.

How strange are the ways of modern theologians! With deep conviction the advocates of "vital universalism" and the advocates of "decisive uniqueness" seemingly oppose one another. Yet the position of each needs the support of the other as much as two rafters of a house support one another.

But unless the rafters of a house rest on the framework of a house which itself in turn rests upon a solid foundation they cannot support one another.

It is thus that the current advocates of the uniqueness of Christ and the current advocates of the universalistic Christ need the support of one another and together build their house upon sand.

Their real opposition is therefore not to one another but to Christ and the Scriptures of historic Reformation theology.

Alas for a poor sin-stricken world that is thus given stones for bread. And alas for Christ's little ones that are thus asked to feed upon the wind.

It is your glorious task to prepare yourself to bring unto the children of God and to all men everywhere, not

some phantom Christ but the Christ who really died and really rose again and really rules the world from heaven now. This was the Christ of Luther and of Calvin. It is the Christ who really saved his own from the wrath to come and in saving his own saved the world. This Christ is truly unique and his kingdom is truly universal. It is this Christ who is truly unique and truly universal that we hope and pray you will prepare yourself to preach. It is our responsibility as a faculty to help you in every way that we can as you will be engaged in this glorious work. It is to the undertaking of this work that we welcome you now.

Grace Kern Freeman

After a long period of ill health Grace Kern Freeman, wife of the Rev. David Freeman, Ph.D., pastor of Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, went to be with the Lord on May 28. Born in Brooklyn, N. Y. in 1900, she was the youngest child of Jewish parents who had become Christians.

Her father was given a New Testament when he arrived in this country and was converted as a result of reading the Word of God. Her mother, daughter of a rabbi, was so opposed that she left the home. Later, healed of serious illness in answer to prayer to "Jesus, if He be the Messiah," she confessed Him as her Lord and Saviour and returned to help bring up a Christian family.

Mrs. Freeman devoted much of her life to witness for Christ among Jewish people. She sought in many ways to win their friendship in order to bring to them the gospel. At one time she organized and taught classes in English for European refugees as a means to this end. Ever anxious to sow the seed, she often gave away Bibles and continued her testimony during her last weeks in the hospital.

Married in 1921 in Washington, D. C. to David Freeman, she stood with him in leaving the Presbyterian Church in U. S. A. in 1936 when he became a charter pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Besides her husband she is survived by two sons, David and Calvin, both college professors, and by three granddaughters.