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July 16, 1951

VOL. 20, NO. 7

*The Presbyterian*  
**GUARDIAN**

*God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*

**Westminster Confession III.1**

J. Gresham Machen  
Editor 1936 - 1937

Published Monthly  
\$2.00 per year

# THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN

JULY 16, 1951

## *Reformed Faith In Action*

**V**ARIOUS circumstances have combined recently to place stress on the opportunity and necessity for a clear Reformed testimony in our time. The utter confusion that prevails in Christendom generally, the substitution of the wisdom of this world for the revealed truth of God, and the desperate need for an authoritative voice, all call us to the courageous proclamation of the full faith given us in Scripture.

When we contemplate the organized church, we find many areas where such a Reformed testimony needs to be strengthened. First of all is the central area of church life, the area of preaching. Commonplace sermons do not belong in Calvinistic churches. In His gracious providence God has not been pleased to appoint only the experts and the orators to the pulpit. But He does call on those who occupy the pulpit to make full proof of the ministry, and diligently to declare the glories of sovereign redeeming grace. Our faith is relevant for our times. It must be so presented to a hungry church.

But in connection with preaching, we think also of that proclamation of the Word especially associated with missions. The adding of new believers to the church is a part of our aim, be it at home or on the field. Here, perhaps, more than in local pastorates, the problems of method appear alongside the problems of content. A Reformed testimony should be presented according to a method suited to its authority, universality, and applicability.

Likewise, within the realm of the organized church, there is the whole field of distinctively religious education. There is the teaching of children, the instruction of youth, the indoctrination of the more adult. Here, too, method is important, but method must not overshadow content. The purpose is to communicate truth, the truth God has given, to impress it upon mind and heart so that it becomes a living force in the life of the individual. The purpose of teaching is not to help the pupil to have certain "experiences," but to bring the pupil to know certain facts, and their significance for his' and all life.

In connection with education we are also impressed with the need of writing. No generation can

make an effective impact on its contemporaries through the literature of the past. Many valuable reprints are being offered in our day. But unless the faith of the present is able to bring itself to expression on the written page, there is something lacking in our Christianity.

Outside the realm of the organized church, there is needed also the testimony of the Christian community. Does our Reformed faith have an authoritative word to speak concerning the rights and limitations of governments, the duties and responsibilities of labor and industry, the significance of divine truth in the fields of science, economics, art, and sociology? It should be able to present a clear testimony in these fields also, if it is relevant for the whole of life. It is in this connection, of course, that the movement for a Christian educational program assumes central importance.

It so happens that in this issue of the *GUARDIAN* attention is given at several points to the opportunity and need for distinctively Reformed concern with these matters, and in that connection the pressure is placed squarely upon two branches of the church, The Orthodox Presbyterian and the Christian Reformed denominations. Nowhere else in our country do we find portions of the Church of Christ which are so self-consciously attempting to be Reformed in faith and action. It is not strange to find that in these two churches matters mentioned above are receiving serious consideration. It is not strange also to find that there is no small degree of mutual interest and fellowship as between these churches in the effort to develop a Reformed testimony.

But if there is anything that we need to remember, it is that we have not arrived. There can be no complacency. The fact that we are trying to provide a Reformed testimony should not lull us into thinking that we are presenting a Reformed testimony. There is yet much ground to be possessed. Our Reformed faith must be put into action at every point, to the glory of God, the salvation of sinners, and the building of Christ's kingdom.

L. W. S.

# Wanted—A Reformed Testimony

*A Common Witness of Reformed and Evangelicals Inadequate for our Time*

By PROF. C. VAN TIL

**F**LOATING across the Pacific on a raft they named Kon-Tiki was a thrilling experience for the six brave men who recently took that trip. Says Thor Heyerdahl, who tells us about the adventure, "Experts who looked at the raft gave us little encouragement. The biggest balsa exporter in Peru said the porous balsa logs would become water-logged and sink before we had covered a quarter of the distance across the sea. A Norwegian boatswain said the raft would not hold together for a fortnight before every single rope was worn through by the movement of the big logs rubbing against each other. If we totted up all that the different experts, each in turn, pointed out as the vital flaw, there was not a length of rope, not a knot, not a measurement, not a piece of wood in the whole raft which would not cause us to founder at sea."

After they were out on the ocean, it seemed as though the predictions of the experts would come true. "It was easy to see that the balsa logs absorbed water. The aft cross beam was worse than the others; we could press a fingertip into the soaked wood till the water squelched. Without saying anything I broke off a piece of the sodden wood and threw it overboard. It slowly vanished down into the depths. Later I saw two or three of the other fellows surreptitiously do the same—and watch somberly as the waterlogged piece of wood slowly sank."

## The Prophets of Doom

Some of the "experts" who write large books today with such titles as *The Decline of the West*, *The Destiny of Western Man*, *The Crisis of our Age*, are solemnly predicting that every rope that helps to tie the beams of civilization together will soon be worn through. And as we lie in our cabins at night it is alarming to hear these ropes creaking and groaning, "each rope having its own note according to its thickness and tautness." The whole thing seems to be like "one complaining chorus round us in the dark."

## The Prophets of Bliss

But then why not reach for *The Ladies Home Journal*. Looking into the current issue (July, 1951) we at once see Joseph Stalin's military figure. But turn quickly to the opposite page and there you meet the benign countenance of Albert Schweitzer. A small kitten sits quietly on his hand. It seems to know that Schweitzer's life principle is a "reverence for life." "His entire personal life is a reflection of his own deep 'reverence for life!'," says Harold Stassen. If only we would follow the example of Schweitzer and not that of Stalin, he argues, then all would be well. He quotes Schweitzer himself as saying, "I look to the future with hope" (p. 131). And as for himself, Stassen adds in conclusion, "I believe man was meant to be free. I believe man was meant to respect other men. I believe there is a God. I believe that in the half century ahead the philosophy of Albert Schweitzer will be victorious and that of Joseph Stalin will fade" (p. 132).

Here then is an expert predicting, as it were, that the balsa logs of history will not become waterlogged, and that the ropes which tie them together will easily hold till the end of the journey.

## What Choice?

Which expert shall the hapless public believe? Neither the prophets of doom nor the prophets of bliss have actually crossed the Pacific of life in a raft. They speak with great unction, but only on the basis of the "long experience of the human race." The pessimists see that the balsa logs are absorbing water. With "infallible logic" they calculate that before the end of the journey the whole raft *must* sink. The optimists argue that the balsa logs consist of wood and that they *must* float. Both use the word *must* very freely. They can do nothing else. What they are talking about lies beyond the experience of any of them. Yet both pretend to speak in terms of experience only.

## Our Task

Such is the wisdom of the world.

It has been made foolishness with God. Our task as Christians is to tell men so. But it has pleased God to save men through the "foolishness of preaching." Our task as Christians is again to tell men so. A simple all comprehensive alternative must be placed before men. Half-way measures contain no challenge. Men must turn away from the pessimists; they are not nearly pessimistic enough. The human race is not merely adrift, facing a possible extinction. Men are subject to the wrath of God and are headed for the final judgment day. They will one day cry to the mountains to fall on them, wishing that the prophets of doom might be right. For then they would escape the wrath to come.

And by then they would long since have known that the prophets of bliss are wrong. These are not nearly optimistic enough. For those that believe in Christ there will be eternal joy in the presence of God, not merely some sunny days as the Kon-Tiki continues its way surrounded by the monsters of the deep.

## Experience and the Bible

Yet, by and large, Fundamentalists do not thus challenge the wisdom of the world. Their theology does not permit them to do so. The theology of Fundamentalism is largely Arminian in character. And an essentially Arminian theology is vitiated by the fact that it is, in part, at least, based on that very "experience" on which the non-Christian prophets of doom and of bliss depend for their predictions. Fundamentalists start from the experience of freedom, even as Stassen, the humanitarian, starts with the "experience" of freedom. While waving high the Bible, the Fundamentalist yet, at critical junctures, appeals to experience as the final guide. Fundamentalism, in short, is inadequately Protestant. It does not do full justice to the Bible as the only authoritative guide for human experience.

This is sad indeed. Fundamentalists mean to be true to the Bible. They are most sincere. They are, many of them, self-sacrificing and wholly devoted to the Christ who bought them with His precious blood. But their witness to the world is vitiated by their principle of experience as standing next to rather than subject to Scripture.

Fundamentalism, let us say, speaks on a radio station called *Back to the Bible and Experience*. It sounds like two broadcasters on the same wave-

length, each trying to drown the other out.

### A God or God

On a Sunday afternoon you listened to Harold Stassen. He says he believes there is *a* God. Now *a* God is a *finite* god, is *no* god. But the "experience" of sinful man teaches us to believe at best in *a* god. Such teaching leaves men without the true God and without hope in the world. Yet this is the best that the prophets of bliss can offer. They are no better than the prophets of doom.

Now turn on the *Back to the Bible and Experience* program. It speaks vigorously of God, of the true God, the God of the Bible. At the same time it speaks, even if less vigorously, of *a* god, the god of experience. It assumes that the two are identical. It assumes the *god* of Stassen and the God of Luther to be the same God. The result is that you are not clearly challenged to forsake your trust in the false prophets of bliss.

### God Probably Exists

These prophets of bliss are very "scientific." They speak with moderation. They say they *believe* man was made to have "reverence for life," to respect his fellow man. When they say that they *believe* this, they imply that they do not *know* it. How can any one know? The universe is full of unknowables. They *believe* in the incomprehensibility of God, that is, of *Reality*. They assume that God is incomprehensible even to Himself.

Of course the god, the finite god they believe in, is incomprehensible to himself. He cannot, then, help man to know himself. He leaves the prophets of bliss to speak as from themselves.

Now again turn on the *Back to the Bible and Experience* message. It speaks vigorously of the God of the Bible, as *certainly* existing, as *clearly* revealing Himself both in the world and in the Word. It speaks of knowing, though not fully understanding, this God. At the same time it speaks even if less vigorously of God as *probably* existing, because experience, and reason based on experience, it says, cannot reach to certainty. And it assumes that the God of the Bible as clearly revealed and the god of "experience" as dimly discernible are the same God. It assumes that the God of Calvin and the god of Stassen are identical. The result is again that you are not clearly challenged to forsake the prophets of

doom. They may *probably* be right, by the admission of the Fundamentalist himself. Worse than that, if God *probably* exists He is not God at all. In fact, if God only *probably* exists, then He *surely* does not exist at all and the prophets of doom are *certainly* right.

### The Growing Christ

On another Sunday afternoon you perhaps listen to a program called *The Growing Christ*. The speaker for the day is Karl Barth, of Basel, Switzerland. With great power and enthusiasm he urges men to return to the God of the Word and the Christ of the Word. This God, he says, is first "wholly other" than man. But in Christ He becomes wholly identical with man. And then in Christ man comes to participate in the very attributes of God. The whole thing is one process, first God coming down to man and then man growing up into God. And all that because God is God for man in Christ and man is man for God in Christ. It is Christ in whom and through whom man grows into divinity.

Surely, you say, *Back to the Bible and Experience* will speak out against this basic denial of the Christian faith. And, to be sure, you will hear some

criticism by the Fundamentalist to the effect that Barth is not fully true to the Bible. But after that you will hear much of agreement with Barth on the part of the Fundamentalist. The theology of Barth is based upon human experience, not on the Bible. And the theology of Fundamentalism is based partly also upon experience. Hence the sad fact that one does not find any basic criticism of the current heresy of dialectical theology on the part of Fundamentalists. And what is true of this heresy is true of all modern heresies. Fundamentalism is not in a position to guard itself against them with any degree of thoroughness. It is like a helpless hen that sees the hawk carry off its chicks and does little more than make a noise about it.

True, in practice Fundamentalism is much better than it is here presented as being. But that is because Fundamentalists are at heart the best of Christian believers. They therefore often give a better testimony than their system would lead us to expect.

### The Dependent Spirit

Growing tired of the Sunday broadcasts you give the modern religionist one final chance. This time the speaker (See "*Van Til*," p. 136)

## Korea Seminary Supporters Not Recognized By Assembly

### Presbyterian Body Votes To Set Up Official Seminary

REPORTS reaching us from Korea reveal that the General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church, which met early in June, took action cutting off the presbytery in the south which has been supporting the Korea Theological Seminary in Pusan.

At the time of the Assembly a year ago, two presbyteries in this area had been set up, each seeking to be recognized as the lawful presbytery. The Assembly at that time decided to recognize the presbytery which was supporting Korea Seminary. But as we reported in the *GUARDIAN* (June 1950, p. 114) those opposed to this action then proceeded to raise an uproar of such proportions that the Assembly had to dissolve.

The plans were for it to reconvene

in September. We have heard nothing of such a meeting, and may assume it did not occur, in view of the war.

Now however it appears that the Assembly this year has reversed the action of a year ago, recognized as lawful the presbytery which was opposed to the Korea Seminary, and cut off the presbytery which was supporting the Seminary. Just what "cutting off" a presbytery means is uncertain, but presumably it means the ministers and churches included in the presbytery are declared to be no longer a part of the Korean Presbyterian Church, unless they individually submit themselves to the presbytery which has been recognized.

In another action, reported by *Religious News*, the Assembly made plans

confidence, in a certain measure, when we realize that behind our inadequate labors, stands our church with its prayers and its Reformed convictions. We therefore ask for prayers from our church for the task that lies before us, to proclaim to the Japanese people the message that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:19).

## Van Til

(Continued from p. 126)

is an expert on the psychology of religion. His name is Leuba. Of course, he says, we who apply the scientific method to the phenomena of religion, believe in regeneration. If you Fundamentalists tell us that you have had the experience of regeneration, we shall not deny it. A fact is a fact and we would be the last to tamper with the facts.

But now if you wish to tell us what this fact of regeneration means you will, of course, have to talk in language that we all can understand. You will have to explain the meaning of regeneration in naturalist terms. For those are the only terms that all men understand. Are you ready to do that? If not we shall be compelled, however, much against our will, to call your experience meaningless.

You have now reached the point of desperation. Your own experience of regeneration is said to be meaningless unless you can explain it away in naturalistic terms. Does not Leuba see that this is to prejudge the case? Does he not see that, to all intents, it is *impossible*? Yet he had proclaimed his readiness to accept any fact from any source.

What will be the response of *Back to the Bible and Experience*? This time the voice that speaks is even weaker than on earlier occasions. It speaks of regeneration as the gift of the Spirit. But then it speaks also of faith as preceding regeneration. For how can God save men, if man does not want to be saved? You are free to resist the work of Christ. It is you who must let Christ into your hearts or He cannot come in at all.

Here the Fundamentalist is virtually admitting that Leuba is right in separating the fact of regeneration from the

system of Christian religion of which it is a part. Fundamentalism itself will not admit that regeneration is the work of the sovereign and free Spirit. If the Fundamentalist is to be born again he wants himself to be present at the operation and see what it is that the Spirit does. He wants to help the Spirit of God by an act of self-conscious acceptance that is, in part, independent of the Spirit. Thus the

## The Wayward Caravan

By Edwards E. Elliott

A NEW development in the young people's program sponsored by the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, is called "Caravanning." The "caravans" are made up of young leaders of the Westminster Fellowship groups, selected for a summer's effort. These young people are given a week of training at nine centers throughout the nation. They then go forth in teams of four, spending a week at a time in various localities.

At the outset of the week of training each caravaner is given mimeographed sheets, fitted in a loose-leaf binder, full of instructions on how to meet the young people and answer their problems. On page 26 of this manual, we find a section written by Mrs. Ellen Flesseman of the Dutch Student Christian Movement, entitled, *An Introduction to Bible Study for Students*. The caravaners are told,

"Too many students today still see only one of two diametrically opposed possibilities for Bible study, that is either they take the Bible as the absolute word of God in a fundamentalistic sense, so that in its most literal sense it is true and without fault in every word, or they approach it 'scientifically'.

### AGAINST THE FUNDAMENTALISTIC APPROACH

"In the first instance we have made it clear that the Bible is not in itself God's revelation but that it is the human testimony to this revelation. It is written by very human, ordinary men, but by men who have met the real, living God, and are here testifying how this God in history dealt and still deals concretely with men. They are indeed testifying to a truth which is too great for themselves to grasp fully,

Spirit of God is not longer free to go and do in sovereign pleasure what he wishes to do. The Spirit of God and the spirit of man, the sinner, make a common testimony on sin and on salvation.

To reveal the compromising character of Fundamentalism fully it would be necessary to discuss every major Christian doctrine. Fundamentalists compromise the Gospel not merely at

and so we can really say that they are 'inspired' men. But even so, it remains a testimony of men, of men in a particular point in history, who were subject to human errors and who held beliefs common in their time. They certainly were true and real witnesses of what they had seen and what they had heard, namely of God's revelation, but they were merely fallible men, subject to historical and scientific mistakes. It is intellectually dishonest if we today close our eyes to these mistakes or try to explain them away. However, it is even more foolish if because of that reason we would now think that therefore their testimony as a whole is untrustworthy and unimportant.

"It is certainly not wise to state at the outset a 'doctrine of the Bible.' We should know ourselves what our presupposition is and then base our Bible study upon it. However, if we are asked, we should be able to answer in very ordinary, every day words, leaving aside all theological or pious terminology. It might be unavoidable that in doing that we shall shock some of the students who in a fundamentalistic way take the Bible literally. That cannot be helped, as long as we are very careful not to give them unnecessary offense and not to shock them just for the fun of it."

The ensuing answer which this modernistic writer would give to the "Scientifically" minded young person is not so much an argument as an explanation of how to take verses in context, etc.

But the havoc which this sort of manual can wreak in the minds of young people is simply incalculable. How "god-fearing" ministers can support such a blasphemous corporate testimony is a matter which will surely be reviewed at the judgment bar of Christ.