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PREMILLENNIALISM

THE Premillennial view of the return of Christ is that our Lord will return before a thousand-year period held to be mentioned in the Book of Revelation, that during that period He will reign upon this earth, and that after that period will come the final judgment.

Many Christian people, believing in the full truthfulness of the Bible, hold that Premillennial view.

Other Christian people, believing with equal firmness in the full truthfulness of the Bible, reject the Premillennial view and hold that our Lord's return will be followed immediately by the last judgment.

Both these groups of Christian people accept with equal clearness and firmness the great doctrine of the personal and bodily return of Christ and reject with equal abhorrence the Modernist "spiritualizing" or explaining away of that doctrine.

Both these groups of Christian people are represented in the ministry and eldership of The Presbyterian Church of America. Have they both a right to be so represented?

The answer to that question can be found only in the doctrinal declaration made by those who took part in our first General Assembly and prescribed for all those who may subsequently become ministers or elders or deacons.

The first clause in the declaration declares that "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." There is obviously no difficulty about that. That clause obviously can be subscribed to both by Premillennialists and by those who are opposed to the Premillennial view.

The second clause declares that "the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms contain the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." Can both Premillennialists and those who are opposed to the Premillennial view subscribe to that second clause?

We think the question should be answered in the affirmative. We think that both Premillennialists and those who are opposed to the Premillennial view may subscribe to that clause.

It is true, the Westminster Confession of Faith and

Catechisms teach not the Premillennial view but a view that is opposed to the Premillennial view. That is particularly plain in the Larger Catechism (Q. 87 and 88).

But subscription to the Westminster Standards in The Presbyterian Church of America is not to every word in those Standards, but only to the *system* of doctrine which the Standards contain.

The real question, then, is whether a person who holds the Premillennial view can hold that system. Can a person who holds the Premillennial view be a true Calvinist; can he, in other words, hold truly to the Calvinistic or Reformed system of doctrine which is set forth in the Westminster Standards? We think that he can; and for that reason we think that Premillennialists as well as those who hold the opposing view may become ministers or elders or deacons in The Presbyterian Church of America.

We think that a man who holds that the return of Christ and the final judgment take place not in one act, as the Westminster Standards contemplate them as doing, but in two acts with a thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth in between, yet may honestly say that he holds the system of doctrine that the Standards contain.

It is no new thing to take this position regarding creed-subscription. It is the position which has long been taken by orthodox Calvinistic theologians. I think any fears which Premillennialists in The Presbyterian Church of America may have lest their view may suddenly be regarded by anyone in the Church as a heresy unfitting them for ordination are quite groundless.

Of course, that does not mean that a man may subscribe to our ordination pledge no matter how many errors he holds, provided only he is a Premillennialist. Undoubtedly there are many errors held by many Premillennialists, as also there are many errors held by many who are not Premillennialists, which ought to prevent a man from being received into the ministry or eldership of The Presbyterian Church of America. But the point is that such persons are to be excluded from the ministry or eldership not because they are Premillennialists, but for other reasons.

What Shall We Feed Our Children?

A Plea for Christian Education

By the REV. CORNELIUS VAN TIL, Ph.D.

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Dr. Van Til

THERE may be said to be a two-fold aspect to the work that is before us as people of The Presbyterian Church of America. In the first place we shall have to continue to expose modern unbelief wherever it appears within or without the visible church. On the other hand there is the constructive work of building up our own people in an understanding of and love for a full-orbed Christianity.

In the work of education that is before us, for instance, we shall have to continue to point out the false policies and programs that are being adopted elsewhere but we shall also have to build an educational program of our own. It is to the need of such a constructive program that we wish to call attention now.

We know that the literature of the old Board of Christian Education was permeated with Modernism. But even if we are able to find literature that is sound, do we then have all that we need? Can we really believe that the only thing wrong with the old program was its Modernism? Our fathers had a far more comprehensive program of Christian education than we have now. Time was when the public school system of the country was virtually a Christian school system. That time is past and yet are we sure that there is no need for a real system of Christian education?

Perhaps we can best seek an answer to such questions as these by asking whether the educational influences that are Christian are stronger than the educational influences that are not Christian. Imagine with me, if you will, a child now six years old. Then think of this child some twenty years from now. Is it likely, considering the education this child will receive, that it will be an intelligent member of the church at that time? Is it likely that this child will be full of enthusiasm and zeal for the truth when it comes to manhood or womanhood?

In answering these questions we shall assume that the child we think of has the benefit of a truly Christian home. We shall also assume that the child's Sunday school teachers were fully equipped for their task. We shall assume that the child has actually attended preaching services that were truly Reformed in nature. Still further we shall assume that the child is taught the catechism. These are huge assumptions but we must make them now, and ask whether all these Christian influences can counteract the non-Christian influences to which our child will be subjected in the next twenty years.

College Education

Suppose then that our child goes to college. Many children eventually do. Will he go to a Christian college? This is not at all certain. There are not enough Christian colleges. A considerable percentage of our young people will continue to attend the public university or college. Besides, colleges that are not only Christian but truly Reformed are few in number. We think of our child, then, as eventually attending a modern university. Will he, upon graduation "join" or remain in the church? Will he be able to do either if he is honest with himself?

It was not difficult for young people to "join" or remain in a church when that church largely failed to bring out the contrast between the teaching of Scripture and the teaching of the modern university. Under those circumstances young people were not compelled to make an intelligent choice. They could continue in the church because of "hallowed associations" and "noble traditions" connected with fine old buildings. But if the full implication of Scripture teaching for doctrine and life is set forth clearly and forcibly, educated young people will have to choose between this teaching and what they have learned in the university. An intelligent choice for or against the truth will naturally replace decisions made

on the basis of sentiment alone. We ask our young people to believe in Christ as their personal Saviour. Can they honestly say that they do, if they also believe what they have heard in the courses on science and philosophy?

The answer to this question ought not to be difficult. What does it mean to believe in Christ as my personal Saviour? Among other things it means that I am a creature of God who has sinned against God by "want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." As a sinner I am under the wrath of God forever. No mere man can do anything for me. Only God can save me. Therefore Jesus must be God. Therefore He must, in His human nature, die in my room and stead. Therefore the Holy Spirit must regenerate me. But does university teaching agree with this? We trust that no one will argue that it does. That teaching denies, to begin with, the foundation fact of Christianity, the fact of creation. Modern philosophy and modern science are in perfect accord in rejecting the Scriptural notion of creation. If the word "creation" is employed by some philosophers it is not taken in the Biblical sense. Then, too, the Biblical idea of sin as defined by the Shorter Catechism is set aside by modern science in general and by psychology in particular. Freudianism, for example, may say many ugly things about human nature but it has no use for the idea of an originally perfect creation and for the idea that man is, since the fall, guilty before God. Thus, according to this point of view, man does not need to be saved in the Bible sense of the term; why then should he confess Christ as his personal Saviour? To do so would be to prevaricate.

But if it were granted that man needed to be saved there would be no Saviour to save him: Christ is, according to the "modern" teacher, like ourselves, the product of evolution. The virgin birth is "a biological miracle that the modern mind cannot accept." But if Jesus is called divine,

then we are all said to be divine; if He is called God, God then becomes no more than an aspect of Reality as a whole; we cannot be responsible to Him.

There is no need to go on. If our graduate thinks straight he must choose between two mutually exclusive views of life. In this choice the odds are, humanly speaking, overwhelmingly against the church. The university influence has been far more comprehensive and impressive than that of the church. We have no moral right to expect that our child will stay with the church. If we jump off the Empire State building our prayers for a safe landing are but mockery in the sight of God. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

High School Education

But suppose our child does not go to college. Suppose he goes to high school only. This does not obviate the difficulty. The high school teachers have for the greater part been trained in the public universities and normal schools. We are, it would seem, quite safe in saying that the general influence on the high school pupils is largely the same as that brought to bear upon college students. Even if there are a number of high school teachers who are Christians they are not prepared, because of their lack of Christian training, to counteract the general non-Christian influences. Besides, they are forbidden by law to give anything but neutral instruction. Still further it should be remembered that boys and girls of high school age are less mature than those of college age. Then if we recall that though not all young people go to college practically all go to high school, and that though there are several Christian colleges there are practically no Christian high schools, we may well shudder at the results that are bound to follow. If we are unwilling to make use of the natural means of instruction that God has placed within our reach we cannot expect our children to become Christians—useful Christians—through sporadic efforts of our own. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Grade School Education

Finally comes the grade school. Our child will certainly attend the grade school for several years and that for five days a week. In Sunday school

our child has learned the nineteenth psalm. As he goes to school those beautiful words, "The heavens declare the glory of God," still reverberate through his mind. But when he enters the school room all this has suddenly changed. There the "starry universe above" somehow operates quite independently of God. And what is true of "the heavens above" is true of everything else. At home the child is taught that "whether we eat or drink or do anything else" we must do all to the glory of God because everything has been created by God and everything is sustained by God. In school the child is taught that everything has come of itself and sustains itself. This much is involved in the idea of "neutrality" itself. At best this means that

God need not be brought into the picture when we are teaching anything to our children. But is it not a great sin for Christian parents to have their children taught for five days a week by competent teachers that nature and history have nothing to do with God? We have no moral right to expect anything but that our children will accept that in which they have been most thoroughly instructed and will ignore that about which they hear only intermittently. And are not our children "born and conceived in sin"? Will they not naturally accept that which is false rather than that which is true? Nor is the instruction by any means always "neutral." The influence of John Dewey on American primary education is proverbial; and John Dewey is a murderer of Christianity.

If we Christian parents think of all this is it not really amazing that we have so sadly neglected the Christian training of our children? We take excellent care of the bodies of our children. We are becoming "vitamin minded." We do not buy cabbages and potatoes but we buy calories and vitamins. We ask how much of the valuable vitamin D content is in this food or in that. But the strange thing is that in the field of spiritual nurture we do not count the number of vitamin D's our children get. No sensible parent will give his child food not of the best if the best is within his reach. No mother will allow her child to pick up what it may anywhere in the way of food and then when sickness comes suddenly feed that child nothing but cod-liver oil. Why then do we allow our children to have daily meals of spiritual food which has no vitamin D? Do we not care if they develop spiritual rickets? Do we not worry if they are spiritually underfed? "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Humanly speaking, then, one cannot honestly be enthusiastic about the future of The Presbyterian Church of America unless its people will realize that a new and far more intense policy will have to be adopted in the field of Christian education. The existing agencies, even when purged of all the non-Reformed elements, are woefully insufficient for the work that must be done. In obedience to our covenant God we shall have to bring up our children "in the fear and admonition of the Lord."

The National Union of Christian Schools

MR. MARK FAKKEMA, General Secretary of the National Union of Christian Schools, has offered the services of his office in connection with any endeavor to meet the challenge which is presented in Dr. Van Til's article. The organization which he represents held its seventeenth annual convention recently. It has rendered very effective service in solidifying and promoting a system of schools which is under parental, as opposed to parochial, control.

Any who wish to learn more about the history, principles, and program of the Christian School movement in this country may address him at:

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