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## A Pastor Finds His People at War

By the REV. FRANK LAWRENCE

of East River St. Mary's, Nova Scotia, Canada

IT WAS a lovely Monday morning in August when we drove away from the manse and headed toward Philadelphia, 1100 miles away. Vacation time had come. On the night before, we had been elated as our Scotch elders indirectly hinted that perhaps we had earned a bit of a rest. The people had wished us a pleasant vacation. So we were off, past the homes of a people content and happy, past golden fields of wheat and oats, past barns crowded with hay.

But the vacation was anything but rest. We had scarcely reached Pennsylvania when the news thundered out of London and Paris: WAR WITH GERMANY! Then, from our own capital, Ottawa: A STATE OF WAR EXISTS BETWEEN THE DOMINION OF CANADA AND THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT!

Our people at war! Our boys going to town to enlist! What stand would I take in the conflict? What would I preach? What message did I have for my congregation at war? To add to the confusion, many Philadelphia pastors were proclaiming this as heralding the end of the world—Gog and Magog on the march! Tubal, Meshech, Gomer, Togarmah and Ashkenaz were names that blared from the radio and many pulpits. But it is one thing to see the war as a fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39 and another to realize that Arnold, age 20, is not needed on the farm. Mrs. Green's two boys are 21 and 23, respectively, and unemployed. Our Dr. MacKay is a physician in the reserve corps

and Elmira is a registered nurse, out of work—all eligible for war service.

Four months of the war have gone by. Four months of pictures—pictures of young men, startlingly young, swinging down the avenue in their kilts to the swirl of the pipes; pictures of them so self-possessed, carefree and “cocky,” crowding the restaurants, singing, “Roll out the barrel”; pictures of the faithful thronging the churches to sing, “God save our King”; pictures of a synod bowed before its God, imploring divine aid for the cause. What have we preached? What did we say to Mrs. Green, when her two boys went over in the first division? What can be said to the aged elder, Robert Cameron, whose daughter, Elmira, is awaiting word to join her medical unit? What can I say to my people?

The hardest problem for me was to face my people. Here I was, an American citizen, whose native land was crying, “Never again for us,” “1939 isn't 1917,” “Let them fight their own wars.” My sympathies were naturally with American neutrality and these slogans are valid in the States. But my home was among British subjects. My congregation was at war. My problem was to find out where I stood. Was I neutral, pro-German or pro-British? I had seen men swayed by the “bread and butter” argument in the 1936 crisis in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., but this was no temptation to me, for I could be a pacifist and still retain my

may once more give to our brethren in Germany, Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia an opportunity to hear the sweet strains of the gospel

and lay hold on eternal life, and that we, with them, may enjoy national and personal freedom. Our trust and confidence is in the Lord, "whose

eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward him."

## The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance

The Second in a Series of Radio Addresses Broadcast on the Westminster Seminary Hour During the Fall of 1936

By the REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D., Litt.D.

**L**AST Sunday afternoon, in the first of our talks of this winter, I spoke to you in a summary sort of way about the progress of Christian doctrine in the church. I showed how the church advanced from the very meagre statement which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, on through the great early ecumenical creeds, setting forth the doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, and through Augustine, with his presentation of the doctrine of sin and of divine grace, to the Reformation and to Calvin. I showed how that type of doctrine which follows on the path in which Calvin moved is called the Reformed Faith.

The Reformed Faith has found expression in a number of great creeds which all exhibit the same general type. One of these creeds is the Heidelberg Catechism. That is the official doctrinal standard of certain American churches whose members came originally from the continent of Europe. These churches are called "Reformed" churches. Another of the great creeds setting forth the Reformed Faith is the one that consists of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. They are the official doctrinal standards of certain American churches whose members originally came chiefly from Scotland and Ireland. These are called "Presbyterian" churches. It is these doctrinal standards to which I have frequently referred in these little talks that I have been giving on Sunday afternoons during the past two winters.

Perhaps one question was in the minds of some of you as I reviewed the progress of Christian doctrine last Sunday afternoon. Why should the progress be thought to have been brought to a close in the seventeenth

century, when the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms were produced? Why should there not be still further doctrinal advance? If the church advanced in doctrine up to the time of the Westminster Standards, why should it now not proceed still further on its onward march?

Well, there is no essential reason why it should not do so. However before it attempts to do so, it is very important for it to understand precisely what Christian doctrine is. It should understand very clearly that Christian doctrine is just a setting forth of what the Bible teaches. At the foundation of Christian doctrine is the acceptance of the full truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God.

That is often forgotten by those who today undertake to write confessional statements. Let us give expression to our Christian experience, they say, in forms better suited to the times in which we are living than are the older creeds of the church. So they sit down and concoct various forms of words, which they represent as being on a plane with the great creeds of Christendom.

When they do that, they are simply forgetting what the creeds of Christendom are. The creeds of Christendom are not expressions of Christian experience. They are summary statements of what God has told us in His Word. Far from the subject-matter of the creeds being derived from Christian experience, it is Christian experience which is based upon the truth contained in the creeds; and the truth contained in the creeds is derived from the Bible, which is the Word of God. Groups of people that undertake to write a creed without believing in the full truthfulness of the Bible, and with-

out taking the subject-matter of their creed from that inspired Word of God, are not at all taking an additional step on the pathway on which the great Christian creeds moved; rather, they are moving in an exactly opposite direction. What they are doing has nothing whatever to do with that grand progress of Christian doctrine of which I spoke last Sunday. Far from continuing the advance of Christian doctrine they are starting something entirely different, and that something different, we may add, is doomed to failure from the start.

The first prerequisite, then, for any advance in Christian doctrine is that those who would engage in it should believe in the full truthfulness of the Bible and should endeavor to make their doctrine simply a presentation of what the Bible teaches.

There are other principles also that must be observed if there is to be real doctrinal advance. For one thing, all real doctrinal advance proceeds in the direction of greater precision and fullness of doctrinal statement. Just run over in your minds again the history of the great creeds of the church. How meagre was the so-called Apostles' Creed, first formulated in the second century! How far more precise and full were the creeds of the great early councils, beginning with the Nicene creed in A. D. 325! How much more precise and how vastly richer still were the Reformation creeds and especially our Westminster Confession of Faith!

This increasing precision and this increasing richness of doctrinal statement were arrived at particularly by way of refutation of errors as they successively arose. At first the church's convictions about some point of doctrine were implicit rather than explicit. They were not carefully de-

fined. They were assumed rather than expressly stated. Then some new teaching arose. The church reflected on the matter, comparing the new teaching with the Bible. It found the new teaching to be contrary to the Bible. As over against the new teaching, it set forth precisely what the true Biblical teaching on the point is. So a great doctrine was clearly stated in some great Christian creed.

That method of doctrinal advance is, of course, in accord with the fundamental laws of the mind. You cannot set forth clearly what a thing is without placing it in contrast with what it is not. All definition proceeds by way of exclusion. How utterly shallow, then, is the notion that the church ought to make its teaching positive and not negative—the notion that controversy should be avoided and truth should be maintained without attack upon error! The simple fact is that truth cannot possibly be maintained in any such way. Truth can be maintained only when it is sharply differentiated from error. It is no wonder, then, that the great creeds of the church, as also the great revivals of religion in the church, were born in theological controversy. The increasing richness and the increasing precision of Christian doctrine were brought about very largely by the necessity of excluding one alien element after another from the teaching of the church.

In recent years the church has often entered upon an exactly opposite course of procedure. It has constructed what purport to be doctrinal statements, but these supposed doctrinal statements are constructed for a purpose which is just the opposite of the purpose that governed the formation of the great historic creeds.

The historic creeds were exclusive of error; they were intended to exclude error; they were intended to set forth the Biblical teaching in sharp contrast with what was opposed to the Biblical teaching, in order that the purity of the church might be preserved. These modern statements, on the contrary, are inclusive of error. They are designed to make room in the church for just as many people and for just as many types of thought as possible.

There are entirely too many denominations in this country, says the modern ecclesiastical efficiency expert. Obviously, many of them must

be merged. But the trouble is, they have different creeds. Here is one church, for example, that has a clearly Calvinistic creed; here is another whose creed is just as clearly Arminian, let us say, and anti-Calvinistic. How in the world are we going to get the two together? Why, obviously, says the ecclesiastical efficiency expert, the thing to do is to tone down that Calvinistic creed; just smooth off its sharp angles, until Arminians will be able to accept it. Or else we can do something better still. We can write an entirely new creed that will contain only what Arminianism and Calvinism have in common, so that it can serve as the basis for some proposed new "United Church."

Such are the methods of modern church-unionism. Those methods are carried even to much greater lengths today than in the hypothetical example that I have just mentioned. Calvinism and Arminianism, which I have mentioned in this example, though they differ very widely, are both of them types of evangelical Christian belief. But many of these modern statements are so worded as to gain the assent not only of men who hold different varieties of Christian belief, like Calvinism and Arminianism, but also of men who hold to no really Christian belief at all.

Take some of the great world-conferences on missions, for example. At those conferences are represented men who believe in the virgin birth of Christ, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection and other essential elements of the historic Christian faith, and also there are represented men who oppose these things or belittle them as entirely unimportant. There are many speeches—some of them from men generally thought to be evangelical Christians, some of them from distinguished Modernists. After days of such speech-making, a common statement of belief is presented and is unanimously adopted.

What is that common statement like? Well, its outstanding characteristic is apt to be just what would be expected from the circumstances under which it was adopted. Its outstanding characteristic is apt to be a complete absence of character—a complete and unrelieved vagueness. Really, when I read some of these statements, I am amazed at the amount of printer's ink which it is

possible to use up without saying anything at all. Words and phrases are indeed used which formerly had a meaning, and which ought to have a meaning now; but these words have been explained away so long that in themselves they now afford no evidence whatever as to what the person who uses them really believes.

When such a vague statement is issued there are always found people who rejoice. Was it not great cause for rejoicing, they say, that our differences were all ironed out? We had been afraid, they say, lest some one would have objected to an evangelical statement like the statement of that missionary council; but our fears were groundless, and even those at the council who were accounted most radical consented to the statement like all the rest. Was not that perfectly splendid?

No, I say when people talk to me in that fashion, I do not think it was splendid at all. I think it was very sad. I should not have thought it to be splendid even if the statement of the council had been really evangelical instead of only apparently so. Is it splendid when men who are plainly out of accord with an evangelical statement acquiesce in the issuance of it and then go on exactly as before in their opposition to the things that the statement contains? I am bound to think that that is the reverse of splendid. But, as a matter of fact, the statement in most cases is not really evangelical at all, but utterly vague. It is so worded as to offend no one. At least, it is so worded as to offend no one except those old-fashioned souls who are hungry for the bread of life and are not satisfied with a type of Christian doctrine that is afraid of its own shadow. The statement is usually so worded that the Modernists can interpret its traditional phrases in their own fashion; and, on the other hand, it is so worded that persons who are evangelical, or think they are evangelical, can bring it back to their constituency as a great diplomatic triumph of orthodoxy. Its great object is to avoid offence. The consequence is that it is just about as far removed as possible from the gospel of Christ. For the gospel of Christ is always offensive in the extreme.

When we pass from these modern statements to the great creeds, what a difference we discover! Instead of

wordiness we find conciseness; instead of an unwillingness to offend, clear delimitation of truth from error; instead of obscurity, clearness; instead of vagueness, the utmost definiteness and precision.

All these differences are rooted in a fundamental difference of purpose. These modern statements are intended to show how little of truth we can get along with and still be Christians, whereas the great creeds of the church are intended to show how much of truth God has revealed to us in His Word. Let us sink our differences, say the authors of these modern statements, and get back to a few bare essentials; let us open our Bibles, say the authors of the great Christian creeds, and seek to unfold the full richness of truth that the Bible contains. Let us be careful, say the authors of these modern statements, not to discourage any of the various tendencies of thought that find a lodgment in the church; let us give all diligence, say the authors of the great Christian creeds, to exclude deadly error from the official teaching of the church, in order that thus the church may be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God.

That difference of purpose is a fundamental difference indeed. But I am inclined to think that there is another difference that is more fundamental still. The most important difference of all is that the authors of these modern statements do not really believe firmly in the existence of truth at all. Since doctrine, they say, is merely the expression of Christian experience, doctrines change and yet the fundamental experience remains the same. One generation expresses its Christian experience in one doctrine, and then another generation may express the same Christian experience in an exactly opposite doctrine. So the Modernism of today becomes the orthodoxy of tomorrow, which in turn gives place to a new Modernism, and so on in an infinite series. No doctrine, according to that theory, can remain valid forever; doctrine must change as the forms of thought change from age to age.

When you ask a person of this way of thinking whether he accepts the great historic creeds of the church, he says to you: "Oh yes, certainly I do. I accept them as expressions of the faith of the church. The Apostles' Creed expressed admirably the faith

### Thank You

**Y**OUR hearty response to our request for copies of the issues of April and October, 1939, has given us all the copies we need. To all who sent us these numbers we express our thanks. Your subscriptions will be extended.

of the ancient church; the Westminster Confession was an admirable expression of the faith of men of the seventeenth century. But as for making these creeds the expression of my faith, of course I cannot possibly do that. I must express my faith in the terms that are suited to the people of the twentieth century. So I must construct a new and entirely different statement to be the creed of modern men."

"Well, then," I ask such a man, "do you think your statement is more true than those historic creeds?"

"Not at all," says he, if he really works out the logical conclusions of his conception of creeds; "those creeds were true expressions of Christian experience, mine also is a true expression of essentially the same experience in the forms of thought that are suited to the present age, but my statement is not a bit more true than those ancient creeds; it, not a bit more than they, can lay claim to permanency; it is true in the present age, but that does not mean at all that it will remain true in the generations to come."

What shall we say about this skeptical notion of what truth is—this skeptical notion with regard to the nature of Christian doctrine? Well, we can say at least this about it: that it is entirely different from the notion that was cherished by those who gave us the great creeds of the church. Those who gave us the great creeds of the church, unlike the authors of these modern statements, believed that the creeds that they produced were true—true in the plain man's sense of the word "truth". They believed that the truth they contained would remain true forever.

It is time now to get back to the question with which this talk began. Is it or is it not possible that there

should be still further advance in Christian doctrine?

Yes, we answer, but only provided the necessary conditions for any real doctrinal advance be observed.

If there is to be any doctrinal advance, we must believe that doctrine is the setting forth of what is true, not a mere expression of religious experience in symbolic form; we must believe, in the second place, that doctrine is the setting forth of that particular truth that is contained in the Bible, which we must hold to be truly God's Word and altogether free from the errors found in other books; we must endeavor, in the third place, not to make doctrine as meagre and vague as possible in order that it shall make room for error, but as full and precise as possible in order that it shall exclude error and set forth the wonderful richness of what God has revealed. Ignore these conditions, and you have doctrinal retrogression or decadence; only if you observe them can you possibly have doctrinal advance.

Such doctrinal advance is certainly conceivable. It is perfectly conceivable that the church should examine the particular errors of the present day and should set forth over against them, even more clearly than is done in the existing creeds, the truth that is contained in God's Word. But I am bound to say that I think such doctrinal advance to be just now extremely unlikely. We are living in a time of widespread intellectual as well as moral decadence, and the visible church has unfortunately not kept free from this decadence. Christian education has been sadly neglected; learning has been despised; and real meditation has become almost a lost art. For these reasons, and other still more important reasons, I think it is clear that ours is not a creed-making age. Intellectual and moral indolence like ours do not constitute the soil out of which great Christian creeds may be expected to grow.

But even if ours were a creed-making age, I doubt very much that the doctrinal advance which it or any future age might produce would be comparable to the advance which found expression in the great historic creeds. I think it may well turn out that Christian doctrine in its great outlines, as set forth, for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, is now essentially complete. There

may be improvements in statement here and there, in the interests of greater precision, but hardly any such great advance as that which was made, for example, at the time of Augustine or at the Reformation. All the great central parts of the Biblical system of doctrine have already been studied by the church and set forth in great creeds.

We need not be too much surprised to discover that that is the case. The subject matter of Christian doctrine, it must be remembered, is fixed. It is found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to which nothing can be added.

Let no one say that the recognition of that fact brings with it a static condition of the human mind or is inimical to progress. On the contrary, it removes the shackles from the human mind and opens up untold avenues of progress.

The truth is, there can be no real progress unless there is something that is fixed. Archimedes said, "Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world." Well, Christian doctrine provides that place to stand. Unless there be such a place to stand, all progress is an illusion. The very idea of progress implies something fixed. There is no progress in a kaleidoscope.

That is the trouble with the boasted progress of our modern age. The Bible at the start was given up. Nothing was to be regarded as fixed. All truth was regarded as relative. What has been the result? I will tell you. An unparalleled decadence—liberty prostrate, slavery stalking almost unchecked through the earth, the achievements of centuries crumbling in the dust, sweetness and decency despised, all meaning regarded as having been taken away from human life. What is the remedy? I will tell you that too. A return to God's Word! We had science for the sake of science, and got the World War; we had art for art's sake, and got ugliness gone mad; we had man for the sake of man and got a world of robots—men made into machines. Is it not time for us to come to ourselves, like the prodigal in a far country? Is it not time for us to seek real progress by a return to the living God?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: *The third address in this series by Dr. Machen will appear in the issue of March 10th.*)

## A Nation-Wide Call to Repentance

A Review by the REV. CARY N. WEISIGER

Pastor of the Calvary Presbyterian Church of Germantown, Philadelphia, Penna.

THE RADIO FOR CHRIST, by Walter A. Maier, Ph.D., Professor of Old Testament at Concordia Theological Seminary. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1939, 417pp., \$1.50.

WHEN the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world," he came close to describing radio conditions of our day. There are many kinds of voices in the world of radio, and the listener is sometimes bewildered by the verbal barrage that assails his ears through the loudspeaker.

This is especially true in the matter of religious broadcasts. What programs are worth listening to? This reviewer, after listening to Dr. Maier many times and after reading this book which contains his radio messages for the winter of 1938-39, feels that the Lutheran Hour program, which sponsors Dr. Maier, is definitely worth tuning in as regularly as possible.

Here in these messages is a nation-wide call to repentance. Here is a voice, sounding from coast to coast, which summons America to forsake sin and to turn to Him who alone can bestow pardon and peace. And here is a voice that gives forth no uncertain sound, but that rings with conviction and power.

Dr. Maier does not hesitate to name sin where he finds it, whether it be in mighty ecclesiastical councils or in divorce-cursed homes. It is this courageous, militant note that lends such power to his preaching. He exposes the attempt that has been made by the modernist Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America "to monopolize and control the entire Protestant broadcasting" (p. 313). He charges that Dr. Fosdick's "large volume that masquerades as a guide to the Scriptures . . . has made the Book of Life a book of death" (p. 46).

The concern of Dr. Maier for the sins of America is well expressed in his own words: "Unless we become a morally cleaner nation; unless the heart of the American nation is turned from the reproach of destructive sin to the exalting righteousness,

not all the brains, not all the power and the money in this country can guarantee the continued favor of God" (p. 200). Again, he expresses his alarm thus: "Unless there is a definite moral improvement in the American nation . . . unless the reign of open corruption and vice is checked, this country, regardless of all the optimistic predictions of statesmen and diplomats, will grope in darkness such as has never previously covered this land" (p. 364).

Here, in truth, is the voice of a modern Savonarola summoning his fellows to repentance and righteousness. And when Dr. Maier buttresses his arguments and enforces his appeals with figures on crime and illegitimate births annually occurring in this country, one cannot help but share his alarm.

One who hears Dr. Maier regularly or reads his sermons will gain the conviction that he must at some time have made a Pauline resolve to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Christ and His sin-atonement cross are given the preëminence. The great doctrines of sin and grace are constantly dealt with. The way of salvation is clearly presented.

We do not like to quibble over terms or indulge in theological hair-splitting. It is no mere matter of quibbling, however, to note that Dr. Maier goes beyond Scripture in the matter of the design of the atonement. Did Christ die for all men without exception or only for His own? Dr. Maier seems to believe the former, that is, that the design of the atonement was universal rather than particular. On page 170 he says that Jesus came "to die in his own holy body the death of every sinner." On pages 373-4 he appeals: "Oh, let not Calvary's blood be shed in vain for you." We believe that the Bible teaches that while Christ offers salvation fully and freely to all, yet He designed in His death to save only His Church, His people, His sheep. If this seems contradictory, we are content to accept God's revelation and await the light of a clearer day.

Apart from, and in spite of, this, Dr. Maier is a champion of super-