

The Presbyterian

A GOODLY HERITAGE

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Liberal Arts Education in the Tradition of Historic Presbyterianism

Trinity Christian College is located in Palos Heights, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Presently it is a two year college with plans to become a four year school by 1970. The freshman class enrolling September, 1967 should be the first class to graduate from Trinity's four year program. The junior year will be introduced, D.V., September, 1969 and the senior year, September, 1970.

Trinity is a young school. It opened its doors seven years ago to thirty-five students. Under our Lord's gracious blessing the school now numbers 205 regular day students. There is also an interesting evening school program which is attracting more and more attention. Of special interest to the readers of this journal is the fact that two

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There is in the New Testament not a bit of comfort for the feeble notion that controversy in the church is to be avoided, that a man can ever proclaim truth without attacking error.

The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

The question of the church's responsibility in the new age involves two other questions: (1) What is the new age?; (2) What is the church?

The former question is being answered in a number of different ways; differences of opinion prevail, in particular, with regard to the exact degree of newness to which the new age may justifiably lay claim. There are those who think that the new age is so very new that nothing that approved itself to past ages can conceivably be valid now. There are others, however, who think that human nature remains essentially the same and that two and two still make four. With this latter point of view I am on the whole inclined to agree. In particular, I hold that facts have a most unprogressive habit of staying put, and that if a thing really happened in the first century of our era, the acquisition of new knowledge and the improvement of scientific method can never make it into a thing that did not happen.

Such convictions do not blind me to the fact that we have witnessed astonishing changes in our day. Indeed, the changes have become so rapid as to cause many people to lose not only their breath but also, I fear, their head. They have led many people to think not only that nothing that is old ought by any possibility to remain in the new age, but also that whatever the new age favors is always really new.

Both these conclusions are erroneous. There are old things which ought to remain in the new age; and many of the things, both good and bad, which the new age regards as new are really as old as the hills.

Old Things Worth Retaining

In the former category are to be put, for example, the literary and artistic achievements of past generations. Those are things which the new age ought to retain, at least until the new age can produce something to put in their place, and that it has so far signally failed to do. I am well aware that when I say to the new age that Homer is still worth reading, or that the Cathedral of Amiens is superior to any of the achievements of the *art nouveau*, I am making assertions which it would be difficult for me to prove. There is no disputing about tastes. Yet, after all, until the artistic impulse is eradicated more thoroughly from human life than has so far been done even by the best efforts of the metallic civilization of our day, we cannot get rid of the categories of good and bad or high and low in the field

It was thirty years ago on the first day of the new year that Dr. Machen entered his heavenly rest at the age of 55. During the preceding months he had served as senior editor of the Presbyterian Guardian.

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Except for an occasional "dated" reference, the reader will find Dr. Machen's message quite timely. If he is surprised at how little the "new age" has changed since the thirties, he should not be surprised at the continuing truth and therefore relevance of the gospel.

of art. But when we pay attention to those categories, it becomes evident at once that we are living today in a drab and decadent age, and that a really new impulse will probably come, as it has come so many times before, only through a rediscovery of the glories of the past.

Something very similar needs to be said in the realm of political and social science. There, too, something is being lost — something very precious, though very intangible and very difficult of defense before those who have not the love of it in their hearts. I refer to civil and religious liberty, for which our fathers were willing to sacrifice so much.

The word "liberty" has a very archaic sound today; it is often put in quotation marks by those who are obliged to use the ridiculous word at all. Yet, despised though liberty is, there are still those who love it; and unless their love of it can be eradicated from their unprogressive souls, they will never be able to agree, in their estimate of the modern age, with those who do not love it.

To those lovers of civil and religious liberty I confess that I belong; in fact, civil and religious liberty seems to me to be more valuable than any other earthly thing — than any other thing short of that truer and profounder liberty which only God can give.

The Loss of Liberty

What estimate of the present age can possibly be complete that does not take account of what is so marked a feature of it — namely, the loss of those civil liberties for which men formerly were willing to sacrifice all that they possessed? In some countries,

The real trouble lies in that unseen realm which is found within the soul of man.

such as Russia and Italy, the attack upon liberty has been blatant and extreme; but exactly the same forces which appear there in more consistent form appear also in practically all the countries of the earth. Everywhere we have the substitution of economic considerations for great principles in the conduct of the state; everywhere a centralized state, working as the state necessarily must work, by the use of force, is taking possession of the most intimate fields of individual and family life.

These tendencies have proceeded more rapidly in America than in most other countries of the world; for if they have not progressed so far here as elsewhere, that is only because in America they had a greater handicap to overcome. Thirty years ago we hated bureaucracy and pitied those countries in Europe that were under bureaucratic control; today we are rapidly becoming one of the most bureaucratic countries of the world. Setbacks to this movement, such as the defeat, for the present at least, of the misnamed "child-labor amendment," the repeal of the Lusk laws in New York placing private teachers under state supervision and control, the invalidation of the Nebraska language law making literary education even in private schools a crime, the prevention so far of the establishment of a Federal department of education—these setbacks to the attack on liberty are, I am afraid, but temporary unless the present temper of the people changes.

The international situation, moreover, is hardly such as to give encouragement to lovers of liberty. Everywhere in the world we have centralization of power, the ticketing and cataloguing of the individual by irresponsible and doctrinaire bureaus, and, worst of all, in many places we have monopolistic control of education by the state.

But is all that new? In principle it is not. Something very much like it was advocated in Plato's *Republic* over two thousand years ago. The battle between collectivism and liberty is an age-long battle; and even the materialistic paternalism of the modern state is by no means altogether new. The technique of tyranny has,

indeed, been enormously improved; a state-controlled compulsory education has proved far more effective in crushing out liberty than the older and cruder weapons of fire and sword, and modern experts have proved to be more efficient than the dilettante tyrants of the past. But such differences are differences of degree and not of kind, and essentially the battle for freedom is the same as it always has been.

Society and the Soul

If that battle is lost, if collectivism finally triumphs, if we come to live in a world where recreation as well as labor is prescribed for us by experts appointed by the state, if the sweetness and the sorrows of family relationships are alike eliminated and liberty becomes a thing of the past, we ought to place the blame for this sad result of all the pathetic strivings of the human race exactly where it belongs. And it does not belong to the external

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conditions of modern life. I know that there are those who say that it does belong there; I know that there are those who tell us that individualism is impossible in an industrial age. But I do not believe them for one moment. Unquestionably, industrialism, with the accompanying achievements of modern science in both the physical and the social realm, does constitute a great temptation to destroy freedom; but temptation is not compulsion, and of real compulsion there is none.

No, my friends, there is no real reason for mankind to surrender to the machine. If liberty is crushed out, if standardization has its perfect work, if the worst of all tyrannies, the tyranny of the expert, becomes universal, if the finer aspirations of humanity give way to drab efficiency, do not blame the external conditions in the world today. If human life becomes mechanized, do not blame the machine. Put the blame exactly where it belongs—upon the soul of man.

Is it not in general within that realm of the soul of man that the evils of society have their origin today? We have developed a vast and rather wonderful machinery—the machinery of our modern life. For some reason, it has recently ceased to function. The experts are busily cranking the engine, as I used to do with my Ford car in the heroic days when a Ford was still a Ford. They are wondering why the engine does not start. They are giving learned explanations of its failure to do so; they are adducing the most intricate principles of dynamics. It is all very instructive, no doubt. But the real explanation is much simpler. It is simply that the driver of the car has forgotten to turn on the switch. The real trouble with the engine of modern society is that it is not producing a spark. The real trouble lies in that unseen realm which is found within the soul of man.

That realm cannot be neglected even in a time of immediate physical distress like the present. I do not know in detail how this physical distress is to be relieved. I would to God that I did. But one thing I do know; it will

never be relieved if, in our eagerness to relieve it, we neglect the unseen things. It is not practical to be merely practical men; man cannot successfully be treated as a machine; even the physical welfare of humanity cannot be attained if we make that the supreme object of our pursuit; even in a day when so many material problems are pressing for our attention, we cannot neglect the evils of the soul.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

But if that be so, if the real trouble with the world lies in the soul of man, we may perhaps turn for help to an agency which is generally thought to have the soul of man as its special province. I mean the Christian church. That brings us to our second question: What is the church?

About nineteen hundred years ago, there came forth from Palestine a remarkable movement. At first it was obscure; but within a generation it was firmly planted in the great cities of

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The supernatural Jesus presented in all of our sources was the real Jesus.

the Roman Empire, and within three centuries it had conquered the Empire itself. It has since then gone forth to the ends of the earth. That movement is called the Christian church.

What was it like in the all-important initial period, when the impulse which gave rise to it was fresh and pure? With regard to the answer to that question, there may be a certain amount of agreement among all serious historians, whether they are themselves Christians or not. Certain characteristics of the Christian church at the beginning stand out clear in the eyes both of friends and of foes.

Doctrinal—

It may clearly be observed, for example, that the Christian church at the beginning was radically doctrinal. Doctrine was not the mere expression of Christian life, as it is in the pragmatist skepticism of the present day, but—just the other way around—the doctrine, logically though not temporally, came first and the life afterward. The life was founded upon the message, and not the message upon the life.

That becomes clear everywhere in the primary documents. It appears, for example, in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, which is admitted by all serious historians, Christian and non-Christian, to have been really written by a man of the first Christian generation—the man whose name it bears. The Apostle Paul there gives us a summary of his missionary preaching in Thessalonica—that missionary preaching which in Thessalonica and in Philippi and elsewhere did, it must be admitted, turn the world upside down. What was that missionary preaching like? Well, it contained a whole system of theology. "Ye turned to God," says Paul, "from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come." Christian doctrine, according to Paul, was not something that came after salvation, as an expression of Christian experience, but it was something necessary to salvation. The Christian life, according to Paul, was founded upon a message.

The same thing appears when we

turn from Paul to the very first church in Jerusalem. That too was radically doctrinal. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians—again one of the universally accepted Epistles—Paul gives us a summary of what he had received from the primitive Jerusalem church. What was it that he had received; what was it that the primitive Jerusalem church delivered over unto him? Was it a mere exhortation; was it the mere presentation of a program of life; did the first Christians in Jerusalem say merely: "Jesus has lived a noble life of self-sacrifice; we have been inspired by him to live that life, and we call upon you our hearers to share it with us"? Not at all. Here is what those first Christians said: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." That is not an exhortation, but a rehearsal of facts; it is couched not in the imperative but in the indicative mood; it is not a program, but a doctrine.

I know that modern men have appealed sometimes at this point from the primitive Christian church to Jesus himself. The primitive church, it is admitted, was doctrinal; but Jesus of Nazareth, it is said, proclaimed a simple gospel of divine Fatherhood and human brotherhood, and believed in the essential goodness of man. Such an appeal from the primitive church to Jesus used to be expressed in the cry of the so-called "Liberal" church, "Back to Christ!" But that cry is somewhat antiquated today. It has become increasingly clear to the historians that the only Jesus whom we

find attested for us in our sources of information is the supernatural Redeemer presented in the four Gospels as well as in the Epistles of Paul. If there was, back of this supernatural figure, a real, non-doctrinal, purely human prophet of Nazareth, his portrait must probably lie forever hidden from us. Such, indeed is exactly the skeptical conclusion which is being reached by some of those who stand in the van of what is called progress in New Testament criticism today.

There are others, however—and to them the present writer belongs—who think that the supernatural Jesus presented in all of our sources of information was the real Jesus who walked and talked in Palestine, and that it is not necessary for us to have recourse to the truly extraordinary hypothesis that the intimate friends of Jesus, who were the leaders of the primitive church, completely misunderstood their Master's person and work.

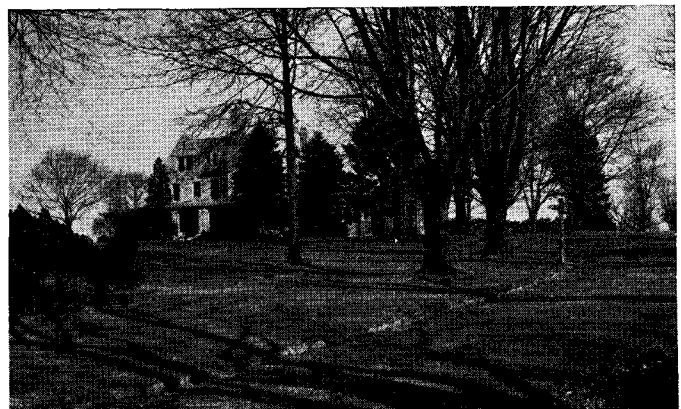
Be that as it may, there is, at any rate, not a trace of any non-doctrinal preaching that possessed one bit of power in those early days of the Christian church. It is perfectly clear that that strangely powerful movement which emerged from the obscurity of Palestine in the first century of our era was doctrinal from the very beginning and to the very core. It was totally unlike the ethical preaching of the Stoic and Cynic philosophers. Unlike those philosophers, it had a very clear-cut message; and at the center of that message was the doctrine that set forth the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Intolerant—

That brings us to our second point. The primitive church, we have just seen, was radically doctrinal. In the

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**Machen
Memorial
Hall
at
Westminster
Seminary**



the divine authority of the Scriptures.

The Westminster Confession is correct when it says that in vain *we* try to convince ourselves of the divine character of the Scriptures. For it is only by the sovereign work of the Spirit witnessing to us by and with the Word which has been given that we shall be convinced. The point is, though, that if the Holy Spirit does not choose to reveal this truth to us, the Bible is no less the Word of God.

When the Christian says that the Bible is God's Word, he is saying something about the Bible in and of itself. Whether human opinion is in agreement or not, whether people comprehend this or not, it does not matter; it is truth, unalterable.

The fault of this proposed subscription statement is that it denies this basic truth, although it does so in a very subtle manner. This statement is saying that it does not make any difference as to what the Bible is in itself; as a matter of fact, this statement is saying that the Bible is not the Word of God, in the ordinary sense of those words. It only matters what value it may have for me at a particular moment. It is a question of value judgment.

Therefore, when the neo-orthodox theologian or disciple says that the Bible is God's Word, he is not confessing something about the *Bible* itself (though he may use exactly the same words the Calvinist uses); he is confessing, rather, something about himself. It is important for us to remember that the thinking behind this theological statement is that this proposition is concerned to tell us of the unfolding of faith's understanding of the Bible, and not of the self-imposed revelation of God upon men with respect to the Bible. This is what unbelieving theology has done with all of the doctrines of Christianity.

But I ask you how something can have the value of God's Word for me (subjectively), if in reality it is not God's Word (objectively)? What comfort is there in this for my hellward bound existence? In view of this fact I think no Christian (officer or layman) in the U.P.U.S.A. has the right to remain silent or comfortable in a church which would undermine the foundation of his faith.

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The responsibility of the church in the new age is the same as its responsibility in every age.

Machen

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second place, it was radically intolerant. In being radically intolerant, as in being radically doctrinal, it placed itself squarely in opposition to the spirit of that age. That was an age of syncretism and tolerance in religion; it was an age of what J. S. Phillimore has called "the courtly polygamies of the soul." But with that tolerance, with those courtly polygamies of the soul, the primitive Christian church would have nothing to do. It demanded a completely exclusive devotion. A man could not be a worshiper of the God of the Christians and at the same time be a worshiper of other gods; he could not accept the salvation offered by Christ and at the same time admit that for other people there might be some other way of salvation; he could not agree to refrain from proselytizing among men of other faiths, but came forward, no matter what it might cost, with a universal appeal. That is what I mean by saying that the primitive Christian church was radically intolerant.

Ethical—

In the third place, the primitive church was radically ethical. Religion in those days, save among the Jews, was by no means closely connected with goodness. But with such a non-ethical religion the primitive Christian church would have nothing whatever to do. God, according to the primitive Christians, is holy; and in his presence no unclean thing can stand. Jesus Christ presented a life of perfect goodness upon earth; and only they can belong to him who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Christians were, indeed, by no means perfect; they stood before God only in the merit of Christ their Saviour, not in their own merit; but they had been saved for holiness, and even in this life that holiness must begin to appear. A salvation which permitted a man to continue in sin was, according to the primitive church, no matter what profession of faith it might make, nothing but a sham.

The Reformation, like primitive Christianity, was radically doctrinal, radically intolerant, and radically ethical.

Conflicts in the Church

These characteristics of primitive Christianity have never been completely lost in the long history of the Christian church. They have, however, always had to be defended against foes within as well as without the church. The conflicts began in apostolic days; and there is in the New Testament not a bit of comfort for the feeble notion that controversy in the church is to be avoided, that a man can make his preaching positive without making it negative, that he can ever proclaim truth without attacking error. Another conflict arose in the second century, against Gnosticism, and still another when Augustine defended against Pelagius the Christian view of sin.

At the close of the Middle Ages, it looked as though at last the battle were lost—as though at last the church had become merged with the world. When Luther went to Rome, a blatant paganism was there in control. But the Bible was rediscovered; the ninety-five theses were nailed up; Calvin's *Institutes* was written; there was a counter-reformation in the Church of Rome; and the essential character of the Christian church was preserved. The Reformation, like primitive Christianity, was radically doctrinal, radically intolerant, and radically ethical. It preserved these characteristics in the face of opposition. It would not go a step with Erasmus, for example, in his indifferentism and his tolerance; it was founded squarely on the Bible, and it proclaimed, as providing the only way of salvation, the message that the Bible contains.

At the present time, the Christian church stands in the midst of another conflict. Like the previous conflicts, it is a conflict not between two forms of the Christian religion but between the Christian religion on the one hand and an alien religion on the other. Yet—again like the previous conflicts—it is carried on within the church. The non-Christian forces have made use