

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

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

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."—Isa. 40:8.

Will Christianity Survive?



Dr. Machen

SOME weeks ago I was asked by the religious editor of the Boston *Evening Transcript* to contribute to a symposium on the question whether Christianity is facing extinction in the Western world.

I said that that question can be answered only if we first answer the more fundamental question whether the preservation of Christianity depends upon man or upon God.

If its preservation depends upon man or upon any natural resources, the chances are overwhelmingly against its being preserved.

The whole current of the age is against it. In Russia, in Germany, in Mexico, and in other countries, it is facing definite persecution; and the weapons by which it is being attacked are far more effective than those that used to be employed. Monopolistic control of education by the state and a totalitarian censorship of radio and of the press are far more effective ways of stamping out Christianity than were the old-fashioned ways of fire and sword. Tyranny today is at bottom what tyranny always was, but its technique has been enormously improved.

In our country religious persecution has not definitely been begun, but every indication is that it is coming very soon. Teacher-oath bills, anti-propaganda bills forbidding criticism of racial and social groups, flag-waving bills, the abominable proposed Control-of-Youth Amendment, falsely called the Child Labor Amendment—these things tell a story that is only too plain. They are wrong in principle, and principle is the mother of practice. They are symptoms of a deadly underlying disease, and every indication is that that disease is going to work itself out in the destruction of all liberty in this country just as lib-

erty has been destroyed in so many of the countries of the world. Communists on the one hand and, on the other hand, those who insult the American flag by seeking to induce a love of it by force are alike in attacking the institutions for which this country formerly stood, and certainly the attack is a very serious attack indeed.

This general decay of civil and religious liberty will almost inevitably in the long run result in persecution of the Christian religion. Christianity will always stand in conflict with any form of the totalitarian state.

Of course it can escape persecution if it sinks back into a neo-pagan syncretism like that which finds expression, for example, in the book *Re-Thinking Missions*—that is, if it relinquishes its offensive claim to be not merely *one* way of salvation but the *only* way. But in that case it will simply cease to be Christianity. If it continues to be Christianity it is facing deadly opposition in the modern world.

It is facing opposition not only in the state but also in the visible Church.

The present tyranny in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.—to take that merely as an example of what is taking place in many churches—is as like as two peas to the tyranny in the state. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has a constitution guaranteeing liberty under the Word of God. That constitution is being overridden by the ecclesiastical machine with exactly the same cynical disregard for solemn promises as that which has established dictatorships in country after country today and has so seriously menaced free institutions in a country such as ours.

Both the state, then, and a denatured Church are arrayed against the Christian religion. What will be the result of the conflict? Will Christianity survive?

Not if it is a natural phenomenon, not if it depends for its preservation upon human resources. The forces arrayed against it are in that case entirely too strong. But then, you see,

it is not a natural phenomenon, and it does not depend for its preservation upon human resources. It is a supernatural phenomenon, and it depends for its preservation upon the living God.

So it is in the case of that particular phase of the world-wide conflict which is seen just now in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. An ecclesiastical bureaucracy, in utter disregard of the Constitution, is engaged in crushing real Christianity out of the Church. It is ever more systematically closing the doors of the ministry to those who will not dethrone Jesus Christ by promising a blanket allegiance to human agencies and programs.

A little group of people is resisting this tyranny and is resolved to stand true to the Bible even if, in order to do that, it is obliged to form a separate church organization.

How can we who form that group have the temerity to stand against the whole current of the world and of the visible Church? How can we stand against so many men who are so much abler and stronger than we? Our answer is plain. It is because of the Bible. Those persons who are against us in this contention are also against the Word of God, and the Word of God stands sure.

The separate church organization, continuing, as we believe, the true spiritual succession of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., will no doubt at the beginning be small. We believe that it will grow rapidly, by the blessing of God. But at the beginning it will be only a very little group. What is more, it will be a very weak little group, and a very sinful little group, utterly without any merit or any strength of its own.

How, then, can it survive? For one reason only. Because it is in the care and keeping of God, because it is founded upon His unchanging Word. Even the smallest and weakest group is strong if it can hear Jesus say: "Fear not, little flock."