

# Columbia Theological Seminary

## BULLETIN

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The following article was prepared for publication in connection with the removal of the Seminary. Its issuance has been delayed till now. Though it seems less timely now, still we think it should be given to the public.

COMMITTEE ON BULLETIN

## THE COLUMBIA TRADITION.

By WM. CHILDS ROBINSON, A.M., Th.M.

The Sons of Columbia are intensely interested in her! That was the delightful conviction the writer received from a few hours happily spent among them at Montreat. Men like Dr. W. M. Hunter, North Carolina Synod's Secretary of Education; Dr. S. L. Morris, the greatly loved Secretary of Home Missions; Dr. C. R. Hemphill of Louisville, bespoke a deep interest, a true filial love. As the dean of our Southern Presbyterian theological professors gave his blessing to the youngest member of that group he spoke touchingly of his farewell visit to the old grounds in Columbia, S. C.

And the Presbyterian Church in the United States is intensely interested in Columbia Seminary, as well she may be. For she was cradled in the Columbia tradition. Those who presided at the momentous occasion of her birth were Columbia men: Dr. B. M. Palmer, Dr. J. H. Thornwell, Drs. J. Leighton and Joseph R. Wilson. The great architectonic principles of our Church were laid down by James Henley Thornwell; while Dr. Adger supervised the writing of the Book of Church Order along the lines of these constitutive principles. Those who love most this Southern Zion are concerned that the Columbia tradition live, in order that this tradition may keep the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. true to her own fundamental ideals.

But wherein does the Columbia tradition lie? In the walls and buildings in Columbia in which these words are penned, or in the great, abiding, rock principles of truth **according to the Word**—principles like the sole Headship and Kingship of Christ in His Body, the Church? Just at this moment we are witnessing a great effort to transform a sister seminary,—Princeton—from a citadel of orthodoxy into a different tradition. The plan there seems to be to preserve the old landmarks, the same buildings, towers, turrets, and grounds; but

to make them symbols of something different. Instead of standing as symbols of the granite-like, consistent, **Old School** Calvinism of Charles Hodge's "Three Volumes," or of B. B. Warfield's scholarly defense of the super-natural character of the Christian origins, these towers are to be made the symbols of a conglomerate, hodge-podge known as "the inclusive church." A seminary with which the writer is familiar in another denomination seems to have swung from the conservative position to the liberal position in the space of a few months by the replacing of old professors by new ones. In the last few years many have expressed grave doubts as to whether the name, the place, or the blood of the great Dwight L. Moody have been sufficient to hold his loved Northfield true to the testimony he bore. A school, in which the teachers chafe under the bonds of orthodoxy, instead of glorying that they are set for the defense of the faith, will lose the very life of its tradition and will turn out men untrue to the name of that school. The point to these comparisons is that the Columbia tradition is a matter of heart, of principle, of love, of loyalty to a great heritage; not of location, nor of buildings. The soundness of the heart is the question; not the cut of the clothes!

Is it time for any lover of Columbia Seminary to bid good-bye to this great Southern Presbyterian tradition as the school moves to Atlanta? When the writer entered Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, ten years ago, there were in the faculty two men (out of six) who were alumni of the school. These two men had put in a total of five years as students in Columbia Seminary. Those who enter Columbia Seminary this year will have (in a faculty of seven) **four** men who have had a total of twelve years in the classroom study in Columbia Seminary. And, if a personal allusion may be pardoned, of these four, two are Columbia men who have been reared in the very shadow of the Seminary and imbibed its theology not for three years each—but for twenty. Dr. Clark grew up as the son of a leading director, and a son of Columbia First Church, the Church whose life has ever been most closely entwined with the life of the Seminary. The writer has known the Seminary influence from a father who is a director, from

a mission Sunday school of which Dr. R. C. Reed was superintendent, from Arsenal Hill Church where Girardeau's theology was faithfully reproduced by his son-in-law, Dr. Geo. A. Blackburn, from Woodrow Memorial Church where most of the preaching was done by Columbia Seminary professors. The name of our president has been the synonym of true blue Presbyterianism since the days of the Westminster Assembly, and every student of Columbia's history knows the place that the "Gillespie Clan" had in giving to the Southern Church her greatest mind—Thornwell.

The other members of our faculty are men whose training in great kindred traditions has fitted them to take up and bear onward the Columbia tradition. Indeed among those who bear to us the nobility of the Richmond tradition, the name of Dr. Wm. M. McPheeters has in the last half century, become so closely interwoven with that of Columbia that to mention the one is inevitably to think of the other. While still in the old Columbia atmosphere, Dr. J. B. Green has closely devoted himself to the study of the Columbia theology. As a result of this study of our two great traditions it is hard to find Dr. Green's peer, either in the pulpit proclamation, or in the classroom exposition of Southern Presbyterian Theology. Moreover, these are men who have earned and enjoy and bring to the new "home Synod" (Georgia), the highest confidence, love, and esteem of the old "home Synod" (South Carolina). And we rejoice in the approaching coming of another representative of the great Princeton traditions—Dr. H. B. Blakely. Two other members of our faculty have taken post-graduate work at Princeton. All have studied carefully the books and articles there produced. If our great Northern sister denomination does not care for the Princeton heritage, we, in Columbia, will do our best to perpetuate the matchless defense of Christian beginnings worked out by Princeton's great Southern triumvirate, Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield of Kentucky, J. Gresham Machen of Georgia and Baltimore, Wm. Park Armstrong of Alabama. An exposure to the contrary viewpoint has taught some of us to appreciate anew the value of this great line of defense. We believe that these two additional traditions will make the new Columbia a mighty

cord woven of three noble strands for the preservation and proclamation of those truths on which our souls depend.

Perhaps a word as to our attitude toward this Columbia tradition may not be out of order—for this is the crux of the matter. What is our purpose and aim on the new foundations? We purpose to keep the old landmarks—not of buildings, but of truths; not of location, but of vocation; not of method, but of meat and matter. We are set for the defense of the Gospel in our day and time as were our fathers in theirs—the same Gospel they preached, the same Christ,—“The Lord of Glory”—the same Cross and gloriously emptied tomb. We have girded our loins to take care that the Columbia tradition is re-embodied in new foundations. The controlling Synods have decided that Atlanta gives us a larger pulpit to reach a greater audience with the Columbia tradition. Atlanta enables us to follow those of Southeastern lineage and of Columbia theology who have moved westward toward the Mississippi—and the New Orleans of Palmer. In Atlanta we promise the Church our best endeavors to exalt the Columbia tradition.

But just because the Columbia tradition is a Scriptural tradition, a spiritual tradition, our human efforts are not sufficient to guarantee its perpetuation. We earnestly ask the prayer support of every one who loves this great heritage. In this year of removal we ask the prayers of those who have so faithfully held the lines and proven the bulwark of support for the Seminary. One of the Seminary’s most devoted supporters recently suggested that the attention of its friends be called to the gracious promise recorded in Isaiah 40:31. Will every lover of the Seminary lay to heart this year our spiritual need and plead to God His promise, “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength”? Will you ask Him to renew Columbia Seminary this year in the great tradition of loyalty to Himself? Will you ask for her a regirding with strength by the Lord for service in His vineyard? In this crucial moment we earnestly appeal to you, who are “the Lord’s remembrancers,” to make mention of Columbia in prayer: that the Lord may renew His heritage, revive His work, regenerate with a rich baptism of redeeming grace every soul that comes in any way into contact with the Seminary you own and love.