

CHRISTIAN WORK

A Religious Weekly Review

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A Blind Man's Faith

FREDERICK WINKLEMAN

The Issues at Columbus

MURRAY S. HOWLAND
J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Freedom in the Presbyterian Pulpit

HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

The Master of The Lilies

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CONTINUING

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The World of To-Day

Houghton's Speech

ACCORDING to custom, Alanson B. Houghton, our new Ambassador to the Court of St. James, gave his first real message to the British people at the dinner of welcome extended him by the London Pilgrim Society. A Harvard graduate, blessed with the real cultivation which Harvard frequently gives her sons, a business man who has always read what is best worth while and kept in close touch with the world of men and thought, Mr. Houghton had already proved his quality by his service as our first post-war Ambassador in Berlin. At London he had the humor and the perspicacity last week to smile at the twanging on the one string of "blood is thicker than water," usual in the speeches of less well furnished ambassadors to Great Britain. Instead, he told England and all the world what America expects just now of Europe.

The full measure [he said] of American helpfulness can be obtained only when the American people are assured that the time for destructive methods and policies has passed and that the time for peaceful upbuilding has come.

They [the American people] offer no advice. But I

may say to you that they hope and that they fervently pray that a peace may soon be reached—not a peace of mere contrivance and arrangement based primarily on force, for that would merely be the prelude to another war, but a peace which contains the elements of permanency—a peace which will deserve and receive the moral support of mankind because it is just.

And they believe that such a peace can come in only one way. It must be based upon the assumption of good faith by all who participate in it. That assumption may be larger, or it may be smaller, but in proportion as men seek to eliminate it altogether their work will be in vain. For now, as always, peace can come only through mutual and hopeful endeavor. Peace is an adventure in faith.

The London papers read different messages between the lines of the Ambassador's speech. Some thought he aimed his words at France, some at Germany. As a matter of fact he was aiming at every nation which bases its foreign policy on suspicion. But the big brothers among nations bear the greater blame for international scrapping as much as do the elder brothers in a quarrelsome family. Mr. Houghton's words represent the feeling of President Coolidge and the administration. They received vigorous approval from Senator Borah and others in Washington. They put the duty of European nations to each other accurately and naturally. We wish that the Ambassador might now turn as frankly to his fellow citizens and free his mind on America.

Shall We Stop the Merry-go-Round?

THE minds of Westerners who have caught some glimpse of the East turn back again and again to the question whether our brothers in Palestine or India or Ceylon do not understand how to live better than do we. The men may go about with great patches on baggy trousers and the women may wear patchwork quilts, but they all have time of an afternoon to sit in the green grass beside the river outside the city; they have leisure to talk; the man in the bazaar may write poetry—even though its verbal jewels may shine a little glassily; people have a chance to dream and gossip and smoke. The papers last week carried a curious dispatch to the effect that some of the retail business men in Washington were put out with President Coolidge for advising personal economy. The announcement that he had bought no Easter suit and had had his old

have a whole world of difference. In America a boy is always endeavoring to attain some outward sign of achievement, to make the college paper, to make one of the clubs or fraternities, to make the football team. The center of gravity is in the world of action far more than in the world of thought. You get the same tendency echoed in the academic sphere. I was struck by the excellence, the vigor, and the competence with which affairs relating to the world of action are handled. I found that everyone could use a typewriter and drive an automobile. I found that drives for money were made on a vast scale and with a success undreamed of in England. I found that the applied sciences, such as medicine and engineering and agriculture and the voca-

tional studies, such as law, are at their best taught [and learned] far better than anywhere in England. But when it came to what one may call by contrast the world of thought, quite the opposite was the case. Pure science and the purely cultural subjects, such as classics and literature and art, are absolutely inferior in most cases and usually neglected. The situation in regard to them is either tragic or comic. Accordingly, although one meets students who obviously show promise of becoming great engineers, great doctors, captains of industry, and so forth, one rarely if ever meets a student who seems destined to become a Darwin, a Beethoven, a Shelley.

New York, May 6, 1925. FREDERICK LYNCH.

Freedom in the Presbyterian Pulpit

By HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

Dr. Coffin, pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York and preacher at many of the Eastern universities, is known to a yet wider audience through his many books. The able and scholarly sermon, which we print herewith, contains the very crux of the situation which the Presbyterian Church now faces. We wish that it might be in the hands of every commissioner at the General Assembly.—THE EDITORS.

"Am I not free?"—I Corinthians 9:1

LET us take as our text the words with which St. Paul, after speaking of the obligations which bind him in the fellowship of the Church of his day, asks, "Am I not free?"

Recent events have turned the thought of all Protestant Christians, and particularly of Presbyterians, to the question of freedom in the pulpit. The determined effort, on the one hand, of a large and dominant group in our Church to exclude from the ministry any who do not share their interpretation of the Gospel, and on the other hand the refusal of a most brilliant and useful preacher to accept the vows required of Presbyterian ministers on the ground that to subscribe an ancient creed and interpret it in modern terms is "perilous to honesty and hampering to the free leadership of the Spirit," makes it fitting that all our people should know what our constitution requires in this matter of their ministers and other office-bearers. If a young man is thinking of giving himself to the ministry, to what must he subscribe? If men are elected elders or deacons, what does the vow exacted of them imply? If one is a member of a Presbyterian Church, what freedom of teaching may he expect from its pulpit?

At the Reformation the uppermost question in the minds of Christians was, Where is the supreme authority in religion? The Roman Catholic answered, "In the Church speaking through the pope?"

The Protestant replied in the words of our Westminster Confession: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship." That statement is repeated as the first preliminary principle to the constitution adopted by our American Presbyterian Church. The supreme authority in religion is God speaking directly by His Spirit to the consciences of men in and through the Bible. It is not the Bible as an external law to be accepted in every detail, but the Bible as the record of the historic Self-revelation of God in the experiences of His people, culminating in Christ, attested and interpreted by the living Spirit within us today. Against the claim of Rome for obedience to the pope, and against Greek or Anglo-Catholics who would bind us to the decisions of the Councils of the early Church, we are asked at ordination: "Do you believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"

And our Puritan forefathers had another contest for freedom with Tudor and Stuart kings, who claimed for themselves and the hierarchy appointed by them, a divine right to govern the Church. In protest the Solemn League and Covenant asserted that the only King and Head of the Church is Jesus Christ; and in 1643, when Parliament had gained the upper hand over Charles the First, an Assembly of English and Scotch divines was called at Westminster to reform the Church on the basis of the Kingship of Christ governing by His Spirit in the Scriptures. The supremacy of Christ controls the sense in which we are asked to receive the Scriptures as our rule of faith and life. Anything sub-Christian in the Bible is obviously not binding upon our consciences. We know what is God's Word in the Bible by testing it by the Word made flesh in Jesus.

The Westminster Assembly proceeded to draw up a statement of the main teaching of the Bible in the form of a Confession of Faith. Their intention was to be inclusive, and to set forth a constitution for a Church which should unite all English-speaking Christians in the British realms and bring the Churches of Great Britain into accord with Protestant Christendom throughout Europe. It was not their purpose to frame a Confession of Faith that would exclude any Protestant Christian. As a matter of fact few Protestant Christians of that time in Britain disagreed with their statement of doctrine; the quarrels were over the system of Church Government—Presbyterianism *versus* Episcopacy on the one hand, and Independency on the other.

Nor did the Westminster divines regard their work as authoritative and final. They insert an article about Councils, in which they certainly included their own, and said: "All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both." Moreover, the Form of Government, which accompanies the Confession, provides for its amendment. A document which sets forth a process for its own alteration presupposes that there may be those in the Church who disagree with some of its articles and will wish to change them.

Nor did the Westminster Assembly compile the Confession with the intention of asking ministers to subscribe it. It was to be the doctrinal platform of the Church, and ministers were neither to preach nor write against it. One of the members of the Assembly says: "I gave my vote with others that the Confession of Faith put out by authority should not be either required or subscribed to; we having been burnt in the hand in that kind before." Their experience of Archbishop Laud and his predecessors made them tenacious of their liberties.

How, then, was subscription introduced? Apparently at first in the interest of further liberty. It came about in Scotland. After being harried by dragoons and subjected to constant persecution under the Stuart kings, the overwhelming Presbyterian majority did not feel kindly towards Episcopal clergyman who had sided with their oppressors. When Presbyterianism was re-established in the Revolution of 1688 the temptation was to oust these ministers. But the Scotch Parliament in 1690 decided that those of them who would subscribe to the Confession of Faith should be allowed to remain in their parishes, and subscription was brought in to secure in their freedom those who differed from the majority in their ideas on Church Government but were Protestants in theology.

In this country there were Presbyterian churches for nearly a century before this question of subscribing the Confession arose. The first Synod met in 1729, and a very strong party, headed by Jonathan

Dickinson, later president of Princeton, vigorously objected to any imposed creed. But the majority felt that with ministers coming from overseas, where a Unitarian controversy was on, and with congregations widely scattered, the Church needed the unity which comes from a common confession professed by all its teachers. So Dickinson and his friends yielded; but they took care to safeguard liberty in the Adopting Act by which the Confession was accepted. It reads:

Although the Synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with, and abhorrence of, such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven.

They could not have made Church membership more comprehensive: everyone whom we believe Christ receives, we must welcome to His Table and His Church. But more care must be taken with those who teach. So the Act continues:—

Yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so handed down to our posterity; and do therefore agree that all the ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of, the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechism as the confession of our faith.

Notice the modest claim made for these standards—"good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine," and the clear statement that there are essential and unessential articles in them. Then further to safeguard freedom, they add:—

And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article of said Confession or Catechism, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government.

The individual makes his statement, and his conscience is relieved if the Presbytery concludes that his differences do not vitally affect his preaching the Christian Gospel. Such subscription does not seem "perilous to honesty."

There were narrower and broader men, then as now, in the Church, and later on in that century the narrower men by insisting upon a too strict interpretation of the confession broke the Church into two synods. These reunited in 1758; and after our country became independent they formed the first General Assembly in 1788. The Confession of Faith was amended, and the revised constitution was

prefaced with certain Preliminary Principles, the first of which, as I have said, reasserts that "God alone is Lord of the conscience," and another that "truth is in order to goodness," so that truths that do not produce character are unimportant; and a third makes the Church declare:—

While they think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers, be sound in the faith; they also believe that there are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these they think it the duty, both of private Christians and Societies, to exercise mutual forbearance towards each other.

It was this Assembly which phrased the form in which subscription to the Confession is now made. The stricter party a generation before had insisted that ministers subscribe it as the confession of their own faith. But the spirit of freedom was now in the air of young America, and the form adopted reads:—

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

It may be objected that the Scriptures do not present a "system of doctrine." But if you read the Bible under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, it leads you to certain great convictions concerning God and man, and these convictions are summarized (to be sure in seventeenth century language and thought) in the Confession, and form "the system of doctrine." Not every statement in the Bible belongs to the system, but the convictions which run throughout its books. For example that Jesus Christ is the divine Lord, the unique Representative and Revealer of God, is the teaching of the whole New Testament. How He came to be this is explained in several ways:—the early preaching of apostles in the Acts and the Gospel of Mark stress His anointing by the Holy Spirit; Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, and John speak of a heavenly Being incarnate; Matthew and Luke represent Jesus as miraculously born. All agree that Jesus is from God and reveals Him—that is part of the system; the various interpretations of His coming are not essentials of the system. Again all the New Testament asserts that Jesus died for our sins—that is an integral element of the system of doctrine. But there are half a dozen slightly differing explanations of the saving power of the cross, and no one of these should be exalted as essential to the system. Nor are we asked to say that all of the Confession is identical with the system of doctrine found in the Bible. The Confession "contains" these Biblical convictions. It is for us to state them, in the thought and words of our day, as the Westminster Divines phrased them for their generation. And for myself, I do not hesitate to say that I find in this ancient creed the Biblical truths about God, His lordship and His redeeming love; about Christ, His disclosure of what God is and does, His victory for Himself and for us over the world and sin and death;

about the Spirit, who enlightens and calls and renews and Christianizes; about man and his need of the only two things which the Confession calls "saving graces"—repentance and faith; about the Church and the Sacraments and prayer and the Christian life; by which I live and which I wish with all my heart to preach. Granted that they are couched in the thought and speech of a bygone century; so are the teachings of the Bible. I find no more dishonesty in decoding (to borrow a word from the Cable Company) the phrases of the Westminster divines into the terms of modern speech than I do in similarly interpreting the words of prophets and apostles and of Jesus Christ Himself.

What are the alternatives before the Christian Church today? I can think of three:—

The first is to make no doctrinal requirements of the public leaders of the Church whatsoever and leave them absolutely free to teach whatever they please. An eloquent preacher in this city a few years ago renounced his connection with the Unitarian denomination and founded what he calls a Community Church. In a book, entitled "New Churches for Old," he sets forth his views and asserts that the minister of a community church may or may not believe in God, and may or may not believe in immortality. But is not a congregation of religiously wistful folk entitled to have something better than an atheist in the pulpit? Is not this the *reductio ad absurdum* of this protest against all creeds? As a matter of fact this same minister sets forth a social platform which may be as dogmatic as any theological formula.

The second alternative is to phrase no written creed, but have a general understanding of what the Church believes, and leave it to local groups of ministers and churches to decide whether a man is or is not qualified to teach publicly. This is the usage in Congregational and Baptist Churches. Sometimes it works for greater freedom, and sometimes for greater narrowness, according to the particular group in question. Our Congregational Churches are on the whole theologically liberal and tolerant; although I heard recently of a council in New England which refused to install a minister on the ground that his doctrine of the atonement was too old-fashioned. That is hardly liberal; and historically Congregationalists have had as many controversies as have Presbyterians. The Baptist Churches in our southern states, although claiming to be bound by no creed, are perhaps the most narrow and doctrinally intolerant of all our larger Protestant communions. It is significant that when Congregationalists joined recently with Methodists and Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada, the union was on the basis of a confession of faith to which ministers are required to assent. And in the conferences on Christian reunion, held lately in Britain, where Baptists, Congregationalists, Wesleyans, and Presbyterians, representing the Free Churches, met

with bishops of the Established Church, they managed to agree on this point—that one basis of reunion should be the adoption of two ancient creeds with proper liberty of interpretation.

This is the third alternative which our Church has followed. Several times in our history, once in the middle of the eighteenth century and twice in the first half of the nineteenth, those who believed in a strict interpretation have tried to force their views on the Church and have caused a disruption. And each time when the dissevered portions of the Presbyterian Church came together again, it was on a basis which allowed both the stricter and the freer views in the reunited Church. In 1902, after agitation by the more liberal elements in our communion, a Declaratory Statement was passed, disclaiming the harsher Calvinistic views drawn from some articles of the Confession, and two amending articles were added on the Holy Spirit and on the Love of God and Missions. These changes could not have occurred had there not been men, entirely honest in accepting their vows, who used their legal right to bring about alterations. Their intellectual honesty is unquestioned, and the Church itself finally adopted their views. This hardly looks as though subscription to an ancient creed "hampered the free leadership of the Spirit."

Several Assemblies lately have issued deliverances naming certain interpretations of doctrinal points "essential and necessary." A deliverance of an Assembly is merely the expression of its opinion and is not part of the law of the Church. Some of us are persuaded that these five points are not essentials in the system of doctrine set forth in the Bible, and we have said so. At the last Assembly an attempt was made to require theological professors and the members and officers of our Boards to subscribe the Confession with these interpretations. But the Judicial Commission decided that this was unconstitutional, and the Assembly sustained its verdict. Our standards conserved our liberties.

Let me recapitulate the conditions under which we take our vows:—

Our supreme allegiance is to Christ the only King and Head of the Church. From Him alone, and under the persuasion and guidance of His Spirit in our consciences, we accept and find in the Bible our rule of faith and life. We receive the Confession of Faith as containing the system of Biblical teaching. We are at liberty to distinguish between essential and unessential elements in this teaching. We are within our rights in disagreeing with articles of the Confession and working for their amendment.

To me this is not bondage, but orderly freedom, with safeguards that the heritage of the past be conserved, and with provision for progress when, in democratic fashion, we succeed in convincing a majority of our fellow-churchmen of the wisdom of change.

At the time that our present constitution was un-

der discussion, a minister of the Scots' Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, who looked askance at the freedom in our communion, wrote:—

This Synod and the people under their inspection, are the most numerous body of Presbyterians in the United States. They are composed of ministers and people from different countries; hence it is not surprising that they are not of one heart and one mind in the faith. However, it appears to be a received principle among them that whatever is disputed among the pious and learned ought not to be a term of communion in the Christian Church, and hence they live generally in peace with one another, notwithstanding their jarring sentiments.

The divine right of Presbyterian government is not generally admitted, but they maintain Church government to be doubtful; hence ministers of the Episcopal, Independent, and Baptist communions who have a glaring appearance of piety, are admitted into their pulpits.

Today we must see to it that our Church deserves this criticism made of our fathers in 1784. There are matters "disputed among the pious and the learned," which ought not to be flung as test questions at young men seeking to enter the ministry. If they do not know that these matters are disputed, they have been insufficiently educated. If they have not made up their minds on them, that is not surprising when ripe scholars differ. There are ministers of other communions of "a glaring appearance of piety," whose ministry is manifestly owned of God in spiritual results, and we ought to welcome them in our pulpits and to manage to keep them there indefinitely as additional preachers, even when for some personal reason, with which we may not agree, they do not see their way to accept the vows we exact of our regularly installed pastors and elders and deacons.

For highly as we esteem the constitution of our Presbyterian Church, we believe that the time has come when there should be mergers south of the border, akin to that consummated this year by our brethren in Canada. We are justly proud of the part Presbyterians have had in union movements in the past, and we wish our Church to take the lead in further advances. It will be a ruinous day if the strict constructionists in our Church succeed, as some of them are openly trying, to break up our communion by driving out the liberal element. This is not a time for division, but for organic union with churches with whom it is patent that we worship and work harmoniously. We dare not permit any of our present constitutional freedom to be infringed, for no able young men will offer themselves for our ministry and thoughtful people will not look for leadership in religion to our Church. We do not wish to part company with our conservative brethren; they have as much right to their views of Christian truth, as have we to ours; but we cannot allow them to abridge our liberty and close pulpits to ministers whose voices we need for the cause of Christ. The usefulness of our Church to the Kingdom of God is at stake.

A world that cares little for minor points of Christian doctrine, and which too often does not seem to care for the one big point—the will of God in Christ—looks on and laughs at these squabbles among Christians who should be a mutually tolerant fellowship animated by the one purpose of redeeming mankind by the love revealed in the Cross. We must have liberty, not because we wish to destroy ancient formulations of truth, or to deny what our fathers have believed—God forbid!—but because we wish to use all knowledge, ancient and modern, to set forth the Gospel convincingly. We should

not be loyal to the framers of historic confessions of faith, we should not be loyal to the writers of our Bible, we should not be loyal to Jesus Christ, if we did not follow them in stating the Gospel of God for the men and women of our day in the thought and speech of our day. Just because we believe, as did they, that the supreme need of mankind is to share God's eternal life, and that God waits and works through His Church to give this life, we must have freedom as ambassadors of Christ to plead in words as immediately persuasive as Christ's own words, Be ye reconciled to God.

The Issues at Columbus

A Liberal View

By Murray S. Howland

A Conservative View

By J. Gresham Machen

Knowing that our readers would wish to consider both sides of the issues confronting the very important meeting of the Presbyterian General Assembly at Columbus next week, we asked Dr. Howland, pastor of the Lafayette Presbyterian Church of Buffalo, to give us a Liberal's view of those issues and Professor Machen, of Princeton Theological Seminary, to give us a Conservative's view. They have complied with our request in the following articles.—
THE EDITORS.

The Liberal View—Dr. Howland

THE great issue that is to be decided at this year's meeting of the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in U. S. A., to be held at Columbus, beginning May 21st, is whether the Presbyterian Church is large enough in spirit to find a place within its bounds for both the conservative and the liberal, or whether the church is to be reduced to a company of those who hold a particular and specific interpretation of some of the great doctrines of Christianity.

It is a momentous instant in the history of the Presbyterian Church. Should the belligerent Fundamentalists win, it will undoubtedly mean, sooner or later, the splitting of the church, the forcing out of it of many of its leading men and most powerful churches, the crippling of the great boards of the church, the creation of bitterness of feeling that will long endure and the furnishing of weapons to the hands of the scorners. Such a division of the church will reveal to the world the absence of that spirit which Christ declared to be the badge of discipleship—love among the brethren. Whatever certain leaders within the church may think, the world has rightly judged that this badge of discipleship is far more important than the possession of exact theological conformity.

One would think that the history of the Presbyterian Church in this country might give pause to those who are so earnestly seeking to divide it. Twice before there have arisen movements similar to that which is being engineered in Princeton and Philadelphia. Both times its leaders were from Philadelphia. Both times they split the church, crippled its work, hampered its advance. In both cases also, after the passage of years, reunion was brought about. Those who joined in the reunions, looking back, could not conceive that the reasons that had brought about the divisions were adequate. They recognized the futility of such divisions. One would think that the men who today are preaching division would have learned from comparatively recent history, its futility.

While the liberal wing of the church and the Fundamentalist wing differ in their interpretation of some of the great doctrines, the most serious difference lies in their conception of the nature of the church and of Christianity itself. If the nature of the church is to be that held by the Fundamentalists, then the church becomes a club of those who hold the same theological point of view and the terms of membership of that club might at any moment be changed, both in character and purpose, by a sufficiently large vote of the dominant faction in the club. The membership of the church becomes thus a matter of ecclesiastical majorities. The Confession of Faith does not hold that the church is confined to those who adopt the Confession but it includes "all of those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children and is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ." The present attempt to cast out of the church those who do not agree with certain self-constituted authorities on doctrine, is a reduction of the church from a universal Church to a sect and schism, contrary to the entire spirit and teaching of the Gospel.