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The Christian's Duty in the Present War

By the REV. RICHARD W. GRAY

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THE church has to decide quickly," declared a certain prominent minister, "whether it is right or wrong to give all-out aid to Britain. If it is right, we should tell the Christian boys we are sending into the army that they have the blessing of God. If it is wrong, we should encourage them to oppose war." That is the way this minister put the issue which now confronts the Christians in America.

Why did he put it that way? Simply because the only voice heard speaking about such matters in the church for the past quarter of a century has been the pacifistic voice of Modernism with its cry, "War is an evil which the Christian must not touch."

With this voice still ringing in their ears, Christian boys are going to army camps, desiring to serve their country but wondering whether they are fighting against their God. Such a mental attitude is tragic, for "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"—and an unstable soldier is a contradiction in terms.

As Christians and at the same time citizens of the United States, what attitude should we take toward the fast-moving international situation? This is another question which faces the church of America. If the controversy between interventionism and isolationism

lies in the moral sphere, as it will be shown it does, then the judgment of the Christians of America should be positive and vocal enough to influence public opinion.

The conservative wing of the church has been asleep during the past two decades. It has been letting the Modernists answer the cry of its people for a formulation of the Christian attitude toward war, foreign policy, and world problems. Just as England and France slumbered while Germany rearmed, so Bible-believers slept while the Modernists declared the church's attitude toward world problems. As a result, the Christians of America who ought to be speaking on

these questions with clarity and conviction have been stuttering with confusion and uncertainty.

It is time for the members of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church to make their voice heard on these matters. Perhaps we have not made up our minds what sort of foreign policy we as Christian citizens should advocate for the United States. Perchance we are not sure what our Christian duty is in the present international crisis. This article is intended as a goad to provoke some intelligent thinking on these vital matters. Perhaps it will be a spark to ignite the flame of

EDITORS' NOTE

The opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the editors, nor are they presented as an expression of editorial position. Since the article deals with one of the most vital questions facing Christians today, The Presbyterian Guardian publishes it as a stimulating viewpoint which will arouse widespread agreement and disagreement. Perhaps some readers will write on their reasons for disagreeing with Mr. Gray. The Guardian will be glad to print the most interesting responses.

and drink; for tomorrow we die." If the root of doctrine is destroyed, the fruit of life will soon wither.

What a glorious faith is ours! On the one hand the grand assurance of victory over sin and death, a hope for

eternity. And on the other hand a motive for our activity on Monday morning!
—J. P. C.

Dr. Romig on Original Sin

By the REV. R. B. KUIPER

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AN EDITORIAL entitled "The Reformed Church in America on Trial," in the August issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, reflected on a striking statement on the subject of original sin by Dr. E. F. Romig, president of the 1940 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Said the retiring president in his report to the 1941 Synod on the state of religion in the church: "I could no more in the Baptism Office ask parents to subscribe to the question 'Do you believe that our children are sinful and guilty before God?' than I could ask them to believe in Mohammed. For I cannot find warrant in Scripture for any doctrine that children whose wills have not yet been formed and who therefore cannot exercise the power of moral choice are guilty before God."

A considerable stir ensued in the Reformed Church in America. There were those who saw in this statement a denial of the Reformed doctrine of original sin and therefore found serious fault with it. Such proportions did the commotion on this issue assume that Dr. Romig deemed it advisable to set forth his position more fully. This he did in several articles in the *Intelligencer-Leader*, the official weekly of his denomination. He styled what he had to say an "affirmation," not a defense.

More recent issues of the *Intelligencer-Leader*—those of September 19th and 26th—urgently requested the writer of the GUARDIAN's editorial to discuss the matter again after reading Dr. Romig's articles. With that request he is now complying.

Dr. Romig's affirmation contains much that is irrelevant to the subject of original sin. For one instance, the warning to beware of adding to Scripture is quite out of place. Dr. Romig himself seems to sense this. No doubt, his critics are as ardent defenders of the sufficiency of Holy Writ as is he. But they are certain Scripture presents a teaching which he rejects. With

much in Dr. Romig's articles every Christian will find himself in most hearty agreement. The repeated insistence on the sinner's crying need of the grace of God is perhaps the most obvious example.

On reading Dr. Romig one can hardly escape the impression that he is a better literarian than theologian. Not only does he evince a wide knowledge of literature, but his own style excels in literary quality. On the other hand, he manifests no great zeal for precise statement of doctrine. And if to touch rather than to teach were the primary task of preaching, he would beyond all doubt have to be rated as a homilist of superior ability. However, Dr. Romig lays no claim to a profound interest in painstaking formulation of truth. Occasionally he tends even to belittle that pursuit, as in his reference to "the unnecessary baggage of dogma" and to theology as "a poor handmaid" for one wishing to tell of his plight as a sinner before God. A perusal of Dr. Romig's list of religious books which he calls his "companions" can hardly help raising a serious question as to his theological discernment. The list ranges all the way from historic orthodoxy to bald liberalism. Believe it or not, Dr. Romig finds in the works of Louis Berkhof, Wm. Adams Brown, H. R. Macintosh, Nicholas Berdyaev, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Clifford E. Barbour "a common agreement on the awfulness of sin, and humanity's utter need of the grace of God in Christ." On reading that amazing statement one cannot help recalling that even Pelagius taught man's need of what he denominated "divine grace." Nor can one help wondering just what Dr. Romig may mean by "the grace of God."

Precisely what is Dr. Romig's conception of original sin? In spite of obscurities in his affirmation, the following answer appears fully warranted.

He believes that little children are sinful by virtue of belonging to the

human family and being Adam's seed. To be sure, it does not become perfectly clear what he means by "sinful." He informs the reader that he is denying himself the privilege of showing in a detailed way what the content of the word "sin" is in his thinking, in order that he may hew to the line and present the thinking of men of earlier generations. One is made to wonder whether Dr. Romig's thinking on the content of the word "sin" differs from that of the authors of the confessions of his church. Otherwise expressed, one wonders whether he would be willing to subscribe to the italicized words in the following quotation from A. H. Strong's *Systematic Theology*: "Every member of the human race, without exception, possesses a corrupted nature, which is a source of actual sin, and is itself sin" (Vol. II, p. 577). Perhaps he would, possibly he would not. The matter is not made clear. But, that aside, what he denies emphatically is that little children are *guilty before God*. About that there can be no doubt, and here is the rub.

His reason for denying the guilt of little children is apparently to be found in the contention that "there must be four conditions before guilt can be posited of anyone. The first is that there be a law. The second is awareness on the part of the individual agent, the third is self-determination, and the fourth is volition, which must include intention." Since not all of these conditions are present in the case of little children, he concludes that to call them guilty is not only extremely harsh, but also erroneous.

It might be thought by some that the difference between Dr. Romig and those who affirm the guilt of infants, apart from the grace of God, is merely one of words, more specifically one of definition of "guilt." The fact is that the difference is much more serious. There is a definition of "guilt" on which both can agree. That guilt is just obligation to punishment may be as-

sumed to be a matter of common consent. But the question in dispute is how one becomes guilty. Dr. Romig asserts that one acquires just obligation to punishment only by volitional transgression of God's law. Those who differ with him hold that there are other ways besides this in which one acquires just obligation to punishment. They teach that the guilt of Adam's first transgression, which he committed as representative of the whole human race in the covenant of works, is imputed by God to all of his descendants. And they teach further that the sinfulness with which infants are born renders them guilty before God even before they consciously transgress God's law. Both these teachings Dr. Romig rejects. How evident that the difference is not one of words, but definitely of theology!

Dr. Romig seeks to bolster his position by appealing both to Scripture and to the doctrinal standards of his church. In passing it must be remarked that his appeal to Scripture would be more impressive had he not described Genesis 18 as "a chapter so sub-Christian in its condoning of departures from decency as to make it utterly valueless in spiritual insight on sin and guilt when compared with the divine understanding of Jesus." Most assuredly there is progress in divine revelation, but that does not give any one the right to speak disparagingly of even the earliest portions of the Old Testament. To return to our theme, Dr. Romig contends that neither the Word of God nor the confessions apply the epithet *guilty* to infants. But this argument is a clear instance of literalism. There are, of course, other ways of saying that one is justly liable to punishment than to call one *guilty*. Other ways may conceivably be even more emphatic. As a matter of fact, Ephesians 2:3 tells us that "we were by nature the children of wrath." In a helpful—though not at every point perfectly lucid—article on "The Doctrine of 'Original Sin'" in the August 29th issue of the *Intelligencer-Leader*, Professor J. R. Mulder asserts that this "can only mean that we are all born in a state of sin and judgment—we are the objects of divine wrath." The Canons of Dort too teach that "all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath" (Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Art. III). It would be difficult indeed to say in more cer-

tain terms that all men at birth, apart from divine grace, are guilty before God.

At first blush it might seem that Dr. Romig is woefully inconsistent when he pleads for replacing the question in the Baptism Office to which he objects so strenuously with another which has long been in use in other Reformed churches and was used in the Reformed Church in America before 1906: "Do you acknowledge that, although our children are conceived and born in sin and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ and therefore, as members of His Church, ought to be baptized?" To be sure, the word *guilty* does not occur in this question, but is not the thought expressed most emphatically? In order to be "subject to condemnation" one must be guilty indeed. Then how can Dr. Romig plead for a return to this question? But the answer is really very simple. There is not the slightest inconsistency here on the part of Dr. Romig. To use his own words, he believes that infants are subject to condemnation only "potentially" and "proleptically." That must mean that in his opinion they are not actually in their own persons subject to condemnation in the very present. He evidently approves of the view that "the child is, potentially, alas, under condemnation, as a part of the human race, just as the offspring of parents with a vile disease are under condemnation."

To sum up, Dr. Romig grants that all men are at birth prone to sin because of their descent from Adam, but he denies that they are guilty before God. He denies that they are guilty because of the imputation to them of the guilt of Adam's first sin. He also denies that they are guilty because of their own sinfulness.

But both of these denials strike at the very heart of the Reformed doctrine of original sin. The Westminster Confession of Faith, perhaps the greatest of all Reformed confessions because the product of the maturest reflection, teaches that, since our first parents were the root of all mankind, "the guilt of this sin [Adam's first] was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity" (Chapter VI, Section III). The Belgic Confession teaches that original sin is so vile a corruption and abominable in the

sight of God "that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind" (Art. XV). A. H. Strong says concisely "that all mankind are sinners; that all men are by nature depraved, guilty, and condemnable" (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, p. 593). And in his famous commentary on Romans, Charles Hodge says that it is the teaching of the fifth chapter, verses 12 to 19, that "in virtue of the union, representative and natural, between Adam and his posterity, his sin is the ground of their condemnation, that is, of their subjection to penal evils." What else can be the meaning of the Scriptural declaration, "Through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation" (Rom. 5:18)?

In his famous *Outlines of Theology*, A. A. Hodge makes great claims for the Reformed doctrine of original sin. Says he: "From the beginning, the universal Church has agreed in holding that the guilt of Adam's first sin was directly charged to the account of the human race in mass, just as it was charged to himself, and punished in the race by desertion and consequent depravity, just as it was punished in him. This was uniformly expressed by the technical phrase, the imputation of the guilt of his first sin to his descendants" (p. 358). He goes on to relate: "In the first half of the seventeenth century, Joshua Placaeus, professor at Saumur, was universally understood to deny any imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and to admit only inherent innate corruption as derived from Adam by natural generation. This was explicitly condemned by the French National Synod at Charenton, 1645; and repudiated by all orthodox theologians, Lutheran and Reformed" (pp. 358f). The Arminian view of original sin he describes in these words: "They admit that all men inherit from Adam a corrupt nature predisposing them to sin, but they deny that this innate condition is itself properly sin, or involves guilt or desert of punishment" (p. 352). It is evident that Dr. Romig's view is strikingly similar.

His view is a low one indeed. He rejects the historic Reformed doctrine of immediate imputation, by which is meant the direct charging of the guilt of Adam's first sin to his descendants, antecedent to their own sinful state. He does not even rise to the level of the faulty theory of mediate imputation, by which is meant that men are

found guilty with Adam of his apostasy because in virtue of inherent depravity they are apostates also. He goes much farther in his denial. According to him a child at birth is only potentially under condemnation, but is not actually guilty before God at all.

The conclusion is inescapable that Dr. Romig's conception of original sin is very far from being the Reformed doctrine of original sin. It is a recurrence of errors of which the Reformed theology disposed a few centuries ago.

Someone asks, "Why all this hubbub about original sin? Is not this doctrine of only secondary importance?" The answer is that, instead of being of secondary importance, it is essential to the integrity of the Reformed system of theology.

With this truth several others are bound up inseparably. Says Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*: "By all theologians, Reformed and Lutheran, it is admitted, that in the imputation of Adam's sin to us, of our sins to Christ, and of Christ's righteousness to believers, the nature of imputation is the same, so that the one case illustrates the others" (Vol. II, p. 194).

If only he who volitionally transgresses God's law can be said to be guilty, if guilt by virtue of its very nature is not capable of being imputed to another, then it must be admitted that the guilt of Adam's first sin is not imputed to his descendants, but then it also follows that our guilt cannot have been imputed to Christ. But then what does it mean that "God laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), that Christ came "to give his life a ransom for [in the stead of] many" (Matt. 20:28), that He who knew no sin was made sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), and that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13)? In a word, what then remains of the precious doctrine of the atonement?

Again, if the guilt of the first Adam cannot be imputed to his descendants, it becomes difficult, to say the very least, to see how the righteousness of the last Adam can be imputed to believers. But listen! Both are not only possible. Both are actual. For "as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through

the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:18, 19).

It is to be hoped fervently that there may be flagrant inconsistencies in Dr. Romig's theology. Only then can Dr. Romig believe in the imputation to Christ of the guilt of His people and the imputation of His righteousness to those who believe on His name. *For the fact is that he has rejected a doctrine so cardinal that with it the only true doctrine of salvation must ultimately stand or fall.* The Christian doctrine of the fall of man and the Christian doctrine of his redemption are of one piece.

A most serious issue confronts the Reformed Church in America. This writer said recently that, if history should repeat itself, the church would do nothing, or next to nothing, about it. That statement must stand, for it is a fact that in 1923 Dr. Edward S. Worcester's bold denial of the Reformed doctrine of original sin did not prevent his election to the chair of Systematic Theology at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. But the good news may be added that the cloud the size of a man's hand which appeared immediately upon the publication of Dr. Romig's report, in the form of a public protest against his view of original sin, has since been growing. In other words, signs are multiplying that in the case now before the Reformed Church in America history may not repeat itself. Something will have to be done, for no Reformed church may tolerate such error in its ministry, and no truly Reformed church will. The outcome of this case will reveal whether the Reformed Church in America means to be Reformed in reality or is satisfied to be Reformed only in name. The Reformed Church in America is indeed on trial.

News Notes of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

GETHSEMANE Church, Philadelphia: During the summer a two weeks' Bible school, with five teachers and thirty-six pupils, proved an outstanding success. . . . The painting of the church building and repairs to

the interior have been completed.

Grace Church, Middletown, Delaware: Eighty-three persons were enrolled, and about seventy attended, the two weeks' summer Bible school; the church was well-filled for the closing exercises. . . . Five delegates attended the Quarryville Bible Conference. . . . During the vacation of the pastor, the Rev. Robert H. Graham, the pulpit was supplied by the Rev. Robert S. Marsden, the Rev. Leslie W. Sloat, the Rev. Edwin H. Rian and Mr. John W. Betzold.

First Church, Waterloo, Iowa: Drawings and specifications for the new church building are being completed, according to the pastor, the Rev. Edward Wybenga. Though not large in size, it promises to be both attractive and well-suited to the needs of the congregation. . . . Guest preachers have been the Rev. John H. Skilton, the Rev. Robert S. Marsden and the Rev. Edwin H. Rian.

First Church, Long Beach, California: A vacation Bible school lasting for two weeks had a total enrollment of more than sixty. It was under the direction of the Rev. Henry W. Coray, stated supply of the church. . . . At a mid-week service during the summer, the Westmont College male quartet of Los Angeles gave a program of music and brief gospel messages.

The Christian's Duty in the Present War

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in the past? The alleged atrocities of the British in the Boer War and the grab of Poland for a piece of tottering Czechoslovakia are instances often cited. How can we justify helping neighbors who have themselves been guilty of unneighborly acts? Another Biblical principle comes into play here. It is the principle that people and nations who sin against their brother, whether he be an individual or a nation, should repent and make restitution.

The one who fell among thieves in the parable of Jesus was a sinful man. No doubt he had been guilty of some unneighborly acts in his life. Many commentators believe that it is implied that he was a Jew. As such he would have been guilty of numerous offenses against his rescuer, the Samar-