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## Can Christianity Face the Crisis?

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IF ONE could take his stand today upon a high tower which overlooks the whole world, wherever he might look he would see smoke rising: either the smoke of preparation for war, the smoke of battle, or the smoke of cities and homes devastated by bombs and shells. East or west, north or south, to whatever point he might turn, there would be traces of war, and he would probably descend from his vantage point with a heavy heart, believing that the world of man is as close to destruction today as it has been since the days of Noah. It is this situation which we face, and must face today no matter which way we turn, for we have reached a crisis in the history of our race, and to its resulting problems Christians must prepare to address themselves in the very near future.

We must beware, however, that we do not gain the idea that the present war is the crisis, nor that it is the most essential part of it. God in His providence governs the world through many lines of development, and no single event nor series of events is the ultimate explanation of any historical movement. Therefore, when we look at the present struggle in Europe, let us realize that it is but the manifestation of something which is not limited merely to Germany or France, nor even to the eastern hemisphere. It is the result of a universal disease: an irrationalism which has laid its grip upon all thought and action of men throughout the civilized world. Chance is now regarded as the governor of all

things. The laws which God established in the universe have been laughed out of court, while man believes himself to be the victim of a whirling maelstrom which takes him nowhere, except downward to his death.

### The Origin of the Crisis

We cannot understand this situation, however, unless we understand its roots. So we must turn back the pages of history to discover, if we can, the reasons for and the causes of this terrible blight which has fallen upon the soul of man. In this way we may be better able to find some means of meeting and solving the problems which face us today.

When we look back some two thousand years, we find that at the time of the apostolic church there were current throughout the world, in addition to Christianity, pagan world- and life-views which were based, not on special revelation, but upon the work of unaided human reason. The most important and most dominant of these philosophies with which Christianity came into contact was Stoicism, the roots of which went back into the thought of Aristotle and Plato. Although the Stoics had at first emphasized the dignity of man and of natural law, having virtually ruled God out of the universe, they at length came to deny all law, and to accept life as entirely meaningless. In this they were by no means alone. Other philosophies of various brands had come to the same conclusion, and despair

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## EDITORIAL

### The Reformed Church in America on Trial

IT IS customary for the president of one year's General Synod of the Reformed Church in America—formerly known as the Dutch Reformed Church—to report to the General Synod of the next year on *The State of Religion* in the denomination. Accordingly, Dr. E. F. Romig presented certain observations on this theme to the 1941 synod. They were published in the June 13th issue of *The Intelligencer-Leader*, the official denominational weekly.

Dr. Romig recommends a revision of the church's liturgy. In the office for Holy Communion, for instance, he feels that "certain phrases, particularly those having to do with 'wrath of God' should not be retained." To be sure, he is careful not to deny the reality of the wrath of the Almighty, his reason for the suggested elimination being that such phrases are "stumbling blocks to the lay mind not versed in theology." That it is the church's duty to see to it that its members become versed in theology does not seem to occur to him. However, in dealing with the office for Holy Baptism he waxes bold. "Traditionalist that I am," says Dr. Romig, "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."

Thus flatly does the president of a General Synod of the Reformed Church in America deny the Reformed doctrine of original sin.

That he cannot find this doctrine in the Bible is no proof that it is not there. Perhaps he has not searched diligently. For just a bit of Scriptural

evidence, it is Paul who teaches that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned"; that "death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression"; that "the judgment came of one unto condemnation"—Romans 5:12, 14, 16. And David confesses: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

Every student of the history of doctrine should know that the doctrine of original sin has been confessed by the Reformed churches throughout the centuries. When the arch-heretic Pelagius denied it, the great Augustine had risen to its defense by appealing to inspired Paul. And the churches of the Reformation followed Paul and Augustine when they took pains to formulate this truth in their creeds. The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that, since our first parents were the root of all mankind, "the guilt of this sin [eating the forbidden fruit] was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity" (Chapter VI, Section III). All three of the doctrinal standards of Dr. Romig's church teach original sin. The following citations are offered in evidence: *The Confession of Faith*, Article XV; *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Questions 7 and 8; *The Canons of Dort*, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Articles II and III. The last of these references states succinctly that "all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath."

Since original sin is taught in both the creeds and the liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, it may seem strange that Dr. Romig would

remove this doctrine only from the church's liturgy. But his reason is readily surmised. With the liturgy he has to deal frequently. Every time he is called on to administer Holy Baptism, he is supposed to employ the Baptism Office. The church's doctrinal standards, on the other hand, he may usually ignore. To be sure, he did subscribe to them when he was admitted to the ministry in the Reformed Church in America. But what of that? Is there not tacit agreement among the leaders of most Protestant denominations that the creeds of the Reformation age are by this time largely outmoded and may therefore be regarded in considerable part as a dead letter?

Beyond dispute there is room within a Reformed church for differences of opinion on certain points of doctrine. Is it possible that the doctrine of original sin falls within that category? To answer that question is not difficult. On some detailed aspects of this doctrine various views are held among Reformed theologians. But the teaching that, in consequence of the first sin of man, every child is born guilty before God and with a corrupt nature may unhesitatingly be declared to be an integral part of that system of doctrine which is known as the Reformed Faith. The fact, for instance, that the imputation of the guilt of the first Adam to his descendants is linked inseparably with the imputation of the righteousness of the last Adam, Jesus Christ, to believers, makes that patent. "For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). In that light the denial of original sin becomes extremely serious.

By boldly rejecting an essential teaching of the Reformed Faith, Dr. Romig has put the Reformed Church in America in a strange position. It is no exaggeration to assert that he has placed his denomination on trial. No truly Reformed church will tolerate in its pulpits deniers of the Reformed Faith. It will demand that deniers either retract or depart. Nor does such a demand constitute a violation of religious liberty. Rather is it a recognition of religious liberty. A Reformed church does not seek to force its faith on any one. It asks voluntary

### Your Summer Contributions

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acceptance of its faith. He who does not and cannot accept may leave. He also must leave, for a Reformed church will insist on remaining Reformed.

What is the Reformed Church in America going to do about the case in hand? If history is to repeat itself, it will do nothing or next to nothing. This is not the first time that that denomination is confronted by a brazen denial of original sin. In 1923 the General Synod was considering the election of Dr. Edward S. Worcester, a Congregationalist minister, to the chair of Systematic Theology at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Some members of synod questioned Dr. Worcester's doctrinal soundness. Well might they, for in a memorandum he had described the Reformed doctrine of original sin as "a bit of the fanciful and allegorizing theology of the Rabbinic period of Judaism and similar schools in Christianity, which is worse than meaningless." And yet, believe it or not, Dr. Worcester was elected. Today it is altogether likely that several deniers of this doctrine occupy pulpits in the Reformed Church in America, and doubtless doctrinal indifference has made such headway among the ministers of that communion that a great many applaud Dr. Romig's pious vaporizings: "Our denomination is going to take a great stride in the direction of vital spiritual growth, if while holding to the real essentials of evangelical Christianity, we get beyond the perverse tendency to set up rules of orthodoxy that our Saviour would have found confusing and in brotherliness toward one another, respect for diverse interpretations of the Gospel, and oneness of devotion to Christ, address ourselves to the actual plight of this sin-sick world."

And yet a cloud has appeared, the size of a man's hand, which gives some promise for the future. Hardly had Dr. Romig's address appeared in print when protests began to arrive at the office of *The Intelligencer-Leader*. Only one of them, the first received, was printed. It was an able refutation of Dr. Romig's position by the Rev. Leonard Greenway, pastor of the Eighth Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Such protests are heartening, but they are not enough. The cloud the size of a man's hand must grow. If it does not, it is certain to evaporate

presently. May the Reformed Church in America not be a church which has in its midst a number of Reformed preachers and laymen but has nonetheless as a denomination forsaken the Reformed Faith. If that is not to be the case, those ministers and elders and other members of the church who adhere to the Reformed Faith will have to band together, bring issues such as that raised by Dr. Romig's address to a head in the judicatories of the church, and press their fight for the faith to a finish. Not only must they do this, but if they love the Reformed Faith passionately, they will.

—R. B. K.

### Can Christianity Face the Crisis?

(Concluded From Page 34)

went, it resulted in the rise, or the attempted rise of democracy. It showed itself in the struggle of the Dutch against their Spanish oppressors, in the battle of the Huguenots against the absolutist French monarchy, the struggle of the Puritans against both Tudor and Stuart despotism, and the rebellion of the Scots against an Arminian and arbitrary prelacy. Much more might have been accomplished in the economic, artistic and literary fields, had it not been for the rise of heresy within the church. Arminianism and prelaticism were the two great foes which had to be destroyed, and this was done at Dort and Westminster. However, when this work had been accomplished, the Reformed churches seem to have forgotten that they had the work before them of bringing the whole world under the banner of Christ. Political freedom had been obtained, so the Calvinists turned more to theological controversy, forgetting about all other phases of our earthly life. Therefore, before they realized what was happening, the paganism of the Renaissance, aided by a revived Roman Church, had laid hold upon so-called secular thought and was in complete control of everything but Reformed theology.

This appears most clearly, perhaps, in the philosophy of a Hobbes, the legal theory of a Grotius, the scientific attitude of the Royal Society, the dramas of Beaumont and Fletcher, and the reasoning of John Locke. God was pushed completely out of His universe for, although on occasions

lip-service was paid to Him, He was usually ignored as relatively unimportant. The human intellect was declared to be its own lord and master, with capacity to find out all truth independent of revelation or regeneration. This theory was so emphasized in the following century that men believed themselves capable of attaining almost to the status of deity. Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin and others looked not to God but to the human intellect for salvation, and in the early stages of the French Revolution, reason was worshiped as the supreme being in the universe. This is the era from which comes our modern world, our scientific, skeptical and disillusioned twentieth century.

### Man as Sovereign

One of the most important elements of the eighteenth century rationalism was its philosophy which forms the basis for modern thinking. Kant and Hegel, the two dominating influences of nineteenth century philosophy, both adopted the view that the human intellect could find out all truth necessary to man. Experimentation and interpretation could both be done by the human mind, so that any desired truth could be discovered. This resulted in scientific discoveries which have brought to us a knowledge of the world much greater than ever before, but God has received no praise for enabling man to increase his knowledge. Man took all the credit to himself. From this source came Darwinism and the evolutionary hypothesis, with its emphasis on the survival of the fittest and the concept of self-existing natural law. But the human mind could not rest there, for it had to acknowledge that if there were no God but nature, nature itself might change without notice and, in doing so, would destroy all existing laws. Therefore, in both the philosophical and the scientific fields, there has been growing up for the past fifty years a distrust of law. This has resulted today in the irrational physics of Jeans and Eddington, who tell us that chance governs the physical universe. It has given us modern irrational philosophy which tells us that "eternal novelty" is the keynote of our existence. We can believe nothing and do nothing with any certainty, for there is no beginning, no end, no middle to anything, and