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Can a Christian Believe in Progress?

By W. STANFORD REID

PROGRESS!" This is a word which, in this day of great advance, is on the lips of many. We are often told, however, that men never realized that they were progressing until the rise of deistic rationalism in the eighteenth century. In that era, so it is said, intelligent men, being freed from the intellectual blight of Christianity, at last saw that the history of man showed progress. Voltaire started the movement and, ever since, this idea has been the very corner-stone of all teaching of history.

Having been given this statement, we are often assured that no Christian can logically believe in progress. And above all, no Calvinist could ever contemplate that concept without having his whole theological edifice overthrown from its foundations.

To prove their point, these "historical progressives" assert that the Reformed view of God and His sovereignty kills all possibility of belief in progress. According to the universal witness of Reformed teachers, God knows all things. Nothing in the future can arise which is to Him new or unknown. This is so because God controls all things. Everything is thus run according to plan from the beginning to the end, so how can progress be taught, when the end was known before time began? To the Calvinist, our enlightened friends assure us, progress is impossible for according to Calvinistic views everything was determined from the beginning of the world.

The non-Christian view, "the progressive view of history," on the other hand, emphasizes progress—even

for God. The old idea of the sovereignty of God must go by the board. Therefore, those who would establish a philosophy of historical progress either separate their god completely from the universe and push him into a corner of eternity with a dunce's cap on his head, or they bring him into the universe and make him a part of it. God, we are informed, thus becomes a progressive too. For the first time he learns things that he never knew before. Thus we have true progress when the deity, like men, progresses in his knowledge of himself and of the world.

Evolution and "Progress"

This marvelous process of progress is brought about by evolution. One of the so-called "great discoveries" of the nineteenth century was that the world is evolving. Nobody knows exactly when or where this evolution started, but gradually vegetation appeared on this planet. Perhaps from this vegetation there evolved, through forces resident within it, a unicellular being. This being, during a period of millions of years, gradually evolved by self-adaptation to its environment, until it became an animal. Thence, after more millions of years, a monkey one day shed his tail, left his trees and decided to walk upright on the ground. In this way, man progressed beyond the animal stage.

This theory, we are told, gives so much more room for progress than the Biblical doctrine of creation. In Scripture we find an account of God creating matter and forming the world. There is no evolution even

obscured further by a skilful vagueness. For example, when asked, Did Jesus die to satisfy God's justice? he said, Yes, but added, "I don't know what happened on the cross." He said also that Christ suffered in our human flesh to show us He could suffer with us. Where, in such a statement, is there any substitutionary atonement and justice of God? Again, when asked how God can forgive sin when the Bible says, "the soul that sinneth it shall die," his answer was that God forgives by grace, that it is a miracle. But he made absolutely no mention of the substitutionary atonement of Christ, which of course is orthodox Christianity's answer to the whole problem.

Again, in the lecture on "What Can Christians Do?" he spoke very glibly of eternal life, but then defined it, not as everlasting living in heaven in the presence of God, but as "the sense of eternality"—whatever that may mean. Further, he said that "the real message" of the cross is that whatever our cross may be we can bring divinity to it by faith in Christ. Orthodox Christianity, however, has always read its Bible to mean that the glorious message of the cross is the reconciliation of sinful man to the holy God—yes, the reconciliation of *all things* to Himself by the cross.

In this same lecture Dr. Homrighausen listed the things which Christians can do to solve this present world condition. They must learn, he said, to live in the midst of the problems of an imperfect world. They must live neighborly, and with a sense of stewardship. They must set an example in the home. They must meet together for the solving of race and housing problems, and for fellowship. The emphasis is on man's relation to man. It is true that he says Christians must also witness to a transcendent God, they must worship together, and must partake of the Lord's Supper which proclaims the "sacrifice of love." By this means the church, he says, becomes the nucleus of a future world fellowship. But the God-man relationship, for Dr. Homrighausen, is thus merely a means to the end of improving the relationship of man to man.

Dr. Homrighausen has thus fallen into the same pit which he has analyzed as the cause of the trouble in the world today—materialistic thinking, concern with "things." His primary concern is man. God is only

an instrument to reconcile man to man.

The Bible teaches us that the primary concern of man should be God, that the disease which must be cured is not wrong human relationships but sin and a consequent wrong relationship of man to God. It teaches also that the proper relationship of man to man is but a by-product of

the proper God-man relationship.

Modernism can hardly be said to be changing its tactics. It is still trying to deceive by the use of orthodox language, and we have a sterling example of this in these lectures. From one more contact with Dr. Homrighausen's teaching, we can conclude only, as before, that his "Christianity" is not Biblical Christianity.

The Authority of Scripture

By the REV. JOHN MURRAY

Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary

THE authority of Scripture is that characteristic whereby there is required of us unquestioning faith and instant obedience. On what does this authority depend? The informed Christian will very readily reply that the authority of Scripture resides in the fact that it is God's Word. Other answers have, however, been given to the question, and so it is necessary to deal with some of these in order that the full meaning of the answer given above may be appreciated and its truth guarded against misapprehension and error.

The Romish Church formally acknowledges that the authority of Scripture resides in the fact that God is its author. But it is characteristic of Rome to give with one hand and take away with the other. One of the cardinal errors of the Romish communion is that it intrudes the church in the place that belongs

to God. The church, according to Romanists, is the infallible and living voice of God. And so Protestants have contended that the position of Rome is virtually that the church, called by Rome "holy mother Church," determines what reverence is due to the Scripture. When we remember that Rome pleads the authority of "tradition" and of the church, as well as the authority of Scripture, we can readily perceive how necessary it is that the church should determine the extent of the authority that is inherent in holy Scripture.

Now, it is true, as the Westminster Confession says, that "we may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture." We must appreciate the fact that the church, when properly conceived, is a divine institution, and that God has used it as His instrument for the preservation and vindication of His Word. It is a fact not to be minimized or despised that *we* do not have the Scriptures in our possession apart from the function the church has performed and the testimony it has borne. It is through the medium of this witness that the Scripture has been brought to us, and it is in the context of that testimony that our faith in Scripture as the Word of God received its birth.

But just as we fully accord to the church the place that God has given it in His wise ordination and providence, we must not allow the church to usurp a place that does not belong to it. The authority of Scripture does not proceed from any decision or

Young People's Topics

THE article on this page will be an aid in studying the young people's lessons published by the Committee on Christian Education of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which may be secured from the Rev. Burton L. Goddard, Box 73, Carlisle, Massachusetts. Topics now being studied are:

April 20th—THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE.

April 27th—WHAT IS INSPIRATION?

May 4th—HOW MUCH OF THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED?

May 11th—HAS INSPIRATION CEASED?

proclamation of the church. It is the duty of the church to proclaim the authority that belongs to Scripture, but we must not ground the authority of Scripture in any prerogative that is vested in the church. Surely nothing should be more obvious than that the Word of God needs no intermediary to invest it with authority, nor any decision on the part of men to determine what reverence is due to it. To teach or insinuate that the Word of God needs human authentication before it can wield authority over us is to oust God from His place of supremacy, and it is to make man more absolute than God. God is truth itself, and there can be nothing addressed to us more absolute than His Word. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater" (1 John 5:9).

There is another view held today with respect to the authority of Scripture that might appear at first to be eminently correct and honoring to the Holy Spirit. It is that the authority of Scripture proceeds from what we call the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, and so Scripture, it is said, is authoritative only as it is borne home to our hearts and minds by this inward work of the Holy Spirit.

This truth of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts is, of course, a very important and precious one, for it is by this testimony alone that we can properly recognize the authority of Scripture and have that full persuasion of its infallible truth and divine authority. Yet it is a gross perversion of the truth to say that the inward work of the Holy Spirit makes Scripture authoritative. The function of the inward testimony of the Spirit is not by any means to invest Scripture with authority; it is rather to bring to our hearts conviction of that authority. The Holy Spirit when He operates in our hearts does not do anything to Scripture; rather, He does something in us.

When we are dealing with any fact, our conviction with respect to that fact does not cause that fact to be, nor does the testimony by which we are convinced of that fact cause that fact to be. The existence of the fact is one thing, the evidence by which it is evinced to be a fact is another, and the conviction we may have on

Westminster Commencement

DR. Gordon H. Clark of the Department of Philosophy at Wheaton College, will address the twelfth annual commencement exercises of Westminster Theological Seminary on Tuesday, May 6th, at 3 P.M., at the campus in Laverock, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia. The subject of Dr. Clark's address will be "A Protestant World-View."

Buses will leave Germantown and Willow Grove Avenues, and Wyndmoor Station of the Reading Railroad, at 1.50 and 2.50 P.M. A most cordial invitation to be present is extended to all friends of the seminary.

the basis of that evidence is still another. So is it with the authority of Scripture. The inward testimony of the Holy Spirit presupposes the authority of Scripture; it does not produce this authority. Our conviction on the basis of that testimony respects an authority that is inherent in the Scripture itself.

It is indeed true that the authority resident in Scripture owes its very existence to the operation of the Holy Spirit. But this operation of the Holy Spirit is not that of the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, as He bears witness by and with the Word, but that once-for-all completed operation which we know as *inspiration*. In a word, it is the fact of inspiration that makes Scripture authoritative and it is the inward testimony of the Spirit that brings home to us that authority.

This view with which we have now been dealing, the view that rests the authority of Scripture on the inward testimony, in reality denies the objective and intrinsic authority of Scripture. If it is the work of the Spirit in our hearts that accords Scripture its authority, then Scripture is not

authoritative in itself, and it is not authoritative for those who do not enjoy the inward testimony of the Spirit. It becomes apparent how devastating for the authority of Scripture this view becomes. Furthermore, it must be said that the resort to the inward testimony as the basis of authority, though it appears to do honor to the Holy Spirit, rests upon the abandonment of another activity of the Spirit, namely, the plenary inspiration of the Bible. We must, on the contrary, do honor to the whole work of the Spirit and realize that without the intrinsic authority of Scripture, resting upon its plenary inspiration, we cannot have even the inward testimony of the Spirit. For it is only to the Word that is intrinsically and in its own right divinely authoritative that the Holy Spirit can bear witness as the Word of God.

Finally, what does the authority of Scripture involve for us? The word "authority" always suggests binding force. It demands acquiescence and obedience. To the binding force of Scripture as the Word of God there attaches an ultimacy and finality that belongs to no other standard. And so the only attitude in us that is appropriate to the authority of Scripture is that of unreserved acceptance and wholehearted subjection. The authority of Scripture is the authority of God, for it is God who speaks in it. To God we are responsible, on Him we are dependent, and that not in one compartment of life but in all of life. As we can never move outside the sphere of responsibility to Him or of dependence upon Him, so we can never at any time or in any department of life pass beyond the bounds of subjection to His Word.

It is this principle of the supremacy of the Word of God that makes the authority of Scripture an intensely practical matter. We are prone to think that the Bible concerns merely the sphere of what is called "religion," and does not bear upon the "secular" activities. How dwarfed and warped is such a conception of the Word of God! It is worse than that; it is godless! The authority of the Bible releases its grip at no point, and if we think otherwise or conduct our life on the basis of another supposition, it is because we have excluded God from His domain. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?"

or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. . . . How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" (Psalm 139:7, 8, 17). "I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Psalm 119:96).

The authority of Scripture is a binding force. But it is also the condition and guarantee of liberty. It is the perfect *law* of liberty. It was Jesus who said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Authority always relates itself very directly to conscience and it is God alone who is Lord of the conscience. Conscience never performs its function *truly* nor does it enjoy its liberty except as it

is the bondservant of an authority that is absolute, bondservant too in willing and intelligent subservience to judgment from which there is no appeal. The authority of Scripture is the very guarantor of liberty of conscience. In the eloquent words of the Westminster Confession, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also" (Chapter XX, Section II).

lives abhorrent in the sight of God. They were idolaters, and neither recognized the Lord Jehovah as their God nor worshiped Him. They profaned the Sabbath. They hated God's chosen people and attacked them without mercy when occasion offered. Their lives were immoral, stained with diverse kinds of grievous sin.

Could they be acceptable unto God? Not unless they became like unto His people. It is sometimes forgotten that God's great requirement of men is that they become conformed to the image of His Son, yet that is God's aim in regeneration, the act whereby He makes us *new* creatures, renewing in us His image, true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, which was lost in the fall. It is also His purpose in sanctification, the process by which sin is lessened and holiness increased in the lives of those who have received the adoption of sonship.

Truly, God's people are a peculiar people, not because of odd mannerisms and eccentricities, but because of a fundamental difference which normally shows forth in every speech and action. It is for this reason that attention is called to the function served by Christians as epistles "known and read of all men."

Are you an enemy of God, and would you yet enjoy the blessings of His grace? Examine your ways. Check them with those of God's people, of the apostles, of Christ Himself. Know where you stand. You cannot live "just any old way" and be a Christian. And if you find little similarity between your life and the lives of God's children, ask of Him who is able to perform the mighty transformation necessary. He can take away the root of sin from within your soul; He can take away the fruit of sin from your life. He can make you like unto His people.

A Necessary Confession

Hand in hand with a change in life goes a change of confession. The work of God in an enemy soul does two things: it removes the enmity, and it implants a firm heart belief in its place. This heart belief is like a fountain, and from it flow two streams of waters, holiness of life and humble confession of God's grace. There is no way of stopping up the fountain so that only one of the streams will issue forth.

Hence God attaches a second clause to the "if" of the text—"If they will

Enemies and Grace

A Meditation on Jeremiah 12:16

By the REV. BURTON L. GODDARD

IT IS common for men to think of an enemy only as an enemy. In southern mountain feuds there is no thought of reconciliation and no suggestion of love or compassion. Enmity passes down from generation to generation. To forget it or to give it up would be an unforgivable act of dishonor.

How different is God's attitude toward those who have constituted themselves enemies against Himself and His people! They are invited to taste of His grace and to share the blessings of His covenant. Divine love toward enemies of God is attested by such New Testament passages as Romans 5:10 — "When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Yet the Old Testament, also, is rich in offers of grace to the estranged sinner. Consider, for example, Jeremiah 12:16—"And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people."

God did not become a God of grace with the coming of Christ. His nature

did not differ from Abraham's time to that of Jeremiah. It has not changed from Jeremiah's day to the present. Our God is an unchanging God, the same in all ages, and His mercy endureth forever. As was wicked Cain at the very dawn of history, so the enemies of God have ever been urged to be reconciled to God, that they might partake of His blessings.

A Necessary Change

Great as is God's compassion, however, no enemy of God can expect to receive and enjoy His blessings unless a radical change takes place in his life. There is an "if" in the words of Jeremiah and, unless it be taken into consideration, there is no guarantee whatsoever that the gifts of life enjoyed by God's covenant people will be visited upon those who have been strangers to the covenant. God hinges everything on whether the enemies become like unto His people, saying, "If they will diligently learn the ways of my people . . . then shall they be built in the midst of my people."

That "if" demands a fundamental change in our life. It was commonly known that Israel's neighbors lived