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The Banner of Westminster Seminary

In Substance the Text of an Address Delivered at the Alumni Banquet
Held on the Occasion of Westminster's Fifteenth Annual Commencement

By the REV. JOHN MURRAY

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ON THE cover of the official magazine of the church in which I was reared in Scotland, there was always quoted the text from Psalm 60, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth".

We are meeting tonight on the occasion of the fifteenth annual commencement of Westminster Theological Seminary. It may well be said in connection with Westminster Seminary, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth".

Westminster Seminary was founded in 1929. The half decade in which that year falls was a critical one in the history of Presbyterian churches in the North American continent and elsewhere. The Seminary came into existence as a result of the crisis that overtook the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1929, namely, the reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary by action of the general assembly of that year. That action was, however, but the registering of the tragic state of affairs that existed in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In 1924 this state of affairs was signaled by the signing of what is known as the Auburn Affirmation in which 1293 ministers of that denomination attached their signatures to a document that denied outright the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy and also denied the ne-

cessity of belief in the virgin birth of our Lord, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection and the supernatural character of His miracles for the ordination and good standing of ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. This fact, together with the fact that not one of these signers had ever been disciplined for such avowal, shows the lamentable decline from the true faith in the denomination concerned.

It was not merely in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. that such decline had been taking place. In the year 1925 the United Presbyterian Church of North America completed its adoption of what is known as the Confessional Statement. That Statement shows that the United Presbyterian Church had decisively departed from its historic creedal position, had adopted a position whereby the gateway was opened to doctrinal laxity and that such laxity was officially protected by the provision that forbearance in love was to be exercised toward any brethren who might not be able fully to subscribe to the Standards of the church.

In that same year, 1925, a great spiritual calamity occurred in the church history of Canada. It was in that year that the union of the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches was consummated. By this union a large proportion of the Presbyterian Church in

Canada abandoned the historic Presbyterian witness and entered into a communion that had as its basis a confession acceptable to the overwhelming majority of Methodists and Congregationalists in that Dominion.

At the outset I made reference to a detail that concerned Scotland. In 1929 there took place in that country the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland. As things had come to be in these two churches by 1929, I do not suppose that any great doctrinal issue was at stake in this union. But the union of 1929 showed the extent to which declension had taken place in both of these churches in the preceding years. These two churches, comprising the large majority of nominal Presbyterians in Scotland, could in 1929 unite on a basis that involved for ministers no more stringent a confession than to believe in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; to believe the Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the supreme rule of faith and life; and to believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith remain undefined and what the import of subscription to the Confession means is not in the least clarified by the opaque statement that the united church "holds as its subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith". This union brought into clear focus the abandonment of the historic Reformed and even evangelical confession.

These are simply a few of the facts which evince that the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929 was no mere coincidence. The Seminary came into being at a time when the very things for which it was established and to which it stands committed, the very things for which it raised and unfurled a banner, were being repudiated by large sections of the Reformed churches in North America and in Europe. It would be more accurate to say that Westminster Seminary raised a banner for the

whole counsel of God when concrete events had made it more than apparent that Reformed churches throughout the world had laid in the dust that same banner, defaced, soiled and tattered. When the enemy came in like a flood, God in His abundant mercy and sovereign providence raised up a standard against him.

It is true, of course, that Westminster Seminary came into existence upon the occasion and particularly for the reason of widespread defection in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and its more immediate purpose was to provide training for the future ministers of that denomination. But two facts must not be forgotten.

The first is that Princeton Seminary, the downfall of which was the reason for the founding of Westminster, had been during its history a nursery for the training of ministers of many denominations. Princeton opened its doors to students of various churches and for this reason the contribution that Princeton Seminary made to catholic Christianity was incalculable. Westminster Seminary was not to be any less hospitable. And the history of fifteen years has demonstrated both its appeal and its generosity in this regard.

The second fact is the general ecclesiastical situation at the time Westminster opened its doors and ever

since. In view of the widespread defection both of churches and theological schools throughout the world, young men looking towards the gospel ministry and seeking the training that would fit them for service in their own denominations found in Westminster Seminary the kind of institution that met this need. We must recognise what is a fact of God's providence, that God raised Westminster Seminary to train men for the great work and battle of the faith in a great variety of denominations.

For what does Westminster Seminary stand? It stands for the whole counsel of God, for unswerving fidelity to that permanent and unchanging deposit of truth embodied in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and for the consistent application of that truth to the whole of life. It exists to maintain this truth, to set forth the grounds of belief in it as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, to defend this truth and to be the instrument of blazing forth that truth to the whole world. It stands, as Dr. John Duncan was wont to say in other connections, for the truth that is according to godliness and for the godliness that is according to truth.

We who are closely associated with Westminster Seminary have to confess that we have come far short of our profession and aim. Indeed, when we think of our own sins and shortcomings, we are amazed that God in His displeasure has not wrenched this banner out of our hands and given it to others more worthy than we. We marvel that God has not removed His candlestick out of our midst.

But surely the facts show that He has not done so. In His abundant mercy He has borne with our sins and faults. I don't think it is presumption to say, and to say it to God's praise, that the banner has not been folded up and laid in the dust. We have not raised it aloft as we should have done, we have not unfurled it as we should. But it has not been lowered or furled.

God has brought Westminster to the kingdom for such a time as this. May I plead that by our prayers, by our labors, by our support and by our promotion we may stand in the place

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namely, the failure of the visible church. "The parable, as the Lord declares, is of 'the kingdom of heaven'; it would in that case be a parable of another kingdom altogether. Announcing that there was one who should leaven through and through with a leaven of falsehood and corruption the entire kingdom of heaven, He would have announced that the gates of hell should prevail against it; He would have written failure upon His whole future work; there would, in that case, have remained no reactive energy, by which it could ever have been unleavened again" (R. C. Trench, *The Parables of Our Lord*, 11th edition, 1870, pp. 114, 115).

Taking the parables of the mustard-seed and the leaven together, we see the marvelous development, external and internal, of Christ's kingdom on earth.

The Lessons for Us

We need to apply this parable to ourselves, and observe these truths:

1. We are again taught that in God's working small beginnings bring large results. Let us therefore not be discouraged though our influence seems small, if it be good.

2. God has much good going on that we cannot see. The workings of His grace by His Word and Spirit are often hidden and quiet, whereas much of Satan's work is conspicuous and noisy.

3. The hidden good which God has in action has great power of expansion. A classic example is the spread of the church in the Roman empire in spite of the fearful persecutions of the Christians.

4. The invisible good eventually has a great visible manifestation. Just as the dough is raised by the leaven, so is society visibly affected by the spread of the gospel. This is true not only of the building up of the visible church but also of its effect in renovating society. The apostles turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), and manifested the gospel in every place (II Cor. 2:14; Rom. 15:19).

5. The gospel is to spread from one individual to another as the leaven spreads from one particle of meal to another. Each Christian is to be a witness for Christ (Luke 24:48). In the early church even the persecuted disciples went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4).

6. The gospel is to affect all parts of human life—work and recreation,

politics and commerce, the arts and sciences. "The mission of Christianity is not to occupy a respectable place apart, but to leaven life through and through" (James Stalker, *The Preacher*, 1891, p. 15).

7. In order to spread the gospel leaven, we must ourselves be leavened, that is, we must be permeated with the gospel. The believer born again by the Spirit, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and progressing by the Spirit's sanctifying work, is ready to be a real influence for God.

We have an influence, whether for good or for bad. May God help us to be the leaven that makes for nourishment and wholesomeness, not for disturbance and corruption. He offers us the glorious privilege of spreading the glad tidings of salvation. This is the most beneficent enterprise that can be imagined either by angels or by men. Let us help the church and Sunday school. Let us distribute our tracts and gospels. Let us speak a word for Christ. We have every reason to take heart, and do our best.

The Banner of Westminster Seminary

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where God has caused our feet to stand, that in these difficult and perilous days there may not be retreat or recession, but that now and in the days to come, against every assault upon and evasion of the whole counsel of God, with persistent and aggressive display of the banner of God's glory and truth, to the establishment of true faith and to the promotion of truly sanctified life, with steadfastness and zeal born of divine commission and compulsion, Westminster Seminary may go on to greater fidelity and usefulness in the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). We shall often cringe before the assaults of sin and Satan. But let us not forget that Christ is King upon the holy hill of Zion, that He has all authority in heaven and in earth. To Him has been given the promise, "I shall give thee the

heaven for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalm 2:8). He must reign until all His enemies will be made His footstool. Let us be warned and encouraged—warned when we falter or fail, encouraged when by God's sufficient grace we seek to raise and unfurl the banner of truth, that He who is King on God's holy hill will one day cast all error and deceit into the pit of eternal dismay and will vindicate to the glory of God and to the everlasting joy of all His people the very counsel which it is our responsibility and privilege now to display.

NEBRASKA BIBLE CONFERENCE UNUSUALLY BLESSED OF GOD

EVERY one of the sixty-three delegates to the Elim Bible Conference of the Presbytery of the Dakotas made a public acknowledgment of his faith in Christ as Saviour, and twenty-five of these delegates made such profession for the first time. Thus was the blessing of God manifest upon this Bible conference held from June 12th to 19th at Niobrara (Nebraska) State Park.

Guest speaker at the conference was the Rev. Professor R. B. Kuiper of Westminster Seminary, who preached a series of sermons on the theme "Salvation". Professor Kuiper also taught a course on "Christianity, the Only True Religion".

Other instructors and their courses were: The Rev. Charles L. Shook on "The ABC's of Salvation" (compulsory for new campers and open to all); the Rev. Robert B. Brown on "The Fruits of the Spirit"; and the Rev. Dean W. Adair on "Jesus the Redeemer".

Also taking part in the conference were the Rev. Messrs. Melvin B. Nonhof, John F. Gray and Walter J. Magee, Elder Gerard den Dulk, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Magee, Mrs. Shook, Mrs. Gray and Mrs. Nonhof.

In addition to the sixty-three delegates, twenty-two other persons attended, making a total of eighty-five campers at this annual conference of Dakota Presbytery. Swimming, hiking, soft ball and ping-pong were, according to a competent observer, the favorite pastimes.