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AUG 3 1944

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Is Southern Presbyterianism Ready To Receive A Theological Liberalism Which Does Not Accept The Deity Of Christ?

By Rev. Wm. C. Robinson, D.D.

John Dick, a grand old Scottish theologian, declares that those who accept the Deity of Christ and those who do not hold two entirely different religions. B. J. Kidd, the Oxford Church historian, traces two opposite ways of thinking of Christ in the early centuries. For the Church of the Ages He is God who became also man for us and for our salvation. According to sundry adoptionistic schools he is only a deified man. Or if one turns to the current theology of Lund (Sweedon), the Incarnation of God speaks the theocentric theology of God's condescending grace (*agape*), while the apotheosis of a man tells only of the humanism of Plato's self-lifting idealism (*eros*). For the Westminster Confession, Christ is very and eternal God who in the fullness of time took upon Him man's nature, so that the two natures of the Godhead and the manhood were inseparably joined in His one person. For Unitarianism Jesus is only a man, a human temporal person, in whom God was present and who at most may now be venerated as a glorified "saint," or a "deified" man.

Now if the Presbyterian Church in the United States enters into organic union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America **without specific safeguards** we will receive into our ministry men who hold both of these diverse views. Many of the U.S.A. brethren are as sound in the faith as we are, but a theological liberalism which does not maintain the Deity of Christ has likewise a place in the U.S.A. ministry.

American liberal theology has never insisted on the Deity of Christ. William Ellery Channing did not call his movement Unitarianism, but "Liberal Christianity."

At a recent meeting of the American Theological Committee, Dr. Walter Horton, of Oberlin, told the group that ministers of Unitarian views had served so long and had become so firmly entrenched in the Congregational Churches that they could not be removed. In **A Christian Manifesto** Professor Edwin Lewis, a noted Methodist scholar, says that a large number of those who make up the Evangelical Churches are Unitarian in thought. The popular Baptist preacher, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, repudiated both the Trinity and the two natures of Christ in his sermon, **The Peril of Worshipping Jesus**, and in his **Guide to Understanding the Bible** represents Jesus as a mere human person, a man who was deified by His disciples.

Has none of this Unitarian thought spilled over into the theological liberals of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America? After all what was the meaning of the Auburn Affirmation? Was it only a tempest in a teapot? Of course, the sharpest point at issue in the U.S.A. Church was the Virgin Birth of Christ. The Virgin

Birth distinguishes our Lord from the other descendants of Adam, saves Him from original sin and so prepares Him to become the last Adam, the Head and Representative of a new humanity, the Lord our Righteousness.

In the 1925 General Assembly of the U.S.A. Church charges were pressed against New York Presbytery for licensing two ministers who could not accept the historical statements in Matthew and in Luke on the Virgin Birth of Christ. The Assembly condemned the Presbytery for this action. But immediately the spokesman of New York Presbytery got the floor and read a resolution of nullification, absolutely refusing to abide by the Assembly's judicial decision. Other Auburn Affirmationists rose and threatened to split the Church. As a consequence the Moderator appointed a committee of fifteen which compromised the matter in such a way that no punishment was inflicted upon the Presbytery or upon the men so licensed.

Now in the recent volume, **Liberal Theology -- An Appraisal**, one of these same men licensed without accepting the Virgin Birth writes the essay on the place of Jesus Christ in liberal theology. And in the essay he sets forth Christ, not as God the **eternal** Son who became incarnate for us men and for our salvation, but as a **temporal** person in whom God was as truly present as He could be in any man of Galilee in the period of the Roman Empire. And this is not just some strained interpretation I am putting on these words. Dr. Samuel Zwemer, of Princeton, in reviewing this essay points out that its view of the Person of Christ is utterly different from that of the Westminster Standards, while another veteran commentator, Dr. James Doig Rankin, of the United Presbyterian Church, declares that this beautifully written essay on the place of Jesus Christ in liberal theology rejects the Deity of Christ. On its own manifesto, then, written by a U.S.A. minister of high standing, liberal theology in the U.S.A. Church does not maintain the Deity of Christ.

Brethren, it is no use to fool ourselves with honeyed words and soft phrases. These things are so written that he who runs may read. Under the New York declaration of nullification and the Auburn Affirmation threat of disruption the U.S.A. Church did permit the licensing and ordination of ministers who did not accept the Virgin Birth. And now one of these men so ordained presents for liberal theology a Christ who is not an eternal Divine Person but only a human temporal person. It will not do to hide our heads ostrich fashion in the sand or to deny the moons of Saturn or of Jupiter because we refuse to look through the proper telescopes. In the days to come Presbyterian liberals will be able to point to this record and to the fact that the reviews of **Liberal**

Theology -- An Appraisal, by Dr. Zwemer and Dr. Rankin, were republished in The Southern Presbyterian Journal for us to read. If we are not willing to open the doors of ministerial communion to theological liberals who do not accept the Deity of Christ we must make explicit provision against such action in the Plan of Reunion with the U.S.A. Church.

Our 1939 General Assembly passed a declaratory statement affirming that our ordination vows involve the acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ as true and eternal God, who became man by being born of a virgin, who offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and reconcile us to God, who rose from the dead with the same body with which He suffered, and who will come again to judge the world. Since this authoritative interpretation was passed a minister in the eastern part of our Church who was reported sowing doubts as to the Deity of Christ in talks to college Y's has left our communion for that of the U.S.A. Church. Another minister in the western part of the Church has withdrawn and united with the Unitarian Church. In other words, we need the maintenance of this declaratory statement for our Church as it now is. We shall need it not less if we unite with the U.S.A. Church.

The U.S.A. Church is asking us to accept as a part of the Plan of Reunion the Declaratory Statement they passed in order to please the Cumberland Presbyterians. Is it not equally proper to ask the U.S.A. people to accept the Declaratory Statement we have enunciated to maintain the Deity of Christ? We hereby request the Committee of the U. S. and the U.S.A. Churches to embody our Southern Presbyterian Declaratory Statement interpreting our ordination vows in the Plan of Reunion in a way that does not limit our statement by or subordinate it to the Declaratory Statement printed on Page 69 of the Plan of Reunion.

New Light And Moral Right

Principal John Macleod, D.D.
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There is a well-worn tag to the effect that the Lord has yet much light to break forth from His Word. As to this no devout believer has any more doubt than had John Robinson. At the same time as believers have no doubt in regard to this matter, it holds of them in the measure in which they are well instructed and established in the knowledge of the Word that they are equally confident that the further light that is to break out will not cancel nor challenge nor detract from the brightness with which the light of the Word already shines. What is new will only intensify what is old. It will not darken it nor throw it in the shade. It will not open up the light or message of another Gospel than that which our Lord and His Apostles have left us. It will be a thing of detail and not of wide-sweeping principle. We need not, then, look for results of a revolutionary kind as the outcome of the shining of the New Light if it is light indeed. Old Light of this kind is better than pretended New.

We need not fear for the Faith as it has been confessed from the first that it shall be shaken or overthrown. It is too well grounded in the sure warrant of the Divine Word to run any such risk. And as for the discovery of further truth such as will modify what is embodied in the Reformed Confessions, the system taught in the Reformed Faith is so truly an echo of Apostolic word that those who hold it need not be put about in their mind nor give place to craven fears that it shall ever be set aside. It may meet again and again with what it has often met already, cavillings and perverse disputings of men that were not willing to take and keep their place at the footstool of Him who by His Apostles has left in their writings the final norm of the Faith. The truth already known may be known more fully and perfectly. It may be seen better in its own setting and in the connection and relations of its various parts. Its power and its beauty and its sweetness and its glory may be more richly known. Yet those who have learned the Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God may rest assured of this, that any further truth which as light will break forth from the Word will have no quarrel with the truth and the proportion of what they have already come to know. They may well keep their windows open to the east to welcome the light that a new day brings with it; but no shining of the rising sun will do more than confirm them in the knowledge and faith of what their confessing fathers learned from the Apostles—what, indeed, in Holy Writ is set forth with plainness of speech. The great outline of the Word is not a thing of yesterday.

The possible emergence of New Light, then, that will set aside the historic faith of believing Christendom may be set up as a bugbear to deter the Church from bravely and simply and steadfastly professing, as truth known and ascertained, what he who runs may read. This has been set down for all time in the Word which chrystallizes and perpetuates the ministry of the Apostles. As that ministry was one of witness we need look for no new facts in the record of our Lord's work, nor for any new words to add to the message with which the New Testament has already come. As their ministry was one of teaching we need look for no other exposition of the facts of the Gospel or of the work of God than they have already given. Divine truth does not contradict itself. The return of the Reformation to the regulative authority of the Lord as He speaks in the Word which He has given was of such a *bona-fide* character that not only is the general substance of the Faith as confessed by our Reformers in keeping with the Rule of Faith, but the system of truth in the mutual connections of its leading parts is the truth that the Divine Word itself has set forth. The offence that as a matter of fact has been given by the Calvinism of our Reformed Faith is an offence that is taken at the truth of the Word in regard to the Sovereign Grace to which we trace up the hope of Eternal Life that is to be found in the Son of God incarnate . . .

Yet if men change their views on what they had confessed as the truth of God they should have the manliness to acknowledge that such a change has taken place and to refuse to stay in what is now to them a false position . . .

We should not fail to observe the moral issues