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Controversy

By the REV. ROBERT S. MARSDEN

General Secretary of the Missions Committees of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

THE Orthodox Presbyterian Church was born through the travail of controversy, but a vast majority of the people who united in forming the church are peace-loving Christians who take no delight in a quarrel. Having fought one major battle, most of us looked forward to the establishment of a church in which all would live in peace because a doctrinal unity had been achieved. Such a hope has not materialized, for we have constantly been compelled to remind ourselves that the Christian life is a warfare from which there is no discharge and in which all must constantly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

The battle with the devil as he is represented by those outside the church is a comparatively easy one. To be sure, we have not always accurately determined whether it is the children of God against whom we are fighting or the children of the devil, and perhaps we have occasionally used words as weapons against the former which should have been reserved for the latter. Yet most of us, recognizing that many wolves in sheep's clothing have entered into the fold of the visible church, have reconciled ourselves to doing battle continuously against the hosts of darkness.

We have also learned that there is another kind of controversy in which we must be engaged. It is controversy within the church. Again there has been a temptation to seek peace in the church at the expense of the truth. May the Lord in His grace preserve us

from that kind of peace! The road of church history is strewn with the wreckage of churches which have allowed their love for peace to lull them into a peace with the devil. Witness the peace which exists within the great modernist churches of our day; there is hardly a ripple of controversy within them. If the history of the Christian church teaches us anything, it is that the church has grown the best and has been blessed most mightily in those periods when there has been the right kind of controversy within the church.

The controversies of the New Testament church are clearly discernible in the Book of Acts and in the New Testament epistles. The controversies in the early church, which led to the great church councils, were the sources of much blessing to the church for hundreds of years. When controversy over doctrinal matters ceased, the church entered into the dark ages for nearly a thousand years! Who can read the history of the Protestant Reformation without seeing that it was one constant controversy, yet who can deny that that was the period of the greatest blessing of the church and the period of the salvation of many precious souls for whom Christ died? When a church shuns controversy, that church has begun to die.

Since, then, we must have controversy within the church, how shall it be carried on? Shall it be carried on in the atmosphere of distrust of motives and suspicion among brethren, or shall it be carried on with

The Witness of Matthew and Mark

A Review by the REV. WILLIAM CHILDS ROBINSON, Th.D.

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THE WITNESS OF MATTHEW AND MARK TO CHRIST, by Ned Bernard Stonehouse, Th.D. THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, Phila., Pa., 1944. 269 pp. \$2.50.

HERE is a solid piece of work by a scholar who is thoroughly at home in the field of Gospel criticism and exegesis. The author's purpose is to show that these Gospels are dependable witnesses to Christ, true to their avowed aim. In carrying out his purpose Dr. Stonehouse deals with the chief problems of critical interest with the precision of a master workman. The casual reader who is seeking a short-cut to popular preaching will not linger over this book. But the serious student of the Gospels will be well repaid for his diligent use of the volume.

Mark is the most abrupt of the Gospels both in its preface and in its original conclusion. This Gospel shows the divine action attesting Jesus as the Christ, the fulfillment of the messianic hope through word and power. "Because of the unique filial relationship of Jesus" He has been chosen to the messianic task. The "liberal" frame which treats Mark as a continuous history of Jesus' life is an overstatement. Professor K. L. Schmidt has rendered a valuable service in shattering this "liberal" myth with his *Formgeschichte*. On the other hand, the Gospel even in its oral transmission shows a proper interest in the time and locale of Jesus' activities. In accord with the hypothesis of Lohmeyer and Lightfoot, Galilee is recognized as providing the historical background of the passion, but it is shown that this passion accomplished in Jerusalem is even more powerfully luminous than the earlier teachings. The Gospel is primarily concerned with "the divine action of salvation which came to expression in the history of Jesus Christ".

Jesus did not first become conscious of His Messiahship at Caesarea-Philippi. "Jesus was perfectly clear from the very beginning as to who he was and what he was to do." "The divine voice from above, seconded by the testimony of the Baptist, reveals his transcendent character". There-

after the power and authority of the Son of Man produced such overwhelming impressions upon the disciples that faith and loyalty are never completely separated from amazement, fear and lack of understanding. "Only when Jesus insists that they must associate in their minds the way of the cross with his transcendent messiahship does the reader become aware of the progress and movement in the account".

The chapter on the conclusion of Mark captures and holds the interest of the reader with the fascination of a novel or a detective story, as it traces out the various possibilities. The reviewer was left a bit undecided between a sudden interruption of Peter's account and the view of the author that the disclosure of the resurrection at the empty tomb brings the entire Gospel to its awaited climax.

In Matthew also the typographical and chronological references are often indefinite. Matthew is rather concerned with setting forth a witness to Jesus as the messianic Son of David, and gives only such an account of His travels and activity as adequately displays the meaning of His coming. The mountain scene in Galilee supplied the fitting climax to the work because "it was the occasion of a stupendous revelation, a revelation of the divine investiture of the risen Christ with universal sovereignty, of the consequent commission of the disciples, and of his continuous presence with them until the consummation".

Matthew portrays a Christ for whom the entire Old Testament possesses permanent validity as the Word of God. At one and the same time Christ is subservient to the revelation of the law and of the prophets and yet paradoxically He places His own as a new revelation alongside of that of the Old Testament. By its emphasis on the Old Testament the Gospel of Matthew finds its distinctiveness in its portrayal of the history of Jesus Christ in the perspective of the history of revelation. The first Gospel is not a biography, but the most significant part of the history of revelation. The transcendent self-

consciousness of Jesus revealed in Matthew's repeated use of "I say", "Verily, I say", as well as the Matthean account of the Great Confession and the Jubilation Passage, show that the Father and the Son in fellowship with one another are both subject and object of revelation. Since one cannot know God as the Father of Christ without knowing Christ as the Son of the Father, ultimately the two mysteries coincide and the action of revelation is conceived of as single. "The whole of the ministry of Jesus is viewed as constituting a divine revelation, the apprehension of the revelation expressed in the words, 'Of a truth thou art God's Son'".

The author is essentially right in tracing the kingdom of redemption through its several stages. There is first the Old Testament dispensation with the throne of Jehovah in the theocracy, then there is the incipient reality of the kingdom in the presence of the King and in His casting out of demons. The resurrection marks the distinctive stage of the manifestation of His power and authority over the church. The final stage of the reign as the kingdom of glory awaits the Parousia of the Son of Man. We would have added to the resurrection the ascension and the pouring forth of His regal power at Pentecost. It is at His resurrection and ascension that Christ who was publicly anointed at His baptism actually ascended the throne of David and as a life-giving Spirit began to exercise the sceptre of His kingdom of grace. Because He has been enthroned at the right hand of God, we have received a kingdom (reign) that cannot be shaken and a church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Understatement is preferable to overstatement, but if one might venture a mild criticism the reviewer is of the opinion that something more might properly have been made of Mark's opening quotations from Malachi and from Isaiah for the point of view of the Gospel and for the Marcan witness to Christ. These passages represent the promised coming of the LORD of the Old Testament to redeem His people. One of them was

used by our Lord Jesus Christ of John the Baptist and thus of Himself, the other was used by John to describe himself and the Lord whose way he was to prepare. Their collocation in Mark is significant for the Old Testament messianic promise, for the primitive Christian tradition, and for the Gospel of Mark. The change of pronouns from "my" to "thy" shows the direct ascription of the Lord in these prophecies to the Lord Jesus by the Gospel writer, and presumably by his source or sources. The revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ which these opening words stamp upon the second Gospel leaves little to be added by the prologue of the fourth Gospel.

Stonehouse properly finds the ultimate Biblical background for the Son of Man in the Book of Daniel. The concrete figure like unto a son of

man, associated with the clouds of heaven and given dominion, glory and a kingdom, is unmistakably presupposed in Jesus' use of the title Son of Man. In Daniel the one "like unto a son of man" symbolically identifies the king whose kingdom shall not be destroyed. "Matthew portrays one who, out of the exalted self-consciousness that he is the one of whom Daniel spoke, tells of his coming glory and of the glorious kingdom, but also on earth manifests the kingdom through his sovereign words and deeds". In Jesus' discussion of Psalm 110 "nothing less than the preexistence and comprehensive lordship of the Messiah is implied".

This is a noteworthy book to strengthen our faith and deepen our devotion to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

That, however, is not the most serious objection to its recital. Let us examine the first clause: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth". What this attempts to declare is that God is "the Father", that God is omnipotent, and that He is the Creator of the universe. Actually what is said, however, gives a totally wrong impression of who God is: To be sure, the Father is one of the persons of the Godhead, but to declare that He is the maker of heaven and earth, to the exclusion of the other persons of the trinity, is to teach a false god who is not God. The Christian God is the triune God, not merely God the Father, and as a matter of fact it is God the Son who was the actual agent of creation. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). "All things were created by him" (Col. 1:16). To give the impression that God the Father was the only creator of heaven and earth, as this first clause does, is to state what is not true.

The following clauses recite several important and true facts about Jesus Christ. Yet in conjunction with the first clause, I submit that the distinct impression of "subordinationism" is given to the reader. Jesus Christ the Son seems to be assigned a place a little lower than the place assigned to God the Father Almighty. Possibly the persistence of the idea that Jesus Christ is not truly God comes from this constant recital of the Apostles' Creed in the churches. The average Christian is apt to place Christ lower in his thinking than God the Father, and perhaps the origin of such an error is right here in this venerable creed.

There is nothing to indicate in the Apostles' Creed that there is a third person in the trinity, God the Holy Ghost. To be sure, He is mentioned in speaking of the conception of Christ, and a later clause states, "I believe in the Holy Ghost", but there is nothing whatever to indicate that the Holy Ghost is just as truly God as is God the Father!

The creed, then, sets forth a false idea about the foundation doctrine of the Christian religion, the doctrine of God. If we do not worship the triune God, then we are really idolaters. We are not worshiping the true God at all, but a man-made idea. No matter how much honor and glory we may ascribe

An Inadequate Creed

By the REV. FLOYD E. HAMILTON

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I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen".

Every Sunday throughout the world these words are repeated in countless churches by countless worshipers of God, usually with little thought or understanding of what is implied in the various articles of this creed. To many people the words of the Apostles' Creed have a peculiar sanctity. In some churches it is placed almost on a par with the reading of the Word of God. To attack it would seem to some almost blasphemy, or at least an indication of heretical leanings.

Looking at the creed objectively, however, one wonders whether the

perfume of sanctity which usually surrounds it has not grown slightly musty, and whether the time has not come in the development of our churches when we can dispense with its recital. To be sure, the creed has a number of points in its favor: it is brief; it sets forth many important facts about Christianity; it deals with certain points which have constantly been under attack by the opponents of Christianity; and lastly, it is in undisputed possession of the field, and there is no brief creed that could be substituted for it with any hope of gaining any widespread approval.

Nevertheless, in spite of these arguments in its favor, we have the temerity to raise again the question whether it ought not to be relegated to a library show-case where it would have a venerable spot in which to grow old along with other theological objects d'art.

In the first place, though it is called "The Apostles' Creed", there is little likelihood that the apostles ever heard of it. There is no reliable tradition that takes it back to the time of the apostles, and though it is undoubtedly of very early origin in the history of the Christian church, it hardly deserves the name it bears.