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

Every theology treats of God and man but each gives the priority to one of the two. The order in Calvinism is God first and man second. In Liberalism it is man first and God second.

We regret very much to see the banner of theological liberalism lifted over one of our Southern Presbyterian periodicals. In the past our spiritual forebears have used terms designed to magnify the whole or some aspects of God's saving action or revelation and of our response thereto. **Augustinianism** placed the emphasis on His saving grace, **Reformed** on the need of a faith and life reformed according to His Word, **Evangelical** stresses the Gospel.

In more recent days, the **Theology of Crisis** proclaims Divine judgment and grace; while its more current designation **The Theology of the Word** recognizes the living Word, the Risen Redeemer as the One who speaks through the faithful preaching of the Bible. The **Christus Victor Fellowship** presents Christ as the triumphant Lord and King. The **Agape-Motif** magnifies the New Testament conception of love and issues in a theocentric religion. Canada has its **Trinitarian Theological Society**, Dubuque its **Crisis Christology**, Princeton its **Theology Today**, H. Kraemer his **Theological Realism**—all of which seek to bring out some truth which the living God has made real for us men and for our salvation.

The term **Theological Liberalism**, however, awakens in our breast no echo of God's saving revelation or intervention for our salvation, and calls forth no deepened obedience to the Christian faith. Its direction is rather away from the saving revelation in Christ toward the dry wilderness of arid rationalism. It plumbs not the depths of Divine dominion established by loving communion. It tells not of the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light. It sings not the song of Moses and of the Lamb, it proclaims not the reign of grace. Across its banner is emblazoned not **theonomy**—the law of God established by the Gospel of His grace—but **autonomy**—each man a law unto himself. Theological liberalism magnifies not God and His Word, but man and his reason. Indeed, the current issue of the Union Seminary magazine reviews a volume which uses "liberal" in the sense of counting the idea of God superfluous. (USR lxi;4:407).

Speaking of the Christian conflict with Nazism, Dr. Hromadka says: "The liberal theology in Germany and in her orbit utterly failed. It was willing to compromise on the essential points of divine law ... It had made all the necessary preparation for 'the Germanization of Christianity.'" (**Doom and Resurrection**). Speaking for French and Swiss Protestantism, Dr. Paul T. Fuhrman says: "It is interesting to hear American liberal 'Protestants' now thundering against Nazism which is simply the inevitable logical product of modern German humanistic 'religion.' German theological liberalism itself prepared the ground for and laid the surest foundations of Nazidom; and this was done in a twofold way: on the one hand, Jesus Christ was emptied of all transcendental and divine content; on the other hand

'Man' was placed at the center of 'religion.'" (**God-Centered Religion**). Rosenberg and Hauer thanked Schleiermacher and Ritschl—the prophets of German theological liberalism—for taking the foundation of religion away from a Jewish Book (the Bible) and for placing it upon the Deutsche-Germanic-Aryan spirit.

We are not forgetting that the Southern Presbyterian spokesman for theological liberalism puts many qualifications in his acceptance of theological liberalism. We would describe his position as a halfway house between the evangelical Calvinism in which he was spiritually reared and the theological liberalism toward which he seems to be moving. Yet it is significant that with other terms before him, such as progressive conservatism, he has chosen **Liberalism** as his banner. It is also significant that the Editor of the **Outlook** in one of the issues containing the articles on **Liberalism** quotes with approval a favorable review of the activity of Dr. Henry Sloan Coffin in opening the doors of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., to such full-grown, theological liberalism as that set forth in the volume, **Theological Liberalism—An Appraisal**.

While we are thankful that the Southern Presbyterian Liberal does not go so far as these men we believe that the term **Liberal** when used in theological circles carries with it certain implications. First, a theological liberal seeks freedom from theological tenets—sometimes from a Calvinistic Complex, sometimes from the Christological formulation of the ancient Church. In 1933 Dr. J. A. MacLean wrote in the **Presbyterian of the South**: "Should the Ministry be Muzzled? A Declaration of Independence." In 1944 he wrote: "Wanted an Evangelistic Creed. How can we overcome the Calvinistic Complex." Secondly, theological liberalism emphasizes the human reason rather than the Word of God as the seat of authority in religion. Dr. MacLean asked for "a comprehensive reasonable statement adequate for intellectual men of our own day." His ambition is "to present religious truth in an intellectually acceptable form to thinking men." Thirdly, theological liberalism when it is fullgrown rejects the Christological formulation of the ancient Church. This is at least one of the reasons for the great hue and cry against creeds. In his history of dogma Harnack tried to show that the Christological formulation of the ancient Church was wrong—that Christ was not an eternal Divine Person, but only a human temporal person. This usage of the word "liberal" is found in an article in the **Presbyterian of the South** Febr. 8, 1933, where Dr. E. T. Thompson, writing particularly of their Christology, describes the Unitarian and the Universalists as "the two most liberal churches in America." This humanitarian Christology is distinctly taught by Dr. Van Dusen in **Theological Liberalism—An Appraisal**, and by Dr. Hocking in **Living Religion And A World Faith**. It was the presupposition of a recent attack in the American Theological Committee on the Christological Foundation of the World Council of Churches by Dr. Craig of Oberlin. The last named scholar definitely rejected both the pre-existence and the post-existence of Christ as mythological, and con-

demned the doctrine that Jesus is God. We are delighted that Dr. MacLean still believes that Jesus Christ is both man and God (we should prefer to say both God and man), very God of very God. We would, however, like to remind him and the men of his movement that New England Unitarianism did not begin as an attack upon the full Deity of Christ. It began as "Liberal Christianity" with an attack upon the Calvinistic doctrine of man, particularly upon what is conceived to be Calvin's doctrine of human depravity. Southern Presbyterian Liberalism has been vigorous in its Pacifism and its call for American disarmament—both of which are based on an inadequate doctrine of the fall and man's consequent depravity.

The repeated affirmations as to the belief of liberalism in personal immortality is not particularly reassuring. Platonists and Kantians also believe in personal immortality. Indeed, this one article was all that Continental theological liberals held of Christian eschatology in the nineteenth century—limiting their belief to what was philosophically defensible. As Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, shows personal immortality was shared in the second century with the Platonists, but Christian leaders like Irenaeus stressed the resurrection of the body in order to maintain the theocentric character of the Christian faith. The vagueness

of the statement about the liberal belief in hell leaves plenty of leeway for double talk about eternal punishment. Their statement on the Virgin Birth of Christ sounds like the acceptance of a beautiful story because it has a musical resonance, rather than a conviction forced by the evidence. The Church is called to declare the whole counsel of God for His glory and man's salvation. In so doing she properly offers the Babe in the arms of the Virgin as well as the Saviour on the cruel cross and the Lord risen for our justification.

If the liberal spokesman will give us the reference from John Calvin as to Luke's alleged mistake we can examine the matter and ascertain whether the statement of Calvin's doctrine of inspiration made by Dr. T. C. Johnson needs modification. But as a historian we must protest against a study of Luther and of Calvin that can bring from these great Reformers only a straw or two to support theological liberalism. Let us rather read Luther until we understand and preach his *Sola gratia* and *sola fida* and Calvin until our pulpits again resound with his *Soli Deo gloria*. The genius of these Reformers is the antipodes of theological liberalism.

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How Germany Got That Way

By J. A. Baldwin*

Before World War I, America received a large part of her dyes from Germany. Also many other material substances have come from there through the years. Happy would we be if the story could end there. Unfortunately it cannot. The simple fact is that deadly ideas have come to us from Germany, ideas that have done England, Scotland and America greater hurt than has come from her bombs and bullets. To most of our people, the seriousness of this situation has not been realized at all. An individual or a small group has from time to time vigorously protested; but, in reply, self-confessed scholars in well-endowed seminary chairs or important pulpits have given an indulgent smile, or deprecating gesture, and a few regretful words that some of our ignoramuses could be presumptuous enough to question the words of "wisdom" from the "great scholars" of Germany. And we have persisted in sending our young men over to get these ideas. When thoroughly indoctrinated, they have returned not only with the ideas but too often with not a little of the conceit that we have seen in the typical German.

But very briefly what are the hurtful ideas? Simply that the Bible is not at all what we have been accustomed to think it is—a divine message—but rather that it is a purely human document, to be regarded and treated as other purely human documents. It began with the first five books of the Bible. These, according to them, were not written by Moses nor in the time of Moses, but several hundred years later, and constituted an ingenious fabrication by a group or groups of priests for their own selfish purposes, and per-

petrated upon a gullible people as coming from a more or less mythical leader named Moses. Gradually, the whole Bible came within their "scholarly" cognizance. It was inevitable that Jesus would, in their opinion, lose His Deity and be simply a mere man, though, of course, a good man and an inspiring teacher. I think it may be safely said that in all the pages of history no other such prostitution of scholarship can be found.

How did Germany get that way? Things do not just happen. This did not just happen. There was a historic background. Anyone interested in this subject at all cannot afford to overlook this background. Throughout the centuries, there have occurred from time to time periods of opposition to the supernatural in Christianity. Perhaps the most widely extended of these outbursts had its culmination in Europe in the Eighteenth Century and was known as deism. This belief admitted a rather vague recognition of God who probably created the world, but who had had little or no supervision since. And such a thing as a Heavenly Father knowing and hearing and caring for those who look to Him in faith was entirely foreign to their belief.

The two most prominent men of deism were Voltaire of France and Frederick II of Prussia. Voltaire wrote voluminously and thus exerted great influence. But Frederick was King of a small but compact little country; the most important, with the possible exception of Austria, of the very small divisions of Germany. He secured later the addition to his name, "the Great"