

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

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"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."—Isa. 40:8.

The Second Part of the Ordination Pledge



Dr. Machen

IN THE last issue I said a few words regarding the declaration of purpose in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union, which declaration of purpose is, as I pointed out, very similar to the ordination pledge required of ministers, elders and deacons in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

The first paragraph of the pledge means that the candidate accepts as true everything that the Bible teaches.

But what, then, does the Bible teach?

Widely different answers have been given to that question. Widely different systems of doctrine have been held by persons who agree in holding to the full truthfulness of the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, holds to the full truthfulness of the Bible; yet no one would doubt but that its system of doctrine is widely different from ours.

Moreover, even among those who, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, hold that the Bible is not only an infallible rule of faith and practice but the *only* infallible rule of faith and practice, there have been great differences of opinion as to what the Bible teaches.

These differences do not concern merely one or two small details, but they are so extensive that they have led to the establishment of various systems of doctrine, each of which, be it remembered, claims to be the system taught in the Bible.

The Lutheran system is one system; the Arminian system, widely held in the Methodist churches until it gave place to the completely destructive Modernism which generally holds sway there now, is another; the Reformed system (often called,

chiefly by its opponents, the Calvinistic system) is still another.

Which of these systems of doctrine, which of these ways of interpreting the Bible, does the ordination pledge require ministers and elders and deacons in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to hold?

There can really be no doubt about the answer to that question. The ordination pledge requires the candidates to hold distinctly the Reformed or Calvinistic system. That is the system which is set forth with a clearness which surely leaves nothing to be desired in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, which are the Standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

Be it noticed that the candidates do not subscribe to the Reformed system of doctrine merely as one allowable system among many allowable systems. They do not even merely subscribe to it as the best system. But they subscribe to it as the system that is true.

Being true, it is true for everyone. It is true for Methodists and Lutherans just as much as Presbyterians, and we cannot treat as of no moment the differences which separate us from Methodists and Lutherans without being unfaithful to the Word of God.

Does that mean that we cannot have Christian fellowship with our Methodist or our Lutheran brethren?

It means nothing of the kind. On the contrary, we can have very precious Christian fellowship with them.

At that point I want to utter a word of personal testimony. I just want to say that in these struggles of the last few years against blatant unbelief in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., one of the most precious gifts that God has given me—and I have no doubt but that many of those with whom I have been associated would say the same thing—has been the Christian fellowship that I have enjoyed with many of my Lutheran brethren, especially those

of the "Missouri Synod." How often, when I have felt tempted to be discouraged, has some message come to me from them bidding me be of good courage and remember that the battle is the Lord's! How often have I in turn rejoiced when I have thought of the way in which that noble Church—I mean the Missouri Synod—cultivating Christian learning at its great Concordia Seminary and bringing up its people truly in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, has stood firmly against the unbelief and indifferentism of the day!

Will those brethren be offended if they read what I have written regarding my devotion to the Reformed Faith and my belief that it is the system of doctrine taught in God's Word?

I feel rather sure that they will not. You see, one of the things that unite me so closely to them is that they are not indifferentists or interdenominationalists, but are profoundly convinced that it is necessary to hold with all our souls to whatever system of doctrine God's Word teaches.

I wish indeed that they were adherents of the Reformed Faith, as they no doubt wish that I were a Lutheran. But I stand far closer to them than I should stand if they held the differences between the Reformed and the Lutheran system to be matters of no moment, so that we could proceed at once to form an "organic union" based upon some vague common measure between the two great historic branches of the Protestant Church.

No, my brethren, we do not risk losing our Christian fellowship with our true brethren in other communions if we hold honestly to our ordination pledge. Let us hold to it honestly; and let us not abandon, in the interests of any vague interdenominationalism or anti-denominationalism, that great system of revealed truth which is taught in holy Scripture and is so gloriously summarized in the Standards of our Church.