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The Auburn Heresy

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WHEN future historians of the Church evaluate this present age, they may forget tonight's mass meeting but they cannot overlook the Auburn Affirmation and what the Church does about it.

The reason the Auburn Affirmation is so important is that it constitutes a major offensive against the Word of God. It, or at least its theology, is the root of all our trouble.

We have heard that high officials in our denomination are spreading the rumor that there is nothing doctrinal involved in the Auburn Affirmation. This rumor, regardless of its source, is untrue. It is true that the Auburn Affirmation is a cleverly written document with some pious phraseology slightly obscuring its real intent. But once a person has seen exactly what it says, there is no disguising the fact that it is a vicious attack on the Word of God.

The five doctrines involved are the truth of Holy Scripture, the factuality of the Virgin Birth of Christ, His miracles, His sacrifice on Calvary to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and fifth, His resurrection.

The real purport of the document is partially obscured because it states that some of the signers believe some of these doctrines. That is true. Some of the signers believe some; but they all deny the inerrancy of the Holy Scrip-

tures. They all hold that the basis of our Confession of Faith is harmful and that the Bible contains error. This attack on the Bible is of fundamental importance, because, obviously, if the Bible be rejected, why should the religion of the Bible be retained? You cannot well impugn the veracity of the Scriptures and then accept the contents of the Scriptures.

Because this point is so serious, we shall not omit the evidence. On page five of the Auburn Affirmation you may read these words: "There is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept 'from error.' The Confession of Faith does not make this assertion; . . . The doctrine of inerrancy intended to enhance the authority of the Scriptures, in fact impairs their supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the Church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ."

Now, kindly note this strange fact. The Auburn Affirmation states that to believe the Bible is true impairs its authority and weakens the testimony of the Church. Or, in other words, in order for the Bible to be authoritative, it must contain error; and I suppose the more erroneous it is, the more authoritative it can be.

But what does our Confession say? In Chapter I, Section 4, you may read: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth . . . wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

May I also quote our Confession, Chapter XIV, Section 2. "By this [saving] faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein, . . ."

The Auburn Affirmation says it is wrong and harmful

to believe true whatsoever is revealed. Thus the signers of the Auburn Affirmation are seen to be antagonistic to the very basis of our faith. In denying the truth of the Bible, they repudiate our Confession, and so, we claim, have no rightful place in the Presbyterian ministry. Do they perchance reply that they agree with the Confession that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that they deny only that the Scriptures are inerrant? I hope they do not make that reply. For if they say they believe the Bible is the Word of God, and if they claim that the Bible contains error, it follows, does it not, that they call God a liar, for He has spoken falsely. Either they have openly repudiated our Confession, or else they have called God a liar. In either case, they have no rightful place in the Presbyterian ministry.

The Auburn Affirmation is more generous toward the other four points. The Virgin Birth, the miracles, the resurrection, which orthodox Presbyterians regard as historical facts, the Affirmationists regard as permitted theories.

On page six of the Auburn Affirmation, after quoting the five points emphasized by the General Assembly of 1923, we read: ". . . this opinion of the General Assembly attempts to commit our Church to certain theories concerning the inspiration of the Bible, and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection. . . . Some of us regard the particular theories contained in the deliverances of the General Assembly of 1923 as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But we are united in believing that these are not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines, whatever theories they may

employ to explain them, are worthy of all confidence and fellowship."

Now to be concrete, what "theory," other than the historical fact of the Virgin Birth, can you think of to explain the Incarnation? There is one which the Jews of Christ's day advanced when they said contemptuously to our Lord, "We be not born of fornication." If Christ be not Virgin-born, and if, as both Joseph and Mary claim, Joseph was not Jesus' father, whose Son is He? Does the Auburn Affirmation really mean that one who accepts this view of our Lord's birth is worthy of all confidence and fellowship? That is exactly what the Auburn Affirmation means. It says definitely that ministers are worthy of confidence "whatever theories they may employ to explain" the Incarnation.

Shall we next refer to Christ's sacrificial death by which He satisfies divine justice and reconciles us to God? This too is declared unessential, and we are asked to put confidence in men who deny this doctrine, who so long as they use the word "Atonement" may employ any random theory to explain it. Christ's death, then, may be nothing but an example, and our salvation may depend on our efforts to imitate His good deeds. No longer will salvation be entirely by grace. And we are told that these men are worthy of confidence "whatever theories they may employ to explain" the Atonement.

Do we have time also to refer briefly to the resurrection? This too is reduced to a permitted but unessential theory. The signers of the Auburn Affirmation may have in mind some theory of a spiritual resurrection as opposed to the fact that Christ rose from the grave with the same body with which He suffered. The Auburn Affirmationists may

hold to some sort of spiritual resurrection; but Jesus Christ said: "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye behold me having." Apparently Jesus would not have been eligible to sign the Auburn Affirmation. The signers of the Auburn Affirmation say the bodily resurrection—and that is the only kind worth talking about—is unessential. But Paul says: "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain." You will note that Paul's name does not occur among the signers of the Auburn Affirmation. No! you will not find Paul asking us to put confidence in men "whatever theories they may employ to explain," or better, to explain away the resurrection.

Now, my Christian people, if the Auburn Affirmation had been signed by only two or three persons, it would still be incumbent upon us to ask them to repent and recant, or to remove them from the ministry. But if only two or three had signed, there might be little cause for alarm. As a matter of fact, thirteen hundred Presbyterian ministers have signed this heretical document. And yet this number, large as it is, does not of itself reveal the full significance of the situation. We must see also to what an extent this type of theology controls the boards and agencies of our Church. There is prepared for you a list of Auburn Affirmationists who hold responsible positions in the ecclesiastical machinery. Be sure to take along with you as you go home tonight a few copies of this printed list. You will see in it that four of the eight ministers on the Permanent Judicial Commission have subscribed to this heretical Auburn Affirmation. There are also twenty-two signers connected with the Board of National Missions. And so on through the various impor-

tant positions in our Church. Take a list and study it carefully.¹

But even this list does not indicate the total depravity of our Church. Realize also that there are numerous other office-holders who, although they have not signed the Auburn Affirmation, approve its principles, and, far from protesting against the Auburn Affirmation, cheerfully cooperate with its signers in the work of the various boards and agencies. Can you think of any one of the secretaries of the boards, any of the prominent office-holders, that have attempted to defend the Word of God against this Auburn attack? No! they cooperate with them, they approve the same policies, and have thus taken their stand against the Holy Scriptures and our Confession.

In addition to these office-holders who cooperate with the signers of the heretical Auburn Affirmation, there are also numerous ministers who take their orders from headquarters, who in their Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assembly, regularly vote with this Bible-dishonoring band. They may not have signed the document, but they vote its principles into effect.

Some time ago you used to hear the modernists talk in favor of an inclusive Church. The Church, they said, was big enough to include all brands of theology. Today, however, they have changed their tune. They now want to put the orthodox out. Headquarters has decreed that those who remain true to the Word of God, those who object to the General Assembly's placing its own authority above

¹ Copies of this leaflet, entitled "Who Controls Our Church?" may be secured from Dr. Gordon H. Clark, General Secretary, The Reformation Fellowship, 3617 Locust St., Philadelphia. Please enclose a three cent stamp.

that of the Bible, those who will not support modernism, must be disciplined.

And if the men now being tried, men who actively support true Christian missions on the foreign field, if these men are finally brought before the Permanent Judicial Commission, they will face a group of ministers half of whom have signed the heretical Auburn Affirmation, and the other half apparently in full agreement.

In these trials to oust the orthodox, real Presbyterians and modernists have, strange to say, found one point in common. It is now openly admitted by the actions of the hierarchy that the Church is not big enough to include all brands of theology. The modernists want to oust the orthodox. Of course they do, because orthodox Presbyterians will not compromise with paganism. Where is that inclusiveness that once we knew? Where is their boasted love of peace? They fight too! They fight to oust the orthodox.

This, then, is in brief the situation conservative Christians must meet. Shall the truth of the Bible be upheld; or shall a fallible Council, the General Assembly or what not, be made the supreme authority over our consciences? This is no trivial matter; it is rather, a life and death struggle between two mutually exclusive religions. One religion can without harm to its integrity reject the infallible Word of God, deny the Virgin Birth, deny the miracles, the propitiatory sacrifice, deny the resurrection. That religion will remain complete even if all these things are eliminated, but that religion is not Christianity.

The other religion is Christianity, because it accepts the Bible as the very Word of God who cannot lie, because it makes Christ's sacrifice to satisfy divine justice the only basis of salvation, and because it glories in the historical fact of the resurrection.

It is claimed that activities such as this speech and this mass meeting disrupt the peace of the Church. But I would have you note who the disturbers are. Those who attack the standards of the Church are responsible for the unpleasantness. The Auburn Affirmation is the cause of the trouble. Certainly the orthodox men did not set all this going. Of course people want peace. I should like some myself. If it were not for this meeting tonight I could have stayed home, read some philosophy, and gone to sleep. But when two antagonistic religions are engaged in a death struggle there can be no peace in the Church. As long as the inerrant Word of God is repudiated, as long as the chief events of Christ's ministry are attacked, there can be no peace.

No peace without purity!

No peace without purity!

But no, I am mistaken. There can be peace without purity; it is peace with sin, it is peace with Satan. A sort of peace indeed; but O God, deliver us from that sort of peace.

No, I ask you, do not blame us for causing all this rumpus. We did not start this fight, but, God willing, we will finish it. I do not call you to peace, but to war; or, rather, I call you to war with paganism and to peace with your consciences and with God.

Who is on the Lord's side?

Then, let him say so!

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