

OUR SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE

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Our System of Doctrine

A DOCTRINAL CHURCH

We are a doctrinal Church. Not just mildly so but with emphasis, and as we stress the fact that we are strongly doctrinal we realize that in our day doctrine is a thing that is in ill repute. We would expect this from Modernists, as they have thrown away the Word of God, but the real tragedy of the doctrinal weakness of the day is to be seen in the fact that those who are commonly called Fundamentalists also put but little emphasis on the study of doctrine. We see fellowships built upon the merest doctrinal statements, but with us it is not so. We have established our Church upon the System of Doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as that which is Biblical, and this System is doctrinally definite and solid.

The value of a clear, strong, vibrant doctrinal position is illustrated by our break from the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Other demoninations which were weaker in doctrinal emphasis fell into the hands of Modernism with barely a ripple of opposition. Individual men withdrew from them from time to time but there was no organized stand such as that which was made by our group. This was due to the fact that a definite doctrinal statement provided a rule against which we could measure those who fell short of its standards.

Let us not forget that our heritage is the rich doctrinal position of old Princeton. Princeton has brought forth the best of doctrinal studies and students this country has known. While the modern world counts doctrine, and the study of doctrine, a thing of little importance, we remember the exacting studies of Hodge, Warfield and Vos. Some of you had the

opportunity of attending Princeton in the days when it was Princeton, and not as it now is, a thing dead. Some of us had brought into our consciousness the realization of what that historic tradition is as we attended Westminster and listened to the lectures of Dr. Machen, and if we were there early enough, of Dr. Wilson as well; for the men of Faith the tradition is still ours because the heritage has passed down directly from Dr. Robert Dick Wilson to Dr. Allan A. MacRae.

We must not forget that this strong doctrinal heritage is not a thing to be kept merely by wish. It, like all other things of value, must be kept by vigilance. It must soon be forgotten, it will pass away, unless we continue to be determined that it shall be ours as long as God gives us the grace to have a part in this Bible Presbyterian Church.

1. PROTESTANT

Having said that we are a strongly doctrinal Church, what then is the doctrinal position which is ours? First of all, **we are Protestant.** I realize that this is not the usual starting place in determining our theological category, but in an age when men are losing sight of the real meaning of Protestant, we must not forget that we are "Protestants." Men on every side call themselves Protestant, and yet while they call themselves Protestant, turn compromising eyes toward the Romish Church. It is true in our country and it is true abroad. The best illustration, perhaps, at the present time, is the "Sword of the Spirit" movement in England: In this Protestants and Roman Catholics collaborate. How clearly Rome shows itself to be the same apostate Rome that it was in the days of the Reformation when we examine the message sent by the Pope recently to the "Sword of the Spirit" leaders! This is not an exact quotation, but it is exact in content, and we find him saying that it is fitting for men of good will in every nation to work together in order

that by their prayers and good works God might be appeased. My friends, this is a statement from the Rome that Luther hated. We do not seek to appease our God by prayers and good works. God was appeased once for all as Christ died on Calvary's cross. Nay, Rome is Rome. She has not changed, nor will she change. And so let it be said with emphasis that we are Protestants; not weakly so, but protesting as long as God gives us breath.

2. SUPERNATURALIST

Coming to the more usual theological divisions we find the first separation between that which we are that which we are not, to be centered in the question, "**Who saves?**" This first division is between the Naturalists and the Supernaturalists. The Naturalist says man saves himself. The Supernaturalist answers, "God saves." **We are Supernaturalists.** Naturalism in theology is not a new thing. The Church has had to combat this throughout its history, and the Church has been united in proclaiming that the Naturalist is not a Christian. The Church has said, and rightly, that a man who answers the question "Who saves?" by saying that man saves, has no concept of Christian doctrine. Today we call the Naturalists Modernists, and the sorrow of our day is the fact that no longer does the Church proclaim that the Naturalist is of Anti-Christ, but has, on the contrary, turned itself over to his theology.

3. EVANGELICAL

Now, we come to the second usual division and this is among those who are Christian, who are Supernaturalists. This division is centered in the question of "**How does God save?**" There is on one hand the Sacerdotalist and on the other the Evangelical. We find the name Evangelical strangely misused in our time. Men speak as though the term evangelical was

simply a synonym for fundamentalist or conservative. But let us be sure that we use the word in its correct meaning. The correct theological meaning of the term evangelical is that we believe that God saves by dealing directly with the individual human soul through His appointed means of grace. By contrast, the Sacerdotalists believe that God has made the Church the depository of grace, and if a man is in correct relationship with the Church, he is saved. But how our hearts stir within us as we realize that **we are Evangelical** indeed, and we hold fast to the word of God as it tells us that "he that believeth hath everlasting life." There is no church that stands between God and the individual soul.

4. PARTICULARIST

And now we come to a third division. We are Supernaturalists, we are Evangelicals, but the third question that must be answered if our system of doctrine is to be complete is "How is it that as God deals with a human soul all are not saved?" On one hand we have the Universalists, not however to be confused when so used with the Universalist Church. As here used these are true Christians, but they say that ultimate choice as to whether a man be saved or not rests with man. We Particularists, on the other hand, answer, "No. The choice is God's. alone." He is sovereign in His decrees. The term which historically applied to those who are Supernaturalists, who are Evangelical, who are Particularists, is **Reformed**. Some of us have ceased to use the word Reformed as much as we once did, but we should not so easily give up a term that is rich in historical meaning in theology. It is as wrong for us to stop using the term Reformed as applied to us, because of its misuse by any group, as to stop using the word love simply because the Modernists have misused it. We are Reformed because we believe in the absolute Sovereignty of God.

5. PREMILLENIALIST

It will not do to mention our System of Doctrine without further noting that we have written into our creed the doctrine of premillenarianism. We can say with pride that we are the first Reformed group to say formally by our creed that we believe in the pre-millennial Second Coming of our Lord. However, let it be noted that the Synod has resolved that these Premillennial statements are not formally a part of our System of Doctrine. When a man comes to us and we ask him by Constitutional Question if he accepts our System of Doctrine, we acknowledge he has eschatological liberty. Let no one think, however, if I understand rightly the feeling of our Church, that this means that we minimize the fact that we are **Pre-millennialists**. We believe this doctrine with all of our heart.

DOCTRINE IN ACTION

Now let us proceed. We have seen that we are a strongly doctrinal Church and we have seen that our doctrinal position is that which is commonly called Reformed. Let us go on and note that the very erection of creeds necessarily brings with it separation. The fact that we have said we are Particularists means that we have separated ourselves in our Church from those who are Universalists; the fact that we have said that we are Evangelicals means that we have separated ourselves from those who are Sacerdotalists; and above all, the fact that we have said that we are Supernaturalists means that we have separated ourselves from those who are Naturalistic in their theology. The very statement of the creed of the Church means that there are some who cannot subscribe to this doctrinal position. To the Modernist, creeds are but window dressing to bring out upon needful occasions, and the men of the world have felt this, and many of them loudly declare that the creeds of the

Church are as fruitless as the prayer wheels of Tibet. Let us remember with stirring of heart that our creed will suffer a like fate if it remains only as a written statement. If our System of Doctrine is to remain alive and vital it must be **DOCTRINE IN ACTION**. If it is less than **DOCTRINE IN ACTION**, it is dead. We must realize that when we say we are Supernaturalist, Evangelical, and Particularist we must of necessity be separated from those who are not.

It is obvious, however, that the separation necessitated by the different portions of the System of our Doctrine is different at different levels. A man who has the Universalist view cannot honestly join our Church, but if he is Supernatural and Evangelical he is still our brother in Christ and we love him and have fellowship with him in many ways. The same is true of certain Sacerdotalists; while we differ with them, yet if they point to the crucified and risen Christ as the only way of salvation we can join with them in wider fields of fellowship. This is the glory of the American Council of Christian Churches, because therein, with men not Reformed, we can have fellowship in preaching the Word of God and in an uncompromising stand against the Naturalist.

Let us notice in passing, however, that while in comparison with the separation between Naturalists and Supernaturalists our division from those who are not Evangelical or Reformed is minor; nevertheless it is real and if our Church is to remain Particularistic, or Reformed, in its outlook, we must be careful that those who enter our ministry grasp and believe this position clearly. The importance of maintaining our Reformed position strongly is to be seen from the fact that when Satan would gradually destroy a church he first begins to make men feel that the finer doctrinal distinctions are unimportant. We should not make a fetish of our Particularistic position, but if we mean to build this Church upon the view of consistent Christianity as it is set forth in the Westminster Stand-

ards, we must maintain our **DOCTRINE IN ACTION** at this level. It is unfair not only to our Church but to the minister to allow him to join with us without his knowing that we take these questions seriously. If our System of Doctrine is to be more than a scrap of paper we must receive with care all those who ask admittance.

Now when we come to the more basic theological difference between Supernaturalism and Naturalism, how much more diligent we must be in our separation. Here we deal not with those who are Christian, but with those who reject our Lord. Therefore, let no one of us forget that our Separatist position is not an arbitrary thing; it is doctrinal. If one should ask for a single word that would show our stand against the evils of this day, the word would be Separatist; and it should be for we are Separatists. On the basis of our System of Doctrine we militantly state that this is a day when the issues must not be confused but when the difference between Supernaturalist and Naturalist must be kept crystal clear. The separation that comes between us and the Naturalist is an absolute separation. If a man is a Modernist he is not of Christ and we have no fellowship with him on any plane of that field that is commonly called religion.

Thus we do have a System of Doctrine. It is Doctrine in that it is the teaching of the Word of God. It is a system because the whole Word of God raises not many conflicting voices but a single voice. By our system we are those who are Supernaturalists, we are Evangelical, we are Particularists (or Reformed), and we are those who have publicly declared that our System of Doctrine is not mere window dressing, a vain incidental thing, but that we mean it to be a reality in our church. Let us say again, that if this is to be so it must be Doctrine, not merely on a sheet of paper, but **DOCTRINE IN ACTION.**