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## MOSES AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

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The book of Deuteronomy portrays the last few days of Moses' life and records his farewell speeches. Moses had defied Pharaoh, freed his people from slavery, organized them into a nation, and had governed them for forty years. But now he had come to the end of his road. From now on a new leader was to guide them through new experiences. Instead of wandering through the sparsely populated wilderness, the Israelites were to invade the land of Canaan. At such a juncture it was highly appropriate for Moses to give farewell instructions and to prepare the people for the momentous changes they were about to face.

One dominant idea, repeated in various phases throughout Moses' several speeches, comes to a very clear expression in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy. It is the idea of revelation. And of all the marvelous events that had occurred in the history of the Israelites, the greatest thing that ever happened was the fact that God revealed himself to them.

If an opinion poll were to be taken today as to what was the greatest event that ever happened, some people would mention the atomic bomb or another recent invention. On the other extreme of history, some people would mention the invention of the wheel or the discovery of fire. A good Christian would probably say the coming of Christ. And this is an excellent answer; but it is an answer which, obviously, Moses could not give. Furthermore Christ himself falls under the general category of revelation, for He came to show God to us, and to leave God's message with us.

So, even today, we can hold to Moses' reminder that "Since the day God created man upon the earth . . . hath there been any such thing as this great thing is?"

If there was one thing that Moses wished to impress on the new generation of Israelites before he died and before they entered Canaan, it was that God (particularly at Mt. Sinai) had spoken to them. God had revealed himself. He had made himself known.

The reason why revelation is the greatest thing that ever happened is chiefly that without revelation no knowledge of God is possible.

The heathen philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, and the Christian philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, attempted to discover God in nature, apart from direct revelation. Their method, however, is a failure. In the first place, their arguments, which are extremely complicated, are logical fallacies. They do not prove that there is any kind of God at all. And if someone doubts this last statement, at least it is clear that these arguments do not prove the existence of an Almighty Personal Creator. In the second place, it is still more obvious that these arguments do not give us any knowledge of God's grace and mercy, his providence, or even his justice.

Thomas Aquinas himself, though he thought he could prove the existence of some sort of God, admitted that natural theology could not prove the doctrine of providence. For if it could, he said, Aristotle would have done so! A queer reason to be sure, but a correct conclusion. Natural theology therefore is useless. Any alleged knowledge of God that has no place for justice, goodness, mercy and grace is futile.

There is a second theological method. I shall call it the hunch method. Mary Baker Eddy in one place tells us that anyone who believes in vicarious atonement does not understand the nature of God. But how did she or how does anyone learn what the nature of God is? Such pronouncements remind one of



the little boy who was scribbling on a piece of paper.

Father: What are you doing, sonny?

Boy: Drawing.

Father: What are you drawing?

Boy: God.

Father: But no one knows what God looks like.

Boy: They will when I'm finished!

In discussions as to God's nature, commands, and dealings with men, a most important question is: How do we know? What is the source of religious knowledge?

The Protestant answer to this question is clear. Both Lutherans and Calvinists explicitly made the Scriptures the infallible rule of faith. The Lutheran Formula of Concord says, "We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm; according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is none other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and of the New Testament." The Westminster Confession says, "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."

This matter of revelation is more than ever important today. Today, what is called the ecumenical movement is trying to unite all denominations into one big organization. The aim of some of the leaders of the ecumenical movement is to abolish all denominational churches and merge them into one big Super-Church.

Now, this movement faces several difficulties. The most important of these difficulties is, in my opinion, the doctrinal and governmental differences now existing. For example, the Baptists and the Congregationalists hold that each local church is complete in itself; but Presbyterians believe in graded courts. The Presbyterians believe in the parity of the ministry but the Episcopalians have a superior order of bishops who alone can perform certain functions.

Now, a Super-Church would have to have some form of government. But which? It cannot have all three because they are mutually incompatible.

How can one decide which form of government the Super-Church should have? On what can a decision be based. Shall it be based on hunch? Shall we have a little boy draw a diagram? Or, shall it be decided by the force of majority vote, a force that has in the past used economic pressure? Or shall the Scripture alone be the basis?

More important than government is the question of the doctrines concerning salvation.

Personally I know vigorous advocates of the ecumenical movement who not only deny and attack the vicarious atonement, but who openly repudiate the Deity of Christ as well. These men I would not even consider as Christians. But they are ministers and advocates of the ecumenical movement.

There are other men, no doubt personally Christians, who differ among themselves on other matters. Arminian evangelists preach that a sinner by his own will power must first repent and exercise faith in Christ and then afterward be regenerated by the Holy Ghost. But I preach that a man is dead in sin and needs to be born again before he is able to repent and exercise faith in Christ.

Now, how are all these differences to be taken care of in a Super-Church? Most of the ecumaniacs want to forget these doctrines. They are not interested in vicarious atonement, justification by faith, let alone regeneration and repentance. Will then these doctrines be banned in the Super-Church. In the merged churches of South India discussion of certain differences has actually been banned. But when doctrines are banned, what will take their place? What will the Super-Church stand for? This is the question that the ecumenical leaders do not answer very clearly. They do not want a creed. They do not want definite beliefs. They want merely a big organization.

But true evangelicals are very much interested in justification by faith. And good Baptists are strongly attached to the immersion of adults. And I have



the definite belief that the children of believers should be sprinkled.

How, then, can these differences be settled? The proponents of the ecumenical movement do not want to face this question. They want to bury and forget these problems. And the reason why they want to forget them is that they are not able to give an answer. They have no method for discussing these problems. They have no norm by which to judge them. They have no norm because they have rejected the Scriptures as the word of God. They do not believe that God has revealed himself, at least in any definite intelligible way.

Now, we who maintain Protestant principles have a norm. We appeal to what God has said. True, we do not all agree. We have the differences previously mentioned. We do not all have the same understanding of the Bible. But we do all have the same basis on which to conduct our discussions. This common basis gives us the promise or the possibility of making progress. But when disputants have no common basis on which to discuss their differences, they can settle things only by a majority vote to suppress the views they do not like.

Organizational unity, this external governmental unity, is much easier to achieve than theological unity. But it is a unity that comes from rejecting the word of God and results in the suppression of sincere convictions.

True spiritual unity, a unity in the mind of Christ, will be much harder to achieve. It will require prolonged study of the Scripture. Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans will have to meet and discuss their interpretations of the Scripture. Reliance will have to be placed on persuasion and study, not on votes in an organization. We must be ready to teach and to be taught. But though this process is much longer and much more tedious, it is also much more honest. We may differ among ourselves, but we openly acknowledge the differences. We do not hide our aims. Nor do we insult those with whom we differ by claiming that theology is of no importance and need not be considered. Not at all. In this process of open discussion no one will be trampled on; convictions will be respected; economic and ecclesiastical

force will not be applied to secure unwilling acquiescence.

Let us now proceed a little further, First, Moses said that revelation was the greatest event that ever happened. Second, there is no knowledge of God apart from revelation, and therefore no knowledge of how a church and its activities should be conducted except in the Scriptures. Now, third, and a point that needs emphasis, God's revelation is clear, objective, and intelligible. And it is authoritative, whether or not we accept it.

It is necessary in this age to emphasize the objectivity of revelation because many prominent preachers consider it entirely subjective. One might think from what has already been said that the proponents of the ecumenical movement have nothing to say about revelation. This is not true. They talk a great deal about revelation, but they do not mean by the word what we mean. We mean that God so controlled the writers of Scripture and so governed their thoughts that they expressed in the Bible the exact truth as God wished it to be. Now, some ecumenicists have virtually no respect for the Bible at all; but others profess to find the word of God in it. The word of God is in the Bible, they say; it is in the Bible wherever you find it. But of course if you do not find the word of God in some chapter, that chapter is not the word of God for you.

This is not the historical Protestant position. Both Lutherans and Calvinists, as previously stated, hold that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible doesn't merely contain the word of God, it is the Word of God. And whether or not we accept this or that chapter, it all remains authoritative for every one of us.

The men whom I have in mind select certain verses and claim that God has spoken to them in these verses. But they quite reject other verses. Most of the Bible is like the hull or the husk of corn: it is to be stripped off and thrown away, and only the nut or the ear of corn is to be eaten.

Now this raises an interesting question. It is this: How does one know what verses to select and which verses to throw away. Consider by way of illustration the way we eat certain things. We eat the outside of a peach and throw the



center away; but we eat the inside of a peanut and throw away the shell. Oysters are like peanuts, but a turkey is like a peach. Now, if some verses in the Bible are bones and shells, while other verses are good meat and fruit, how can we tell which is which? The only answer these men can give to this question is that it depends on one's taste. They choose the verses they like and discard what they do not like. However, this method reduces to what I previously called the **hunch method**. No longer is the Bible a real objective revelation. It is just a source book for convenient quotations to support some preconceived idea.

It is instructive, too, to see just what verses some of these ecumenical leaders choose. Emil Brunner is a good example of many who emphasize the verse: **The Word became flesh**. For some reason they are particularly attracted by the idea of incarnation, and accordingly they repeat, **The Word became flesh**. But they utterly reject all the verses that explain how the Word became flesh. The Virgin Birth is something they don't believe. In the first chapters of Matthew and Luke God has not spoken. In John 1:14 God has spoken, just because they happen to like that one verse.

Similarly, and with more definite relevance to the ecumenical movement, these men often quote John 17:21. In this verse Jesus prays that all Christians may be one: "that they may all be one." And with this verse, no matter how much else in John they repudiate, they try to justify their preconceived notion of one big organization. The choice of this verse, however, ought to be embarrassing to them, for the immediately subsequent clause has nothing to do with organizational unity, but with a far different spiritual unity. Christ prayed that his followers might "all be one, even as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

This verse obviously has little to do with organizational and ecclesiastical machinery, but on the contrary it has to do with a unity of mind and purpose. Immediately preceding, Christ had prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." But this is one of the verses that the ecumenical movement discards as a husk or a hull.

## GENERAL SYNOD TO MEET IN PHILADELPHIA

The 136th Session of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, will meet at the Fifth Reformed Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pa., May 13-16, 1959.

Hospitality will be provided by the members of Fifth Church for the delegates and friends attending. The first meal to be served will be dinner on Wednesday evening at six o'clock. The meetings of General Synod will convene at eight o'clock, with Dr. Charles F. Pfeiffer of Chicago, the retiring moderator of General Synod, speaking.

The Church address is: Fifth Reformed Presbyterian Church, Front Street above York Street, Philadelphia 33, Pa. The phone number is NEbraska 4-0345. The Reverend John H. Morton is pastor of the church. For more specific information on how to reach the church, please call the church office.

Notification of the number of delegates planning to attend should be sent in advance.

### DOES A TITHE BELONG TO GOD?

(Continued from page 39)

open you the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

And it was twenty-six centuries ago that an experiment of this sort was fairly made among God's people. As a result of it, the tithes lay in great heaps, beyond the ability of the Lord's priests to make use of them. "Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store."

Today, if all the Lord's people should bring in their tithes to the Lord's treasury, the money would lie in heaps waiting for new machinery to put it in motion. What do you think is the prospect of such a financial freshet in the religious channels of beneficence? Are you doing your share to bring it about?