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SCRIPTURE PROOF IN THE VIEW OF MODERNISTS.

That the views which modern critical theologians hold of the origin of the Scriptures practically destroy both the causative and the normative authority of the Bible, and render it useless—except in a secondary manner—for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, has been pointed out long ago by the opponents of modernism. It was reasonably claimed that men could not consistently collect proof-texts for divine things from the only Book in which those things are propounded, if they do not believe that Book to be divinely originated and divinely effectual. With the passing of the old Bible, plenary inspired and inerrant, the old *Schriftbeweis* must go; the support is knocked from under systematic theology; the study of Bible-history becomes a study of Hebrew folklore, and preaching from Bible-texts an act of pious reverence for the past.

What Bible Christians have anticipated and feared is declared with appalling candor by a representative of the critical school of modern Protestant theology. At the "January Conference",¹⁾ at Dorpat Prof. Dr. Karl Girgensohn, of the local university, spoke to the pastors present on "Scripture Proof, Formerly and Now, in Evangelical Dogmatics."¹⁾ He beholds "a grave inner crisis" in Protestantism, "so powerful and thorough that disinterested bystanders—Catholic critics and

1) *Der Schriftbeweis in der evangelischen Dogmatik einst und jetzt.* Leipzig, 1914.

radical spirits like Eduard von Hartmann and his followers unite in this view—believe themselves justified in speaking of a disintegration and gradual dissolution of Protestantism.” In our country this crisis is exhibited by Catholic spokesmen under the name of “decadent Protestantism.” While formerly Protestant theologians had to defend particular and specified points of doctrine against individual critics, modern Bible-criticism has launched a war against Protestantism that is to crush the Protestant Scripture-principle.²⁾ The historico-critical method of Scripture-interpretation, with every new publication that it issues, renders it more difficult and impossible to derive eternally valid norms from Scripture.

The gravity of the situation is not always recognized. Some imagine that they can meet the critical onslaughts “with the harmless instrument of apologetics on a small scale.” Others declare themselves personally convinced that they occupy an impregnable position, and that the fundamental problem of modernism does not disturb them. Still, many evangelical theologians are showing signs of uneasiness. Such as still declare emphatically that there is nothing the matter with Protestant theology, nevertheless reveal, by the great expenditure of artificial force in their declarations and by their frequent repetition, that they are perturbed. Intelligent laymen who have come under the spell of modernism feel the tension between the modern scientific spirit and the old evangelical Scripture principle so strongly that they begin to speak disparagingly of the Bible, manifest animosity toward the Church, and cast aside the evangelical faith of their childhood. Popular agitators are carrying the claims of modernism, frequently in coarse forms, into the plebeian masses, and while they do not succeed in making these people see the real force of the contention, they beget in them an instinctive sensation of unrest. “The number of simple and sincere believers in the Bible is

2) “um, Sein oder Nichtsein des protestantischen Schriftprinzips.” (p. 3.)

decreasing everywhere, and there is but meager success attending the efforts to supplant them by congregations that have inwardly overcome the crisis." (p. 4 f.)

There is a great deal of talk about better times coming. The need of religion is being strongly felt,—a harbinger of a new revival of religion. In philosophy there is a tendency to metaphysical speculation, and the current is setting strongly toward idealism. Still, these movements are not turning into the traditional church-channels. The churches remain empty, even when there is a "liberal" preacher. When the claims of certain optimists are sifted, there is little of fact found to support them.

Four possibilities have suggested themselves to Dr. Girgensohn for overcoming the crisis that has been caused by the collision of the traditional faith in the Bible within the evangelical churches with the modern scientific spirit of illuminism: 1. Theology and the Church may regain the lost ground, drive the hostile forces out of present-day cultural life, and supplant the illusive, merely human, enlightenment by one of a strictly churchly and Biblical character; 2. theology and the Church may be utterly destroyed; an era free from dogma, purely human enlightenment, purely human ethics, the worship of nature and of humanity, may be introduced. Either of these possibilities has this in its favor that it is radical and thorough-going. There is nothing done by halves along either of these two lines. However, Dr. Girgensohn thinks that there is no prospect of either of these possibilities ever being realized. Accordingly, he approaches the solution by way of a synthesis of the opposing forces, and discovers these additional possibilities: 3. Modern enlightenment may secure a dominant position and endeavor to save what it can of the old Bible-faith, *viz.*, anything that admits of being reconciled with modern scientism; or 4. the old Bible-faith may gain the ascendancy by rejecting all teachings that invite an easy and destructive attack from scientists, and by taking over from the sciences anything that does not contradict the traditional faith.

In his detailed argument on these four possibilities, Dr. Girgensohn discards the second as not worthy of being entertained by a theologian. Thus there remain three possibilities. We are interested chiefly in his first possibility.

The old orthodox attitude toward the Bible, Dr. Girgensohn thinks, cannot be restored. True, there still are a few groups of Christians—some of them not so diminutive in size either—who boast the old Bible-faith. They are a strange company.³⁾ Theologians possessing a complete scientific training there are none among them. It is useless to argue with them. It would be carrying coal to Newcastle to try to convince them of the untenableness of their belief. They should be piously tolerated. Their old orthodox views will collapse as soon as they enter the current of modern thought.

Another orthodox group has begun to realize its weakness, but they refuse to frankly and cordially acknowledge it. They are still hankering after the flesh-pots of the old orthodox dogmatics. For the sake of maintaining outward harmony they prudently adapt themselves to those differing from them. At the same time they are hoping in their heart of hearts that this whole modern scientism may some day be proved a colossal humbug. They carefully note the collapse of a theory and the disintegration of schools of thought and the forming of new ones out of the old, and they fail to see that in each case it is Beelzebub that is driving out Satan. These people wield a great deal of influence in church-circles, and there are among them quite respectable scholars, with up-to-date information on all questions. They know the modern scientific methods of thought, and apply them to a degree, thus giving to their literary productions quite a modern appearance. They all concede that the old orthodox doctrine of inspiration must be discarded. Nevertheless, these people are inwardly sworn enemies of modernism. Whenever modern scientific thoughts

3) "Allen ihren Vertretern haftet gegenueber dem modernen Leben eine eigentuemliche Wirklichkeitsfremdheit an."

force them to draw a conclusion which is inconvenient to their real mind, they will sidestep the issue. They are, for this reason, admirers of the solidarity of Roman Catholics and of the determined rigor of the Roman Catholic church-government in its dealings with modernists.

Dr. Girgensohn claims that he can appreciate and appropriate much that is being said and done by these men, but avers that he can never adopt their "program of re-pristination." Why not? In the first place, he finds that no attempt to re-pristinate the orthodox past has really and truly reproduced that past. The neo-Lutheran confessionalism of Hengstenberg, Tholuck, and the Erlangen school is not identical with the old orthodox system of doctrine. Even Philippi reveals an advance in thought beyond the sixteenth century.

In the second place, the old evangelical dogmatics aimed only at exhibiting in the utmost purity the teaching of Scripture and to champion the same with all force. But the Scriptures simply cannot be interpreted in our day as they were three hundred years ago. The cosmology of the Bible, literally understood, is become antiquated since Copernicus. Modern research has by its minute and accurate investigation lighted up matters that were commonly regarded as inexplicable mysteries and as miracles. In the third place, the scientific method of our day has necessitated a different valuation of the historical records of the past. The easy faith of former ages in anything written or printed is gone. Nowadays, the critical student subjects each witness of the past to cross-examination: Is he a credible witness? Did he see the things he should have seen? Was he capable to undertake his literary task? etc.

Nor is it only in matters pertaining to nature-study where modern thought clashes with Bible-thought. It touches the Biblical plan of salvation. Such ideas as a preexistence in heaven, a coming down from heaven and a return thither, a descent to hell, are in Scripture locally circumstanced. Modern science has proved that in the places indicated in the Scriptures there

is no heaven or hell, at least not such a heaven or hell as the Scriptures picture. And to make heaven and hell illocal, to interpret these terms as signifying states or conditions, is not doing full justice to the respective passages of Scripture. Moreover, the question as to the credibility of the Biblical writers affects the Christ. Can it be historically proved that He existed? ¹⁸⁴⁰⁻¹⁸⁵⁰ Dr. Girgensohn thinks it can, however, by a very laborious process and with no mathematical certainty.

Add to this that the man of to-day is confronted with problems of which his forefathers, still less the Biblical writers, never dreamed, and it is evident that a new understanding of the Bible must be inaugurated, and this will necessitate a corresponding transformation of the doctrines gleaned from the Bible as understood by the fathers. We cannot reverse the wheel of time. A riddance of all difficulties might be attempted by a heroic measure: The theological faculties might be purged of all adherents to modern science; "modern" pastors might be forced out of office; "new-Protestant" laymen might be compelled to secede from the Church; theological students might be forbidden certain books, etc. Thus quiet might be restored where there is now a wordy war, however, only for a season. The modern spirit will not brook repression. Witness Rome! Her leaders are employing these heroic measures, but even her powerful means are not sufficient to overcome modernism. Truth crushed to earth will rise again. *How might ask:*

~~With us our reader will inquire: Has this scientific theologians any use at all for the Bible?~~ Dr. Girgensohn still acknowledges that there is a poetical, esthetical, and historical value in the Scriptures. Moreover, he believes that when the Bible has passed through the alembic of the modern scientific method, it will come forth purged from all dross. It will shine like pure gold, and men will behold its true worth, because they will recognize — what a thoroughly human product it is.

Thus modern advanced thought as applied to Bible-study has reached the climax of negation. It has seemed to us that

these reflections of a modernist deserve to be recorded, in order that it may be known what a Bible-quotation is worth in writings of scientific theologians.

Meanwhile the Word will pursue its course among men, and will accredit itself as divine to the hearts of men. The truth of that love which it proclaims is self-authenticating, and will beget in the will of men a love of the truth that will conquer every imagination of the proud reason of men. John 7, 17; Heb. 4, 12. 13. D.
