

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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Published monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN AND
REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.,
501 Witherspoon Bldg., Phila., Pa.

MID-NOVEMBER, 1930
Vol. 1 No. 7

\$1.00 A YEAR
EVERYWHERE

The Present Age

AGES differ. As generation succeeds generation there is not sameness but continuous change and differentiation. No generation of men, of all those which have preceded us, has faced the same situation as that which confronts us. Whether we will or no we live in the twentieth century and face the problems peculiar to the twentieth century. Moreover of our age as truly as of former ages it can be said in the words of the Psalmist: "It shall wax old as does a garment and shall be changed."

One of the most outstanding characteristics of our age as compared with the ages that have immediately preceded us, is that the validity of the Christian life and world view is not generally admitted. In the days of our fathers, broadly speaking, the Christian life and world view was accepted in scientific, literary, artistic and educational circles; and so by public opinion and in the better forms of social intercourse. In those days, therefore, it was not so much the theoretical as the practical acceptance of Christianity that was involved. Those who were not Christians had the feeling that they ought to be, and expected to become such before they died. Or if they rejected Christianity as false and injurious, few had the temerity to confess it. On the other hand those who were really Christians had the consciousness of being in harmony with the general bent and tendencies of the times, both intellectual and practical. The spirit of the age acted as a support and protection, carried them along as it were, so that they were as those who swim with the current rather than as those who struggle against

it. Such, however, is no longer the case.

Today there is scarcely a fundamental idea about God, creation, sin, CHRIST, the atonement, regeneration, the ideal of conduct, life after death, future judgment—ideas which our fathers in general held as common property—that is not denied in the name of science, that is not questioned in academic circles, that is not uncertain in public opinion, that has not been banned as a proper subject for conversation in many serious-minded circles. Nay, more; that set of conceptions we call Christian is being increasingly supplanted by a radically different set of conceptions. As a result the right of Christianity to dominate the thought and life of the future is widely disputed, so true is it that in many circles a non-Christian interpretation of life has superior standing to the Christian interpretation. As a consequence it is becoming more and more true that the immediate question con-

fronting the non-Christian is not whether he will permit Christianity to have practical sway over his life. He is faced with the previous question: Is Christianity true? Does loyalty to truth and duty require the adoption of another and different confession of faith than that known as Christian? Moreover, as already intimated, if a non-Christian becomes a Christian he does not find that public opinion is wholly or even predominantly on his side. Not only in schools and colleges but in popular books and magazines a purely humanistic or a purely rationalistic interpretation of life and destiny is being everywhere set forth as the only valid one. Instead of being carried along, as it were, by the prevailing tendencies in thought and life he must struggle against them. No doubt this situation has its compensations. It tends to separate those who are Christians in fact from those who are Christians merely in name. Moreover those who maintain their Christian faith in the present situation may be expected to develop a strength and purity of Christian character that was often lacking in those who lived in times when it was relatively easy to profess and call one's self a Christian—in the New Testament sense of that word.

What has been said explains why the situation confronting Christianity today is so often compared with that which confronted Christianity during the first three centuries. During those centuries Christianity existed and had to make its way against a pagan culture and civilization. Then the great issue was whether Christianity was to dominate the culture and

IN THIS ISSUE:

Robert Dick Wilson.....	4
Oswald T. Allis	
The Modern Crucifixion.....	6
F. Paul McConkey	
Fiftieth Anniversary of the Free Univ. of Amsterdam.....	9
Books of Religious Significance.....	11
Letters to the Editor.....	13
Questions Relative to Christian Faith and Practice.....	14
Current Views and Voices.....	17
News of the Church.....	19

Robert Dick Wilson—Defender of God's Word

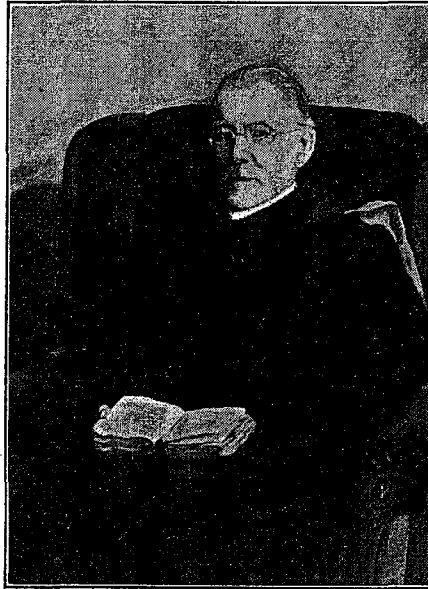
By Oswald T. Allis, Ph.D., D.D.

Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary

ON October 1st the Opening Exercises of the second year of Westminster Theological Seminary were held in Witherspoon Hall, Philadelphia. On this occasion Dr. Wilson, as senior professor, addressed a few words of greeting to the new students. It was his last public appearance. Two weeks later his body was laid to rest in the beautiful cemetery of the Western Pennsylvania county-seat, Indiana, where he was born nearly seventy-five years ago. It was peculiarly fitting that his last words should be spoken as a teacher to students. For it was just fifty years since, as an instructor in Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, he entered upon the work of theological education to which he devoted half a century of fruitful service. Teachers are legion: great teachers are few. A great teacher must be a man and a lover of men: an ardent lover of knowledge, tireless in seeking it, skilful in imparting it: a passionate lover of truth and zealous in proclaiming it. It was because he was all of these that Dr. Wilson endeared himself to so great a number of students and Bible-lovers scattered all over the world who today mourn the loss of a friend, a teacher, a scholar and a great defender of the Word of God.

It is as a teacher that Dr. Wilson's students will most often think of him. He loved to teach and teaching never became a routine with him. His methods never became stereotyped, his material never became stale. His students appreciated the enthusiasm with which he threw himself into teaching. Whether the subject was the Hebrew alphabet or the refutation of some dangerous and subtle theory of the "higher critics," Dr. Wilson was all aglow with enthusiasm. For a number of years at Princeton he gave the new students a lecture on the importance of Hebrew. He called it his "Cui Bono?" (i.e., "What's the Use [of Hebrew]?") lecture. And it became an institution; upper classmen who had heard the lecture once or twice already would come to hear Dr. Wilson enlarge upon a theme so dear to his heart.

As a teacher Dr. Wilson impressed his students most of all with his thorough mastery of his subject. He did not entrench himself behind the professor's desk, read lectures written years before and discourage student-questions as an impertinence. He would leave his desk and walk the floor,



ROBERT DICK WILSON, 1856-1930
(From a painting by Miss Agnes Allen.)

emphasizing with voice and gesture the point that he was driving home. A question or objection from the class would often lead to a digression in which he would pour out a wealth of information quite overwhelming to the inquirer or confounding to the caviller. This readiness on Dr. Wilson's part was due primarily to his great learning, but fully as much to the remarkably retentive memory that made it possible for him to draw at will and without consulting lecture-notes or card-index on the rich treasures of accumulated information which were his. Yet he was careful not to trust too much to memory and especially in quoting the views of an opponent he endeavored to be scrupulously fair and to have the evidence before him in black and white. With all his learning, he never felt that he was doing full justice to his classes unless he made special preparation, often a great deal of preparation, to meet them. His Hebrew class, of course, he could have conducted in his sleep!

Dr. Wilson was a very conscientious teacher. The students might feel entitled to an occasional "cut." But he set them a fine example of fidelity to duty. And sometimes when one of them had allowed him-

self a little unauthorized holiday the cordiality with which Dr. Wilson welcomed him back and the solicitude with which he inquired after his health and general welfare, served to convince the returning prodigal that his absence had been noted. Dr. Wilson knew all his students and made them feel his interest in them. His home was always open to them and he often visited them in their rooms. He was never happier than when he had a group of them around him for informal talk. He looked upon them as his "boys" and when his only son died nearly twenty years ago, soon after graduating from Princeton University, this bond became even closer and more intimate and his boys took the place of the son that he had lost.

With all his brilliancy and fire Dr. Wilson was remarkably patient as a teacher. Many great scholars find it difficult to get down to the level of their students. Others less gifted become impatient with what they think the pupil's slowness because they have themselves traversed the ground so often that they have forgotten the difficulties which beset their path when first they travelled over it. Dr. Wilson was not concerned to dazzle his students, to impress them with the greatness of his erudition. His aim was rather to teach them the subjects and convince them of the truths which he deemed of prime importance for them. It was this which made him so successful as teacher and as lecturer.

Especially characteristic of Dr. Wilson as a teacher was his geniality and the pleasant humor which showed itself in his classroom. He did not stand on his dignity, yet the students were few who took unwarranted liberties with him. I remember his telling of an experience of some forty years ago. There was a student in his class who thought himself wiser than the youthful teacher and assumed an unbecoming attitude. The teacher ignored it for several days. Then without warning he called on this student to recite, quizzed him for nearly an hour, and so completely exposed his unpreparedness that there was nothing left for self-sufficient ignorance to build upon. But it was rare that Dr. Wilson found it necessary to exert his authority. The boys respected him and loved him and that was enough. One afternoon at Princeton before the Hebrew recitation a student introduced a member of the canine species into the classroom.

Dr. Wilson apparently took no notice. He merely went to the blackboard, wrote the word "dog" in Hebrew letters, remarked to the class, "Gentlemen, *dog*, is *fish* in Hebrew," and started the class as if nothing had happened. But in the next written recitation the Hebrew word "dog" was included. He frequently spiced his lectures with joke or anecdote. He held this to be sound psychology. But it was more than pedagogical expedient; it was as natural and spontaneous as the breath he drew.

One cannot speak of Dr. Wilson the teacher, without speaking also of Dr. Wilson the scholar. As already intimated, it was because of his great learning, expert and highly specialized, yet also unusually broad and comprehensive, that Dr. Wilson was so influential as a teacher. His students realized that he knew whereof he spake. As a boy his special interest had been in history. After graduating from Princeton University with the Class of 1876 and studying and teaching at Western Theological Seminary he spent two years in special language study at the University of Berlin, then perhaps the greatest centre of Semitic studies in the world. In 1883 he returned to Western Seminary as Instructor and soon was made Professor of Old Testament. While there he devoted much of the spare time allowed by a heavy schedule of teaching to the study of language. For some years he endeavored to add one new language each year to the list of those which he already had at his command. In 1891 he published his *Manual and Grammar of Elementary Syriac*, following the inductive method which President Harper of Chicago University had applied so successfully to the study of Hebrew. While at Princeton he prepared a *Hebrew Grammar and a Syntax*. But despite his rare linguistic talent Dr. Wilson's interest was never exclusively or even primarily linguistic. Languages were to him a means, not an end. They were the means of studying at first hand all those records of the past which could throw any light upon the Old Testament, which he was privileged to teach and to defend.

The death, in 1900, of Dr. William Henry Green of Princeton Seminary came as a great loss not only to that institution but to the Church at large. Dr. Green had been the great Presbyterian protagonist of the Biblical and historical view of the Old Testament Scriptures against the so-called Higher Criticism. It was a high tribute to Dr. Wilson's ability and reputation that he was called to Princeton to occupy the William Henry Green Chair of Semitic Philology and Old Testament Criticism. He accepted the call; and he proceeded with all fidelity to carry on the great work of his famous predecessor. It was no easy task that was thus laid upon him. From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Malachi the Old Testament Scriptures were under fire. This had been true in Dr. Green's day. But the task was made increasingly difficult by

the fact that these unscriptural views were becoming increasingly popular and even being regarded in many circles as "assured results," established facts no longer open to discussion. Furthermore the new light which the archaeologist was constantly providing, as, for example, the Code of Hammurabi and the Elephantine Papyri, while throwing welcome light upon the history of the past laid an increasing burden upon the scholar who would master the records of that past in order to use them in the defense of the Scriptures. The interest which Dr. Wilson took in every new discovery and the care with which he canvassed it for any light upon the Scriptures appears on almost every page of his writings.

The method used by Dr. Wilson in defending the Scriptures and confounding the critics is so characteristic that it must be stated briefly. Everyone at all familiar with the "Higher Critics" is at times appalled with the multitude of arguments and assertions put forward by them in support of their "reconstruction" of the Bible. There are two ways in which the defender of the Scriptures can proceed: he may approach the subject along general and at times theoretical lines setting forth the objections to the theory as a whole, or he may concern himself with specific points and definite charges. Dr. Wilson did not neglect the former, but he much preferred the latter of these methods. When he went to Princeton, the best and clearest statement in English of the higher critical position was Canon Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. Here was an authoritative presentation of the views of leading critics. Dr. Wilson proceeded to test the stability of this imposing structure as a prospector might bore for oil. He would take an assertion here, a denial there, and subject them to an intense and searching scrutiny. He did not care how much labor this might involve. It might take months of study to settle a single important point. It might require twenty, fifty, a hundred pages of carefully collected facts and ordered argument to disprove a sentence or a paragraph of higher critical assertion. That did not matter. What did matter, what Dr. Wilson was supremely concerned to do was to show by example after example, test-case after test-case, that wherever they could be tested by the facts the allegations brought by the critics against the Bible were wrong and the Bible was right.

In his *Studies in the Book of Daniel* (1917) Dr. Wilson has given a number of examples of his method. In discussing "Darius the Mede," for example, he first quotes the "objections" to the correctness of the Biblical statements in the exact form in which they are given by three leading critics. This occupies the greater part of a page. He then analyzes the assertions of these critics into *nine* distinct "assumptions" which he states briefly. He then proceeds to examine each one of these assumptions in

detail. The complete answer covers more than one hundred pages of the *Studies*, and is a masterpiece of penetrating scrutiny and careful reasoning.

Dr. Wilson is most widely known through the little brochure entitled *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* (Sunday School Times Co., Philadelphia, 1922.) Here he brought together and stated in popular form the results of many of his most fruitful investigations. He regarded the accuracy with which the names of foreign kings are written in the Hebrew Scriptures "a Biblical phenomenon unequalled in the history of literature." This booklet has surpassed many a "best seller" in America and Great Britain and has been translated into several foreign languages. It would be hard to estimate the service it has rendered in confirming the faith of thousands in the trustworthiness of the Bible. But only one familiar with Dr. Wilson's weighty articles published mainly in *The Princeton Theological Review* will appreciate the long years of arduous and indefatigable labor which were needed before he was ready to write this little book. In 1926 he published another popular work, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Sunday School Times Co.), in which he dealt with the text, grammar, vocabulary, history and religion of the Old Testament.

Since it is the studied policy of the "critics" to ignore as "unscholarly" and "unscientific" everyone who has the temerity to question their "assured results," it is a matter of interest that an English scholar, Mr. H. H. Rowley, has recently attempted (*The Aramaic of the Old Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1929) to answer the "strictures" pronounced seventeen years ago by Dr. Wilson on the claim of Dr. Driver and other critics that the characteristics of the Aramaic in which part of the Book of Daniel is written support the view that it is of late date and unhistorical. The author describes his book as "long overdue;" and it is to be regretted that it did not appear several years ago. But it is fortunate that it came to Dr. Wilson's hands in time for him to devote part of the last summer of his life to examining it. His reply was nearly ready when he died; and it will probably appear in *The Evangelical Quarterly* (Edinburgh) in the not far distant future.

As a result of his vigorous defense of the Old Testament in his classroom, on the lecture platform and through the printed page, Dr. Wilson came to be very widely recognized as the foremost living defender of the Old Testament. In consequence of this, he was much in demand as a lecturer at home and abroad. His most notable lecture trip was to the Far East in 1923 when he lectured in Japan, Korea and China. On this trip he did much to confirm the faith of missionaries and native Christians in the Sacred Oracles, but he was distressed by the inroads which modernism was making in the Far East. His unwillingness to ignore this issue brought him into difficulties with mis-

sionary leaders in the Church at home. But it was impossible for him to ignore on the mission field what he had been for years opposing and combating in the home land.

Although not himself a graduate of Princeton Seminary Dr. Wilson became so thoroughly representative of that institution that his stalwart defense of the Scriptures led many to suppose that Princeton, as in the days of Dr. Green, stood four square for the defense of the faith once delivered to the saints. Consequently, it cast the shadow of tragedy over Dr. Wilson's latter days to know that while he was fighting the battle of the Old Princeton against the liberal hosts without the gate, there was a conflict within the walls of which many had no knowledge, and the meaning of which many would not see. It is not necessary to retell the story. It is well known to readers of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. Princeton was first "investigated," then "reorganized."

Dr. Wilson might, indeed, have remained at Princeton. He was already past the age for retirement. He might have continued teaching for a year or so and then have retired to spend his old age in literary work, with a pension sufficient for his needs and one of the greatest theological libraries in America ready to his hand. The induce-

ments and allurements he saw clearly. Who could see them better? He knew quite well that he would be misunderstood, that many would regard him a fool. But he believed that to remain would be to countenance and tacitly approve a reorganization which he held to be destructive of the Princeton which he loved and where he had labored for nearly thirty years. So in his seventy-fourth year and with the infirmities of age upon him he left the scene of his best labors and most abundant successes and went forth to begin again and to begin at the beginning, to lay the foundation of a new institution, which should, God willing, ever stand for that brave and uncompromising defense of the Bible as the Word of God to which he had devoted his life. It was the crowning act of a great defender of the faith. And it was one which Dr. Wilson never regretted. He loved Westminster Seminary and saw in the good hand of God upon her the evidence that his work of faith and labor of love had not been in vain.

In estimating the enduring value of the service which Dr. Wilson has rendered to the Church, it is important to remember that his first interest, his prime concern, was not books, but men. He liked to remember that as a young man he had served for a short time as an evangelist. The evangelistic

note was present in all his work. He was an ambassador and advocate. He aimed not only to refute error but to establish truth and win men for Him who is the Truth. Consequently the greatest monument to Dr. Wilson is in the multitude of men and women, boys and girls, whose faith in the Bible he has strengthened or renewed. They are a mighty host who rise up today to call him blessed.

But while all this is true and should never be forgotten the amazing thing is that Dr. Wilson was also so preeminent for his great learning and for his many contributions to a true and sound Biblical scholarship. Living in an age over-proud of its "science" Dr. Wilson matched a devout and believing scholarship with the best which "science" and "criticism" could put forward and proved again and again that the foundation of God standeth sure. We who are still in the thick of the battle may find it hard to estimate rightly the strength of the adversary or the nearness and greatness of the victory which God is preparing for His people. But when the smoke has cleared away and the noise of combat has changed to the triumph song, the name of this Christian warrior will receive the honor it deserves. He fought a good fight, he finished his course, he kept the faith.

The Modern Crucifixion

Sermon Delivered at the Opening Exercises of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Oct. 1, 1930

By the Rev. F. Paul McConkey, D.D.

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THE crucifixion of Christ is not a static thing nor can it be confined to any one age or generation. The atonement may be and is a concrete historic event definitely bounded in time, but the cross can never be properly made an archaeological exhibit, a sacred relic, an antique. The writer to the Hebrews insists that there are those in every generation "who crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame." The crucifixion of Christ is not in its essence a matter of driving nails through quivering flesh or pressing thorns upon a blood stained brow. It is not in its essence physical but moral. Who crucified Christ? Certainly not the soldiers who performed the physical part of it. Not those who wove the crown of thorns and drove the nails and placed the cross upon a skull shaped hill. Who murdered Uriah? Certainly not the Ammonite that smote him before the walls of Rabbah. The guilty one was far away in a king's palace. The warrior of Rabbah washed the blood from his hands easily enough but the royal murderer found the task not so easy. David's hands were stained with blood till he might have said

with a royal murdres of a far later day, these hands "would all the multitudinous seas incarnadine and turn the green one red." When Nathan sought the real murderer he went not to Rabbah but to Jerusalem.

The real guilt of the crucifixion must be sought not among Roman soldiers but with governors and priests and disciples. It must be sought among those who in the hour of the world's great crisis betrayed every high and holy principle of truth and righteousness and sent the Son of God to His death. Because the crucifixion is in its essence moral and not physical it cannot be confined to any age. In every generation there are those who climb the hill called Calvary and with the jeering crowd watch while the Son of God bleeds afresh. Our own generation is no exception and the modern crucifixion is a crimson tragedy of deepest dye.

When Peter rose to preach on Pentecost he knew that in that audience were the crucifiers of his Lord. He could say "whom ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." Small wonder that he preached a great sermon. Can you imagine anything more dramatic and soul stirring than to

stand before the same crowd that had cried "crucify Him" and call them to repentance and salvation by the power of the very cross they had placed upon a windy hill? Yet, young gentlemen, as you enter the Ministry that task is to be yours. The average preacher before the average twentieth century audience faces some of those who have had part in the modern crucifixion. It is a dramatic and thrilling ministry that is ours. God grant that like Peter we may improve our opportunity. The modern crucifixion, then, like the ancient, is a betrayal of principles.

1. The modern crucifixion comes through the selling of spiritual values for material.

Judas represents this attitude in the ancient crucifixion. He sold out everything that was high and holy in his nature for thirty pieces of silver. The call of conscience was not as loud as the clink of the silver coin and so Christ went to the cross. Christ tried for three years to spiritualize the nature of Judas, to lift his thoughts from a material kingdom and material recompense to a higher level. In vain! At the end of three years of constant companionship with