

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Christianity as a Way of Life: Its Supernaturalism

IN a previous issue we sought to indicate the kind and measure of that supernaturalism that Christianity recognizes and demands. On that occasion (February, 1931) we dealt with the place that the supernatural occupies in Christianity as a mode of thought rather than with the place that it occupies in Christianity as a mode of behaviour. On this occasion we propose to reverse the emphasis and to show that the supernatural is as inextricably implicated in Christianity considered as a way of life as it is in Christianity considered as a creed. In proportion as we succeed in doing this it will become evident that in the struggle for and against supernaturalism it is not merely the Christian creed that is at stake. It will be seen that the Christian ethic, the mode of life that it commands, is equally at stake. Doubtless there have been, and still are, those who have rejected the Christian creed and yet have commended the Christian ethic. But, unless we are altogether mistaken, that is only because they have not realized the extent to which Christianity even as a way of life is through and through supernatural. It is our contention that neither the reasonableness nor the practicability of the Christian way of life can be maintained except as the supernatural as a factor in human life is frankly recognized. We hold, therefore, that if the present attempt to uproot belief in the supernatural should succeed, it would mean the ultimate dis-

appearance of Christianity as a way of living as well as a way of thinking. Some considerations that indicate the part the supernatural plays in Christianity as a way of life follow:

(1) We cannot get into the Christian way of life apart from the supernatural. When we first discover our whereabouts we find ourselves in the broad way that leads to death, not in the narrow way that leads to life. Moreover we find that of ourselves we are unable to forsake the broad way and plant ourselves in the narrow way, not because the way is barred, as it were, by stone walls and iron gates but because of our sheer inability. We might as well suppose that an evil tree

can produce good fruit as suppose that those dead in trespass and sin can by their own will and power set themselves in the path that leads to eternal life. Only as a supernatural power energizes within us does this become possible for us. In other words regeneration, a rebirth through the operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary before we can get into the Christian way of life.

We are aware that a different representation is widely current. We are told rather: "The gates along the way of life stand open; whosoever will may enter in." Moreover such language is employed not merely to express the universality of the gospel offer; it is employed to express belief in man's plenary ability to work out his own salvation. Are we not constantly told that the parable of the Prodigal Son is all the gospel men need? We would be the last to minimize the value of this parable, but we are not blind to the fact that it says nothing of atonement, nothing of the Holy Spirit, not even anything of CHRIST Himself. If this parable contains the whole, or even the core of the gospel, then, we can get up of ourselves and go back to God and assume the position of a child in His household whenever we choose—no questions asked and a warm reception assured. Such a conception is pleasing to many but it is not the Christian conception. It is CHRIST Himself who says: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot

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enter into the Kingdom of God." We are dependent on the Holy Spirit at every stage of the Christian life but our immediate concern is merely to point out that apart from the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts we cannot even get started in the Christian way of living.

(2) We cannot make progress along the Christian way of life apart from the supernatural. As travelers along the way of life we need directions. Such directions have been supplied us. These directions, however, are of supernatural origin. Christianity does not represent its moral code, its ethical ideals, whether as expressed in words or embodied in the life of its founder, as naturalistic in origin. It maintains that if sinful man had been left to work out his destiny on the plane of nature he would be as ignorant of the Christian standard of conduct as he would be of the Christian dogmas.

As travelers along the way of life we also need motives or incentives. Such motives and incentives are provided but the main ones are drawn from the supernatural. Christian ethics does not disdain motives drawn from purely earthly consideration, but it places its chief reliance on motives that according to naturalism have no existence. The central and controlling motive in the life of the Christian is represented as grateful love to the redeeming God who mercifully set His love upon us and sent His Son to die for us. PAUL put it thus: "The love of CHRIST constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." No doubt we all act from mixed motives, but if this motive has no place in our lives it is quite certain that we are not living a Christian life. And yet only as we frankly recognize the supernatural CHRIST as a living reality is there any such motive with which to reckon. Even the motive drawn from the thought of rewards and punishment in a future life which Christianity employs is deceptive and misleading apart from the reality of a supernatural world. Reject the supernatural and the main motives which have hitherto induced men to walk in

the Christian way will have to be thrown into the discard.

It is not enough, however, that we know the Christian way of life and that incentives be brought to bear upon us to lead us to walk in that way. These will prove unprofitable unless we receive power to walk in newness of life. We may have the latest model of an automobile; we may have studied our Blue Book and be certain of our route; we may be under strong inducement to follow the route chosen; but if there is no gasoline in the tank or our ignition system is not working, we cannot advance a single mile. And so it is because and only because we can do all things through Him that strengthens us that it is possible for us to advance along the Christian way of life. Apart from this element of power JESUS would still possess significance as a moral and spiritual teacher; but in that case He would not differ in kind from SOCRATES, BUDDHA, CONFUCIUS and others. The power that enables us to walk along the Christian way fairly shouts to us concerning the indispensableness of the supernatural to Christianity considered as a way of life. Even if we could show the reasonableness of the Christian standard of conduct, we would not be able to show its practicability apart from the supernatural—and that for the very good reason that it requires the supernatural to make it operative in a world of sinful men. As well expect an automobile to run without gasoline or an electric spark as expect men to make progress along the Christian way of life apart from the supernatural CHRIST and the equally supernatural Holy Spirit.

(3) When we speak of Christianity as a way of life we imply not only that it prescribes the path along which we should walk but that this path leads somewhere. If now we consider the end of the Christian way, we will have impressed upon us anew the futility of supposing that we can retain the Christian ethic while rejecting the supernatural. The naturalist may feel that he has no need of an eschatology, but the Christian necessarily has one—and that because his goal lies in the world beyond. It is indeed true that Christianity is not an ascetic, world-shunning religion. Its shibboleth is not separation

from the world but only from that which is evil in the world. And yet unquestionably it finds its center of gravity in the world of the supernatural. Hence it is impossible to vindicate its reasonableness, save as we recognize that supernaturalism in which alone it finds its proper setting. If there be no such supernatural fact as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST or if the present economy be but a short span of life between two eternities of death, how can it be maintained that the Christian ethic indicates the best type of life or the lines along which our activities may most profitably proceed? A superstructure whose center of gravity lies in the supernatural world cannot be built on a naturalistic foundation.

We do not profess to have enumerated all the points at which the supernatural enters into Christianity considered as a way of life. It seems to us, however, that we have said enough to make clear that it is impossible to vindicate either the reasonableness or the practicability of the Christian way of life apart from a frank and generous recognition of the supernatural as a factor in human life.

There was a time when the enemies of Christianity were accustomed to maintain that they were opposed not to its moral ideals but to the puerilities of its supernatural creed. MILL and HUXLEY and ARNOLD, for instance, rejected the supernaturalism of the Christian creed but had only praise for Christianity as a way of life—apparently unaware that the supernatural is as essential to Christianity as a way of life as it is to Christianity as a creed. NIETZSCHE saw more clearly. He perceived that the Christian ethic is organically connected with the Christian creed—as roots and fruit are alike part of the same tree—and having rejected the Christian creed he saw that the logic of the situation demanded that he be equally outspoken in rejecting the Christian ideal of life. Today it is increasingly recognized that NIETZSCHE was right and that on the outcome of the struggle for and against the supernatural depends the future of Christianity as a way of life as well as its future as a believable creed. We simply deceive ourselves if we suppose that Christian ideals of conduct will survive even if belief in the super-

naturalism of Christianity becomes extinct. We hold with L. S. THORNTON that "the whole strength of the Christian position lies, not in repudiating those features in it which are most unlike the temper of the world, but in emphasizing them. If the Christian ethic were of this world and like unto it, there

would be nothing more to be said. Its distinctive character is its other-worldliness. For Christianity, so far from being a system or code, is the manifestation in the world of a life which draws all its power from a supernatural experience—an experience which in its turn is based upon a supernatural creed."

the national body. It has always seemed regrettable to us that the "World's Christian Fundamentals Association" should insist on belief in the "pre-millennial and imminent return of our LORD and SAVIOUR" as a condition of membership, inasmuch as this necessarily excludes a vast number of "Fundamentalists." For instance, this means that such giants of orthodoxy as the late Drs. B. B. WARFIELD, ABRAHAM KUYPER and HERMAN BAVINCK were not eligible to membership in this organization, not to mention many of the leading living exponents of orthodoxy.

Editorial Notes and Comments

The Failure of Attempts to Unite the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches: An Explanation

DR. WILLIAM CROWE, Minister of the Westminster Presbyterian Church (South), of St. Louis, Mo., has written and the *Presbyterian* has published one of the most illuminating articles dealing with this matter that it has been our good fortune to see for many a day. Dr. CROWE's contention is that fifty years of negotiations have led to nothing because when these two churches talk of unity they are talking of two entirely different things. "In the North emphasis is laid upon church administration; in the South, it is laid upon doctrine. Therefore, when Southern Presbyterians speak of organic union, they are talking about a unity in belief; whereas, in the North, in discussing the same subject, the thought in mind is community in government." In support of this contention Dr. CROWE maintains that the basis of union both between the Old and New School Presbyterians in 1869 and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1906 was a basis of common administration that ignored doctrinal differences. The gist of Dr. CROWE's article is expressed in the passage which follows his historical summary, to wit:

"It may be asked, why not then let all Presbyterian Churches unite in accord with the idea expressed above. The answer is, that while we might have consolidation in such a project as that, consolidation is in no sense union. Christianity is a doctrine; it is an interpretation of the Christian story; it is the method by which an unsaved man discovers the meaning of CHRIST's death. Therefore, the essential business of Christianity is to proclaim a message of salvation. In other words, the atonement of JESUS CHRIST is the throbbing heart of the Church and a removal of that doctrine from the center of the life of the Church is destructive to the mission of Christianity. While in large measure the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. promotes Christianity through that message, yet by the carelessness of its actions for fifty years it has permitted many voices, hostile to this heart message, to be raised within its body. Therefore, the Presbyterian Church is not at one

on a basis of belief. The situation, as it is today within that body, justifies the answer that there is no organic union within the Presbyterian Church itself. Because of these variant voices there are various parties within the Church as divergent as theological poles can separate them. These divisions, running through the whole Church, affect the harmony of belief and action. It is true that the Presbyterian form of government is seen presiding over these various schools of thought, but even that effective administrative agency has never yet been able to coerce all the factions into a semblance of unity."

In our judgment Dr. CROWE does not speak without knowledge when he maintains that doctrinal indifferentism is rampant in the Northern Presbyterian Church and warns his brethren against union with said Church except on the basis of a doctrinal unity. It seems to us that a like doctrinal indifferentism is on the increase in the Southern Church but we hope that it will never become strong enough to bring about union with the Northern Church upon a governmental basis that sits loosely to doctrinal purity. Our hope and prayer is that our own Church may be led to put first things first and that upon the basis of these first things all Presbyterian Churches will unite. At the same time we hold with Dr. CROWE that the churches are already one, "in so far as they love a common LORD and strive together for bringing the message of His salvation to all people."

"Fundamentalism and Premillennialism"

THE September issue of *The Christian Fundamentalist* (edited by W. B. RILEY) contains a vigorous assertion of belief in pre-millennialism as a prerequisite to membership in the "World's Christian Fundamentals Association," the occasion of this assertion being the formation by a group of Philadelphians of a Fundamentalist organization in which belief in the pre-millennial view of our LORD's return is not a condition of membership, as was reported in our July issue.

We are free to confess that our views at this point coincide with the "Philadelphia Fundamentalists" rather than with those of

The occasion of our comments, however, is not the unqualified stand that Dr. RILEY takes against any change in the basis of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association. It is to be found rather in some of the things that he says (or implies) in the course of his reaffirmation of the pre-millennial position. Dr. RILEY writes throughout as though all believers in the personal and visible return of CHRIST were either pre-millennialists or post-millennialists completely ignoring the fact that many of them are a-millennialists. It is this assumption that all believers in the "blessed hope" are either pre or post-millennialists that explains, if we mistake not, the otherwise inexplicable list of scholars that are cited as advocates of pre-millennialism. Apparently he assumes that all intelligent Christians who are not post-millennialists are pre-millennialists. Otherwise how explain the fact that CALVIN, ZWINGLI, MELANCTON, LUTHER, KNOX and the WESLEYS, not to mention others, are cited as pre-millennialists? Be that as it may, we are confident that the list he cites must be rather radically revised before it can be accepted as authentic.

What is more, we do not believe that Dr. RILEY can sustain the allegation that "post-millennialism has been the breeding-ground of modernism." Such an allegation seems to us similar in kind to the representation that pre-millennialism has been the breeding-ground of say Millennial Dawnism, Seventh-Day Adventism and other similar heresies. Equally irrelevant in this connection is the following: "You can't deny the Word at one point and hold it at another. It is either all inspired or none." A-millennialists and post-millennialists may or may not be mistaken, but at any rate they do not admit (at least the ones of which we are thinking) that pre-millennialism has Scriptural sanction. It is hardly fair to imply that the pre-millennialists are the only ones who have "always and everywhere stood for the authority, integrity and verbal inspiration of the Bible."

While we think it regrettable that the differences between pre-millennialists, post-millennialists and a-millennialists should be made a divisive issue, yet we fully approve when our contemporary writes: "Our advice to the brethren is: stay by the Book first; let loyalty to the LORD and His Divine