

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Is Christianity True?

IT is futile to discuss this question except as we are agreed as to *what* Christianity is. To a superficial observer it may seem as though Christianity had all but won its victory in the forum of the world's thought, however it may be in the world's market place. There is little discussion of the question, Is Christianity true? Most everybody—with significant exceptions—either call themselves Christians or claim to be exponents of essential Christianity. It is, however, only necessary to consider the answers given to the question, What is Christianity?, to perceive that here, also, appearances are exceedingly deceptive. If these answers differed only as regards details there would be nothing to occasion comment. That would be what was to be expected in view of the limited knowledge and ability for clear thinking that characterizes us all. These answers, however, do not differ merely as regards details. They differ so radically that if the one is true the other is false.

It is no comfort to us to have a man tell us he believes that Christianity is true if what he calls Christianity lacks all the distinctive marks of what we call Christianity. Because in that case he says in effect that what we call Christianity is false. Christianity, according to many of its present-day professors, is a religion in which JESUS CHRIST is not an object of worship and in which His death as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice has no place whatever. Even if such a religion could be shown to be true, that would have no bearing on the question whether Christianity is true as we understand

Christianity—except as it would affect Christianity's claim to be the only true religion. Unless the word "Christianity" is a word without definite meaning, unless it be a word that can be used to designate the views of those who deny the GOD-MAN and scoff at His death as an atoning sacrifice as well as those whose only hope in life and death is that the SON OF GOD bore their sins in His own body on the tree, we are living in a fool's paradise if we suppose that all the things calling themselves Christianity are really such.

As used today it can scarcely be denied that the word *Christianity* is threatened with the fate that has befallen the word *gentleman*—that word of which TENNYSON sang: "The grand old name of gentleman, defamed by every charlatan, and soiled with all ignoble ease." Just as the

word *gentleman* became a word of no particular significance through being applied indiscriminately to all sorts of men, so the word *Christianity* is in danger of becoming a word of no particular significance through being used to designate all sorts of belief or lack of belief. Be this as it may, it is the truth of a particular religion, not of every religion that may label itself with the Christian name, that concerns us when we discuss the truth of Christianity. Our interest is in a great historical reality, not a mere word. We could view the passing of the word with small concern if we had the assurance that the thing itself was being retained; but the retaining of the word would afford us no satisfaction if the thing it has expressed for well-nigh two thousand years should pass.

Those who define Christianity as the Church has all but universally defined it will not be content to maintain that it is true in the sense of "truth of idea." They will also insist that it is true in the sense of "truth of fact." Strange as it may seem to the ordinary, common-sense Christian, there are many alleged Christian leaders who are not only content with maintaining that Christianity is true in the sense of "truth of idea" but who assert that that is the only sense in which it is true. Facts have significance, they tell us, only as they express some idea or principle. The idea or principle is the main thing and provided we grasp that it matters not whether the fact that expressed it be real or supposed. Just as the value of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is the same whether the father and

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son of the parable be regarded as real or fictitious, so, we are told, the value of the Bible as a whole is the same whether ABRAHAM and MOSES and MARY and JESUS be regarded as having the reality that attaches to historical figures like WASHINGTON and LINCOLN or the reality that attaches to one of SHAKESPEARE'S characters or a character in a modern novel. Edification, judgment of value, moral and spiritual instruction, not objective history or science, we are told, is the aim and purpose of the Bible; hence its value is not destroyed by reason of the fact—if fact it be—that its history and science are not true to fact. In harmony with this we are told that the value of Christianity is independent of the question whether its facts and doctrines are true in the sense in which the scientist and the historian understand truth.

One of the impelling motives leading many to welcome such a representation is the desire to make Christianity independent of historical criticism. If the value of Christianity is independent of the question whether the Biblical narratives are true in the sense of "truth of fact," the Christian can view with unconcern the alleged findings of even the most radical Biblical critics. In that case it is a matter of no vital importance that critics allege that many of the Biblical characters are legendary or fictitious beings and that such events as the Virgin Birth and bodily resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, not to mention other miraculous events, never happened.

Why not adopt this view? It would certainly make the task of defending Christianity much easier. In that case we could throw all the miracles overboard and concern ourselves not at all about the question of the historical truthfulness of the Bible. After all what real difference does it make whether the events recorded in the Bible actually happened? We reply that it makes little or no difference if Christianity be what many today say it is. If the essence of Christianity be the fatherhood of GOD and the brotherhood of man, we may sit loosely to the question of the historical truthfulness of the Bible.

But if Christianity be what the Church of all ages has held it to be, that religion that brings to mankind salvation from

the guilt and pollution of sin through the expiatory death of JESUS CHRIST, it makes all the difference in the world. A modern scholar puts it thus:

"The difference between those who think they can do without the facts and those of us who feel we must have the facts, does not lie on the periphery of the Christian faith. It relates to nothing less than the claim of our holy religion to be a supernatural religion and a religion which objectively saves from sin. . . . He who has once clearly perceived this will not even for a moment consider the possibility that his faith and such criticism as destroys the the supernatural facts can dwell peacefully together in the same mind. To him, the facts are become the very bread of life. Though you tell him a thousand times that the value of the Biblical narratives for moral and spiritual instruction remains precisely the same, whether the facts occurred or not, it will not satisfy him, because he knows full well that all moral instruction and religious impression combined cannot save his soul. In his thirst for redemption from sin, he will not rest in anything short of an authentic record of how God wrought wonders in history for the salvation of His people. History we need, and that not only in the form of the tale of a certain perfect ethical and religious experience, which has somewhere come to the surface on the endless stream of phenomena, but such a history as shall involve the opening of the heavens, the coming down of God, the introduction of miraculous regenerative forces into humanity, the enactment of a veritable drama of redemption between the supernatural and the natural world. Whether we like it or not, criticism can touch the essence of our religion, because religion has become incarnate, and for our sakes had to become incarnate and make itself vulnerable in historic form. As the SON OF GOD while on earth had to expose Himself to the unbelief and scorn of men, so the word of the Gospel could not be what it is for us unless it were subject to the same humiliation."

When, therefore, we speak of Christianity as true we mean that it is true in the sense of "truth of fact" as well as "truth of idea." Reject either the fact-content or the truth-content of Christianity as set forth in the Bible, and Christianity for us would no longer exist.

Is Christianity true in the sense indicated? It has been so contended by the Church of all ages. In that conviction it was established, in that conviction it has grown, and only as that conviction is maintained can it escape decay and go on from strength to strength. The fundamental reason for the present-day defection from Christianity, especially in academic circles, is that men have been led to believe that Christianity is not true. If Christianity is to shape the future, it will be because men will continue to maintain, as all the great heroes of the faith have maintained, that the Christian

is the only true rationalist, the only religious believer who can soundly prove his position. The court of reason is at least the court of original jurisdiction. If non-suited before this court Christianity will be denied a hearing in every appellate court. Christianity will soon cease to move our hearts and guide our hands when it is no longer approved by our heads.

The task of convincing the present age that it has been over-hasty in concluding that Christianity is not true in the sense indicated may not be shirked. It is true that rational assent does not make a man a Christian. To be a Christian is much more than to have an intellectual conviction of the truth of Christianity. "The devils also believe—and tremble." It is futile, however, to expect a rational being to become a Christian as long as he withholds rational assent. "Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved," we are told. And yet such advice is worthy of the consideration of an intelligent being only if there is adequate warrant for believing that JESUS CHRIST exists as a living reality, both able and willing to save those who put their trust in Him. We are not Christians merely because we find it comforting to believe in the existence of a FATHER-GOD and a SAVIOUR-KING. Not a bit of it. We are Christians because it is the only reasonable as well as the only right thing to be. Otherwise Christian piety and devotion is a child of ignorance and Christian churches but asylums for the feeble-minded. All Christianity asks for from this standpoint, but what it is so often denied, is a fair hearing and a just verdict.

It will be seen that we are not disposed to minimize the importance of apologetics, as is the manner of some. Because we cannot argue a man into becoming a Christian, many seem to think it is a matter of no moment whether arguments be presented at all. How frequently the words are quoted: "He argued not, but preached, and conscience did the rest." Unquestionably a clear statement of what Christianity is is often the best argument in its favor; but it is equally unquestionable that something more is often needed. It is indeed true that only the HOLY SPIRIT can make a man a real Christian, but it

is not a blind, ungrounded faith that the HOLY SPIRIT works in the sinner. PAUL may plant and APOLLOS may water; it is GOD alone who gives the increase. That is not to say, however, that it is a matter of no moment whether PAUL plants and APOLLOS waters. In all ages there has been need of those set for the defense as well as for those set for the proclamation of the gospel. Surely our age, an age in which Christianity is everywhere spoken against, is no exception.

Roman Catholic Comment on Assembly Action

THE Commission on Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage, in its report to the last Assembly, recommended "as consonant with the religious temper of our day that there be stricken from our Confession of Faith, Chapter 24, Section 3, the following words: "And, therefore, such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, Papists, and other idolaters; neither such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life or maintain damnable heresies." When the matter came up for discussion, however, the Assembly voted against the amendment and so in favor of leaving the Confession of Faith as it is, in this respect.

A Roman Catholic organ, *The Catholic Standard and Times*, of Philadelphia, comments in part as follows:

"We Catholics must now understand that by deliberate vote of the Presbyterian Church—North, not South, be it noticed—we are considered to be idolaters, and we are officially designated by the purposely opprobrious term 'Papist.' Nor is this all. We are classed with infidels, the notoriously wicked and the maintainers of damnable heresies. From this we may gather that all the honied words offered in the name of sweet charity are only courtesies that will not bear the strain of official definition. Officially we are idolaters; officially we are linked with the reprobate. Nor is this the decision of a few hot-heads, but the considered verdict of the Presbyterian Church, North, assembled in solemn conclave.

"We are not objecting to the mere fact that we are called 'idolaters.' If the Presbyterians really think that we are idolaters, then we have a certain respect for their honesty. If they really think that the veneration of the saints and their images is idolatry, then we do not object to their saying so. If they think with their Episcopal brethren, that the sacrifices of Masses are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits, then we may let the matter pass. They are consistent and consistency

is above price. But that is not the point of our objection. The point is that the modern Presbyterians, by actions that no one can mistake, do not regard orthodoxy of faith as a matter of importance. Their ministers teach every kind of heresy which is condemned by their own printed standards. They openly deny the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection of CHRIST and the resurrection of the body; even the Divinity of our LORD is questioned, or explained away. Advanced Modernists have captured the seats of learning from which they have cast those who still adhere to the spirit and letter of their own constitution. Yet with this flouting of orthodoxy, they vote to retain in their Confession of Faith words that cannot express any longer any other meaning than that which is offensive. They say, in effect, that any one can believe anything; that theology does not count; that creeds are outworn; but that words that might now seem to be insulting must be kept for no other reason than that they are insulting."

It was hardly to be expected that Roman Catholics would derive any satisfaction from the action of the Assembly. It seems to us, however, that our contemporary over-estimates the significance of the Assembly's action. The Assembly did not vote to add to the Confession of Faith a statement offensive to the Roman Catholics. What it did was to refuse to excise the statement already there. Moreover it did this, if we mistake not, not to express its dislike for the Roman Catholics, but because to have voted to excise this statement, as recommended by the Commission on Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage, would have been in effect to approve what Roman Catholics themselves disapprove, viz., marriages between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. This was the real point at issue before the Assembly when it voted to leave the Confession as it is in this respect. Many who voted against the recommendation would no doubt have voted in its favor if it had proposed a substitute expressed in more suitable language, provided the substitute made clear its disapproval of marriages between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. As the matter stood, however, the Commissioners to the Assembly had to choose between registering their votes in a way that seemed at least to favor such marriages and retaining the existing statement with its needlessly opprobrious language—and choose the latter as the lesser of the two evils.

But while it seems to us that our contemporary somewhat exaggerates the significance of the Assembly's action, it does

not seem strange to us that it has drawn the inference it did. An Assembly that did not regard orthodoxy of faith a matter of importance voting to retain terms so out of harmony with the religious temper of the day is certainly an anomaly. It is not true, of course, that all modern Presbyterians regard orthodoxy of faith as a matter of no importance. That is not even true of all those who voted against the recommendation. In fact it was that vigorous representative of Presbyterian orthodoxy, DR. GEORGE B. BELL of Philadelphia, who led the opposition to the Commission's recommendation. None the less it can hardly be denied that our Roman Catholic contemporary's strictures on the Assembly, on the Presbyterian Church as a whole in fact, are largely deserved. Whatever may be the relative number of those within the Presbyterian Church who prize and those who flout orthodoxy, it is true that the Presbyterian Church "assembled in solemn conclave" has not recently taken any action that indicates that it regards "orthodoxy of faith as a matter of importance." Our contemporary writes not without knowledge when it says:

"Their ministers teach every kind of heresy which is condemned by their own printed standards. They openly deny the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection of CHRIST, and the resurrection of the body; even the Divinity of our LORD is questioned or explained away. Modernists have captured the seats of learning from which they have cast those who still adhere to the spirit and letter of their own constitution."

In the prophecy of JEREMIAH we read: "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

"The Gospel of Jesus"

ON another page we are privileged to publish an article, by Professor W. CHILDS ROBINSON of the Southern Presbyterian Church, that deals in an informing way with that substitute for genuine Christianity that is most frequently offered to those seeking the bread of life. In a scholarly way he makes clear that what is usually offered under this name comes under the head of serpents and scorpions rather than of eggs and

fishes (LUKE 11:11). It is not our purpose to add anything to his criticism of this pseudo-gospel; that would be a case of sending coal to Newcastle. It may not be out of place, however, for us to say a word, for the benefit of the ordinary reader, having to do with the meaning of the phrase, "The gospel of JESUS," as it is widely used today.

It is perfectly proper, of course, to speak of Christianity as the gospel of JESUS. Christianity was founded by JESUS, derives its main content from Him, is what it is by virtue of what He was and is. None the less when we find a present-day religious teacher employing this phrase as his favorite designation of Christianity, we may be all but sure that he is the advocate of "another gospel, which is not another." The reason for this is that those who favor this designation of Christianity, or rather of what they call Christianity, almost invariably identify Christianity with the religion that JESUS himself taught and exemplified and that to be a Christian is to believe *with* JESUS rather than *in* or *on* JESUS. They almost invariably distinguish between a religion *about* JESUS and the religion of JESUS and maintain that Christianity consists not at all in believing certain things about JESUS (such as that He was Himself God or that His death was sacrificial) but wholly in believing *with* JESUS, in sharing His religious experience and in manifesting the same attitude toward God and man. They almost invariably hold with HARNACK that the Gospel has to do with the FATHER only, not at all with JESUS Himself except as JESUS was its first and best exponent. This means that JESUS was merely a subject of religion, not its object; and that the intelligent Christian is not one who worships JESUS or one who trusts JESUS as his Saviour but one who imitates JESUS. It must be obvious to all that when so used the phrase, "The Gospel of JESUS" is used to commend "another gospel, which is not another."

There are many religions in the world but fundamentally there are but two kinds. The one, whatever the historic form it may take, is built on the assumption that man saves himself; the other whatever its historic form, on the assumption that, if man is to be saved at

all, he must be saved by a power outside of himself. The contrast between these two types of religion is clear and unmistakable. The one calls upon man to save himself; the other brings him into contact with a power that saves him. The one is a religion, replete it may be with lofty moral and spiritual lessons and with wise counsel and good advice, but with no dynamic save that which inheres in man as man; the other while it stresses these things yet finds its distinctive note in the fact that it tells us of a living Redeemer and so of a saving power other than that which is our own. "The Religion of JESUS" as it is currently proclaimed is a religion of the first kind, but the religion that JESUS actually established in this world and that finds its center and goal in Him as truly today as it did 1900 years ago is a religion of the second kind—in fact it is the *only religion of this second kind* inasmuch as genuine Christianity is the only religion that even professes to offer the world a divine redemption in and by the work of another, and so to do more than first instruct and then arouse into activity those powers of conscience and sensibility and will that belong to man as man.

Rights Vs Duties

THE sovereignty of the individual personality within its proper sphere should not be waived. As individuals we have rights as over against all others and there are occasions when, if we are to maintain our own self-respect as well as the respect of others, we must see to it that these rights are respected. Otherwise we virtually assume the status of slaves and underlings. And it is because in every age there have been those who have had the courage to insist upon their rights that we enjoy that measure of civil and political and religious liberty that we possess. Moreover Christianity has been the most prolific mother of those who have led in the age-long struggle for the practical recognition of the just rights of men in every sphere of life. None the less the New Testament has but little to say about our rights and a great deal to say about our duties. The New Testament is indeed a Declaration of Rights but is to a much larger extent a Declara-

tion of Duties. It is a book that creates within us a high sense of our own value and dignity but it directs our attention not so much to the maintenance of our rights as to the performance of our duties. It tells us in fact that such is our intrinsic value that GOD sent His SON for our redemption but at the same time it teaches us that service is the true measure of greatness.

Beyond question the placing of the emphasis elsewhere than where the New Testament places it is at the root of much of our present-day unrest and dissatisfaction. Everywhere men are placing the emphasis on their rights rather than on their duties. Instead of seeking to pay the debts they owe others they are seeking to collect the debts that others owe them. So intent are they on the latter that too often they quite forget the former. This is particularly evident in the industrial world. It is proper that labor should insist on its rights. It is only too true that labor has often received less than its just dues, that not infrequently it has been exploited and shamefully treated; so that those who have led in the struggle for industrial rights are no less deserving of praise than those who have led in the struggle for civil and political rights. In insisting on its rights, however, labor too often forgets its duties, what it owes to capital, what it owes to the general public. It needs to be more conscious not only of its obligation to earn what it gets but to promote the general good. It is also proper that capital should insist on its rights. For capital has its rights even though it be true that in many instances, for long periods, it has obtained more than its rights. But in insisting on its rights, capital should not be forgetful of what it owes labor, of what it owes the general public. Suppose that capital and labor were both as much concerned about their duties as about their rights. Would this not of itself put an end to most of our industrial unrest and dissatisfaction? And it is because the gospel is the only power that is capable of leading men to place the emphasis on their duties rather than their rights that it offers the only hope of anything like a satisfactory solution of industrial unrest. But it is not in

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