

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Relative to the Value of Christianity

IT is to multiply words without wisdom to discuss the value of Christianity apart from the question of its truthfulness. If Christianity lacks the element of truthfulness it is worthless and may be harmful; but if it possesses this element it is safe to assume that it has some worth and that it may be beyond price. It would be otherwise, of course, if the subject of discussion were the significance of Christianity. Because the significance of a movement is more or less independent of its truthfulness. Whether or no Christianity is true, it is one of the most significant movements in history—a movement, moreover, that must still be reckoned with despite the “wishful thinking” of its enemies. At the same time while a movement may have significance, regardless of the degree to which it is an embodiment of truth, the permanency of its significance and so its abiding value is indissolubly bound up with the question of its truthfulness. Here the words of WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT apply:

“Truth crushed to earth shall rise again:
Th’ eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among his worshippers.”

A few decades ago, few, if any, would have taken any exception to what has just been written. Such is not the case today. Many of our leaders of Christian thought—so-called at least—insist that the value of Christianity is independent of the question of its truthfulness in the ordinary sense of the word, *i.e.*, in the sense of conformity to historic fact or objective reality. In harmony with this we are told that the value of Christianity in no wise hinges on the question, for instance, whether ABRAHAM ever migrated from

Ur of the Chaldees, or whether the Law was given by MOSES, or whether JESUS was virgin born or bodily resurrected or even whether JESUS ever lived. Christian faith, we are told, is something too deep, too vital, dwells on too high a level, to be dependent on what happened, or is alleged to have happened, so many centuries ago. We are not concerned to deny that the faith of those who make such statements is independent of anything so prosaic as historic facts; but we more than question whether such a faith has any right to call itself Christian. It is altogether certain—whatever may be alleged by some—that the faith of the Apostles and of the Apostolic Church was wedded for weal or woe to what they regarded as historic facts, that such events as the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, the ascension of CHRIST and the descent of the HOLY SPIRIT on the day of Pente-

cost were not only looked upon by them as belonging to the sphere of history but as belonging to the very essence of their faith. The fact, therefore, that there are those who allege that the value of Christianity is independent of its truthfulness has no real bearing on the question we are actually discussing and that because a Christianity that is independent of the historic facts is something other than Christianity as we, with the Church of all ages, understand it.

Perhaps a word should be said relative to a somewhat closely related view. There are those who though skeptical of the truthfulness of Christianity both in the sense of “truth of idea” and “truth of fact” are so impressed by the usefulness of Christianity that they maintain that it is the part of wisdom to live “as if” it were true. The restraints of Christianity (such as its teaching as to rewards and punishment) are useful, we are told, in holding the masses in check and its quietives (such as its belief in the existence of a FATHER-GOD and a SAVIOUR-KING) is the hope and consolation of multitudes. Whether or no Christianity is true, it produces the highest and most satisfactory type of life of which we have any knowledge: why then should we not exhort men to live “as if” it were true? We reply that while Christianity is useful yet in our judgment it is useful because, and only because, it is true. It is no doubt the part of wisdom to live “as if” Christianity were true but this too finds its ultimate explanation in the fact that Christianity is actually true. We hold indeed that those who live “as if” Christianity were true will as a rule

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come to believe that it is true but that too finds its explanation in the fact that it really is true. It is noticeable, however, that those who urge living "as if" Christianity were true usually have others in mind rather than themselves. Christianity is useful for the masses, for the "unenlightened," somewhat as the story of SANTA CLAUS is useful for children: but of course "enlightened" persons like themselves have no need of such restraints and incentives as Christianity affords! We have scant sympathy with this view, even less than we have with the view of those who maintain that Christianity has been and is a curse to humanity. Christianity presents itself as the truth. If it is not the truth, it has led mankind astray long enough and it is high time it were relegated to the museum of dead religions. If there is something truer than Christianity there is something better than Christianity and that something better is what we and all men ought to have. Our conviction that there is nothing better, and that nothing better will ever be discovered or revealed, finds its ultimate explanation in this conviction and in this conviction alone, viz., that Christianity is true both as regards its facts and its doctrines.

But granting that Christianity is true, wherein consists its value? If Christianity is true, we may be sure that it has some value but that fact of itself would not justify the belief that it has any great value. At the risk of undue repetition we repeat that just as it is futile to discuss the question, Is Christianity True? except as the parties interested are agreed as to *what* Christianity is, so is it futile to discuss the question, "What is the value of Christianity?" unless the parties in interest be agreed as to *what* Christianity is. Unless the parties in interest have the same object in mind, it is hardly to be expected that their estimates as to value will agree. Or if the "Modernist" and the "Fundamentalist" vie with each other in adding superlative to superlative in praise of what each calls Christianity it is nevertheless true that what one considers an asset the other considers a liability. Let it be known then that it is the value of Christianity as it is understood in "conservative" or "evangelical" or "fundamentalist" circles—call them which you will—with which we are concerned in this connection.

There are many possible ways of briefly indicating the things that give value to Christianity. The following commends itself to us as one of the best. The value of Christianity is due (1) to the additions it has brought to this world's aggregate of facts, (2) to the additions it has brought to this world's stock of knowledge and (3) to the additions it has brought to this world's fund of power. We would not be understood as implying that all the values of Christianity may be subsumed, naturally and logically and without compulsion, under one or the other of these heads but certainly if what falls without demur under either of these heads is ignored or denied it is impossible to obtain any adequate conception of the value that attaches to Christianity.

In the first place, Christianity has brought an addition to the world's aggregate of facts. Christianity is not a product of this world's resident forces as the consistent evolutionist would have us believe. The forces implanted by the CREATOR in the beginning, no matter how divinely led, were incapable of producing those facts that lie at the basis of the Christian religion and apart from which Christianity would be as empty of content as astronomy would be empty of content if the stars were phantoms. If the supernatural in the form of the miraculous had not energized in this world the facts which lie at the basis of Christianity, and make it what it is, it would have no existence. Those great acts which GOD hath wrought in history for the salvation of mankind—acts which have their culmination in the birth, death and resurrection of the LORD JESUS CHRIST and in the descent of the HOLY SPIRIT—would never have taken place had not GOD interposed, in a supernatural manner in this world's processes. And yet if these acts had not taken place there would be and could be no such thing as Christianity as it has been all but universally understood until recently. Let no one deceive himself. A non-miraculous Christianity is simply no Christianity at all and that because it involves the denial of the factual basis of our holy religion.

In the second place Christianity brought an addition to this world's stock of knowledge. Sin had not only brought guilt which needed to be expiated it had brought ignorance which need to be dis-

sipated. Only where Christianity has gone do men know what they should believe concerning GOD and what duty GOD requires of man. Christianity is a "revealed" religion, not a religion that man has "discovered," or it is a religion that claims to be what it is not. This revelation is partly a revelation by acts or deeds, and partly a revelation by words through the mouths of prophets and apostles and especially through JESUS CHRIST. In large part the words would be empty without the acts while the acts would be blind and unmeaning without the explaining word. The great value of the Bible lies in the fact that it both records those great acts that GOD has wrought for our salvation and explains their meaning. The acts are meaningless for us save as they are understood. The GOD who wrought them is alone competent to make known their significance, and that He has done in what we call the doctrines of the Bible. The doctrines of Christianity are no less essential both to its being and its well-being than are its facts.

In the third place, Christianity brought an addition to this world's fund of power. Sin had not only brought guilt and ignorance, it had also brought weakness and inability. It is not enough to say to the sinner, "This is the way; walk ye in it." "Men know the good without the power to do it; they know the evil without the power to avoid it." Men need something more than a correct knowledge of divine things, something more than a correct knowledge of what they ought to be and do; they need more power, more energy, a dynamic that will enable them to be and do what otherwise would be impossible. It is one of the distinctive glories of Christianity that it provides mankind with such a dynamic. JESUS CHRIST is set before us in the Scriptures not merely as our teacher and example, not merely as one who by his sufferings and death made atonement for our sins, but also as one who through the HOLY SPIRIT breaks that dominion that sin has over us and enables us to walk in newness of life.

What has been said has perhaps served to at least suggest the things that contribute most to the value of Christianity. Many other things might be mentioned either as constituent elements or as benefits that accompany or flow from Christianity; but it will hardly be denied by

those who share our conception of what Christianity is that these are the things without which it would not have that outstanding value they attach to it.

Before concluding it may be well to call attention to the fact that it is impossible to value Christianity aright unless we remember that it is a religion that concerns the life to come even more than the life that now is. If life is a cry between two eternal silences, or if the future does not stand in organic relation to the present, there is no occasion for such a religion as Christianity professes to be. The eschatological interest, so much decried, is not a useless appendage to Christianity; rather it is so essential to its very being that a Christianity that is unconcerned about the future life is just no Christianity at all. Christianity is indeed profitable for the life that now is, as history teaches with no uncertain voice, but it is at the same time a religion that has its center of gravity in the life beyond. Only as we interpret these earthly lives of ours in the light of eternity is it possible to appreciate the significance of the question, "What must I do to be saved?" and so the value of that redemptive religion we call Christianity.

"Who Are the Heretics?"

THE *Presbyterian Advance*, in its issue of July 24th, under the title given above has as its leading editorial an article that is characteristically "liberal" as regards the looseness and inaccuracy of its thought. The gist of the editorial is expressed in the following extract: "Who are the heretics? Those who depart from doctrine, or those who in deed and in spirit depart from the Christian life? There can be no question that it was about the latter and not the former that CHRIST was most concerned. And it may have been for this reason: If Christians would live the gospel they profess, their lives would be a creed which needs no defense and which would quickly win the assent of the whole non-Christian world." In the same article its editor writes: "It is as clear as the noonday sun that JESUS was mildly interested in the heresy of doctrine, but spent his life in the attempt to persuade his followers to avoid the heresy of the life and of the spirit."

From the confident, dogmatic manner in which the matter is expressed one

might suppose either that its editor was giving expression to something concerning which all men are agreed or to something conclusive evidence of which he himself had presented. Such, however, is not the case. Not only is the view expressed opposed to that generally held among Christians—the very creed to which this editor subscribes affirms that "no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which . . . represents it as a matter of no consequence what a man's opinions are" and that "there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty"—but no real evidence is offered in its support. That one bit of alleged evidence is contained in the following: "Upon one occasion when charged with heresy JESUS made a most incisive reply. He said in effect, 'You ask me why my disciples break a rule or tradition of the elders which has nothing to do with morality or religion. I ask you, in turn, why you transgress a real commandment of God which has to do with a human problem and a moral duty?' (Mt. 15:1-20). By this utterance JESUS drew a sharp distinction between the heresy which refuses to conform to creed or ceremony and the heresy which fails to conform to moral principles." How any one can suppose that on that occasion JESUS drew a distinction between the "heresy" which rejects creed and the "heresy" which rejects moral principles we are utterly at a loss to see. JESUS' reply in fact was made in the interest of a sound creed—a creed based on the commands of GOD rather than on the commands of men. It was the false creed of the Pharisees and scribes that made them indifferent to moral interests; and what JESUS did was to direct attention to a true creed, one based on the commands of GOD, that would issue in the right kind of conduct. JESUS' reply was indeed an incisive one but it was not one that lends any support to the representation that He was but little concerned about what men believed; rather it supports the contrary idea that He held that men will act rightly only as they believe rightly.

It would be a very disturbing fact and one fitted to shake our confidence in JESUS as a moral teacher if it were true, as alleged, that he was little concerned about doctrines. Not only would that mean that

the difference between JESUS and PAUL in this respect is unbridgeable but it would stamp JESUS as a superficial teacher, as one who dealt with effects rather than causes. Fortunately, however, that is not the case. As a matter of fact JESUS recognized as fully as did the Apostles that the Christian creed logically precedes the Christian life and that the latter can no more rise above the former than the stream can rise above its source; and hence that those who decry Christian doctrines, whether or no they suspect it, are enemies of the Christian life. It is indeed true, and the editor of the *Advance* does well to stress the fact, that "there are many conformists to doctrines who are not conformists to the Christian way of life" but we believe that JESUS approves when we add that it is also true that there are no exemplars of the Christian way of life who do not, in some degree at least, accept the Christian doctrines. Christian conduct is a fruit that grows only on the tree of Christian doctrine. Lay the axe to the root of that tree and it will not be long before the fruit known as the Christian life will no longer be found in the market-places of the world.

It is indeed true that the un-Christian conduct of professed Christians is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of the acceptance of Christianity by men in general. It is going too far, however, to say that if Christians would but live the gospel they profess they would quickly win the assent of the whole non-Christian world. Such a representation rests on too complacent a view of sin. CHRIST did not so teach, much as He stressed the importance of good example. That He did not think that Christian living would of itself win men, that it would rather at times intensify their opposition, is evident from the fact that he forewarned his disciples that they must expect treatment from the world similar to that which was meted out to himself. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore, the world hateth you." "If they have called the Master of the house BEELZEBUB, how much more them of his household!"

Our contemporary is loud in its denunciation of "heresy hunting," referring in this connection exclusively to the heresy

of doctrine. It is somewhat difficult to suppose, however, that it expects to be taken altogether seriously in what it says in this particular connection. Certainly if anybody is engaged today in the task of *hunting* heresy he is to be compared to a man looking for mosquitoes in New Jersey at this season of the year. The trouble is not to find them but to avoid them. The difficulty is not to discover the wolves that are molesting our fields and threatening our loved ones. The difficulty is to guard our fields and our homes against them. If anybody is being hunted and harassed today it is the orthodox not the unorthodox. It is they, if anybody, who are being treated with intolerance, who are being driven out of positions of trust and power in the Church, and whose property is being confiscated. To shout from the house tops that defenders of the faith are "heresy hunters" may be useful as a device to divert attention from the activities of those who would destroy the Christian heritage, as it has been received from Christ and His apostles, but only the thoughtless and uninformed will be deceived thereby.

The Deepest Quietive

WHEN we speak of a quietive we speak of that which calms and soothes and tranquillizes. A quietive is calmative and sedative in its effects as contrasted with a motive which excites and stimulates. Quietives and motives are closely related, however, inasmuch as both terminate upon and influence the will. It has been well said that in order to possess an adequate knowledge of any man, great or small, we need to know not only the motives that urge him to action but the quietives that bring rest and solace to his soul in days of disappointment or forced inaction. For instance we have but little knowledge of a character like NAPOLEON if we know only the motives that urged him along the path to military glory but are ignorant of the quietives he made use of to set his will at rest at St. Helena.

There are many quietives. The typical earthly quietive is perhaps music. No doubt there are many individuals who are more or less immune to the influence of music, but having humanity as a whole in mind it is probably rightly called the typical earthly quietive. Certainly in all

ages it has been a soothing, care-dispelling as well as a stimulating influence in the lives of men. The classical instance is the playing of DAVID on the harp in the presence of SAUL. For when DAVID played, SAUL was "refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (I Samuel 10:23). Except when associated with Christian conceptions, however, music, like all other earthly quietives—art, the pursuit of pleasure and such like—has no power to afford permanent relief to the deepest aches of the human heart, no power to bring lasting peace to the sin-troubled soul face to face with death and the judgment. At the most it brings only temporary peace and tranquillity of soul, as in the case of SAUL. Hence there is need of a deeper quietive, of one that will meet the soul's need no matter what calamity may befall it. Such a deeper quietive Christianity affords us, viz., that we are beloved of GOD in CHRIST JESUS, that through Him there is forgiveness and restoration to GOD's favor, and that no matter what may befall us during this earthly pilgrimage nothing can separate us from GOD's love as that love has been revealed in the face of JESUS CHRIST. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee" (Isaiah 54:10). "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23). "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth and for evermore" (Psalm 121). "Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST? shall tribulation, or distress or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD" (Romans 8:35-39).

Those who possess such an assurance can, with full knowledge of all the facts, sleep quietly amid life's most violent storms. Whatever their trials and per-

plexities and sufferings they possess inward peace, for theirs is a peace which the world cannot give and which the world cannot take away. We may properly avail ourselves of every legitimate earthly quietive. But here too we should be on our guard lest the good prove to be the enemy of the best, especially since the good in this instance has but a temporary and passing significance. The deepest motive of the Christian life, that of grateful love to the redeeming GOD for the salvation He has bestowed upon us, is at the same time its deepest quietive.

"Books of Religious Significance"

A BOOK may be of large religious significance that has little or no religious value. A book like MACHEN'S, "The Virgin Birth of Christ," is both significant and valuable but a book like MENCKEN'S "Treatise on the Gods" is significant but utterly valueless. Some may think it would be better if we confined our attention to books of outstanding religious value. But if we did that we would have to overlook books which while themselves irreligious or non-religious have immense importance for religion. For instance DARWIN'S "The Origin of Species" while a non-religious book has perhaps had as great, if not greater, religious significance as any book written within a hundred years. This means also, since our space is limited, that many books of great value may not be given special notice in our columns because while valuable they would hardly be called significant even though they expound and enforce with unusual ability the orthodox viewpoint. We have in mind such books as the two volumes by ABRAHAM KUYPER, recently translated from the Dutch, and published by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., entitled "His Decease at Jerusalem" (\$2.50) and "Keep Thy Solemn Feasts" (\$2.50); also the two recent volumes by CLARENCE E. MACARTNEY, published by Richard R. Smith, Inc., entitled "Wrestlers with God" (\$2.00) and "Parallel Lives of the Old and New Testaments" (\$2.00). We hope, however, to at least call attention to books like these from time to time as such books will be treasured long after books that are merely significant have been forgotten.