

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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hound beneath his master's lash" when Modernism hurls the dread name of science rather than produce argument. We need to be humbly bold in our fight with Modernism because we have the fullest confidence that truth is on our side.

Many other matters might be mentioned which would prove that the book of Luther makes very profitable reading for any one interested in the progress of the old gospel. We have mentioned only two or three items in order to give an illustration of the great value of the book.

CORNELIUS VAN TIL.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KARL BARTH by the Rev. John McConnachie. Hodder and Stoughton, London. pp. 228.

KARL BARTH: PROPHET OF A NEW CHRISTIANITY? by William Pauck. Harper & Brothers, New York. pp. 228.

THESE two books witness to the growing interest in Barthianism in English speaking circles. The first is from the pen of the Minister of St. John's Church, Dundee, Scotland (see our August issue, p. 16) and is more appreciative than critical. In fact we will hardly do its author an injustice if we speak of him as a disciple of Barth. The second is from the pen of the professor of Church History and Historical Theology at the Chicago Theological Seminary (Congregational) and is more critical than appreciative. For while Professor Pauck finds much of value in Barth he holds that he is the "preacher in the wilderness" not the prophet of the new Christianity. Both these writers have studied under Barth and speak out of a first-hand knowledge of his writings. Their books admirably supplement each other and together constitute a valuable contribution to the literature of Barthianism.

In the first of these books we see Barth through the eyes of one whose theological background is that of a present-day Scottish Presbyterian while in the second we see him through the eyes of one whose theological background is the modernism that derives from Schleiermacker by way of Ritschl, Harnack and Troeltsch. The thoroughly naturalistic viewpoint from which Professor Pauck approaches Barth is indicated not only by his statement that "supernaturalistic metaphysics are offensive to our minds and consciences" (p. 202) but more in detail by such a passage as the following: "No intelligent person will deny the validity of the demand that the church recognize the modern world-view as it has been shaped by the results of scientific research. A defense of the story of the creation as it is told in the first chapters of the Bible against the theory of evolution is an act of blind stubbornness. A denial of the human origin of the Bible and a refusal to investigate the

history of the Church according to the best scholarly methods is dishonest. To retain a theology of yesterday, which does not do justice to modern astronomy, geology, biology and psychology is impossible" (p. 22). We cannot stay to question Professor Pauck's assumptions that scientific research has disproved the Bible story of creation or that the use of the best scholarly methods leads to belief in the purely human origin of the Bible; but we pause to remark that the fact that a man like Professor Pauck finds so much in Barth to praise is fitted to raise the question whether there is as much of good in him as Mr. McConnachie discovers.

In trying to appraise Barth it is imperative that we keep in mind that he attacks both modernism and fundamentalism. Our satisfaction over the vigor and cogency of his attack on modernism is greatly lessened by the fact that he is scarcely less vigorous (we do not say scarcely less cogent) in his attack on fundamentalism—true as it is that his sympathies are with fundamentalism rather than with modernism as shown by the fact that he says that if he had to choose between them he would choose the former. Moreover it is significant in this connection that Barth began as a modernist. This means that he has travelled in the direction of fundamentalism (using the term in its broad sense) and inasmuch as he is still travelling it is by no means impossible that he will yet reach a position more in accord with that of the fundamentalist. Our regret that Barth's own position is as yet so far removed from orthodoxy should, however, not be allowed to conceal from ourselves the fact that the theological movement now most in favor in Germany is strongly anti-modernistic. A few years ago it seemed that the whole theological world insofar as it was not fundamentalist had gone over to the modernist position. Certainly that is not the case today. Today Barth and his friends look upon liberalism as represented by men like Fosdick as belonging to yesterday to a much larger extent than fundamentalism.

Mr. McConnachie maintains that Barth is a reformed theologian and that Barthianism is a revival of Calvinism. It seems to us, however, that Professor Pauck is nearer the facts when he maintains that there is only a small measure of truth in this contention. It is true that Barth holds that Calvinism understood Christianity much better than have the modernists but Calvinism will have to be largely re-defined before we can call Barth a Calvinist.

We hope at some future date to give our readers something like an adequate appraisal of Barthianism but at present we content ourselves with indicating some of the points at which it seems to us fatally defective. In the first place it seems to us that its doctrine of the transcendence of

God is so one-sided as practically to deny that man is made in the image of God. If modernism errs by a too exclusive emphasis on the immanence of God, Barthianism errs by a too one-sided emphasis on the transcendence of God. In the second place its doctrine of the Bible seems to us far removed from the true doctrine. We agree that the Bible cannot rightly claim exemption from historico-critical treatment but we cannot agree that its value as revelation is independent of the results of such criticism. According to Barth the Word of God is in the words of the Bible, but the Word of God is in no real sense to be identified with the words of the Bible. While Barth has repeatedly said that the doctrine of the literal inspiration of the Bible is not easily pushed aside yet he does not hold that position and many of his followers at least accept the conclusions of the most radical critics of the Bible. In the third place its view that faith cannot be built on historical facts seems to us fatally defective inasmuch as it seems to sit loosely to the very things that make Christianity the gospel of salvation. Mr. McConnachie in the name of Barth takes exception to Dr. Machen's statement (*What is Faith* p. 242) that "Christianity is founded squarely . . . upon facts." Barth's desire of course is to secure a basis for Christianity that is independent not only of the psychologism of modernism but of the historicism of fundamentalism. He is attempting the impossible. Christianity is grounded in facts and is neither credible nor possessed of saving significance apart from those facts.

The following passages from Professor Pauck seem to us significant. After stating his own conviction that "our only authority is our venturesome faith as we have been led by a sincere open-minded consideration of the facts of life. God has revealed Himself to us in the present life we are living. We believe in Him because the realities of life compel us to. In these realities He finds us. In this sense faith comes to us; we do not create it" he adds: "our impression is that the ultimate authority on which Barth depends is no other than this, and we cannot avoid the conclusion that he is guilty of a strange self-deception, when he insists on pointing to the immediate revelation of God which is concealed in the Biblical testimony on Jesus Christ. He operates with a conception of revelation which is antiquated, outlived, unreal. It is the old supernaturalism, the old belief in the miraculous intervention of an otherworldly, superhuman, anthropomorphic God which haunts him" (p. 165). We call this passage significant because it indicates to us what seems to us to be an important truth about Barth, viz., that within him two life and world views are struggling for the mastery. Broadly speaking these life and world views are the ones known as naturalism and su-

pernaturalism. Professor Pauck holds that it is the former that fundamentally determines his thinking but admits that the latter still supplies much of the content of his thought. It seems to us, therefore, that the question whether the Barthian movement ultimately furthers the cause of true religion depends on which of these elements in its thought secures the ascendancy. If its

naturalistic elements triumph it may be different but it will be as much the enemy of Christianity as is modernism; but if its supernaturalistic elements triumph it may be instrumental to a revival of Christianity in all its ancient power. The supernaturalism of Christianity is not its weakness but its strength.

S. G. C.

minority up to 1890. But every year their number increased. Look at the following list:

Immigrants from Northern Europe:	
1870-1880	91.6%
1880-1890	80.2%
1890-1900	48.4%

Immigrants from Southern Europe:	
1870-1880	8.4%
1880-1890	19.8%
1890-1900	51.6%

Since 1890 the Southerners (Roman Catholics) have outnumbered the Protestant immigrants and the ratio in their favor has increased.

Look at these statistics: Number of immigrants from Northern Europe during 1900-1910 was 23.3%. In the same time from Southern Europe it was 76.7%. From 1910-1920 the Northerners came down to 22.8% and the Southerners climbed up to 77.2%. What do these figures tell us? A great deal. They tell us that Protestant America is on the brink of ceasing to be a Protestant people. These figures tell us that we are drifting to Rome if not to Leningrad (Moscow) for many of the aliens from Latin and Slavonic countries have communistic and anarchistic if not atheistic tendencies. If the latter pernicious tendencies should get the upperhand in our beloved country not only Wittenberg and Geneva (Luther and Calvin: Protestantism) but also Rome itself would be in danger and doomed to destruction.

If our present-day Protestant churches would only be "Valiant-For-Truth"; if they had only maintained "The Faith of our Fathers"; if they only had stuck to the fundamentals of our Apostolic Catholic Christian Faith and Creed there would be at least some hope for a vigorous Protestantism, able and powerful enough to overcome Roman Catholic errors superstition and also unbelief and atheism, etc.

Alas! nowadays Modernism has rejected many truths which Rome upholds, such cardinal doctrines as: Creation and Providence, the Holy Trinity, the Godhead of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the substitutionary character of Christ's death, His resurrection, the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, the plenary inspiration of Holy Scriptures, etc., etc.

There is more. The committee of the Federation of Churches reported favorably on Neo-Malthusianism, (birth-control, rather birth-denial).

While negroes, orthodox Jews and Roman Catholics as a rule believe in large families, so called *Protestants* protest against them! They cannot afford them.

Indeed there are reasons to be heavy of heart as to the future of Protestantism in our country.

J. KEIZER.

Kalamazoo, Mich.

Letters to the Editor

[The letters printed here express the convictions of the writers, and publication in these columns does not necessarily imply either approval or disapproval on the part of the Editors. If correspondents do not wish their names printed, they will please so request, but all are asked kindly to sign their names as an evidence of good faith. We do not print letters that come to us anonymously.]

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: Your excellent and informing report of the 143rd General Assembly deserves appreciation, even though belated. If it had not been for CHRISTIANITY TODAY and the daily press, Presbyterians in general would have had little knowledge of what actually took place. The church papers which are under the domination of the ecclesiastical machine either do not care to inform their readers of what is going on, or they are not permitted to tell the readers what they should know. Some day, perhaps sooner than those now in the saddle are thinking, the rank and file of Presbyterians will awake to the folly of supposing that a church divided against itself can fulfill the mission God intended. The sooner Presbyterians do get possession of the facts, the sooner some of the "distinguished" leaders, who are running things now with a high hand, will stop some of their Modernistic tomfoolery.

The triumph of Modernism, with its "every man his own saviour," and "Christianity a way of life" teachings, seems to have had something of a jolt by the way the General Assembly voted on Moderator, by the "progress" of Church Union, and by the outcome of the Federal Council matter. Church Union is coming by leaps and bounds through various well known undenominational agencies too numerous to mention, but the Union which is coming with such certainty is in no sense such a machine affair as Presbyterian politicians are endeavoring to bring about. All who are true to the faith can rejoice in that fact. The average member of the Presbyterian Church is led to wonder why certain of the "statesmanlike" leaders should be so zealous in behalf of the Federal Council, in view of the unsavory notoriety that organization has acquired. Certainly the Presbyterian Church has nothing desirable to gain from connection with such an outfit. There may be some "big leaders" of the Church who have not as yet been elected to the presidency of the Federal Council, but this is hardly a

worthy reason for the Presbyterian Church to retain membership in such an organization. Since many of the interests of the Federal Council are more or less anti-Christian—indeed it is interested in about everything except redemptive Christianity—it is passing strange that the President of a Presbyterian Theological Seminary should feel called upon to go out of his way to keep the Church in the Federal Council. It is no wonder the Seminary finds it necessary to issue protestations in defense of its orthodoxy! They are needed. This is carrying the "inclusive policy" to the bitter extreme.

Has the General Assembly ceased to seek the glory of God and become merely an agency for the glorification and flattery of a few selected or self-appointed "leaders"? It is no wonder the question is being asked in all seriousness. Let us confess that it is because the Presbyterian Church is forgetting the glory of God and giving a sadly divided testimony, that she is so impotent in the presence of infidelity, worldliness and heathenism. It must be so until the Church is purged and can give a clear witness to the Christ.

Sincerely,

RUSSELL T. BARR.

Germantown, Phila., Pa.

"Protect Us by Thy Might, Great God Our King."

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: We Americans have been from the beginning a Protestant people. The immigrants from England, Germany, Holland and Scandinavia were as a rule, of Protestant persuasion. But since the year 1890, there has come a change. During the decade from 1860-1870 there came to our ports from Northern (Protestant) Europe 98.4% immigrants in comparison with 1.6% only from Southern Europe: Italians, French, Spaniards, Slavonians, etc. These were as a rule, nominally at least, Roman Catholics. These Southern immigrants were far in the