

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

SAMUEL G. CRAIG, Editor

H. McALLISTER GRIFFITHS, Managing Editor

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Christ and Christianity

WHAT is the relation between CHRIST and Christianity? Is it incidental or essential? Suppose it should be discovered that CHRIST never existed or that we lack any dependable knowledge of Him. Would that necessarily spell the death of Christianity or might it continue to thrive despite that discovery? Or assuming that He existed and that we have some measure of knowledge of Him, was He merely the founder of Christianity and its best as well as its first exponent, or does He also constitute its content to such an extent that it is proper to say that CHRIST is Christianity? In other words, from the viewpoint of Christianity, is CHRIST merely the exemplary religious person or is He Himself an object of religion and as such to be worshipped?

The questions that have been put at least suggest what is today the deepest issue at stake between those calling themselves Christians. Modern Christianity, so-called, regards CHRIST merely as an example for faith, not as the object of faith. If CHRIST be merely an example for faith His uniqueness lies in the fact that He was the first Christian and the place He occupies in Christianity does not differ in kind from the place occupied by Buddha in Buddhism or Confucius in Confucianism. If, however, CHRIST be the object of faith it is obvious that the place He occupies in Christianity is infinitely more than that of a pioneer and pattern in the sphere of religion, and that the religion He founded is as dependent upon Him today as it was in the days of His flesh. It

is difficult, if not impossible, to exaggerate the difference between those to whom CHRIST is merely an example for faith and those to whom He is also an object of faith. The latter stand in a religious relation to CHRIST; the former do not stand in a religious relation to CHRIST. This difference is so profound that it is to use words without meaning to speak of them as adherents of the same religion. As a matter of fact they are advocates of mutually opposed religions. None the less in all the great Protestant Churches, including the Presbyterian, there are not only members but Ministers who regard CHRIST as merely an example for faith and so those who do not take a religious attitude toward CHRIST.

The width and depth of the difference

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between those who see in CHRIST merely an example for faith and those who see Him also an object of faith is fully discerned, however, only when it is seen that the sense in which CHRIST is a saviour is involved. If CHRIST is merely an example for faith it is obvious that He is a saviour only in the sense that He shows us how we may save ourselves. There is no room for faith in CHRIST as one who saves us from the guilt and power of sin. Only those who see in CHRIST an object of faith can "receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." Those calling themselves Christians who look upon CHRIST as merely an example for faith ignore the dividing line between Christianity as a religion that offers salvation in and by the work of another and a religion that merely calls upon men to save themselves. Let us never forget that the object of the faith of the genuine Christian is CHRIST and Him as crucified to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God. It is not enough that we stand in a religious relation to CHRIST, if we are rightly to call ourselves Christians; ours must also be an attitude of faith in Him, of dependence upon Him as our Saviour.

It is hardly open to dispute that those who look upon CHRIST as merely an example for faith have departed from the position of the Church universal, at least until the rise of Modernism. The creeds of the churches, both ancient and modern, more especially perhaps the liturgies and hymns of the churches, both ancient and modern, make clear that, generally

and by its light will try to carry out his Father's will.

But you may say, "Much of this direction is general, it is not specific. What is the specific will of God for me?" I answer therefore, finally, that we may, like Christ, rejoice to do His will as revealed in *providence*. I have tried to show that even Christ followed where the Father led, embraced opportunities, met new circumstances, prepared for "the hour." And certainly, we are to do so. The will of God for each one of us is unfolded by the events of life. These are not causeless. They are not a chance medley of good and bad. God rules: not a sparrow falls without Him. And therefore, as providence unrolls the will of God for us, the true child is to accept and obey. Now He brings an opportunity; now He lays a burden. Now He tries us with prosperity; now with sorrow. Now He sends us

into battle and temptation; now He lays us on beds of pain and idleness. Now He wounds, and now He heals: the way opens under His Divine guidance. It may lift us up, it may cast us down. As with Christ, I say, so with us. It may give us a soul to save, it may cause our plans to be rejected, it may lead to Gethsemane, it may translate us to glory; but in all it is the will of Him that sent us, the work He has for us to do. In all, infinite wisdom, the Father's goodness, and eternal righteousness move. He shows the way, and man's highest privilege—yea, man's strength and food—is to do His will, because we love and trust and adore Him so entirely that what He wishes, that we are glad to do.

I hold, therefore, before us Christ's joy in service as not beyond our power to imitate; and I ask if conscience and reason do not testify that this is the loftiest ideal in life

which we can have. When we reach heaven, this will be realized. But here, in the desert, now, in this world of sin, is the time to begin. I do not show you so exalted a Jesus as to put Him beyond the reach of imitation. He came to make us like Himself. And I ask if any other ideals of life can compare with this—if they are not poor and mean—if this does not soar above them. You claim to seek nobility and greatness and victory. Here they are. Come, learn from Jesus the love of God. Let it win your heart; and as at His feet you look in that infinite, eternal sea of love, whose depths are fathomless and whose billows break on the shores of time—that love of God to man out of which Christ came to save our souls by death—as you gaze on it, rise with this resolve: "By thy grace, O Christ, I too will joy to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."

Books of Religious Significance

AN EMERGING CHRISTIAN FAITH.
By Justin Wroe Nixon. Harper and Brothers. 1930. Pp. 320. \$2.50.

DR. NIXON is the Minister of the Brick Presbyterian Church of Rochester, N. Y. It is the position held by the author—a position that requires him to profess belief in the Bible as infallible and acceptance of the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith—that more than anything else lends significance to this volume. That a man of intelligence holding the views expressed in this book should continue to minister in a Presbyterian Church constitutes a moral enigma difficult to solve. Small wonder that Dr. Nixon writes in one place: "I wonder if in all the world there is any institution with such vested interests, material and spiritual, which tolerates such public criticism of its faith, organization, and methods on the part of its paid servants as does the Protestant Church" (p. 285). The fact that the Church at large tolerates it, however, does not alter the fact that it is difficult to believe in the moral integrity of one who preaches and teaches what is obviously out of harmony with what he is under vows to preach and teach.

According to Dr. Nixon "the Christian religion needs a new house of faith." To supply that need, or at least to make a contribution to that end, he has written this book. Readers of *Fundamental Christianity* by Dr. Francis L. Patton will recall that he tells us there are two ways of pulling down a house. You can put dynamite under it and blow it up. Or you can begin at the top and carefully remove stone after stone. The second way, he remarks, "is a slower method, but much to be commended because of its neatness, the absence of any unsightly debris, and the avoidance of a rude shock to the feelings of those who have lived in the old home and loved it for the sake of

the old associations. Besides, the material thus carefully removed may serve a useful purpose in constructing another building of a different design and intended to serve another purpose. What once entered into the structure of a church may now find a place in building a hall for ethical culture; and what was once part of the religious life of a people may usefully enter into the moral fabric of society." It is the second of these methods that Dr. Nixon has adopted.

If the new house of faith that Dr. Nixon builds made use of the main stones that went to make up the old house of faith, we could readily admit that the *Christian* faith could find a home within its walls. It is a matter of secondary importance how the materials that enter into a theological building are arranged provided the separate blocks of doctrine used in its construction are hewn from the quarry of Christian revelation. As a matter of fact, however, Dr. Nixon in rebuilding the house of faith makes use of very little of the material that constituted the old house of faith. The result is that his volume but serves to afford added evidence that Dr. Machen is right when in *Christianity and Liberalism* he maintains that within the Church itself "the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is the only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology." That Dr. Nixon in rebuilding the house of faith throws into the discard practically every block of doctrine that gave strength and substance to the old house of faith is hardly open to question. He lays great, almost exclusive emphasis on what he calls Jesus' "insight" that led him to the "conviction that life with God and with men was capable of being organized upon the basis of love, of mutual sharing, of fellowship;" but such a conviction is not a distinctive Chris-

tian conviction and may exist in those to whom Christianity is anathema. In this connection it may be noted not only that he explicitly repudiates the idea of Biblical infallibility—despite his ordination vows—but that he expressly repudiates such conceptions as hell, the devil, the virgin birth and second coming of our Lord—the whole world of the supernatural in fact as ordinarily conceived in Christian circles, and by implication many others. It would, however, be superfluous to attempt to call attention to all the Christian conceptions he directly or indirectly rejects in view of the fact that he regards Jesus Christ Himself as one-hundred-per-cent human. This means of course that no matter what elements of Christian truth he employs in building the superstructure of his house of faith he builds it on other than a Christian foundation. It was no merely human Christ, it was the Son of God who became incarnate for us men and our salvation that Paul had in mind when he wrote: "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Dr. Nixon calls his book "An Emerging Christian Faith." If he had been reared in a non-Christian faith and so could be thought of as one in his thinking was moving in the direction of Christianity we could find much in his book to commend. In that case we would be quite hopeful that in the end he would attain to something like an adequate Christian faith. As a matter of fact, however, he was reared in a Christian home and for more than twenty years has been a Minister, first in the Baptist and later in the Presbyterian Church. It would seem, therefore, that this book records a movement away from rather than a movement towards a genuine Christian faith. If we mistake not, it would have been more accurately named if it had been called "A Disappearing Christian Faith."

S. G. C.