

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Christianity and the Bible

THE relation between Christianity and the Bible has perhaps received its best confessional expression in the opening paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith. That paragraph reads as follows:

"Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preservation and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased."

According to the statement cited, it is a mistake to say that Christianity is dependent upon the Bible for its very existence. Christianity existed before the Bible—obviously before that portion of the Bible we call the New Testament—and conceivably God might have found a way of preserving and propagating it without having caused the Bible to be written. It is a relative not an absolute necessity that the Confession of Faith asserts concerning the Bible. What is absolutely necessary to the existence of Christianity in the thoughts and lives of men is "that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation," however acquired. God, however, was not content to make known that knowledge of

His will which is necessary to salvation and leave the matter of its preservation and propagation to the ordinary workings of providence. He went further and made special provision for its preservation and propagation. He caused a written record of it to be made "for the better preservation and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church." The Bible is the instrument or vehicle that God employed to convey to men a saving knowledge of Himself and His will (Christianity), "those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased," but we should ever distinguish between the conveyance and the thing conveyed. The famous declaration of CHILLINGWORTH that "the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants" is true only in as far as it be taken to mean that the Bible is the sole authoritative source of a saving knowledge of God and His will.

It is one thing, however, to say that we

could have Christianity had we no Bible and quite another thing to say that we would have Christianity had we no Bible. Granted that God might have adopted some other method for the preservation and propagation of saving truth, the method He actually adopted was the method of committing it to writing. Granted, that conceivably we might have a saving knowledge of God and His will even if God had not committed this supernatural revelation to writing, yet actually and as a matter of fact it is to the Bible that we are indebted for such saving knowledge as we possess. Here we avail ourselves of the eloquent but exaggerated words of Warfield:

"We may say that without a Bible we might have had Christ and all He stands for to our souls. Let us not say that this might not have been possible. But neither let us forget that, in point of fact, it is to the Bible that we owe it that we know Christ and are found in Him. And may it not be fairly doubted whether you and I—however true it may have been with others—would have had Christ had there been no Bible? We must not at any rate forget those nineteen Christian centuries that stretch between us and Christ, whose Christian Light we would do much to blot out and sink in a dreadful darkness if we could blot out the Bible. Even with the Bible, and all that had come from the Bible to form Christian lives and inform a Christian literature, after a millennium and a half the darkness had grown so deep that a Reformation was necessary if Christian truth was to persist,—a Luther was necessary, raised up by God to rediscover the Bible and give it back to man. Suppose there had been no Bible for Luther to rediscover and on the lines of which to refound the church—and no Bible in the hearts of God's saints and in the pages of Christian literature, persisting through

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Books of Religious Significance

THE TEACHING OF KARL BARTH: AN EXPOSITION by R. Birch Hoyle. Charles Scribner's Sons. Pp. 279. \$2.75.

THE first issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY (May, 1930) contained a review of Brunner's *The Theology of Crisis*. Our February issue (1931) contained a review of Zerbe's *The Karl Barth Theology or the New Transcendentalism* from the able pen of Dr. Cornelius Van Til. Our readers, therefore, cannot be wholly uninformed concerning the Barthian School of theology that is the center of large interest in Germany and which seemed destined to exert a world-wide influence. It cannot be said, however, that even at the best the American reader can be very well informed concerning this important theological movement. Hence we are confident this volume will be welcomed by many. Its purpose is to interpret the theological ideas of Karl Barth and his associates to English readers in the manner that will meet the needs of the average Christian Minister and Christian worker.

The first part of the book deals with "The Man: His Friends: Their Milieu." The second part expounds the message of Barth and his friends, dealing in turn with such subjects as the transcendency of God, the brokenness of humanity, the invasion of time by eternity, the resulting crisis, the bridge between two worlds on different planes, the view of history (pre-temporal, temporal, post-temporal) where God speaks and man hears. The third and final part deals critically with Barth's method and views as a theologian. Mr. Hoyle seeks to be objective in his exposition of Barth and his message and with a large measure of success despite his own more or less liberal viewpoint.

Our reading of Mr. Hoyle's exposition confirms us in the view that the Barthian movement is wholesome as over against Modernism but that it is inadequate as a substitute for the historic Reformed Faith. However it is a movement concerning which the Christian scholar should be informed and which none such can afford to ignore. It seems destined to be as influential for the next generation as Ritschlianism has been for the past generation. It seems to us a decided improvement over Ritschlianism. In giving us this relatively full account of Karl Barth and his message Mr. Hoyle has made us all his debtor.

S. G. C.

HUMANISM AND CHRISTIAN THEISM by William Hallock Johnson, D.D., Ph.D. Pp. 154. \$1.50.

THIS book is small in compass but rich in content. It deals in an informing and discriminating manner with a subject that

is being widely discussed—often in a more or less confused and confusing way. That this discussion should be more or less bewildering to the general reader is not surprising in view of the fact that the word Humanism is used to designate views so diverse and even antithetic. "There are," as Dr. Johnson says, "literary, scientific, philosophical, economic, religious, and ethical Humanists; and there are Humanists of every shade of religious belief and unbelief—atheistic, agnostic, positivistic, theistic, naturalistic and supernaturalistic, Roman Catholic, Anglo-Catholic and Protestant."

"Humanism and History," "Humanism and Religion," "Humanism and Science," "Humanism and Philosophy" and "Humanism and Morals" are the titles of the five lectures (they were given on the L. P. Stone Foundation) of which this book is composed. Throughout his discussion Dr. Johnson keeps clearly before the reader the fact that there are two main schools of Humanism in the world today and that these two schools have little in common but the name, apart from the fact that both seek to promote the happiness of mankind. "What one kind of Humanism asserts the other denies. Humanism A. says that man is essentially good, that we may follow without check the impulses of our nature, that man through science can solve all problems and assure the highest progress, and that through science and the natural altruistic impulses an ideal kingdom of man can be established. Humanism B. on the other hand says with Plato and Aristotle that there are conflicting impulses in man, the higher and the lower, that the lower passions need to be restrained, and that man has free will and responsibility. Humanism of the former kind denies God and the future life, or at best is completely agnostic about them; Humanism of the latter kind has shown itself in its leading advocates to be an ally of religion, at least cooperating with it, and at most finding it essential to the highest development of man. The former is agnostic, naturalistic, monistic; the latter is dualistic, not unfriendly to the supernaturalistic, and asserting at least in man a power of restraint or control that distinguishes him from nature and the animal" (pp. 35-36).

Our author concludes as follows: "Our study of Humanism in its various forms and its bearing upon the problems which affect human life bring us face to face with certain alternatives between which it is necessary to choose. We can find no certainty anywhere in the present welter of confusion unless we find it in the sure word of prophecy of the Christian revelation. . . . If there is no certainty in Christianity, there is no certainty anywhere. Our discussion

of Humanism and morals shows that we must adopt the highest conception of God, the Biblical conception, and believe in a living God who can raise the dead, a loving God who so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son; or we shall have no God at all to worship. Our ultimate choice lies between 'the ethics of infinite and mysterious obligation from on high,' and no ethics at all. We must choose between supernaturalism and naturalism: between a supernaturalism in revelation, in history and in redemption, and a naturalism, in theory and ultimately in practice, of a very poor sort."

S. G. C.

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY AND ITS WORK by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. Oxford University Press, 114 Fifth Avenue, New York. Pp. 400. \$3.00.

THIS is the sixth of the ten volumes of the selected writings of the late Dr. Warfield that are in process of publication by the Oxford University Press. For information as to the five preceding volumes as well as for an appraisal of Dr. Warfield as a theologian the reader is referred to the July issue (1931) of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.

This volume derives its title from its opening article—an essay which is typically Warfieldian in the breadth and accuracy of its scholarship. This is followed by an article on "The Making of the Westminster Confession, especially of its Chapter on the Decree of God" that gives the reader some knowledge of the great labor and care that was employed in the preparation of the Westminster Standards—a fact that goes far to explain the further fact that they still remain, in the judgment of a body of Christians second to none in intelligence and evangelical zeal, the best expression that has ever been framed by the hand of man of the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures.

Particular value attaches to the article, "The Westminster Doctrine of the Holy Scripture," in view of the fact that a much different view of Scripture is widely held even among those who subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is safe to say that no where else is to be found so adequate an exposition of the origin and contents of this the foundation chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Dr. Warfield makes clear, whatever may have been said to the contrary, that the inspiration which the Westminster Divines affirmed of all the books of the Bible was an inspiration which constituted them "in the most precise sense, the very Word of God, di-