

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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What is an Evangelical?

PHILIP SCHAFF'S great work, "The Creeds of Christendom," consists of three large volumes—of which the first deals with the *History of Creeds*, the second with the *Greek and Latin Creeds*, the third with the *Evangelical Creeds*. An examination of the second and third volumes shows that the former deals with the creeds of the Greek and Roman Catholic churches and the latter with the creeds of the Protestant churches, other than those of the Unitarian type, that appeared before the publication of the volumes in 1877. This means that the designation, "Evangelical," as employed by Dr. SCHAFF was for the most part synonymous with the designation, "Protestant."

If now we keep in mind the fact that Dr. SCHAFF employed the word in its generally accepted sense, we will not be greatly at a loss to understand how it has come about that the word as used today seems to have no definite meaning. As long as the vast majority of the members of the Protestant churches held to what was common in that system of thought and mode of life that found expression in the creeds of the Protestant churches—Lutheran, Reformed and Arminian—no great confusion resulted from identifying the Evangelicals with the members of these churches. It has come about, however, that an increasing number of the members, and particularly of the Ministers of these churches, do not hold to that system of thought and life. The word, however, still continues to be used to designate the members of these churches. Hence the varied and confused senses in which the word "evangelical" is

employed today. Hence the fact that men with all kinds of beliefs, or lack of beliefs, are designated "Evangelicals." If everybody that is called an Evangelical today is really an Evangelical, then it means nothing to call a man an Evangelical. A word applied indiscriminately to everybody ends by designating nobody. We would not imply that the word "Evangelical" has become a word without meaning but it does seem to us that if it is to be saved from that fate—and it seems to us too good a word to be allowed to die—there must be an insistence on the part of many that the word be used in its proper historical meaning.

When we call ourselves "Evangelicals" in the proper historical meaning of the word we mean, first of all, that we are not Roman Catholics. The primary protest of LUTHER and CALVIN was against the

sacerdotalism of Rome, i.e., its interposition of the church with its priesthood, as a means of grace, between the soul and God. As a result, their primary affirmation was on the immediacy of the soul's relation to God. An Evangelical is, therefore, first of all, one who holds that God saves men by acting immediately on their souls not through the medium of the church and its ordinances established by Him for that purpose. We are not to suppose, however, that a man is an Evangelical merely because he insists on the immediacy of the soul's relation to God. If that were the case Unitarians would have a perfectly good right to call themselves "Evangelicals." It is imperative to point out, therefore, that a man is not an Evangelical in the historical meaning of the word unless he also affirms that the soul is dependent on God and on God alone for salvation, that nothing that we are and nothing that we do enters into the ground of our salvation—that it is all of God, nothing of ourselves. The opposition of the Evangelicals to the sacerdotalism of Rome was not in the interest of making man his own saviour. Not at all. Rather it was in the interest of directing men's attention to JESUS CHRIST Himself as the one and only Saviour from the guilt and power of sin. The Evangelical is even more strongly opposed to any and all representations that makes man his own saviour than he is to the sacerdotalism of Rome. An Evangelical is ever one in whose soul there echoes a hearty "amen" when he reads PAUL'S words: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;

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Books of Religious Significance

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS by Henry Sloane Coffin. Charles Scribner's Sons. Pp. 164. \$1.50.

THE significance of this book lies in the fact that it represents an attempt on the part of an outstanding Presbyterian liberal "to put the meaning of the cross in terms intelligible and moving to the men of today."

In his attempt to evaluate the cross, Dr. Coffin pays little or no attention to the meaning that the writers of the New Testament ascribed to the death of Christ. What he seeks to do is to indicate the meaning that Christ Himself attached to his own death. In order to do this, he tells us that it is "obviously necessary to distinguish in the (gospel) narratives between material which can be traced back with some assurance to Jesus himself and the material which is due to the reflection of His followers subsequent to His death and resurrection" (p. 48). On the basis of such Gospel statements as he considers worthy of a measure of credence, Dr. Coffin holds that Christ went to His death deliberately, not however as one who offers himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God (Shorter Catechism Q. 25) but rather as one who had "become convinced that His death, even more than a continuation of His work of teaching and healing and friendship, would set up His Father's reign over His children and bring them abundant life" (p. 63). According to Dr. Coffin, Jesus went to His death "battling with doubts and tormented with moral perplexities" (p. 80) and with no clear understanding as to why the innocent should suffer with and for the guilty, but sustained by the faith that such was His Father's will and that His Father is good (p. 81). Dr. Coffin says "there is a sense in which we speak of Christ as our substitute" but only in the sense that it is He who has blazed the trail along which we must travel by our own efforts but with much less effort than was required on the part of Christ. (pp. 101-102). The present-day revolt from "various theories of the Atonement," we are told, "has been due to their un-Christian views of God" (p. 110). Dr. Coffin regrets that "certain widely used hymns still perpetuate the theory that God pardons sinners because Christ purchased that pardon by His obedience and suffering" (p. 118). "There is no cleansing blood which can wipe out the record that has been," we are flatly told (p. 119). The cross is spoken of as "the wisdom of God" but "not as a wisdom confined to the Christian Gospel" (p. 103). The cross of Christ is not needed as a means of procuring forgiveness because God graciously forgives all who turn to Him in penitence (pp. 118-121).

Dr. Coffin admits that the cross does not hold the central place in the preaching of those who accept the current liberal theology (pp. 3-4). Why should it if the cross of Christ has no meaning beyond that which he ascribes to it? Liberalism in the Presbyterian Church has no abler or more attractive exponent than Henry Sloane Coffin. His attempt to state the meaning of the cross has but served to make yet more clear, it seems to us, that liberals are the preachers of "another Gospel which is not another." The Christ of this book is not the Christ of evangelical Christians; and even if it were the cross whose meaning it seeks to set forth is not the cross that Paul had in mind when he wrote: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

S. G. C.

RELIGION IN A CHANGING WORLD by Abba Hillel Silver, D.D., Litt.D. Richard R. Smith, Inc. 1931. Pp. 204. \$2.00.

THE author of this book is a Jewish Rabbi of the liberal school. It has been written as an exposition and defense of liberal religion as over against materialism and atheism. It is safe to say that it is the best book of its kind that has appeared in many a day both as regards its content and its literary charm. Few, if any, will be able to read it without both profit and delight—unless it be those who hold to a materialistic conception of the universe. At the same time it is important not to overlook the fact that Dr. Silver writes from the viewpoint of those who hold that the citadels of orthodoxy—Hebrew as well as Christian—have crumbled under the battering rams of modern science. This viewpoint is assumed rather than argued but it dominates the book throughout. With all its excellence, therefore, the book must prove highly disappointing to all those who hold to the viewpoint set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We rejoice at what Dr. Silver says in behalf of the theistic world-view as well as what he says in criticism of the materialistic and atheistic propaganda of today, but we are very far from supposing that he defends all that is essential. It is well that men believe in God but what does that profit the sinner—and all men are such—unless they also believe in the historic yet ever-living Christ? Moreover it seems to us that it is only from the standpoint of orthodoxy that we can effectually maintain even those values in which Dr. Silver and his fellow-liberals are interested. In other words we believe that the real conflict today is not between liberalism and atheistic materialism but between natural-

ism (whether in a materialistic or a pantheistic sense doesn't make much difference) and a supernaturalism in which both the facts and the doctrines set forth in the Bible find a natural and a logical place. "The great battle of the twentieth century," to cite Francis L. Patton at the height of his intellectual powers, "is in its final issue a struggle between a Dogmatic Christianity on the one hand and an out-and-out naturalistic philosophy on the other." Orthodoxy is not bankrupt; rather it offers the one hope for saving mankind from what Dr. Silver calls "the Apollyon of materialism, agnosticism and atheism."

S. G. C.

THE HISTORY OF FUNDAMENTALISM. By Stewart G. Cole. Richard R. Smith, Inc. Pp. 360. \$2.50.

THIS is a history of Fundamentalism written by a modernist. Moreover it is a history not merely in the sense of a narrative of events but in the sense of an explanation of their causes. What Dr. Cole purports to do is to explain the rise and development of Fundamentalism despite the fact that the things for which it stands are antiquated. He practically takes for granted that no man who is abreast of modern scholarship can be a fundamentalist and so is precluded from adopting the simple (but true) explanation that the rise and spread of Fundamentalism is rooted in the perception on the part of intelligent Christians that genuine Christianity is threatened with extinction at the hands of Modernism and therefore of the need of maintaining its truthfulness and saving power in the face of those who attack it—whether within or without the church. Fundamentalists do not admit for one moment that the beliefs for which they stand are incapable of scholarly defense; rather they maintain that it is the things for which Modernism stands that are incapable of such defense. Be this as it may, it is obvious that Dr. Cole's history of Fundamentalism cannot possibly commend itself to any except those who look upon Fundamentalism as a more or less quixotic attempt on the part of ignorant men to maintain an antiquated life and world view. Doubtless individual fundamentalists have set forth and defended the essentials of Christian belief with various degrees of knowledge and effectiveness but to characterize them as a group as obscurantists motivated by personal ambition to exercise rule in church affairs (as Dr. Cole does in effect) is in our judgment little short of sheer misrepresentation.

This volume contains a great deal of in-

formation concerning Fundamentalism not readily obtainable elsewhere. This information, however, is bound up with so much misinformation that relatively few will be in a position to know what to believe and what to disbelieve. How little dependence can be placed in Dr. Cole's history of Fundamentalism in the Presbyterian Church, for instance, is indicated by the fact that he speaks of the doctrinal deliverances of the Assemblies of 1910, 1916 and 1923 as an attempt to state the essence of the Westminster Confession and heads the chapter that deals with the controversy that centered about these doctrinal deliverances as "Neo-Calvinism in the Presbyterian Church." Such misunderstanding is abysmal. Apparently he confuses the five points of the doctrinal deliverances with the so-called five points of Calvinism. As a matter of fact, of course, the five points of the doctrinal deliverances were not an attempt to

state the essence of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and, what is more, do not even touch on the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism. A man might accept each and every one of them without being a Calvinist. In fact the five points of the deliverances are held in common by all the great historic branches of the Christian Church—Catholic, Lutheran, Arminian and Reformed. To speak of them as expressive of the views of the strict Calvinists is about the last word in misunderstanding. In view of this basic misunderstanding, it is not surprising that nearly every page of his account of the situation in the Presbyterian Church will have to be revised before it can be accepted as anything like a reliable account thereof.

Strictly speaking this book is not so much a history of Fundamentalism as an attack on Fundamentalism clothed in historical form.

S. G. C.

Questions Relative to Christian Faith and Practice

Why Do "Liberals" Advocate Organic Union?

Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

Will you explain why the liberal party in all branches of the Christian Church are so much in favor of organic union of the Churches? Why are they placing so much emphasis on the outward, visible organization of the Church?

J. A. C.

WE can hardly qualify as a spokesman for the liberals. All we can do is to indicate why it is that while liberals as a class are more or less indiscriminate advocates of church union proposals conservatives as a class are disposed to be critical of such proposals. It seems to us that this difference of attitude is rooted in different conceptions of what Christianity is, more especially in different estimates of the value of Christian doctrines. Liberals as a rule tell us that Christianity is life not doctrines (and so regard doctrines as having at the most a secondary importance) whereas conservatives tell us that Christianity is a life based on a message concerning Christ—and so include doctrines among the things of primary importance. The result is that liberals are not disposed to allow doctrinal differences to stand in the way of church union while conservatives favor only such church union proposals as involve the maintenance of the doctrines they consider essential to Christianity. Of course there are liberals and liberals just as there are con-

servatives and conservatives, but, broadly speaking, it seems to us that the consideration advanced explains the fact that it is the liberals rather than the conservatives who are pushing the present-day proposals for church union. Conservatives are not blind to the importance of the outward, visible organization of the church but they hold that such organization obtained at the cost of purity of doctrinal witness is obtained at too great a cost. Dr. A. C. Headlam wrote wisely, it seems to us, when at the beginning of his Bampton Lectures on "The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion" (pp. 2-3) he said:

"There is wide agreement as to the evils of disunion. There is a great and increasing desire for union. . . . From time to time reunion is discussed as if it were an economic or business proposition. The waste of division and overlapping is dwelt upon, the loss of efficiency or the weakening of power. All such questions in relation to Christianity are secondary. For the fundamental point to remember about it is that it claims to be a revelation of the truth, and to teach the truth. However much worldly motives or human frailty have prevailed among the causes of Christian disunion, yet ultimately the causes of division have been differences as to what is true. . . . The evils of disunion are great; but a far greater evil would be to compromise with truth. It would be better that we should remain divided than leave problems unsolved. If we are to come together it must be by wider knowledge and deeper thought, not by evading the issue."

Is the Bible to Be Taken "Literally"?

Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

I greatly appreciate the kindness and the fairness of your reply to my inquiry in the December issue on the Old Testament canon. I know I did fail to particularize any of the "claims" of "extreme fundamentalists" which seem to be hindering rather than helping the young college seniors of whom I spoke.

One of these is the claim that the early chapters of Genesis must be taken with absolute literalness—that one cannot be a true Christian and accept the theory of evolution. Recently, as one might expect in any such youthful group, the question of the literal or allegorical acceptance of "the story of Jonah and the whale" came up, also of a literal Adam and Eve and a literal "tree of knowledge" in the garden of Eden. Personally I emphasize to the young senior who is nearest to me, my own belief that a true Christian's status depends upon his relations to Jesus Christ—that I think one may be truly His, and regard these puzzling parts of the Old Testament either as literal history or as inspired allegory. The question of the miraculous seems to trouble them especially and I do not hesitate to say that I find it easy and intellectually necessary to accept the miraculous in Christ while being in doubt as to many of the Old Testament miracles.

While I should very much like to have you say something about these points, I realize that I may have already had more than my fair share of space in your column of questions.

A. B.

IN our December issue we dealt in a broad way with our questioner's allegation that the "extreme claims of Fundamentalists" are an obstacle to Christian faith on the part of intelligent people inasmuch as nothing had been said to indicate the "extreme claims" our questioner had in mind.

In replying to this further question, we would say in the first place that we think she does right in emphasizing the fact that the question whether a person has the status of a Christian depends upon his or her relations to Jesus Christ. We are not to suppose that Christ saves only those who have an intellectual grasp of all the presuppositions and implications of Christian faith. Christ is able to save and does save all those who receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation even though their knowledge be very faulty and imperfect (see our October, 1930, issue, pp. 1-3). In the second place, we would say that we are not aware that "Fundamentalists" claim that all parts of the Bible must be taken with "absolute literalness." What they claim, as we understand their