

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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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

deaden all sense of guilt in their followers by removing direct responsibility for evil doing." Augustine argued the freedom of the will clearly enough to rout these ideas from Christian thought. "Sin is not of God's creating, although it is a consequence of the divine and dangerous give of free choice He bestowed upon His creatures."

Pelagius was a more important opponent than Manichaeans proved to be. Papini compares him with Rousseau, "that patron of all the rehabilitators of the innocence of our passions. Pelagius held that of his own will man can accomplish all things, and that he may attain to virtue and attain salvation without the help of Divine Grace. Christ did not come to redeem us from original sin and therefore from death itself, but merely to set us an example and to raise us to a higher life. Original sin does not exist. Man is born pure and virtuous as was Adam before he sinned. We can be saved through obedience to the moral law.

"What troubled and offended Augustine most in this romantic doctrine was the proclamation of the original innocence of man. He was well aware from painful experience that man even in childhood is pursued by every weakness. To hear Pelagius calmly proclaim that man is virtuous by nature, and that his own will is sufficient without any supernatural remedies to maintain him in a state of innocence seemed to Augustine, as it seemed to the Church, a piece of foolishness based upon complete ignorance of the human soul, and a jumble of anti-Christian errors. Augustine recognized man's part in the work of salvation, but he deemed it a small part and one ever subject to Divine Grace."

It was Augustine's great doctrine of predestination that finally set against him all the half-Christian elements in the Church and arrayed him against every man who belittles the sovereignty of God. He overcame them, and predestination entered the beliefs of the universal church. Papini writes cautiously on the immense theme. "For the present, in spite of heretical boastings, we continue to maintain that man is not God. What to man with his limitations appears injustice may be a higher justice in the eyes of God. The doctrine of predestination in which many see an offense against God's loving kindness, may be a further proof of His mercy. If some, isolating a single principle without thought to the rest, and forcing it to the point of absurdity, have fallen into error, the fault is not Augustine's. Everything that is sublime is dangerous." Predestination has been accepted because it is Scriptural, logical and inevitable.

It is not possible to praise all of Papini's book. After writing fully of Augustine's propensities as a youth, one cannot help smiling at this touch: "Only eunuchs, the cold-blooded, Pharisees and Quakers will find them incredible." Certainly this is unexpected light upon the Society of Friends. Equally far-fetched are Papini's judgments upon John Calvin and Martin Luther. But his strictures are so manifestly caused by lack of information that

the writer of this review does not take them seriously, and probably few other readers will.

We have more than a hint from Papini that Augustine's relationships to Rome were strained. "By birth he did not belong to the class of presbyters and monks. In the eyes of the clergy two circumstances of his past, connected with Manichaeism and literature, still told against him. It was as if a poet and a freemason (anti-Church in Italy) should suddenly become converted and succeed in entering the priesthood. The Church would take him to her heart with rejoicing and on occasion make good use of his genius and erudition, but he would ever remain an object of suspicion to sheep grown old in the fold, as one from whom a fresh surprise might be expected. Augustine remained ever, if not precisely an irregular soldier, at least one who often fought alone, with his own weapons and regardless of ancient rules, and although he always respected the supreme commander who resides at Rome and was prompt to obey him in all things, yet he was never entered on the lists for promotion." Was Augustine another John Henry Newman? They must have been similar spirits, even if Newman at last was made a Cardinal.

"Saint Augustine" is concluded with the following paragraph:

"At once the eagle and the diver, Augustine lifts us up among the constellations and guides us in the immensities of abysmal space. By his intellect we are led up to loopholes which afford glimpses of impenetrable mysteries, and his loving and fiery heart still, after so many centuries, finds the way to the heart of man and causes it to beat in unison with his own. We recognize in him not only the architect of theology and the giant in philosophy but also the brother who, like ourselves, has suffered and sinned, the saint who has scaled the walls of the city of eternal joy and seated himself at the feet of the God to Whom he is reunited for all eternity."

A note on pronunciation, *not from Papini*: "St Augustine is in Florida; Saint Augustine is in Heaven."

FRANK H. STEVENSON.

WHAT IS LUTHERANISM? A Symposium in Interpretation. Edited by Vergilius Ferm. The Macmillan Company. 1930. 300 pp. \$2.50.

THIS is a useful and informing book that claims to give a representative cross section of the thought that obtains among American Lutherans. The particular occasion of its appearance is the fact that this is the four hundredth anniversary of the adoption of the Augsburg Confession, the Mother Symbol of Protestantism, which more than any other is the common bond of union among Lutherans throughout the world. It will be surprising to many non-Lutherans to learn how sharply divided the Lutherans are among themselves, despite the much that they hold in common. The foreword advises us that this is the first time in the history of the denomination in America that Lutherans of different schools of

opinion have met within the covers of the same volume to interpret the broad features of Lutheranism as a whole. It will no doubt serve to give the Lutherans themselves a better understanding of themselves as well as give readers in general a better appreciation of the genius and character of Lutheranism. It would have added to the representative character of the volume if a Lutheran of the "Fundamentalist" type had been asked to contribute a chapter, as the volume itself makes frequent reference to the fact that there are many Lutherans of this type. No doubt most of its contributors belong to the "Fundamentalist" rather than the "Modernist" type—the Lutheran Church is doubtless the most orthodox of the leading American denominations—but the absence of a chapter by a "Fundamentalist" of the type that many of the other contributors criticize detracts from the claim of the book to present a cross section of the thought that obtains among American Lutherans.

This book is a product of twelve different men. Each was asked to write with the following questions before him: "What is Lutheranism: What is its essential character? In the light of its unique character what is its unique contribution to modern Christianity or to Protestantism? What is the relation of Lutheranism to the historic confessions, especially to its own confessions and symbols? How far are these normative? Are the declarations set down in the post-Luther period an essential part of Lutheranism? Is its theology fixed? What is the attitude of essential Lutheranism to such problems as: modern biblical scholarship with the implications involved in textual criticism, historic method; such contemporary issues as modernism, fundamentalism, naturalism, humanism, evolutionism, etc.? What is meant by the 'Word of God'? What is Lutheranism's very *raison d'être* as a distinct communion in the twentieth century? Has it fulfilled its mission as a distinct body?"

It is not to be supposed that each writer has expressed himself on all these matters, or that they manifest equal ability or equal loyalty to fundamental Christianity in connection with such of them as they discuss. The least satisfactory of all is the foreword and conclusion by the editor of the book, Dr. Ferm, who by the way is the professor of Philosophy in Wooster College—a fact that is not fitted to add to the reputation of that institution as a sound Presbyterian institution. The contributions by Drs. Evjen and Wendell are of doubtful value while that by Dr. Weigle (who is no longer a Lutheran) is slight and not very significant. Those, however, by Drs. Offerman, Wentz, Reu, Hefelbower, Scherer, Haas, Dau and Rohne while not of equal value are all of high value and breathe the spirit of genuine Lutheran culture and scholarship. It is regrettable, it seems to us, that such worthy articles should have been published under the auspices of one occupying not merely so un-Lutheran but so un-Christian a position as that of Dr. Ferm. Dr. Ferm has done what he could (unwittingly of course) to destroy the value of

this volume but despite his efforts it has great worth and is to be commended to the attention of all those interested in learning about contemporary Lutheranism. As was to be expected there is considerable criticism not only of Romanism but also of Calvinism and Fundamentalism (taken in its narrow rather than its broad meaning).

Dr. Ferm's contribution reveals the influence of Professor Macintosh of Yale and, in seeking to indicate the essence of Lutheranism, adopts the thoroughly vicious principle that Professor

Macintosh had previously adopted in seeking to indicate the essence of Christianity, viz., that "the essence of a thing is that which it is necessary to retain, after sloughing off adiabaphora, to realize its valid purpose"—a principle that ignores the fact that the question, "What is Lutheranism?" is primarily an historical question and that enables one to substitute his own conception of what Lutheranism ought to be for what Lutheranism actually is. The result is that Dr. Ferm virtually maintains that essential Lutheranism is what Luther would teach

if he were living today; which being interpreted means that essential Lutheranism is what Dr. Ferm thinks Luther would teach if he were living today. Those interested in a thorough refutation of this method of determining the essence of any historical entity, more especially of Christianity, are referred to Dr. B. B. Warfield's discussion of Professor Macintosh's use of it in the article "The Essence of Christianity and the Cross of Christ" in the recent volume *Christology and Criticism* (Oxford University Press, \$3.00). S. G. C.

Questions Relative to Christian Faith and Practice

Ordination Vows and the Bible

Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

What in your opinion is the meaning of that part of the ordination vow of ministers and elders in which they affirm that they "believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?" If I say that I so believe, do I merely say that I regard the Bible as infallible only in as far as it is a rule of faith and practice or do I also say that I regard it infallible in all its statements? I am told that the ordination vow of Presbyterian ministers and elders does not commit them to the belief that "the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error." Do you take that view of the matter?

Very sincerely yours,

L. R. C.

IT seems to us quite inadequate to say that the ordination vow of a Presbyterian minister or elder necessitates belief in the Bible as "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." At their ordination ministers and elders affirm a great deal more than that about the Bible. They affirm that they believe the Bible "to be the Word of God." Every candidate for ordination is required, first of all, to affirm that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. Having done that he is required to go on and affirm that said Scriptures are also, or, therefore, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. It is absurd to say that the Bible is the "Word of God," and therefore infallible only as a rule of faith and practice—if it is the "Word of God" we may be sure it is altogether trustworthy—but it is quite fitting to say that the Bible is the "Word of God" and therefore "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." It seems altogether clear to us that every candidate for ordination who honestly and intelligently answers the question put to him in the affirmative—as he

must before he can be ordained—affirms in effect that he believes the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be trustworthy in all their statements.

Not only is it true that a fair exegesis of the double statement (1) that the Bible is the Word of God and (2) that it is the only infallible rule of faith and practice preclude the minimizing interpretation we have rejected; it is also true that the history of this interpretation makes clear that it does not express the view held by the framers of the Westminster Standards. It had its origin among the Socinians. Later it was adopted by the Dutch Arminians and Rationalists. And it was not until 1690, nearly half a century after the completion of the Westminster Confession, that it was introduced into England by the translation of Le Clerc's *Letters*. Generally speaking it has been adopted by those who have been content with maintaining the least that must be defended if Christianity is to exist rather than by those interested in maintaining the whole truth of God as it has been made known. The view that the ordination vow merely binds one to the acceptance of the Bible as trustworthy in as far as it is a rule of faith and practice is, therefore, to be rejected on historical as well as exegetical grounds.

It is important to note in this connection that the doctrine of Scripture taught in the Confession of Faith lends no support to the supposition that the ordination vow merely binds the candidate to belief in the Bible as a rule of faith and practice. Rather it accords with the conviction that the Bible is free of error and trustworthy in all its statements. In the Confession of Faith the Scriptures identified with "all the books of the Old and New Testaments" are spoken of as "the Word of God written" and as "given by inspiration of God" (Chap. I, sec. 2), as of "authority in the Church of God" (sec. 3), as having "God (who is truth itself)" for their "author" (sec. 4), as of "infallible truth and divine authority" (sec. 5), as "being immediately inspired by God" so that "in all controversies of religion

the Church is finally to appeal to them" (sec. 8), as so trustworthy that a "Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in them" (Chap. 14, sec. 2)—not to mention other references. If the ordination vow is to be interpreted in the light of the doctrine of Scripture taught in the Confession of Faith, as seems reasonable, it is clear that it commits the candidate to belief in the full trustworthiness of the Bible.

"The Lost Books of the Bible"

Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

I have a copy of a book called "The Lost Books of the Bible." According to the statement on its title page it contains "all the gospels, epistles and other pieces now extant attributed to Jesus Christ, his apostles and their companions not included by its compilers in the authorized New Testament; and the recently discovered Syriac Mss. of Pilate's letters to Tiberius, etc., translated from the original tongues." The book is arranged in chapters and verses like the King James version and has the appearance and reads very much like the regular Bible. Is it really true that this book contains writings that ought to belong to our Bible so that we have an incomplete Bible without them. . . . I would like very much to know about this. . . .

Very truly yours,

C. A. B.

A GREAT deal of publicity was given to the book described above some two or three years ago. Full page advertisements appeared in daily papers as well as in magazines of national circulation commending it to the attention of their readers in language that gave the impression that numerous lost books of the Bible had been discovered; with the result no doubt that many copies were sold. And inasmuch as these advertisements were accepted by papers and magazines that would not knowingly accept advertisements for fake stocks, for instance, it is probably true that a considerable