

# CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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## The Paramount Duty of the Christian Church

THE Church of JESUS CHRIST has many tasks. One, however, takes precedence of all others. This task was assigned it by the supreme Head of the Church when He spoke the words recorded in the eighth verse of the first chapter of the Book of Acts: "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." JESUS was "taken up" immediately after the utterance of these words: they may, therefore, be said to express the final instructions which our LORD gave His Church in person, later instructions having been given through the instrumentality of the apostles.

The paramount duty of the Christian Church, then, is to bear witness, to make known a message—a message that has to do primarily with the death and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST as PAUL tells us in the fifteenth chapter of his first letter to the CORINTHIANS: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received; how that CHRIST died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." The New Testament, particularly the Book of Acts, makes perfectly clear that the campaign launched by the apostles, immediately after Pentecost, was a campaign of witnessing. By means of the "foolishness of preaching" they began the task not only of bringing the thoughts and activities of individual men and women into captivity to JESUS CHRIST but of transforming the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of their LORD.

It is not strange that the then-living

wise men of this world should have judged it foolish that the apostles thought it possible to achieve any significant results by such means. It is somewhat surprising, however, in view of the signal success that attended the efforts of the apostles—as well as the efforts of their imitators in later centuries—that there should be so many today, even within the Christian Church itself, to whom the apostolic method should seem so foolish that they have largely discarded it in the interest of other methods. For the "foolishness of preaching" many professed followers of CHRIST—despite the clear instructions He left behind Him—are putting their main confidence in organizations, programs, mass movements, and the like, to such an extent that it is more proper to speak of them as "men with a program" than it is to speak of them as "men with a message." It is true that plans and

programs and organizations have an important part to play in the great task of Christianizing the world; but in view of the method commended by CHRIST Himself and followed by all His apostles, it should be as clear as day that our chief emphasis should be on the purity and sincerity of our testimony to the truth as it is in JESUS CHRIST. Christianity is indeed a life but it is a life based on a message. In as far, therefore, as the Christian worker denies or ignores or falsifies that message his labor is in vain in the LORD. The primary note of a true Church, as our Protestant fathers ever insisted, is that therein the Gospel is honored and proclaimed.

The campaign of witnessing carried on by the apostles included two elements—both of which were kept constantly in the foreground. In the first place they made known what had taken place, the great historic events that lay at the basis of the Christian religion. In the second place they expounded the meaning or significance of those facts or events. In a word facts and doctrines were inextricably bound together in their testimony.

The apostles were not mere expounders and defenders of certain religious principles which they had learned from the great Nazarene; neither were they mere ethical teachers, interested primarily in persuading men to live as JESUS lived. Certainly they were religious and ethical teachers who recognized JESUS as their final authority; but they were concerned, first of all, to tell men of certain events that had happened, together with their meaning or significance. Here PAUL'S

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statement is classic: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received that CHRIST died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

The apostles testified to the facts (in the sense of events that had happened) that lay at the basis of their message—facts apart from which their message would not have been a gospel or good news. They bore witness to the fact that JESUS had died and that He had risen. But that is not all they did. They also pointed out the meaning of those facts—that JESUS had died "for our sins," and that He had been raised "for our justification." They did not suppose that the facts alone—what are often called the "bare" or "naked" facts—gave them a gospel of redemption. It is true that apart from such facts as the death and resurrection of JESUS there would be no gospel for a sin-cursed world; but it is also true that there would be no such gospel to proclaim if the meaning and significance of those events were not known. Only as it is known that the death and resurrection of JESUS was the death and resurrection of the GOD-MAN, and that He was "delivered for our trespasses and raised for our justification," do they beget within us a living hope "unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away."

The apostles being judge, the gospel is constituted, not by the facts apart from the doctrines, still less by the doctrines apart from the facts, but by the facts and the doctrines so bound together that in effect they coalesce. "The gospel is no mere proclamation of 'eternal truths,' but the discovery of a saving purpose of God for mankind, executed in time. But the doctrines are the interpretation of the facts. The facts do not stand blank and dumb before us, but have a voice given them and a meaning put into them. They are accompanied by living speech, which make their meaning clear. When JOHN declares that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh and is the SON of GOD, he is stating a fact, but he is none the less enunciating a doctrine. When PAUL affirms, 'CHRIST died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' he is proclaiming a fact, but he is at the same time giving an interpretation of it."

The paramount duty of the Christian Church being what has been indicated, it is obvious that it can function adequately only as it bears clear and positive testimony to the facts and doctrines of Christianity. Say what we will, the fundamental things about Christianity is that it is a revelation of truth—in deed and in word. From a Christian viewpoint anything gotten at the cost of this truth is gotten at too great a price. Be the circumstances what they may, there must be no surrender of truth or even any minimizing of its value and importance. Let a Christian Church cease to bear witness to the truth as it is in JESUS, or even ascribe a secondary place to such truth, and it has abandoned the main reason for its existence. No matter what its members or its wealth or its other values, unless it be a "pillar and ground of the truth" it is as the Church in Sardis of which it was written: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and thou art dead." The truth must be proclaimed in love; but love itself will permit no paltering with the truth. Truth, particularly the truth as it is in JESUS, is the supreme need of man and he who withholds or even adulterates that truth is man's worst enemy.

If the Church is functioning badly today—as can hardly be denied—it is largely because of the evil of its divided testimony. Even within the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches what one Minister commends as saving truth another Minister denounces as fatal error. As a result the Church's testimony is discordant and contradictory and many are the souls which are confused and distracted. "If the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?" In as far as such divided testimony exists within the Presbyterian Church it finds its explanation, for the most part at least, in the fact that men have been admitted into its ministry, or have persisted in remaining in its ministry, in defiance of its constitutional requirements. But be the explanation what it may in the various churches, a crying need of the hour is the creation of a situation wherein the Church, as far as is humanly possible, will bear undivided and consentient testimony to the gospel of the grace of God in its purity. "The trouble is within, not without."

## Preaching in the Language of Today

IT is a mere truism to say that a preacher, if he is to attract and hold the attention of his hearers, must express himself in terms of current thought. Every age has its own language, and, broadly speaking, can speak and understand no other. If, therefore, the preacher of today expresses himself in the language of yesterday it will be as though he spoke in an unknown tongue—as far as most of the men of this generation are concerned. The "Fundamentalists" believe this as fully as do the "Modernists."

But while the preacher should express the gospel in the language of his age, he should never overlook the fact that before he can express the gospel in any language he must first have a gospel to express. Expression is important but it is always secondary, never primary. The thing of primary importance is always *what* we express rather than our manner of expressing it. Expression may change and does change from age to age; but the gospel—we mean the Christian gospel—remains essentially the same as age succeeds age.

We do not pretend to like many so-called modern expressions of Christianity. This is due, however, to the fact that we object to expressions of modern thought in terms of Christianity rather than to the fact that we object to expressions of Christianity in terms of modern thought. Their main concern is with "modern thought"—by which is meant the science and philosophy and scholarship of the day—and what they really seek to do is to make it intelligible and acceptable to those more or less familiar with the terms of Christianity. The result is that only as much of Christianity is given expression as can be brought into harmony with the science and philosophy and scholarship of the present age. It makes all the difference in the world, however, whether it is modern thought that gets expressed in terms of Christianity or whether it is Christianity that gets expressed in terms of modern thought. If the sum of the conclusions commended to us by "modern thought" could be identified with the truth and nothing but the truth, a whole-hearted

acceptance of them would not militate against our holding fast at the same time to a full-orbed Christianity. But inasmuch as it is certain that the sum of these conclusions is not a fixed but a constantly changing total, it is obvious that we can force Christianity into harmony with the science and philosophy and scholarship of today only at the cost of making certain that it will be out of harmony with the science and philosophy and scholarship of tomorrow. The difference here has to do not so much with a question of terms as with a question of standards. For those we criticize, the standard is "modern thought;" for us the standard is Christianity. In our judgment, it is Christianity rather than "modern thought" that is the stable element. It is our firm conviction that Christianity has a definite content of its own, given it once and for all by CHRIST and His apostles, and that while this content must needs find expression in terms intelligible to each age, yet in seeking to express it in modern terms we should ever be on our guard lest change of form also involve change of content. As regards content the gospel is for all time.

It is one thing, then, to say that we should express Christianity in the language of the times; it is another and quite different thing to say that our beliefs should be re-fashioned so as to bring them into harmony with those phases of belief, or unbelief, that may be most characteristic of the times. We may approve the first statement while wholly disapproving the second. Action in accord with the first statement will further the interests of Christianity, but action in accord with the second will mean a pared-down Christianity if not an extinct Christianity. Nothing is more characteristic of much "modern thought" than its aversion to the supernatural in the form of the miraculous unless it be its aversion to a blood-bought salvation. As a result there are "modern expressions of Christianity" that make no mention of the miraculous or the Cross as an atoning sacrifice, except to reject or even to scoff at them. And yet apart from these things, there is no Christianity, as Christianity is expressed in the New Testament and as it finds expressions in the historic creeds of the Christian Church. It is a high tribute to the significance of Chris-

tianity that men should retain the name even after they have given up all that makes it what it is. But those Christian men and women who are concerned not with words but with realities will derive no comfort from such modern expressions of Christianity because what they really express is something other than the gospel of the grace of God in which their souls have found rest and encouragement. Let us seek to express Christianity in the language of the twentieth century, but let us see to it that the thing we call Christianity is what CHRIST and His apostles would instantly recognize as such, even if called by another name, not a somewhat that lacks all that is distinctive of the religion they established in the world. How we preach is important, but *what* we preach is always the thing of primary importance.

### The Joy of Salvation

THE New Testament makes clear that joy was one of the outstanding emotions of the early Christians. This joy had its source in their faith in JESUS CHRIST as one who had obtained for them the great boon of sins forgiven and of restoration to the favor of God. If that joy is no longer so generally characteristic of Christians, it is because they have no adequate appreciation of the greatness of their indebtedness to CHRIST as one who averted from them evils that could not otherwise be averted and secured for them blessings that could not otherwise be secured. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" was at once the source of their joy and the inspiration of their self-sacrificing devotion.

A pessimistic Christian is a contradiction in terms. And yet apart from Christianity, with its faith in a FATHER-GOD and a SAVIOUR-KING, all informed thinking would be pessimistic. It is not too much to say that apart from Christianity it is only ignorance or thoughtlessness that keeps men everywhere from being pessimists. Christianity does not shut its eyes to the evils of life. It sees the evil of life so clearly that even the literature of pessimism cannot surpass the pathos of its lament. And yet it is fundamentally optimistic in its outlook on life—because of its faith in its SAVIOUR-GOD.

It is easy today to fall into a pessimistic mood. To multitudes the future looks dark and foreboding. The thoughts of many have been so unsettled by the alleged findings of Biblical criticism and science that they are living without fixed convictions, and so without any fixed purpose. Moreover business and political conditions are such as to make many fearful of the future. If we are to maintain our poise in these trying days, if we are to face the future confident that the best is yet to be, we must have faith in God as revealed in JESUS CHRIST. Apart from that faith we might well despair alike of our future as individuals and of the future of the race. Firm in that faith, however, we need despair of neither. Rather we cannot but cherish large hopes and expectations for both.

### A Notable Series of Bible Expositions

IT is with great pleasure that the Editors of CHRISTIANITY TODAY announce the beginning, in this issue, of a series of remarkable Bible expositions by the Rev. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D., Litt.D., Professor of New Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary. Those who are familiar with Dr. MACHEN's writings know that his great scholarship never obscures the clarity or simplicity of his style. Few men can so open up the great deeps of God's Word. Out of years of rich study Dr. MACHEN will contribute monthly a popular exposition of a portion of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, the great Epistle of the Protestant Reformation. We believe that those who follow his unique treatment will find Galatians opened to them as perhaps never before. The Editors regard the beginning of these notable expositions as a distinct event in the history of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, and sincerely hope that through this ministry all may be drawn closer to the LORD JESUS CHRIST. The series will in all probability continue for most, if not all, of the present year. Do you not have friends who you believe would be spiritually helped by these meditations? If you do, and wish to subscribe for them, or to induce them to subscribe, we will gladly enter their subscriptions beginning with this issue. Dr. MACHEN's first exposition will be found on page nine.