

# CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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## The Revolt Against Christian Moral Standards

PRESENT-DAY repudiation of Christianity is not confined to a rejection of its creed. It includes a rejection of its ethics, of the mode of behaviour it commends. That was not the case fifty years ago. Our fathers, not to mention our grandfathers, did not have to defend their ethical conceptions. Practically everybody admitted their superiority. In those days, even those who rejected the doctrines of Christianity vied with those who accepted them in extolling the superiority of its ethics. The oft-quoted words of JOHN STUART MILL (written in 1873) express what was then, and for a considerable number of years thereafter, the prevailing view even among those most pronounced in their rejection of the supernaturalism of the Christian creed:

"The most valuable part of the effect on character which Christianity has produced by holding up in a divine person a standard of excellence and a model of imitation is available even to the absolute unbeliever, and can never more be lost to humanity. . . Whatever else may be taken from us by rational criticism, CHRIST is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal preaching. . . Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this Man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor even yet would it be

easy, even for the unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to so live that CHRIST would approve our life."

It is quite otherwise now, however. Today there is no part of Christianity more openly assailed or more expressly repudiated than its ethics. In apparently ever-widening circles the Christian type of man is no longer regarded as the highest type of man. NIETZSCHE was the first outstanding person to openly attack the Christian ideal of conduct. Moreover he counted it as one of his chief claims to greatness that he had "unmasked Christian morality," which he declared to be "the most malignant form of all false-

hood, the actual CIRCE of humanity, that which has corrupted mankind." H. G. WELLS, BERNARD SHAW, BERTRAND RUSSELL, BENJAMIN B. LINDSEY, WALTER LIPPMANN—not to mention others, including even preachers and theological professors—may as a rule express themselves more mildly but it must be obvious to all informed persons that they repudiate Christianity as a way of life as truly as they repudiate it as a system of thought and belief. The decade that has passed since FIGGIS wrote the following words has but served to add to their significance:

"On all hands we hear preached a revival of Paganism. Christianity as an ethical ideal is contemned. Formerly Christians were charged with hypocrisy because they fell short of their ideal. The charge was false, although the fact was true. We do fail, fail miserably, to come up to our ideal, and always shall, so long as it remains an ideal. Nowadays the Christian is attacked not because he fails, but in as far as he succeeds. Our LORD Himself is scorned, not because He is not the revealer of love, but because He is. Hardly a single specifically Christian value is left as it was."

How shall we explain this change of attitude towards the Christian ideal of character and conduct? What lies at the root of the fact that the present-day attacks on Christianity are aimed at the morals it inculcates as well as the doc-

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trines it proclaims? No doubt a number of considerations must be taken into account to obtain anything like a complete explanation, but we are confident that L. S. THORNTON stressed that which is most central when he wrote:

"The repudiation of Christian moral standards is a direct and entirely natural result of the earlier rejection of Christian dogma. No doubt far-seeing theologians foresaw all along that this would be the case; but (at first) those who repudiated the Christian creed did not themselves see it. It is indeed safe to say that they had no suspicion of it. There are still, perhaps, a few pedants who declare that the essence of Christianity is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and that one can be a good Christian by practising the imitation of CHRIST, without taking any notice of the traditional dogma. Such people are living in a fool's paradise; for all around them at this moment are living proofs of the fallacy of their opinions. If there is one thing that can be said with absolute certainty about the whole movement with which we are dealing, it is that the revolt against the Christian ethic is due to a previous repudiation of the doctrines upon which it is founded. The two things, belief and conduct, are indissolubly bound together; they are parts of one whole, as the roots and the fruit are both alike parts of one tree, organically connected."

Much as we may deplore it, there is no occasion for being surprised over the fact than an outstanding characteristic of "modern" thought is its repudiation of the ethics of Christianity. That is only what was to be expected as a consequence of its previous repudiation of the doctrines of Christianity. It is true that men of the last generation like J. S. MILL, THOMAS HUXLEY and MATTHEW ARNOLD did not regard themselves as enemies of Christian morals because they rejected the supernaturalism of the Christian creed. But that was only because they did not think themselves through, because they attempted the impossible task of remaining up a tree after they had sawed off the limb upon which they had been sitting. NIETZSCHE reasoned more soundly. He perceived that the Christian ethic was

organically connected with the Christian creed; and that having rejected the creed there was no halting place short of a rejection also of the ethic. Hence he waged war not only against the Christian creed but against its ideal of life and conduct. In our judgment, the logic is all on the side of NIETZSCHE. Doubtless there will continue to be those like GEORGE ELIOT who commended the Christian ideal of life though she wholly rejected the supernaturalism of its creed; but we may be sure that the number of such will become fewer and fewer. We anticipate no general return to the half-way position of so many of the generation immediately preceding us. Rather we expect that it will become more and more true that those who reject the creed of Christianity will also reject its standards of moral conduct.

Neither the reasonableness nor the practicability of the mode of life that Christianity commends can be vindicated apart from that measure of supernaturalism that it confesses. Whether we direct our attention to the beginning, the course, or the goal of Christianity as a way of life, we come face to face with the supernatural. The Christian life originates in regeneration by the Holy Spirit. When CHRIST said, "Ye must be born again," He enunciated a truth as fundamental to Christianity as a way of life as it is to Christianity as a system of thought. Or do we consider the course of the Christian life, the path along which the Christian walks? Then, we discover that the directions for that life (its principles and precepts) are of supernatural origin, that the main motives and incentives advanced to lead men to live a Christian life are drawn from the supernatural, and even that the power, that enables men to live Christian lives comes from a supernatural source. Apart from the supernatural it may be possible to show that the Christian ideal of conduct is superior to all known ideals, and that this would be a much more desirable world in which to live if it was more generally embraced and practiced; but it is not possible to show that it is reasonable and practicable simply because it requires the supernatural to make it operative. It is because, and only because, we can do all things through Him that strengtheneth us that it is possible to translate the Christian ideal into terms of life and character. Or do we consider the

goal of the Christian life? Then, we find that while it is a mistake to suppose that the Christian way of life is exclusively, or even predominantly, a world-shunning and contemplative life, yet that its center of gravity is in another world. The supernatural alone provides its proper setting. If this life is all, or even if the Christian life does not culminate in an immortality of blessedness with GOD, it is idle to attempt to vindicate its reasonableness. PAUL said not without warrant: "If in this life only we have hope in CHRIST, we are of all men most miserable."

If we are right—as we are confident that we are—that the wide-spread repudiation of Christian moral standards, evidence of which abounds on every side, is rooted in a previous repudiation of the distinctive doctrines of Christianity (doctrines which are but interpretations of great supernatural facts), it is obvious that the only way in which Christian moral standards can be restored to honor and acceptance by those who have repudiated them is to persuade them that the doctrines of Christianity are true. If that is not capable of being done, it is futile to suppose that the civilization of the future will be dominated by Christian ideals of character and conduct. We believe that it can be done, and hence that one of the crying needs of the hour is an apologetic that will make clear that the Christian view of things is the only valid view. In the meanwhile, let no one suppose that our zeal for doctrines is a zeal for a sterile intellectualism. Far from it. We can be intelligently indifferent to Christian doctrines only as we are indifferent to Christian standards of conduct. All around us, for those who have eyes to see, there exists living proof of the fact that those who attack the doctrines of Christianity are at the same time attacking its ethics. Nothing is more certain than that in the long run Christian doctrines and Christian morality stand or fall together. We might as well expect a house to stand after its foundation has been undermined or a tree to continue to bear fruit after its roots have been cut as expect men to try to act like Christians when they do not think like Christians. The cry, "Christianity is life not doctrine" is folly and unbelief. In the interest of the Christian life itself the doctrines must be maintained and propagated.

## What and Where is Christ Today?

SOME nineteen hundred years have come and gone since the resurrection and ascension of our LORD. Where is He today? What is He like today?

In answer to the question, What is CHRIST today? instructed Christians reply that in all essentials He is just what He was nineteen hundred years ago. In the Gospels we learn not only of what He once was but of what He now is. It is this that divides between the Gospels and all other biographies. Other biographies tell us of what men once were but not of what they are like today. Of CHRIST alone can it be truly said that He is "the same yesterday, today and forever." What CHRIST was, that He continueth to be. Through every change and chance of time His character, thoughts, feelings, sympathies, powers, activities remain essentially the same. Let us never forget the answer which the Shorter Catechism gives to the question, "Who is the redeemer of God's elect?" to wit: "The only redeemer of God's elect is the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who, being the eternal Son of GOD, became man, and so was, and *continueth to be* GOD and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever."

Christian faith, however, not only asks, What is CHRIST? it also asks, Where is CHRIST? Obviously, we cannot say that where CHRIST was nineteen hundred years ago, there He is today. In that case we would but need to travel to Palestine to find Him. The resurrection was followed by the ascension. Where did CHRIST go when He ascended? The most compendious statement which the New Testament affords as to His present whereabouts is that He is at the right hand of God. The exact meaning of this phrase in as far as it indicates His whereabouts, not merely the dignity and honor that is now His, is not easy to determine. It is the truth but not the whole truth to say that God being an omnipresent Spirit this phrase implies the omnipresence of CHRIST. We must not forget that He ascended with His human body, and that it belongs to the very idea of body, even a glorified body, that it occupies a definite point in space. The thought of the ubiquity of CHRIST's body seems to us an impossible conception and yet the notion in whose interest this thought has been advanced, however we

may explain it, is profoundly true and one that is repeatedly taught in the New Testament and constantly confirmed by the experiences of God's people, viz., the continued presence of CHRIST with His people. When CHRIST ascended—an event that is not to be interpreted astronomically—He did not forsake the earth and migrate to a distant heaven. He ceased to manifest Himself as He had done during the forty days, but He continued His presence; neither has He withdrawn it at any time during the centuries that have succeeded. To PAUL alone, as far as we know, has He manifested Himself since that event; and yet CHRIST is still in the midst of His people, and still as really as in Apostolic days does the great promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," find confirmation in the experience of the redeemed.

The very nerve of the Christian religion, the secret of its continuance in this evil world of ours, lies not only in the fact that CHRIST today is essentially what He was in the days of His flesh but equally in the fact that He is constantly accessible to His people—one to whom they can pray, one from whom they can derive strength and comfort, one in whom they can ground their confidence whether for this life or the life to come. What and where is CHRIST as far as we are concerned? "Is CHRIST for us an attractive and impressive figure who lived in Palestine two thousand years ago, and left an ideal of religious and moral conduct, which we intend, if possible, to follow? Or is He an abiding Presence in our hearts and wills, moulding our purposes and controlling our impulses? Is He a mere example or an inspiring influence? Is He for us a dead man, or the living God?"

## In Retrospect and Prospect

THIS is the twelfth issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. A year has elapsed since this "venture of faith" was launched in the belief that it would meet an imperative need in the life of the Church. Events, thus far, have justified the faith of its founders. Numerous letters from all parts of the United States and from many foreign lands testify to the large place the paper already occupies in the lives and hopes of God's people. We approach our second year in the confidence that in an increasing measure the great Head of the Church will be pleased to use

it for the maintenance and furtherance of His cause.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY is operated by The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company—a company incorporated under the laws of Pennsylvania under conditions that preclude its owners from receiving any financial profit therefrom. The price of the paper was fixed at \$1.00 per year to put it within reach of all. This was done, moreover, in the knowledge that such a price would cover but a portion of the cost of operation until the paper had a larger subscription list than it could hope to have during its first two or three years; and so with the knowledge that during its early years it would, in all likelihood, be dependent for its continuance on the special contributions of those who share its aims and purposes. CHRISTIANITY TODAY closes its first year without financial indebtedness. Some of those who have contributed most generously to its support, however, have been so affected by the business depression that they will not be able to repeat their gifts. This means that we must look to others to do what these are unable to do. We are going forward in the confidence that the needed support will not be lacking. Fuller information will gladly be given any who may be thinking of including the paper in their benevolence budget.

We solicit the aid and cooperation of our subscribers in extending the influence of the paper. Such success as we have had is largely due to what the rank and file of our subscribers have done for us; and only as this service is continued can we hope for any large measure of success. This is particularly true in view of the fact that we are not in a position to employ subscription agents. The situation being what it is the future of the paper depends even more on what the rank and file of our subscribers do than upon the special gifts of a relatively few individuals, indispensable as these latter are. It will save us much labor and expense if those whose subscriptions expire with this issue will renew without waiting for a special notice through the mails. Along with your renewal please send us the names of those you think would be interested in CHRISTIANITY TODAY or still better of those you have induced to subscribe. Sample copies and subscription blanks will be furnished on request.

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