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CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Being a Christian Today

THE situation confronting Christians at the present time has often been compared, not without warrant, with the situation that existed at the beginning of the Christian era.

During the first three centuries Christians had to make their way against a Pagan culture and civilization. In that day, as later, there were those who counselled compromise with the thought and life of the day; others who, despairing of producing a Christian culture and civilization sought refuge in asceticism. Christians in general, however, realizing that what CHRIST demands of his followers is separation, not from the world but only from what is evil in the world, challenged the right of Paganism to continue to dominate the culture and civilization of mankind. Humanly speaking, their efforts must have seemed more foolhardy than DAVID's challenge to GOLIATH. None the less Christians won that conflict with the result that civilization, as we know it, with all its defects, rests upon and is permeated by Christian principles.

Ever since Christianity's initial triumph over Paganism there have been those who have regretted its victory; but until comparatively recent times they have been too few in number, in Christendom at least, to seriously challenge its rights to continue to reap the fruits of that victory. About 150 years ago however the "Empirico-Scientific" life and world view which professes to explain everything including man, religion and morality without the aid of any supernatural factor made its appearance. Within the last seventy-five

years this movement has made such headway, has been accepted by so many, especially in university and scientific circles that it has gained the courage to openly challenge Christianity's right to dominate the thought and life of the world.

As a result of this rapid spread of naturalistic thought and sentiment, Christians in the second quarter of the

twentieth century face a situation not unlike that which existed during the first three centuries. In the days of our fathers, or at least of our grandfathers, the Christian conception of life and destiny was generally accepted in science, literature, and education, and so by public opinion and the better forms of social intercourse. Generally speaking those who were not Christians felt that they ought to be and expected to become such before they died. On the other hand those who were Christians had the consciousness of being in accord with the dominant thought and life tendencies of the age in which they lived. They were supported and carried along as it were by the spirit of the age and so were like men swimming with rather than against the stream.

Today however, there is hardly a fundamental Christian idea about GOD, creation, man, sin, redemption, conduct or the future—ideas once all but universally accepted by our not distant forefathers—that is not opposed in the name of science, ridiculed by educators, questioned by public opinion and banished as a topic for serious consideration in many circles. ARNOLD BENNETT in a book written shortly before he died spoke not only for himself but for many of the intellectuals of our age when he said: "I do not believe, and never have at any time believed in the Divinity of CHRIST, the Virgin birth, the Immaculate Conception, Heaven, Hell, the immortality of the soul or the Divine Inspiration of the Bible. These denials of belief are taken for granted in the conversation of the vast majority of my

IN THIS ISSUE:

Editorial Notes and Comments

The Approaching Assembly	
The Moderator.....	2
The Proposed Union of Churches.....	3
The Federal Council.....	3
The General Council.....	3
The Presbyterian Magazine.....	4
The Revised Book of Discipline.....	4
The Budget and Finance.....	4

Modernism on the Mission Field..... 4

Federal Council Seeks to Dominate Seminars..... 5

The Jamison Case..... 5

Is Presbyterianism Prepared to Surrender the Deity of Christ?..... 6

Wm. Childs Robinson

Religion and Trouble..... 8

Clarence Edward Macartney

Notes on Biblical Exposition..... 10

J. Gresham Machen

Questions and Answers	
Are Modernists Christlike and Tolerant?.....	13
The Second Coming of Christ.....	13
Do Beliefs Matter?.....	14

Current Views and Voices	
Chaos as Camouflage.....	15
Problems of a Humanist Minister.....	15

Ministerial Changes..... 16

News of the Church..... 17

tion to lower our doctrine of the Lord Christ there comes a pressing call to all true Presbyterians to an even clearer conception of His glory. According to a recent issue of the *Christian Observer* the Pan-Presbyterian Meeting in Richmond, Va. appealed to all Presbyterians to study the work of our greatest American theologian Dr. B. B. Warfield in his presentation of our theology (*Calvin and Calvinism*, Oxford, 1931). In this volume Dr. Warfield declares that the

history of the efforts of the Church to work out an acceptable statement of the great mystery of the Trinity has been "dominated from the beginning to the end by a single motive—to do full justice to the absolute deity of Christ." (p. 284.)

In this effort the three whose names stand out in high relief are Tertullian, Augustine and Calvin. Calvin held that Christ is God, *a se* (autotheos). From Calvin this doctrine of the self-existent

Deity of Christ (autotheotes) has become a distinctive hall-mark of the Reformed faith. Presbyterian hosts, as you face Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you, will you sink His honor to the depths which the ancient Church never allowed, will you become mere Psilanthropists; or for His glory will you rally anew in the Reformed army of Autotheanites holding against all comers that your Lord and Head is indeed God the self-existent Jehovah?

Religion and Trouble

A Sermon from Life by The Rev. Clarence Edward Macartney D.D., LL.D.
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Job 4:5—"But now it has come upon thee and thou faintest; it toucheth thee and thou art troubled."

THIS is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it." So spoke a business man who recently came in to see me, and had been telling me of the difficulties and anxieties through which he was passing.

When trouble comes, some turn to religion; that is, it increases and deepens their faith. The winds of adversity only drive them the nearer to God. But others seem to turn away from religion. If they have been going to church, now they stop going, and disassociate themselves from public worship and from Christian activity; and others again not only turn away from religion and neglect it, but turn against it. Thus there was profound truth in what this business man said to me, that this is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it.

The Book of Job is still the incomparable classic on this great subject, suffering and life. Life is always thrusting this question upon us, for whether we desire it to be otherwise or not, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Without trouble, "life would be sort of a Dead Sea, a sea of bliss in which one could float, but neither swim nor explore." Yet the fact of adversity and trouble always raises difficult questions when we think upon God and his

dominion over our lives. "When I think upon God," said the Psalmist, "I am troubled."

The Book of Job is a very old book, one of the oldest in the world, but you cannot hurt its reputation by saying it is old, anymore than you can hurt the reputation of a rock, or a tree, by saying that it is old. Some of the greatest things of the world will always be the oldest. Here in this book, as Carlyle put it in his "Heroes and Hero Worship," is "sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation, oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind, so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars."

From the pinnacle of prosperity, Job had suddenly been hurled into the deepest valley of adversity. One calamity after another had broken over him, and when possessions and family and health have all been stripped from him, we see the desolate patriarch sitting upon the ash heap and cursing the day he was born. Job, indeed, did not curse God nor charge Him foolishly. But he did curse the day he was born, and lamented his existence. But he discovered, as we all do when life hurts, that to curse the day of our birth and to lament existence effects no change and accomplishes no good. The date of our birth cannot thus be expunged from the calendar; life is here and we must face it.

Job had not lived carelessly or fool-

ishly in a fool's paradise, when, as he tells us, his steps were washed in butter and the sun of prosperity was in the mid heavens. He was not unmindful of the fact of the instability and uncertainty of all earthly things, for he says, "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." And when trouble did come, and the storm broke over him, in spite of all his preparation and contemplation, Job is shaken by the successive calamities which seem to mock at all his preparation and go beyond all his apprehensions. There is a popular saying spoken with the purpose of keeping people from undue anxiety, that the "things we contemplate seldom happen, and the things that happen we seldom contemplate." But this is only a half-truth. Sometimes the very things which we have contemplated, and perhaps dreaded, come to pass. So it seems to have been with Job, and when the storm was over we behold this God-fearing and right-living man deluged with a wave of misery, not abandoning his faith, it is true, but getting no comfort and little hope out of it.

In his day of trouble, Job had true and faithful friends, and these three friends came and sat with him on his ash heap. Whatever mistakes they made in their theology and in their efforts to justify the ways of God to Job, their intent and purpose was true and honorable. After seven days of sympa-

thetic silence, which is sometimes the deepest ministry of sympathy, Eliphaz breaks the silence with his speech. With true Oriental grace and courtesy, he introduces his remarks by saying, "If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking?" With that for an introduction, he commences by reminding Job of his former faith and his godly life, and expresses astonishment that a man with such a record should now be so upset and staggered by his adversity. He reminds Job how often he had helped and steadied others when adversity came, and they were tempted to rebel against God and all His ways. "Behold thou hast instructed many, and thou has strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Eliphaz appeals from Job in adversity to Job in prosperity. "You are the man," he says, "once noted for faith, and you are able to strengthen others in the time of trial. But now you do not seem to be able to take the cure which you prescribed for others. But now it has come upon thee, and thou faintest. It toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

What disturbed and perplexed the friends of Job in his hour of trial and trouble is something which still perplexes and disturbs the mind. It is painful to see those who have entertained Christian faith for themselves, and have also given comfort and help to others, without comfort and without courage or hope in the time of their own trial, and still more painful is it to see men actually abandon religion or turn against it.

How shall we account for this lack of strength and courage in the day of trouble. In part, no doubt, it is due to the lack of definite instruction in Christian truth. "Prophesy unto us smooth things" is still the popular request and counsel to those who proclaim the great truths of religion. So we have the reign and sway of what is merely entertaining in religion. I frequently receive invitations to deliver what is called an "inspirational" address at some meeting. Inspiration is good, and we all need to have the gift that is in us stirred up and

to be urged on towards the great goal. But in straits of life, what the soul must rely upon is Christian knowledge of great granite facts and truths. It is the neglect of those fundamental facts and truths which leaves so many people without spiritual resource or reserves upon which they can call in the day of trouble.

It may not be a smooth thing to say, but it is said over and over again in the Scriptures, that adversity and trial are a part of this earthly experience. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. There is not a sentence in the New Testament which would lead one into the great error of thinking that his life as a Christian is to be free from trouble and from temptation, and temptation to doubt both the love of God and the reality of the Christian faith. On the contrary, we are told repeatedly to expect testing, trial, loss and tribulation. "In this world ye shall have tribulation." If this fact were clearly stamped upon our minds then we should not be in a panic and ready to abandon our faith when trouble comes.

Not only is the uncertainty and instability of all things earthly taught by our faith, and not only the fact of tribulation and sorrow, but the spiritual and moral purpose of it all. The grand proposition of Christian faith is that our life here is not an end in itself, but a probation, and that the purpose of this probation is not to give us a good time, not to make us lie down in a meadow of flowers and ease, but to produce and develop moral and spiritual qualities with a view to their complete expression and their full reward in a future life. This is the only key which fits the lock of life's experience. Every other key has been tried and has failed. But if this is so, that life is a trial system with this great purpose back of it, then none can say that life is not well adapted for such an end.

When the Psalmist was brooding over his own troubles and wondering how it fared so ill with him, when others who did not obey God, indeed gave Him no place at all in their lives, basked in prosperity and rejoiced in success, he comforts himself with the reflection that the things which have happened to him,

painful though they are, are bringing him nearer to God; whereas, the unbroken prosperity of other men leads them to forget God. "Because they have no changes, they fear not God." That is, without any reverses, without any changes, or overturnings in fortune, man would hardly believe in God. The only God he would need would be himself, and the only heaven this life. If you and I, then, when things go wrong, as we say, and life sometimes hurts rather than delights, would only remember this, that the great purpose of life, moral and spiritual character, and the way that purpose is fulfilled through trouble and trial, it could never be said of us, that in the time of trouble we turned away from religion, or, what is worse, turned against it. "Tribulation," said one of the most tried and troubled of men, "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." All things work together for good to them that love God. But the trouble is that we are so often unwilling to admit that moral and spiritual good is the supreme and abiding good. Instead of that, the health or position or friendship or affection or money we have lost bulks so large that it shuts out from our eyes the nobler and greater proportions of those things which nourish and adorn the soul.

The most wretched and unhappy of men is he who has turned against religion. The very energy with which such a person gives expression to the revolt and unbelief in his heart is a witness to the deep unrest and unhappiness of his life. Newman, after reading one of the brilliant and anti-Christian writings of Voltaire, made this comment, "plausible and terrible." So far as an argument goes, the man who is sorely afflicted may find something plausible about a theory of life without God. In his own experience he can point to so many things which appear to crush and overwhelm what he has believed. But always a theory of life without God, a theory of trouble and adversity without great spiritual purposes running through it, is terrible; and to avoid that terrible state, we must keep in mind the great purposes running through life, and also

the great possessions of life, that a man's life consisteth not of the abundance of things which he possesseth.

Not only for our own sake, but for the example we set, and for the sake of others, those of us who confess to a faith in God and in Christ dare not speak and act when trouble comes, as if that faith made not the slightest difference in the world. Where would the world be today, where would the church be today, if when trouble came upon them, those great souls of the past, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, had turned against their God and against their faith. Instead of that, they made the adverse winds drive them nearer to the shores of faith and hope. They were able to say, "Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

In time Job was given deliverance out of all his troubles, although the path was not that which he mapped out for himself, or which was mapped out for him by his well-meaning, but often mistaken friends. During the storm, Job holds on to God. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," is his only creed. But at length God Himself speaks. Job is permitted to behold the majesty and the goodness of God, and in that vision his thought, which hitherto had centered on himself and his vicissitudes, is transferred to God. Up to this time he had

wanted to argue and dispute with God, but now all that he wants to do is to repent, to worship, and to believe. "I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes seeth thee; wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Hitherto his faith had been dependent upon the incidents of his own life. When the sun of prosperity shone upon him, the thermometer of his faith stood high; but when adversity came, it sank to the lowest depths. But now his faith is based not upon his own life or its incidents, but upon God. Instead of standing on its apex, the pyramid of his faith now stands upon its true, broad, and grand base, the infinite power and wisdom and love of God. Job has got free of the world, and nothing which might happen to him now could shake the tower of his faith.

This is a day for Christian men to show the faith that is in them. To a world whose stock of faith is exceedingly low, what could have a worse effect than the spectacle of Christian men giving up the Church, absenting themselves from divine service, or becoming bitter towards religion because of the difficulties through which they are passing, and worst of all, because they have lost that which Christ and the Scriptures tell us is of all things least valuable—money. One of the most noted of writers on industrial and financial conditions has recently said that the prosperity which the country enjoyed for so long a time

led people to neglect the Sunday School, the Church, abandon the family altar and turn Sunday into a pagan common holiday. Hence, when the change came and men no longer had easy employment or easy money, when employment and profits had both vanished, they had no spiritual resources upon which to fall back.

Two men were once discussing why it is that you cannot see the stars by day. The stars are still there, the distance is not greater by day than by night,—why then cannot these mighty lamps be seen by day? One man maintained that they could be seen if one went far enough down in a well. The other denied the proposition, but permitted himself to be lowered into the well. After he had been lowered a certain distance, he was asked if he could see the stars, and said, "No." Still further down, the same question was asked with the same answer. But when he had been lowered to a great depth, then, looking up towards the heavens, he said he was able to see the stars. Go down deep enough into a well and you can see the stars by day. So to those who are willing to cooperate with God, and will for themselves the things which He hath willed for them, the deep well of adversity and trouble is a place whence we can see the stars of the spiritual heavens and know that in all and above all and through all is God, and that God is love.

Notes on Biblical Exposition

By J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D.

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XVII. Consequences Versus Truth

"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was condemned. For before certain men came from James; he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And there dissembled together with him also the rest of the Jews; so that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissembling. But when I saw that they were not walking straight according to

the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all . . ." (Gal. 2:11-14a, in a literal translation).

A Vacillating Policy

IN the last number of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we finished our exposition of Gal. 2:1-10, which passage, it will be remembered, presents the second of Paul's arguments in defence of his apostolic independence. The first argu-

ment (in Gal. 1:11-24) was that his conversion was not brought about by human persuasions or teaching but by the immediate act of Christ, and that even after his conversion he had not had the early or extended contact with the original apostles which the Judaizers' notion of his dependence upon them would require. His second argument (in Gal. 2:1-10) was that when he did discuss his gospel fully with the Jerusalem leaders they took his view, not the