

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Is Christianity True?

IT is futile to discuss this question except as we are agreed as to *what* Christianity is. To a superficial observer it may seem as though Christianity had all but won its victory in the forum of the world's thought, however it may be in the world's market place. There is little discussion of the question, Is Christianity true? Most everybody—with significant exceptions—either call themselves Christians or claim to be exponents of essential Christianity. It is, however, only necessary to consider the answers given to the question, What is Christianity?, to perceive that here, also, appearances are exceedingly deceptive. If these answers differed only as regards details there would be nothing to occasion comment. That would be what was to be expected in view of the limited knowledge and ability for clear thinking that characterizes us all. These answers, however, do not differ merely as regards details. They differ so radically that if the one is true the other is false.

It is no comfort to us to have a man tell us he believes that Christianity is true if what he calls Christianity lacks all the distinctive marks of what we call Christianity. Because in that case he says in effect that what we call Christianity is false. Christianity, according to many of its present-day professors, is a religion in which JESUS CHRIST is not an object of worship and in which His death as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice has no place whatever. Even if such a religion could be shown to be true, that would have no bearing on the question whether Christianity is true as we understand

Christianity—except as it would affect Christianity's claim to be the only true religion. Unless the word "Christianity" is a word without definite meaning, unless it be a word that can be used to designate the views of those who deny the GOD-MAN and scoff at His death as an atoning sacrifice as well as those whose only hope in life and death is that the SON OF GOD bore their sins in His own body on the tree, we are living in a fool's paradise if we suppose that all the things calling themselves Christianity are really such.

As used today it can scarcely be denied that the word *Christianity* is threatened with the fate that has befallen the word *gentleman*—that word of which TENNYSON sang: "The grand old name of gentleman, defamed by every charlatan, and soiled with all ignoble ease." Just as the

word *gentleman* became a word of no particular significance through being applied indiscriminately to all sorts of men, so the word *Christianity* is in danger of becoming a word of no particular significance through being used to designate all sorts of belief or lack of belief. Be this as it may, it is the truth of a particular religion, not of every religion that may label itself with the Christian name, that concerns us when we discuss the truth of Christianity. Our interest is in a great historical reality, not a mere word. We could view the passing of the word with small concern if we had the assurance that the thing itself was being retained; but the retaining of the word would afford us no satisfaction if the thing it has expressed for well-nigh two thousand years should pass.

Those who define Christianity as the Church has all but universally defined it will not be content to maintain that it is true in the sense of "truth of idea." They will also insist that it is true in the sense of "truth of fact." Strange as it may seem to the ordinary, common-sense Christian, there are many alleged Christian leaders who are not only content with maintaining that Christianity is true in the sense of "truth of idea" but who assert that that is the only sense in which it is true. Facts have significance, they tell us, only as they express some idea or principle. The idea or principle is the main thing and provided we grasp that it matters not whether the fact that expressed it be real or supposed. Just as the value of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is the same whether the father and

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The Office of Ruling Elder: Its Obligations and Responsibilities

By the Rev. F. P. Ramsay, Ph.D.

The following address was made by the late Dr. Ramsay on the occasion of the installation of his son, R. L. Ramsay, Ph.D., professor of English in the University of Missouri, as an elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, Mo., on March 25, 1925. It came into our hands through another son, the Rev. Mebane Ramsay of Staten Island, N. Y., who found it among the papers left by his lamented father.

AS one is to be here inducted into the office of Ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church, my remarks will seek to be appropriate to the occasion.

At this induction into office the elder makes a declaration of his doctrinal belief, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that the Confession of Faith (and Catechisms) contain the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures; and he promises to study the (doctrinal) purity of the Church. This is the covenant that he enters into with the Church when inducted into this office. Here is the difference between an unofficial member and an officer in the Presbyterian Church: the member simply professes his personal faith in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; the officer professes his belief in the Church's doctrinal system. One may become a member who does not believe that the Confession of Faith contains the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures, or even that the Scriptures are the Word of God, if only he trusts in Jesus Christ and means to obey Him; but one cannot become an officer in the Presbyterian Church without accepting its doctrinal system and intending to strive for the Church's doctrinal purity—unless he is willing to come into his office on a false profession.

Let me stress this a little. Note the difference between the unofficial members, who are required only to profess faith in Christ, and the officers, who are required to profess acceptance of a body of doctrine. Thus the Presbyterian Church is both liberal and intolerant.

Note that it is intolerant of disbelief in its system of doctrine on the part of its officers. Why? The Church is a propagandist institution, an organization for the purpose of advocating and propagating certain beliefs. It is true that the Church's end is to produce and nourish a certain life; but belief is an inseparable element of that life and necessary to it. Or be that as it may, the Church is organized and works upon that assumption, and so sets itself to propagate certain beliefs. This system of beliefs its officers are required to accept and maintain and propagate.

Here is a striking difference between the Church and the University. The University is organized to search for truth; the Church, to propagate the truth. The University, assuming that there is truth still hidden, sets itself to investigate and discover new truth; but the

Church, assuming that certain truths have been given to it by revelation from God, sets itself to teach and disseminate that truth. The University asks questions, the Church answers questions.

The candidate on this occasion is a University man, filled with the University spirit; and I therefore say to him that the Church is organized on the assumption that it already has the truth and exists for the purpose of disseminating and propagating this truth. If a society were organized for the purpose of propagating Socialism, a man might conceivably belong to that society, and yet be a professor in the University. If in the University he were teaching social science, he would endeavor to lead his students in investigations that would enable them to judge for themselves between Socialism and Individualism, seemingly indifferent whether they became Socialists or Individualists, but only concerned that they became capable of weighing the claims of both. But if this same man joins the Socialistic society, and is sent out as one of its speakers to expound and advocate its system of beliefs, and make converts to it, and ground them in it; he is then a propagandist of Socialism, and will endeavor to gain adherents to the system. He is then at work on the assumption that Socialism is true and established, and now needs to be propagated. So the Church is a propagandist society; and its officers, and especially its elders and ministers, are its agents to disseminate its system.

Now one may not believe that the system of beliefs held by the Presbyterian Church is truth, or that it is wise to have an organization for advocacy and propagation of this system; but if he becomes an officer in this Church, pledged to promote its system and propagate its beliefs, then he professes himself to receive this system and covenants to cooperate with others in disseminating it. He is not obliged to assume this obligation; he is not obliged to make this profession and pledge, any more than he is obliged to become a lecturer for the Socialistic society. But if he does make this profession and pledge, and does become an officer in the Presbyterian Church, he must be loyal to this profession and pledge, or disloyal. If a man should join the Socialistic society, not believing in Socialism, or not believing in its type of Socialism, and should accept a commission from

it to go out as one of its speakers, and as such should really oppose its type of Socialism; we and other honest men would accuse him of borrowing from within, of betraying his trust, and of paltry dishonesty. I trust that the man to be now ordained will never sink so low.

Now the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church is not indeed a lecturer to advocate its principles to the same extent as the Minister is; but he is, all the same, the conservator and guardian of its doctrinal purity. The eldership has equal voice with the Ministers in the Presbyteries and higher courts of the Church, which judge its Ministers and administer its whole government and discipline, and control its administration; and the eldership in the local Church, always more numerous than the ministry, have the control. And it lies as a special obligation on the elders to see that the teaching in their church is loyal to the Confession of Faith of the Church. If the pastor should be somewhat erratic, and yet in life and spirit is loyal to the system of truth, the elders should bear with him, and cooperate with him on the whole; but if at any time the pastor departs from the system and becomes disloyal to the system, the elders are there to protect the Church against his false teaching. So I say that the elders are the conservers of our system of doctrine.

Nor need we be ashamed of being members and agents of a propagandist society. True, there is such a thing as progress in understanding religious truth; and the Presbyterian Church makes provision for this progress. It provides for amending its doctrinal standards; and it has amended them again and again. We do not say that we believe them to be errorless, but to contain the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures; and any elder or minister may propose amendments. So new truth may be discovered, or better statements of truth may be invented; but this improvement of the system is to be made by those who believe in the system, and by methods that insure full discussion.

But while there is this provision for progress and change, the very nature of Christianity makes it a stable thing. The process of revelation runs through many generations, a growth from its germinal beginning in the beginning of human history up to its fruition in Jesus Christ. This revelation of truth through the ages has reached its consummation in the Per-

fect Word. We cannot now go back and make the history different. We cannot go back now, and prevent the entrance of sin into the world. We cannot change or improve the covenants with Abraham. We cannot make the redemption from Egypt, and the Mosaic legislation, and the settlement in Canaan, throw any finer light on the teachings of Christ. We cannot build the tabernacle or the temple, or fashion the priesthood and sacrifices, or turn the music of the temple, to clearer significance on what the Christ was to be. We cannot alter the development of the Messianic monarchy, so that the Son of David shall mean more than it does. We cannot adjust the birth of Jesus, or His miracles, or His resurrection, more in accordance with modern skepticism, or make

His bloody death more esthetic. We cannot call Him down from heaven and instruct Him how to guide His Church and to apply His religion. There are the facts, and we cannot now change them; there is the Christ that God has given us, and we cannot modernize Him; there is the unalterable revelation shining in the heaven of history, and we cannot remake it.

We can only accept Him as He is, and en-throne Him in our hearts and lives. Let us be loyal to Him, and loyal to His Church.

And especially may educated men, men whose very occupations require them to push on the frontiers of inquiry in science and philosophy and literature, render this service to their Lord: they can be loyal to Him, and loyal to

His revelation made once for all, and thus testify that progress in investigation does not mean putting out the light of the past; and can show that humble faith in Christ is consistent with the scientific humility of willingness to learn.

Christianity as a system of truth is a great building. Its foundations have been laid, and even its walls have already risen into the skies. It rises like the Memorial Tower yonder on the campus. We may come and build upon this building; but we will not wreck its walls nor raze its foundations. We will build ourselves and our lives into the rising structure, sure that we shall be safe on its walls that waver not, and on its foundations that tremble not. For here is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

"A Man . . . whom God hath Hedged In"

A SERMON

By the Rev. David De Forest Burrell, D.D.

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WHERE Job lived, a man shut in by a hedge would have little chance to get out. The hedge was of acacia bushes, bristling with an array of thorns stiff as steel bayonets, sharp as needles. So Job thinks himself imprisoned by unkind circumstance. His life has been free, prosperous and happy; now, suddenly, a succession of calamities has fallen upon him, and he sits here, bewildered, disconsolate, stripped of all he has held dear. "I am a man," he cries bitterly, "whom God hath hedged in."

Plenty of men feel as Job felt: that they are by force of circumstance compelled to live one life when they would far rather live another; shut in to small things when they feel equal to great endeavors. Some are confined by poverty, and that frequently not of their own making: many a woman is hedged in to a poor and barren life by her own husband's laziness or vice; others are bowed down to a life in which pride is broken, friendships are lost, existence seems a burden. Some are hedged in by the weakness of the flesh, unable to attempt the larger tasks their souls hunger to undertake, simply because their poor bodies will not stand the strain. Some are hedged in by heavy responsibilities placed on them in youth and never removed. One of the best men I have ever known, a man of brains and power, told me he had been forced to support dependent relatives since he was eight years old: he had never had the right to take the risks incident to accepting a larger position in business, for fear his loved ones might suffer. And many are hedged in by the limitations of age, the failing of sight or hearing or bodily strength. Few troubles are much harder to bear than the consciousness of uselessness to one who has always been active and serviceable at home and in the world. So many, many people there are, tempted to cry

with Job, "God hath walled up my way, so that I cannot pass!"

Well, what is the philosophy of life-within-the-hedge?

Every little while some poor creature, desperate, tries the short cut and takes himself out of the world by his own hand. But that is the coward's way, bringing no relief: to carry trouble from this world to the next is not to lose it at all, but to intensify it. Hamlet did well to hesitate:

"Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death—
That undiscovered country from whose bourne
No traveller returns—puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we know
Than fly to others that we know not of."

Or let us try the Stoic's philosophy. "Grin and bear it." Stiffen your upper lip and your backbone, and go ahead doggedly, crying like the tragic poet Henley, "My head is bloody but unbowed." This is popular doctrine today: the humanists are teaching it. But it has a fatal defect: it brings no happiness, provides no spring of joy here within the hedge. That is enough to condemn it.

Then there are some that try to solve the puzzle by breaking through the hedge. They run away from responsibility, escape selfishly from under burdens. You call him a coward who flinches under fire in the trenches; but in all the world I know no greater coward than the man who deserts wife and children—as one of our popular novelists has done—to find for himself an easy, carefree life. The reprobation of society, the penalty of the law, the surer penalty of conscience, fall justly upon the selfish soul that breaks through the hedge of moral responsibility. This is no honest way out.

But there is a fine and happy philosophy of

life-within-the-hedge. You can sum it up in three simple propositions:

First: *Here within the hedge is my proper place.* Mind you, I do not say that you are to be completely satisfied with life within the hedge: I do say you are to be contented there. There is a world of difference between satisfaction and contentment. If William Carey had been satisfied with his cobbler's bench he would never have become a pioneer missionary to India; but until God opened the way to India, Carey was content with his cobbling. Satisfaction breeds a state of mind like that of Tennyson's lotos-eaters; but contentment, like Carey, sings happily at its cobbling, with a map of India nailed to the wall before its eyes. Paul the apostle was a restless man, always looking forward to the conquering of more worlds for Christ; but Paul had learned wisdom when he wrote: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

This is the first step in hedge-philosophy: to acknowledge that evidently God expects you to stay within the hedge for a while, and therefore to make the best of it. When physical weakness, or responsibility for others, or some other hedge shuts you in, it is clear that God is not shutting you away from your proper place, but *shutting you in to it.*

"Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine,
Nor ever marmur nor repine;
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me."

Here, then, is our second proposition: Since this narrow place is where God wants me to be, *then here, too, lies my proper work.* Shut in, under the kindly, wise hand of God? Then it must be that you are shut in for service. *Opportunity*, therefore, lies not without the hedge,