

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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What is Christianity?

IT may seem strange that in this year of our Lord, 1930, men should be discussing the question, What is Christianity? But whether it be strange or not, the question is being everywhere debated and the most divergent answers given, and passionately defended, even by those calling themselves Christians. Nothing in fact is doing more to render matters "confused and confusing" in the sphere of religious discussion at the present time than the fact that those who are carrying on the discussion have radically different notions of what Christianity is. When the doctors disagree—men of equal ability and sincerity it may be—what is the plain man to do? Many will agree when a modern scholar says: "I can imagine a man exclaiming, in no flippant spirit, that it is more difficult to discover what Christianity is than to believe it when it is discovered."

Some define Christianity as "the religion of JESUS," meaning the religion that JESUS Himself taught and practiced, and so look upon JESUS as little more than the first Christian. Others think it little short of blasphemy to speak of JESUS as a Christian at all, as such a mode of speech erases the distinction between the Saviour and the saved, between the Lord and His followers; and so define Christianity rather as the religion that has JESUS as its object. Some identify Christianity with loyalty to a cause or ideal, some with altruism, some with CHRIST-like morality, some with man's religious and ethical life at its highest. We hear of a Christianity without miracles, without doctrines, even of a Christianity without

CHRIST—and, as though nothing was too extreme to lack advocates, of a Christianity without God. Moreover Christian Science and New Thought and Theosophy and Russellism and Mormonism and Spiritualism—and what not?—either call themselves Christianity or claim to include its essential values. Surely if everything that is called Christianity today is rightly so-called it must be confessed that the word, "Christianity," is a meaningless word, a word into which we can pour whatever content may suit our convenience.

The seriousness of the situation is greatly enhanced by the fact that divergent answers to our question are being given within as well as without the churches. It would be natural to expect that in the pulpits of professedly Christian churches and in the class-rooms of

professedly Christian schools of learning essentially the same answer would be given to this question. Such is not the case. The situation is rendered even more serious by reason of the amazing ignorance that exists among the rank and file of the Church. In no respect has the modern Church failed more signally than in the exercise of its teaching function. As a result there are multitudes in the pews unable to discriminate between true Christianity and Christianity falsely so-called. Do we need to look further to account for the fact that so many members of Christian churches fall easy victims to every popular expounder of a new Ism, provided it is labeled with the Christian name? The saddest phase of the matter is that multitudes are embracing systems of thought and life that lack everything distinctive of genuine Christianity, that in fact are positively hostile to all that is distinctive of such Christianity, while cherishing the delusion that they are Christianity's purest confessors and exemplars and as such its heirs and beneficiaries.

We are not indeed to suppose that our age is the only age that has debated this question. In the nature of the case it takes precedence of all others whenever Christianity becomes a subject of discussion. Such questions as, Is Christianity true? What is the value of Christianity? What are its claims on our belief and acceptance? are meaningless until we know what Christianity is. Christianity may or may not be true; how can we judge until we know what it is? It may be worthless or beyond price; how can we

IN THIS ISSUE:

The Study and Defense of the Bible in Westminster Seminary.....	5
R. Dick Wilson	
The Concentrated Life.....	6
H. H. MacQuilkin	
If One Resorts to Ordinary Logic.....	9
Gertrude Smith	
Books of Religious Significance:	
What is Hell?.....	11
Humanism.....	12
Voices from Many Quarters (Second Series).....	14
General Assemblies:	
Pres. Church U. S. A.....	17
Pres. Church in Canada.....	22
Pres. Church in U. S.....	23
United Pres. Church.....	23
An Important Appeal.....	24

The Study and Defense of the Bible In Westminster Seminary

By R. Dick Wilson, Ph.D., D.D., LL.D.

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(Dr. Wilson is by common consent the leading scholar in the world holding to the historic position of the Christian Church concerning the Old Testament. Recently Professor R. H. Charles and Dr. H. H. Rowley, famed British critics, have attempted to answer Dr. Wilson's criticism of the late Dr. S. R. Driver with reference to the significance of the Aramaisms of Daniel, as has likewise Professor W. Baumgarten of Marburg, Germany. It is safe to say that no Old Testament scholar in the world is today commanding such attention as is Dr. Wilson.)

WESTMINSTER Seminary has been founded by men who believe that the Westminster Confession is a correct synopsis of the Word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which we hold is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, teaching us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. This God whom we worship is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

The Boaz and Jachin of the temple of our faith are: Our God is the God of the Word; and, The Word of God is true. In short, our motto is: The God of the Word and the Word of God.

We professors are set to do our level best by tongue and pen to remove the doubts from the minds of the doubting Thomases in the seminary and in the Church, and to produce such faith in God and in His Word among all who hear or read our words that they will go and preach the gospel and teach Christ's commandments to every creature. Now, fifty years ago, most of the men who came to the seminaries believed with all their heart in the God of the Bible and in the Word of God. Today, alas, many of them come filled with doubts as the sparks fly upward. They know little about the Bible but are bristling with objections to it like a porcupine with spines. And yet many of them have never learned that there are certain rules that govern thinking, commonly embraced under the head of logic, such as: that the validity of a conclusion depends upon that of the major and minor premises; that a statement as to fact is never self-evident but always is true only as the evidence is in its favor; that a definition is correct only when based upon a complete induction of the facts entering into and bearing upon it; and, especially, the introduction of the fourth term, that "nigger in the woodpile." They have never learned that it does not prove that a thing is not true that you cannot prove that it is; nor, that an event is not impossible simply because you cannot see how it could have occurred.

Now, in the fifty years since I began to teach, I have learned that if they give me a student who wants to believe in God and his Word, his objections and doubts as to both will be dissipated by showing him the fallacies and

absurdities that underlie the objections and doubts which he has had; and, on the other hand, his faith will be awakened and strengthened by presenting the evidence in favor of it and the reasonableness of it in the light of the divine revelation presented in the Scriptures.

This then, as I understand it, is the great work that is incumbent upon us at Westminster Seminary. We are defenders of the Christian faith: negatively, by the removal of doubts and objections; positively, by the increasing of it through showing the reasonableness of it, and more specifically, by presenting its content and its claims,—the subjective and objective evidence for it.

For example, to illustrate from my own department which is that of Old Testament criticism: I have made it an invariable habit never to accept an objection to a statement of the Old Testament without subjecting it to a most thorough investigation, linguistically and factually. If I find that the objector bases his objection upon a general theoretical consideration such as the denial of miracles or of predictive prophecy, I just smile at the objector and turn him over to the department of Theism to learn who and what the God of the Bible is. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" at them, and I for one laugh with Him. But if a man believes in the probability or certainty of miraculous events wherein God is working but is precluded from faith in the claims of the Bible to be a divine revelation by doubts arising from objections to its trustworthiness based upon alleged historical, scientific, or philological evidence, then I consider it to be my duty to do my best to show that this alleged evidence is irrelevant, inconclusive, and false.

At last, then, behold the professor and his boys sitting down together and taking up with avidity the investigation of the writings of the old Hebrew prophets. Where shall we begin? Why begin, of course, with a careful reading of the books to see what they contain and what they claim to be. Read them all through once at least. Do they claim to contain a revelation from God and to have been written under his supervision? They do. Then here we have a new and marvelous thing among the literary productions of the world. No class work of the college curriculum, no Homer, no Vergil,

no work of Goethe or Schiller, no Dante or Victor Hugo, makes claims like these of Moses and David and Isaiah, that God speaks through them; nor grips like them at the very vitals of our intellect and imagination. Here are works which treat of God the author of all beings, the Alpha and the Omega of the ages. He lifts the veil that hid His face and the brightness of His glory and the revelation of His will from Sakya Mouni and Confucius and Plato, and speaks apparently face to face with His chosen ones as a man speaketh with his friends. Can these wonders of love be true? Come, let us see. A revelation, we must admit, is what we must expect from the Creator who made us what we are, and who is represented by the prophets as being what they portray in their writings.

But could these works have been put into writing as early as Abraham and Moses? Why, certainly, they could and must have been. For writing was practiced in Egypt and Babylonia long before their time. Can they have been written in Hebrew? Yes. For we have documentary evidence in both Egyptian and Cuneiform that Hebrew was known in Syria and Palestine and Egypt as early as the times of Abraham. And was this Hebrew written in Palestine down to the time that the last book of the Old Testament was written? Yes. For we have Ecclesiasticus in Hebrew from the second century B. C., and the Zadokite Fragment and the Pirke Aboth from about the time of Christ. And the forms of literature from the earliest book of the Old Testament down to the latest—unless we except the somewhat peculiar style of the prophetic rhapsodies (?)—are found in the literature of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon.

But, admitting that these works could have been written, could they have been handed down? Why, certainly. We have a part of the Egyptian Book of the Dead in manuscripts from the twelfth, the eighteenth, the twenty-second, and the thirtieth dynasties. The three last are not copies from the first, but all are from an earlier and complete original. Some lines of these manuscripts are exactly alike although the earliest and the latest are separated by two thousand years at least. And, further, Assurbanipal has left us thousands of tablets which were copied by his scribes

from other tablets going back to the time of Abraham. So the works of Abraham and Moses could have been handed down to the time of Ezra and to that of the translation of the Seventy.

But have we any evidence that the text not merely could be but that it has been handed down from the original writers to our own time? Yes. Here again God has not left us without sufficient witnesses. More than a thousand manuscripts of the Old Testament, in whole or in part, now exist in the libraries of the world, from 250 to 400 of every book. From these we learn that the variations of one manuscript from the others are unimportant, mostly affecting neither the form or the sense of the common text. The notes of the old scribes, which were affixed to the Hebrew text about 500 A. D., corroborate the care and accuracy with which the manuscripts were copied. And, finally, a large number of versions from the third century B. C. down to the present time show that the same original text lay back of all of them. The New Testament and the Targums also show that their writers had substantially the same text of the Old Testament that we now possess.

But can we go back of the time of Christ and of the Septuagint? Yes. We can even do that. For scores of proper names in the Old Testament are to be found also in the contemporary documents of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, carrying us back to the times of Shishak and Solomon and even to that preceding the Exodus. Shishak, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sennacherib, and Cyrus also mention events, more or less at length, which correspond to events recorded in the Scriptures. And the very ruins of Palestine are now giving their testimony to the general accuracy of the Old Testament history.

And lastly, the languages in which the books of the Old Testament are written, are now rising up from the sleep of millenniums to testify to the trustworthiness of the documents which were written in them. For more than a century the objectors to the veracity of the Old Testament Scriptures have been appealing to the evidence of the languages in which the books are written to prove that they are not historical. And many Christians, even professors in our seminaries, and almost the whole Protestant church at home and abroad, have accepted these dicta of the critics instead of the Bible; so the whole church has been shaking in its shoes. The Pentateuch, Daniel, in short the whole Bible has been reconstructed and largely rewritten, and largely on the basis of the forms and the meanings of words found in the documents.

Now it is my claim that the *prima facie* evidence of the languages of the books themselves is in the light of our present knowledge correct. First, because the critics themselves assume that text to be correct whenever it suits them. Secondly, because an examination of the proper names of kings and countries shows that the present text of the Scriptures spells these names exactly as they are spelled in the contemporary documents of the kings of Egypt,

Assyria, Babylon and Persia. And, thirdly, because a scientific examination of all the foreign words to be found in the Old Testament shows that the foreign words occur just where we would expect to find them *if the documents in which they occur were written near the time when the events mentioned in the documents are said in the documents themselves to have occurred.* Thus, in the records of Abraham and his predecessors, we find the foreign words embedded in the documents to be Sumerian and Babylonian, the languages of Ur of the Chaldees; in the history of Joseph and Moses we find Egyptian words; in the records from the times of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius we find Persian words. As you determine the age of the rocks by the foreign substances embedded in them, so you can determine the age of the documents by the foreign words embedded in them. And my contention is that these foreign words demonstrate that the history of God's chosen people follows the chronological lines laid down in Chronicles and Ezra-Neemiah. No scientific philologist will deny the facts in evidence. They are to be found in every Hebrew Bible. They can be investigated and tested scientifically by all who have sufficient knowledge or who trust the most modern of scientific grammars and dictionaries. It is scientific work. Its statements can be tested just like the rocks in mineralogy.

And so, strong in an enlightened faith, we lead our students on to defy the allegations of the objectors to the infallible rule of Holy Scripture. We thoroughly believe that the Scriptures are right and the objectors wrong. We fervently hope that Westminster Seminary may be a place where an intelligent defense of the fundamentals of the Christian religion (which is grounded upon a belief in the his-

torical character of the divine records) may be taught to the future Ministers of the church. It is our firm belief that a revival of the old-time religion for which we hope and pray, will only come when faith in the trustworthiness of the simple record shall have been restored. We can not expect an educated people to believe a book which they think to be untrustworthy. Let us waken up. Let us begin our scientific defense of the historical character of the Scriptures by gathering together a library of books containing all the published documents from Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and elsewhere that contain any evidence whatsoever bearing upon the Bible and its times. These books are what we now need most. For without them we cannot thoroughly investigate the objections of the critics of our times. And then let us secure young men of faith who love the Lord, and train them till they are able to use all the evidence of all the documents, so that the doubts of God's people, and especially of Christ's Ministers, may be removed and their faith confirmed.

But enough for the present. We defenders of the faith—professors and students in Westminster Seminary, Ministers and laymen who are supporting us—are in this fight for God's Word to a finish. We want to confound infidelity by laying the foundation of belief on a scientific basis of fact and knowledge. This basis lies in books and documents. We must have them or we are bound in the long run to fail. We cannot make bricks without straw. Who will supply the straw? We depend on believing laymen to supply what will enable us to train and strengthen the faith of God's Ministers in this world-wide war for God and the Word. Let us all do our best for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

The Concentrated Life

A SERMON

by the Rev. Harmon H. McQuilkin, D.D.
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"Strive to enter in by the narrow door; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."—Luke 13:24.

THROUGH the query of this unnamed questioner there echoes a curious interest in the destination of human existence. "Are they few that are saved?" It is the ultimate self, the culmination of the career, the abounding and the abiding environment in the world to come, that kindle his imagination and provoke his inquiry. In his mind the problem is most likely speculative, remote and detached from actual life. He is moving with an academic frame of mind through the shadowy fields of eschatology and asks his question mainly in order to satisfy a curiosity that has no issue in moral earnestness.

Nor are many of us in a position with impunity to bring any railing accusation against this unmoral interrogator, for fear the Master might once more "stoop down and with his finger write on the ground" and lifting himself up say to us, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at him." For the temptation is strong to separate between the future and the present and to divorce religion from life.

But, as He so often did, our Lord answers more than the man asked, replying to the inner need rather than to the formulated question. In doing this, He transposes the whole problem from the future to the man's present; rivets the end to the means; relates the termination to the way; and shows him that direction spells destination and destination destiny. Speculation is