

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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The Bodily Resurrection of Our Lord: Its Importance

THE General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that it is an essential article of Christian faith that our LORD JESUS CHRIST "rose again from the dead with the same body with which He suffered." The fact that the General Assembly has deemed it necessary to make such a pronouncement bears witness to the fact that even within the Presbyterian Church there are many who do not hold this opinion concerning the place that the bodily resurrection of CHRIST occupies in Christian thought and life. Within the memory of living men His resurrection—meaning of course, His bodily resurrection—was regarded by friend and foe alike as an article of a standing or falling Christianity. Our fathers, certainly our grandfathers, whether they were Christians or non-Christians, would have been practically unanimous in approving the representation of the late DR. FAIRBAIRN:

"The resurrection created the church, the risen CHRIST made Christianity, and even now the Christian faith stands or falls with Him. If it be proved that no living CHRIST issued from the tomb of JOSEPH, then that tomb becomes the grave not only of a man, but of a religion, with all the hopes built on it and all the splendid enthusiasms it has inspired."

Today, however, there are many calling themselves Christians—and apparently their number is on the increase—who, so far from looking upon CHRIST's resurrection as an article of a standing or

falling Christianity, maintain that it can be discarded altogether without sacrificing anything essential to Christian faith. This, if we mistake not, is one of the fruits of that anti-supernaturalism of thought and sentiment that has become so dominant in recent years even among those calling themselves Christians. In the nature of the case, just as the "non-miraculous Christianity," so much in vogue today, cannot allow that an event so obviously miraculous is needed to account for the origin of Christianity, so it cannot possibly allow that confidence in its reality is fundamental to the Christian's life and hope. Be this as may, we are fully persuaded that those who take this new attitude toward the resurrection of CHRIST are profoundly mistaken, and that as a matter of fact His resurrection

is so essential to Christian faith and hope as to warrant the strong language of PAUL:

"If CHRIST be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and our faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of GOD; because we have testified of GOD that He raised up CHRIST whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not CHRIST raised: and if CHRIST be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

The basic question at issue in this connection is, of course, the question, Did JESUS really rise from the dead? That is not the question before us now, however. The question before us is rather, assuming the reality of this event does it so enter into the substance of Christianity as to constitute an indispensable element in the religion we profess? It need not be overlooked, however, that, if the resurrection of JESUS is essential to Christianity, the whole mass of that evidence that evinces the truth of Christianity also evinces the reality of the resurrection.

It is impossible in the space at our disposal to even mention all the ways in which the resurrection of JESUS enters as a constitutive and indispensable element in making Christianity what it is. All we can hope to do is to direct attention to some of the more outstanding considerations which make clear that the resurrection of CHRIST is essential to Christian faith and hope.

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of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., yet it would cause the fog to lift sufficiently to enable us to observe the layout of our ecclesiastical landscape.

(b) The mere fact of the organization of such a Fellowship, but especially the facts revealed after it got to functioning, would raise our morale, which is now so deplorably low.

(c) It would open the way for concerted action—the very thing we have been lacking up to the present time.

(d) Congresses could be held under its auspices in such large centers as New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, and San Francisco or Los Angeles, where able, orthodox church men could deliver spiritual and scholarly lectures dealing with reformation problems, followed by general discussions.

(e) Under its leadership we could gradually seek to eliminate the various "tactical mistakes" mentioned in this article. At least, we could make determined efforts in that direction.

(f) The Fellowship could prepare for a thoroughgoing reformation. This would involve a great deal. It would involve far more than a correction of "tactical mistakes." Space limits forbid us to enter into details at this point.

(g) With its leaders aglow for Jesus Christ and his truth the Fellowship could become a spiritual radiation center for the whole Church, to the glory of the triune God.

In suggesting and urging the organization of such a Fellowship we would stress particularly the great need of constantly show-

ing true love for those who differ from us. The majority of those who have left the paths of the fathers have done so in ignorance. We are convinced of that. In the case of many, many others the situation may be accounted for by the fact that they lack faith and spiritual vitality. Only a handful, comparatively, are making premeditated and determined attempts to wreck that which was bequeathed to us. But even with regard to that "handful"—though our attitude in defense of the truth should be most determined and aggressive—the Law of Love should reign. We must fight them to save them.

The writer would invite all those who sympathize with the idea of a "Reformation Fellowship"—both men and women—to write to him. He may be addressed at Oostburg, Wisconsin.

What Is Truth?

A Sermon

By the Rev. R. B. Kuiper, D.D.
President of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich.

*Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?
John 18:38.*

JUST what did Pilate mean when he asked, *What Is Truth?* What was he driving at? In what tone of voice did he put the question? Did he ask it seriously or sneeringly? Did he mean to say: "I hear thee speak of the truth, King of the Jews. Thou sayest that thou camest to bear witness to the truth. Now that interests me keenly. I have long been an earnest seeker after the truth. Thus far, however, I have failed to find it. Canst thou really tell me what it is? If so, pray speak"? Or did he have in mind something like this: "Do I hear thee speak of the truth, thou Jewish Rabbi? But what's the use? Haven't men been searching for the truth for ages, and haven't they uniformly failed to find it? It is perfectly evident by this time that man cannot know the truth. Then let's quit talking about it."

To us it seems that Pilate asked his question in the latter spirit: not seriously, but sneeringly and scornfully.

It is a matter of common observation that a person whose education has been very limited will often speak with much more confidence about the truth than one with a broad liberal education. Here is a man who never graduated from the eighth grade, whose reading is confined to the daily paper, and who has never traveled outside his own state. When he answers the question *What Is Truth?* he does it with so much confidence, cocksureness even, that one can

hardly escape the impression that he knows it all or at any rate thinks he does. And here is a university graduate whose reading is remarkably comprehensive, and who has traveled around the globe. When he tries to answer the question *What Is Truth?* he does it with so much hesitation that after a little you begin to wonder whether he knows anything at all.

The explanation of this seemingly strange phenomenon is easily discovered. The uneducated man has only his own ideas and it never occurs to him to call them into question. The educated man, on the other hand, is in touch with the ideas of others, has made the discovery that others know something too. He has observed that when opinions clash it is frequently very difficult to decide which is right. And so he finds the question *What Is Truth?* a hard one to answer.

Now let us apply this to Pontius Pilate.

He was a Roman. He was an educated Roman. He was an educated Roman of the first century of the Christian era. The Romans had subdued the world. The Roman eagle had flapped its wings over the whole of the then known world. In their conquests the Romans had come into contact with all kinds of peoples, all kinds of philosophies, all kinds of religions, all kinds of answers to the question *What Is Truth?* They had made the discovery that they, the Romans, did not know it all, that other peoples knew something too. It had even occurred to them that the gods of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Greeks

might be just as real and just as great as their own. They had begun to question whether the traditional Roman definition of the truth was quite correct. The Roman mind had been thrown into a state of quandary. Educated Romans especially had lost their moorings. Agnosticism was the philosophy of the day. And no doubt it was in the spirit of agnosticism that Pilate put the question *What Is Truth?* He meant to say: "What it is anyhow? Nobody knows."

We of the year of our Lord 1931 are as compared with previous generations well educated. Education is much more general today than even a generation ago. Today almost everybody gets a high school education and the demand for a college education is so general that many colleges have had to place a limit on the number of their students. Almost all of us do considerable reading, though likely the quality has not kept pace with the quantity. Modern conveyances have made travelers, at least tourists, of most of us. The radio broadcasts much information and many views. May that not be one reason why many find it increasingly difficult to answer the question *What Is Truth?* If we were less well educated the problem might appear simpler.

Then too, our age is hardly one of traditionalism. Time there was when a young man was pretty sure to be a Republican if his father was, and a young lady would almost certainly join the Methodist church if her mother belonged there. But this time is rapidly passing. Nowadays young people

clamor for something different and often throw overboard the old just because it is old. Consequently it is not surprising that many of them have begun to doubt whether the answer which their parents, teachers, and preachers give to the question *What Is Truth?* and which they accepted without argument in childhood is after all correct.

Let us face a concrete question here. There are several religions in America, each of which gives its answer to our question. To mention just a few, there are Christianity, Liberalism, Humanism, Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritism, and Buddhism. How do you know that the traditional Christian answer to the question *What Is Truth?* is correct and that all other answers, though of course not wrong in every detail, yet are essentially false? Do you know it?

Now don't worry! Don't suppose that we would sow the seeds of skepticism! God forbid that we should do anything of the kind! But we are trying to impress you with the exceeding difficulty of our question. And in doing that we would go a step farther still. So extremely difficult is this question that all men everywhere, if left to themselves, would never be able to answer it. The reply is far beyond the reach of the finite and sin-darkened mind of men. The only reason why we can answer it is that God has seen fit to reveal the truth to us. Apart from revelation agnosticism is reasonable. If divine revelation be left out of consideration it must be granted that Pilate was right.

II

It must have seemed almost ridiculous to Pilate to hear Jesus say: "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth." Think of it! From time immemorial the whole human race had been in quest of the truth. The greatest thinkers had earnestly pondered the question *What Is Truth?* And the upshot of it all was that educated men had despaired of ever discovering the truth. They were sure of but one thing: that the truth could not be known. On a certain Friday morning along comes a Jew, a despicable Jew. He happens to come from Galilee, where the people were notoriously uneducated. And he is a prisoner in chains. All of a sudden he puts forth a stupendous claim. Says he in effect: "What the greatest philosophers of mankind in spite of mighty efforts have failed to find that I am come to disclose. I know what is the truth. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth." Then Pilate could not suppress a smile, a sneer. He felt that there stood before him a religious fanatic. Perhaps he thought the Nazarene a paranoiac.

Would that the Roman had been willing to listen to the Jew! Would that the judge had come down from his throne, had invited the defendant to take his place, and

then had humbly seated himself at his feet to listen to his words! Then Pontius Pilate would have learned the answer to the question *What Is Truth?* and would have been delivered from the bondage of error into the glorious liberty of the children of God. But alas! he was too proud for that.

Let not us be so proud. Let us even now very humbly, as little boys and girls, mere school children, sit down at the feet of the Divine Teacher to hear from His lips the answer to our question.

God is truth. About that there can be no reasonable doubt. It is a truism. To be sure, the gods of ancient mythology rather frequently committed dishonesties, but that very fact is proof that they were no gods. If there is a God, if God is God, He must be truth.

It follows that the truth does not change. As God is the unchangeable, with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning, so also the truth is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is often suggested that the holy men who wrote the Scriptures did indeed write the truth for their day, but that the truth has changed so radically since that by this time the Bible is hopelessly out of date. The fact is that if the Bible ever was true it is true today.

God's revelation is truth. That is another truism. If God Himself is truth, then His revelation cannot but be truth.

God has revealed Himself in His Word. By His Word we mean both the inscripturated Word, the Bible, and the personal Word, Jesus Christ. The two are inseparable. The authors of the various books constituting the Bible were controlled by the Spirit of Christ, the great Prophet. And all the light of Scripture gathers round the sublime person of Christ. Both are truth. Said Jesus: "Thy Word is truth," and "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

We shall not weary you at this time with the traditional dozen or more proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. We are addressing a Christian assembly and take it for granted that you are convinced already. But allow us to shed a little light by means of an illustration on what has been called the most conclusive reason why Christians honor the Bible as the very Word of the living God. We refer to the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the Christian.

Let us assume that my father is in an adjoining room, the door to which is closed. I know him. I *know* him. Some of you have perhaps a superficial acquaintance with him, but not one of you *knows* him as do I. Now he speaks in his natural voice. At once I say: "That's my father speaking." If you ask me how I know my simple reply is: "Don't I know my own father?" You, however, do not recognize his voice because to you it is the voice of a stranger.

Listen! The Christian is a regenerated person. And every one who is born of the

Spirit knows God. Consequently he recognizes God's voice as a matter of course, let us say intuitively. When he opens his Bible he knows at once that God, his heavenly Father, is speaking.

Not all truth is contained in the Bible. Don't let that statement alarm you. The whole Bible is true, but there is much truth not recorded in Holy Writ. That Columbus discovered America in 1492 and that George Washington was the first President of these United States are facts about which the Bible says nothing. There is a general revelation of God in nature and history as well as a special one unto salvation in the Bible. The former is as true as the latter. Surely, it behooves us Christians to study the one as well as the other. And let us never worry that the proper study of nature may lead our young people away from God. Let us be on our guard against science falsely so called and at the same time remember that the truly scientific pursuit of any branch of learning must of necessity lead the student Godward.

We come to a most interesting though difficult problem. Those who accept the Bible as the Word of God frequently differ among each other in its interpretation. This accounts in large measure for the rise of the various denominations. To be more concrete, there are Roman Catholics and Protestants, Calvinists and Arminians, Pedobaptists and those who would baptize only adults, Premillenarians, Postmillenarians, and A-millenarians. Now how are we going to decide which of various interpretations is correct, which has the best claim to being truth?

The problem is not altogether so bewildering as some would have us think. One frequently hears the remarks that there is hopeless confusion regarding the interpretation of Holy Writ. That is by no means the case. All those churches which hold unqualifiedly to the Bible as the truth have a common confession. We refer of course to the Apostles' Creed. It is a concise statement of certain fundamentals of the Christian faith, all of which are obviously taught in the Bible. It may well be called the norm of a church's Christianity. All Christian churches honor it. The church which rejects such doctrines as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and so on, forfeits its claim to the Christian name.

But we may go a step farther. Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the church into the truth throughout the centuries. It goes without saying that this promise has been kept. Consequently there runs through the history of the Christian church a stream of orthodoxy, a line of truth. In the days of the apostles the church stood on the solid foundation of the truth. Almost at once error crept into the church. It began to prevail. The King and Head of the church at the right hand of God, mindful

of his promise, filled a certain man, or perhaps certain men, with the Spirit of truth. They reasserted the truth and called the church back to it. The church gave heed. Again error crept in. Again it began to prevail. Again Christ filled a certain man with the Spirit of truth. Again the church gave heed to his message. Such has been the history of the Christian church from the beginning to this day, and thus no doubt the course of its history will continue until Jesus comes again. The line of orthodoxy runs from Paul to Augustin, to the great reformers of the sixteenth century as Luther and Calvin, to the recent scholarly defenders of the faith, such men as Orr in Scotland, Kuyper and Bavinck in the Netherlands, Hodge and Warfield in our own America. All these men interpreted the Bible in essentially the same way. In essence they all reasserted the doctrines of the apostle Paul. Every one of them was an apostle of the truth.

We want to call special attention to one truth which all of these teachers stressed with all the powers at his command. It is the doctrine of salvation, not by works or by character, but by the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Bible has been rightly called the Book of Salvation, and on this point in their interpretation of the Book they were an absolute unit. And do not all Christians in all denominations agree on this all-important point? Every sincere Christian, no matter what his theoretical theology may be, in his heart of heart is convinced that the one way to be saved is by sovereign grace.

To put the matter somewhat differently, the truth is expressed in the great historic creeds of Christendom, most precisely in such monumental expressions of the Reformed faith as the Westminster Confession.

It seems hardly necessary to add that the creeds are not of equal value with the Bible, that the two may not be said to be truth in altogether the same sense, that the church's confessions are not as authoritative as is God's own Word. That goes without saying. The holy men who wrote the Bible were guided infallibly by the Spirit. That claim cannot be justly made for the church in its interpretation of the Bible.

We should add that there is no good reason to suppose that the church at the time when the creeds were written had all the light on the truth that it would ever receive. To the contrary, the history of the Christian church is evidence that the Spirit leads the church in the truth progressively. To be sure, this progress is by no means uninterrupted. It may best be pictured by a zigzag line, rather than by a straight line running upward at a considerable angle. But the zigzag line too tends upward. And so it may well become the church's duty from time to time to add to its creed by virtue of additional light shed by the Holy Spirit on the truths of Scripture.

III

Let us suppose that all of us are agreed on the answer which we gave to the question *What Is Truth?* What does that mean? Does it follow that we are Christians? We reply with emphatic negative. It does follow that we are orthodox. But orthodoxy is not synonymous with Christianity. Orthodoxy—we shall not now seek to determine precisely to what degree—is indeed essential to Christianity, but it does not constitute the very essence of Christianity.

What the bones are to the human body that orthodoxy is to Christianity. Imagine a body without bones. Is it really a body? Hardly. It is just a lump of flesh. So Christianity without orthodoxy is not really Christianity. It is a nonentity. On the other hand a body consisting solely of bones is not a body either. It is a skeleton, and skeletons are wont to be dead. Such is orthodoxy without Christianity.

There is such a thing as the orthodoxy of demons. James tells us that they believe that there is but one God. About that they are absolutely right. But he adds that they tremble. For all our orthodoxy you and I might conceivably be demons trembling on the brink of hell.

What then constitutes one a Christian? Not merely to know about the truth, but to know the truth. Not just to know some, or for that matter many, things about God, but to know God personally. We must be able to say with the psalmist of old: "I love the Lord." We must sing from the heart:

"My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;

For thee all the follies of sin I resign.

My gracious Redeemer, my Savior, art thou;

If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love thee because thou hast first loved me

And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;

I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow;

If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."

That constitutes Christianity.

And to such knowledge Christ referred when He spoke those mysteriously deep words: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Letters to the Editor

[The letters printed here express the convictions of the writers, and publication in these columns does not necessarily imply either approval or disapproval on the part of the Editors. If correspondents do not wish their names printed, they will please so request, but all are asked to kindly sign their names as an evidence of good faith. We do not print letters that come to us anonymously.]

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: We all thank you for your ringing editorial in the last issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. I refer to the editorial in reply to an open letter from Rev. Roberts Williams referring to Westminster Seminary. We have heard before much of this talk of a "rebel institution," "outlaw seminary" and that *ad nauseam*.

Thank God that in these days of apostasy there are yet the seven thousand, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal.

May you and the heroic band that centers about Westminster Seminary be sustained and prospered, and be instrumental in leading us all out of the wilderness of present day unbelief.

Sincerely yours,
WILLIAM A. GERE.

Syracuse, N. Y.

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: Thank God for the stand you are making. Too bad we don't have more that will come out and meet the issue straight in the face. I think Mr. Williams should join the Roman Catholic Church. I hope this will open his eyes and some of the eyes of others that are in the same class. Fight the good fight of faith.

Kindly renew my subscription.

In "Him."

C. A. BALCOM.

Olivet Presbyterian Church,
Volga, South Dakota.

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: Only a line to express my thanks for current number of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. If you could see it today—scored as it is from first page to last—you would at least see how appealing—deeply interesting—how delightful it is to an old retired preacher like me. We surely need such clear cut definite teaching today.

May you be long spared to bear such vital faithful testimony to God and His Word.

In all sincerity yours,
GEO. WM. FARYON.

Winnipeg, Canada.

Mr. Williams' Rejoinder

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: I thank you for your courtesy in printing my letter. You render a distinct service in permitting such full and free discussion of vital church problems in your columns. I do not know offhand of any other church publication that would have