

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

SAMUEL G. CRAIG, Editor

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Editorial Notes and Comments

RELATED BUT NOT IDENTICAL QUESTIONS

LOSELY related as are the questions, What is Christianity? and, What is a Christian? they are not to be identified. The first is primarily a purely historical question. In kind, it does not differ from the question, What is Fundamentalism? or, What is Modernism? And just as a man may correctly answer the question, What is Fundamentalism? without being a Fundamentalist, or the question, What is Modernism? without being a Modernist; so a man may correctly answer the question, What is Christianity? without being a Christian. Moreover, just as a man may be rightly called a Fundamentalist or a Modernist, while having a very imperfect conception of either of them, so a man may be rightly called a Christian while having a very imperfect notion of what Christianity is. It is one thing, therefore, to accuse a man of holding views that are imperfectly Christian, and quite another thing to say that he is not a Christian at all.

We are not to suppose that only the well-informed, and among the well-informed only those who have the intellectual ability to perceive the implications of what they confess, are genuine Christians. The fatal thing is not intellectual inconsistency, but wickedness of heart, coupled with lack of dependence on Christ for salvation. We would not indeed be understood as implying that ignorance or error is a slight fault, still less a desirable characteristic, in a Christian. We are far from holding that Christianity loves darkness rather than light, or that it thrives equally well whether or no it is understood. None the less, it should not be supposed that our salvation hinges on the correctness of our intellectual constructions: it hinges rather on the inner attitude of our souls to Christ. If our attitude is even that of those of "little faith," we will be saved even though our intellectual constructions are markedly imperfect. If saving faith exists, we will be saved, though that faith be weak and wavering. That because the power of faith resides not in faith itself, but in the object on which faith rests, *i. e.*, Jesus Christ. Christ is able to save and Christ does save all

those who put their trust in Him, however weak and imperfect their faith may be.

In maintaining that our salvation hinges on our inner attitude toward Christ, rather than on the correctness of our intellectual constructions, we do not mean to imply any sympathy with that anti-intellectualism that is so rampant today. An inner attitude toward Christ is never without an intellectual element. Moreover, there are many intellectual constructions of the person and work of Christ with which an inner attitude of trust and dependence on Him as Saviour cannot and do not co-exist. Inner attitudes toward Christ are dependent upon intellectual convictions concerning Him. There are intellectual convictions relative to Christ among those who call themselves Christians of such a nature that if some are really Christians, others are not. The contrary can be maintained only by saying in effect that the word "Christian" is a word without definite meaning—a word that may be applied indiscriminately to all kinds of men, both to worshippers and deniers of the God-man, both to those who despise and those who glory in the Cross. It is absurd to suppose that men may have the same inner attitude toward Christ, no matter how greatly their intellectual conceptions of Him differ.

In view of the distinction between the questions, What is Christianity? and, What is a Christian? it follows that a genuine Christian may have a very inadequate conception of the religion he professes, and hence that we should judge leniently of men's shortcomings in the sphere of understanding. Not only is it true that here, too, there is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," but there are many whose intellectual limitations are such that they never get beyond the first stages in the understanding of Christian truth. "Our logical capacity," Dr. WARFIELD once wrote, "can scarcely be made the condition of our salvation, the Scriptures do not encourage us to believe that only the wise are called. They even graciously assure us that blasphemy itself against the Son may be forgiven. It would surely be unfortunate if weakness of intellect were more fatal than wickedness of heart."

This distinction, however, as we have already indicated, should never be so applied as to imply any indifference to Christian truth. We must grow in knowledge if we

glad to have our readers submit questions of a nature suitable for consideration in these pages.

The matter of the Sunday-School lessons is still under advisement.

We make bold to request those of our readers who find this paper helpful to commend it to others. Only as they do this can we hope to greatly widen its ministry. Sample copies will be sent on request. Why not send a year's subscription as a Christmas gift? Many of your friends will prize such a gift beyond any other of equal cost.

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR WITH REPLY

WE HAVE received the following letter with the request that it be printed. In the covering letter its author made perfectly clear that no one beside himself had anything to do with or was privy to its writing. The letter follows:

October 7, 1935.

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

Like most of your subscribers, I have read your last two issues with surprise, sorrow and indignation; and after perusing your replies to two letters in your October number, I cannot resist writing to say that your special pleading would indicate to me that you have not stated the real reason for your willingness to divide the forces of Jehovah in the presence of the enemy, to desert your friends and associates, to give aid and comfort to the adversaries of the Cross, and—I weigh my words, but can only speak the truth as God gives it to me—to betray your Lord.

I cannot resist the feeling that you are whistling, not to keep your courage up, but to conceal your cowardice. Search your own heart, and see if I am not right. If the so-called Independent Board had not been subjected to persecution, if its members were not threatened with excommunication from your Church, would you have taken your present position? Would you now,—now of all times—have taken your present stand, if you were not a coward?

My father used to din into me, "You can never do anything with a coward." Of course he meant "unless by the grace of God he repents of his cowardice." St. Peter on a memorable occasion played the coward thrice, but he repented of it, and never did so again. God grant that you may do likewise.

I am a member of the Southern, not of the Northern Presbyterian Church, but have frequently attended services in the latter communion; and will only add that if the percentage of sound foreign missionaries under the official Board of the latter Church is as high as you estimate, it is passing strange that the percentage of sound ministers in this country should be so much lower. Ruxton, Maryland

ARTHUR W. MACHEN.

It would be easy, if one were so disposed, to reply to Mr. MACHEN's letter in kind. Apparently he has some means, not available to us, of ascertaining the feelings with which our subscribers read our last two issues. All we can say is that most of those from whom we have heard have expressed approval rather than disapproval. Some have even been kind enough to say that they surpass most of our previous issues.

The editor of this paper does not claim to be courageous above his fellows. At the same time he is not aware that he was ever before accused of either physical or moral cowardice. He is especially at a loss to understand why he should be accused of being afraid of ecclesiastical discipline. He is not in the the active ministry or in any degree dependent on such position as he occupies in the Church for his livelihood. He neither holds nor aspires to any ecclesiastical office. The fear of ecclesiastical discipline is, in fact, one of the least of his fears. It might be different if he were a pastor or office holder—or aspired to become such—but for one occupying a position like his it really requires little courage to brave the ecclesiastical machine.

The manner in which Mr. MACHEN alludes to our "present position," or differently expressed our "present stand," is fitted to convey the impression that our present position (or stand) relative to the Independent Board is radically different from what it once was. Such is not the case. If space permitted, and we thought that our readers would be particularly interested, it would be easy for us to cite documentary evidence in proof of the fact that there has been no change of front on our part, that our position today is essentially the same as when the Independent Board was launched. It may be added that since our stand relative to the Independent Board was taken before the Mandate of the 1934 Assembly was issued it is hardly in order for Mr. MACHEN to find in that Mandate an explanation of our present stand. That is clearly an anachronism.

It is natural that Mr. MACHEN should desire to make it appear that the members of the Independent Board are not responsible for that sad division that today exists among those in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. who are not only opposed to Modernism but who realize that in as far as a church becomes modernistic it ceases to be Christian. Hence, we take it, his attempt to place the blame for this deplorable division on the editor of this paper and those who share his general viewpoint. All such attempts are vain and futile. It is beyond reasonable denial that the chief responsibility for this division between those who should be fighting shoulder to shoulder rests upon the small group that organized the Independent Board without consultation with and even without the knowledge of all but a few conservatives. The editor of this paper did not oppose, rather he favored, the formation of an organization having as its objective the reformation of the official Board. However, he did oppose calling it a "Board" and more particularly he did oppose setting up the particular type of organization that was actually set up. When that was done in the face of his protests he withdrew. However while he thought this particular organization both premature and unwise he rather hoped he was mistaken and could not well have given more space in his columns to its supporters if it had had his full confidence and support—columns which are still open to its advocates. He believes the Mandate of the 1934 Assembly to

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lievers have a birthright membership in the church as children in general in the family and state. Christian parents, according to Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 579), "should not only be permitted but urged and enjoined to present their children for baptism, that they may belong to the Church, and be brought up under its watch and care. To be unbaptized is a grievous injury and reproach; one which no parent can innocently entail upon his children. The neglect of baptism, which implies a want of appreciation of the ordinance, is one of the crying sins of this generation."—EDITOR'S NOTE.]

A Letter to the Editor

(Continued from Page 124)

have been as unwise as it was unconstitutional, and expects to do whatever he can to prevent its enforcement. Such opposition to the sponsors of the Independent Board as he has shown finds its explanation in the fact—for fact it seems to him to be—that they are identifying its interests with those of Westminster Seminary and what is more with the whole conservative cause in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It seems to him that this is working great harm not only to the Seminary but to the conservative cause as a whole. What is more to the point, it seems to him that it is this attempt to make support of the Independent Board a test of orthodoxy that more than anything else has worked to make this Board a divisive influence among conservatives. MR. MACHEN may believe it or not but it is what we have just touched upon, not fear of ecclesiastical discipline, that explains that measure of opposition to the Independent Board that the editor of this paper has either expressed or felt.

The most serious charge that MR. MACHEN brings against the editor of this paper—that he has betrayed his Lord—is closely related, if we mistake not, to what has just been mentioned, viz., the disposition on the part of the sponsors of the Independent Board to identify their cause with the cause of the Lord to such a degree as to lead them to think that anything short of positive support of said Board is disloyalty to the Lord himself. Their zeal is to be commended but it is largely a zeal without knowledge. To the editor of this paper it seems nothing less than preposterous to allege that a Presbyterian cannot stand, without compromise, for Christ and the Gospel unless the Independent Board has his positive support.

Much more might be said anent the above letter. We conclude by saying that our estimate of the number of sound missionaries under the official Board is based on statements by missionaries and others of un-

questioned orthodoxy having a first-hand knowledge of mission fields. We have no doubt but that the percentage of sound missionaries is much greater than the percentage of sound ministers at home. That

was to be expected, not passing strange. Unsound men and women are not only less disposed to seek appointment as missionaries but less apt to remain in the work after they have been sent.

News of the Church

Religion and Science Association Formed

BELIEVING, as we do, that God is the author of all true science as well as of the Christian Scriptures, we deplore the present situation in which, under the dominance of the evolution theory, the educated world has largely accepted the idea that science has proved many important tenets of the Christian faith to be false.

We believe that many scholars all over the world are not content to allow this situation to continue.

We believe that the philosophy of nature which is based on the theory of evolution is false, and we recognize many instances where the adoption of this theory has led scientists to conclusions which are flatly contradicted by objective facts and common sense. In opposition to this naturalistic philosophy, we take the position that God not only created matter in the beginning, but that He is still in direct control of all the processes and phenomena of nature; and although He conducts the affairs of His universe in orderly ways which we term the laws of nature, yet He can act and has acted in other ways which transcend and, in our finite knowledge, seem contrary to what we term natural law.

Especially must we emphasize the great truth that there are no present-acting natural processes which can explain how anything really originated in the beginning. From this utter failure to explain origins in terms of present processes, we rightly infer that there must have been a real Creation: (1) of the stuff of which the universe is made; (2) of the first forms of organic life; (3) of typical examples of all the distinct kinds of plants and animals; (4) of man. Thus we are compelled to own that, while the perpetuation of the present order of things may be termed natural, yet the origins of all things were not natural, but distinctly supernatural.

By the Christian view of nature we arrive at a conception of the origin and history of plants and animals more reasonable than can be obtained by following the theory of evolution. The results of true science are seen to be in full accord with the Bible record, taking the latter in its simple and natural meaning.

But while Christian scholars are out of harmony with the teachings of evolutionary geology and biology, as well as with the

materialistic set-up of psychology and sociology as taught at the present time in many colleges and universities, it is a matter of regret that they do not agree as to the best methods of meeting these errors. In the field of geology, for example, many accept the history of the rocks and the fossils as taught by the evolutionists, but think that the six periods of the first chapter of Genesis must correspond with the geological ages. Others say that these "ages" never really occurred, but the animals and plants found in the rocks were contemporary, not consecutive, and the Flood was responsible for the fossils. Still others assert that the six periods of Creation were really periods of reconstruction of a previously ruined world, though in holding this view they seldom attempt to decide what was the actual geological history of the earth. In other words, those who believe in the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible and agree in condemning the teachings of evolution, do not by any means agree among themselves about some of the most vital parts of their belief.

For these reasons a number of Christian scholars have united to form the Religion and Science Association, their object being to present a united front against the theory of evolution all around us, and to study all aspects of natural science in their relation to the Christian religion. Three main purposes have been before the minds of the organizers: First, to correct the errors into which the false philosophy of evolution has led modern scholars; second, to settle as definitely as possible what should be believed by Christians on all those vexed points wherein modern science seems to be in conflict with the Christian faith; third, to make public their findings on these matters.

Cooperation in this work from all persons sympathetic with these purposes will be welcomed. An active and enlightening program has been planned. Persons who may desire membership in the association will please write to the president or to the secretary-treasurer, as given herewith.

L. Allen Higley, Ph.D., D.Sc., President, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

Dudley Joseph Whitney, B.Sc., Secretary-Treasurer, Exeter, California.

Constitution of the Religion and Science Association

1. The name of this organization shall be The Religion and Science Association.