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Christian Realism

By the REV. LESLIE W. SLOAT

A SHORT time ago we saw in a newspaper the picture of a house. Or rather, it had been a house—now it was only the second story. The first story had been stolen. The house was in the poorer section of town and unoccupied. Apparently neighborhood vagabonds had torn away the first floor piece by piece to use as firewood, and there the second story remained, with nothing under it, supported only by its attachment to the houses on either side of it in the row.

This is an excellent illustration of what has been happening to Christianity of late. The second story may be likened to the moral and spiritual benefits, the fruitage in life and conduct, of Christianity. The first floor, then, is like the basic realities of Christian truth, the root and foundation from which all else proceeds.

In our day there is a tendency—and more than a tendency—to justify the Christian religion on the basis of its ethical fruitage in the life of the individual and the state. We do not object to this in its proper place. But unfortunately the matter has reached the point where this fruitage is presented as itself Christianity. Christianity consists, so we are told, merely of the high ideals of conduct, and of the striving of the individual to realize these ideals. All the rest which we commonly associate with traditional orthodoxy is all right if we want to keep it, but it is not necessary, and if we wish to be up to date it may well be cast aside. We are told that real Christianity, or the realism of Christianity, is the practice of goodness and truth and beauty and justice and honesty which are so desirable among men

and for which we should strive with all our powers.

But the second story of that house stayed up, you remember, only because it was supported by houses on each side. And this foundationless Christianity continues to exist only through the accidental support it receives from the common morality of our civilization. By itself it would quickly fall in pieces, as it has fallen in many places of the earth. It is important, therefore, that we look to the foundations of our faith, to the realities which are absolutely basic in Christianity and without which all else is much like smoke waiting to be dispersed by the first strong wind.

The first reality with which we are confronted in our Christian faith is the reality of God. Have you ever sat back and just faced the simple, straightforward, inescapable fact that God exists? Yes, He does! We take Him too much for granted, even we who claim to believe in Him. He is not an idol made by men's hands, nor an idea fashioned by men's minds, nor even a definition in the Shorter Catechism. He is a really existing, spiritual Being. He knows and sees and understands. He is far greater than you or I, or than the universe about us. He is also entirely different from these. None of them could exist were it not for Him. He brought all things into being, and He continues to have oversight of them. Yet He is not to be identified with what He has made. He is distinct from them. In and of and by Himself, *He exists!*

We feel it necessary to stress the truth of this. It is the basic and primary reality of our Christian faith,

Christianity is only a personal religion and that it has nothing to say about society and economics. We merely wish to emphasize that Christianity is first of all a personal relationship between God and man through Jesus Christ. But more than that, Christianity is a world- and life-view; it has implications in every sphere of existence. Christians should feel their responsibility in any recon-

struction of this modern wicked society according to the principles of Christianity. Yet we do not believe that there will be a perfect society, or one even approaching perfection, in this present evil world. That perfect society will only be realized and the kingdom of God come upon earth in its completeness when Christ comes back to consummate redemption. Then and then only will there be righteous-

ness, peace and truth in all of its fullness upon the earth. In the meantime each Christian is to exercise his faith in every walk of life, pointing men to the Saviour and upholding Christian truth for the good of men until He comes to bring all things into subjection unto Himself. This is the Bible's program for bringing the kingdom of God on earth.

—E. H. R.

The Necessity of Scripture

By the REV. JOHN MURRAY

Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary

A NOTED poet once said that "the proper study of mankind is man." It is much better to say with the prince of Christian theologians that "true and substantial wisdom principally consists of two parts, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves." The greatest question that can be asked and answered is, What is God? For all that we are, all that we have been and all that we shall be is determined by what God is and by our relations to Him. The most important matter of life is to know God and what He is. How may we know God?

God is a person, and an infinitely great and transcendent person at that. We can know God only as He is pleased to reveal Himself. And how or where has God revealed Himself?

God has revealed Himself in all His works, for all the works of God declare His glory, the glory of His power, wisdom, righteousness and goodness. He revealed Himself first of all in the work of creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work" (Psalm 19:1). "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). And God even reveals Himself in our own nature. We are the creatures of God, made originally in His image. The revelation that God gives in our own nature is nearer to us and more directly and inescapably present than even the display of glory that He gives in the works of external creation.

This revelation of God is a very important and solemn fact. All men are confronted with it, and every revelation of the majesty and glory of God carries with it the demand for our faith, our obedience and our worship. The revelation in nature without and within carries the stupendous responsibility that we should love that God thus revealed with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. And it leaves all men without excuse if they fail to glorify and enjoy Him.

When we speak of Scripture we think of an entirely different kind of revelation. It is not entirely different in the sense that Scripture reveals to us a different God from that revealed in nature. No, there is complete harmony between the revelation God gives of Himself in nature and that which He gives in Scripture. God cannot contradict Himself. It is the same God who unveils His glory in nature

and speaks to us in Scripture. Why then was Scripture necessary?

It must be remembered that, even before man fell, God revealed Himself to our first parents in another and additional way than that of revelation through nature without and nature within. For example, He said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). And He gave them the testing command, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16, 17). Obviously, then, the performance of duty by man and the enjoyment of his highest blessedness required this kind of special revelation, that is to say, revelation by another way than that of the light of nature and the works of creation and providence. So we see that in the very state of innocence there was what we call *supernatural* revelation.

Man did not continue in the state in which he was created. He fell from his original state of knowledge, righteousness and holiness. This fall into sin did chiefly two things. It changed man's mind towards God and it changed God's relation to man—man's mind and heart became depraved and man's state before God became one of guilt and condemnation. Two results followed. First, man's mind became blinded to the revelation of God. He could no longer truly behold the glory of God and thus he became destitute of the true knowledge of God. And second, man was separated from the favor of God and became an heir of

Young People's Topics

THE article on this page will be an aid in studying the young people's lessons published by the Committee on Christian Education of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which may be secured from the Rev. Burton L. Goddard, Box 73, Carlisle, Massachusetts. Topics now being studied are:

April 6th—THE IMPORTANCE OF A CORRECT VIEW OF SCRIPTURE.

April 13th — THE SCRIPTURE'S CLAIM FOR ITS OWN INSPIRATION.

April 20th—THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE.

April 27th—WHAT IS INSPIRATION?

death and of hell.

God had in great mercy provided for man's salvation from this estate of sin and misery before man fell into it. It is not our purpose now to deal with this plan of salvation nor with the way in which it is accomplished. What we are going to deal with is the *knowledge* of this salvation that God planned from eternity and wrought in time. How could man come to the *knowledge* of this salvation?

In order to give greater meaning to this question we must remind ourselves of certain things. Man's mind had become darkened and blinded by his sin, so that he could no longer behold with pure and true vision the glory of God displayed in the external works of creation. Furthermore, the light of nature in his mind and heart had also been corrupted so that no longer did his nature truly witness to the glory of God. For these reasons, then, he lost the knowledge he had previously possessed. His state and condition became desperate. So far from being able to afford the loss of the knowledge that had previously been his, he now needed more knowledge than ever. He needed the knowledge of salvation. And instead of having that knowledge, he had unspeakably less knowledge than he possessed before he even needed the knowledge of salvation. Indeed, he had now no *true* knowledge at all. So two things were necessary: first, the knowledge of salvation or unto salvation, and second, the restoration of that knowledge he lost by sin.

Now the question becomes, Whence the knowledge requisite to supply these needs? It is obvious that the works of creation did not convey that knowledge that is necessary to salvation. God created the world and man when there was no sin. We are told that "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). And creation did not reveal any remedy for sin. Nature could not meet the need caused by the fact of sin. We see therefore that the knowledge of salvation required revelation by God in some other way. In a word, it required a *supernatural* revelation.

We find throughout the whole history of our race that the knowledge that is unto salvation was derived from some special revelation on the part of God. For example, God spoke to our first parents of the victory that would be secured over the serpent

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and of the deliverance that would be wrought for mankind. As we follow the history we find that this special revelation came at sundry times and in divers manners, but it was always special and supernatural in character. Man himself could not discover it and neither could he find it in the works of creation or in the workings of his own mind and heart. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man. God always revealed its special content in a special way.

We are dealing however with Scripture, and therefore with the supernatural revelation that God has committed to writing. Scripture refers to what is inscribed on some material so that it can be read. Why, we are asking, did God commit to writing the supernatural revelation He has given? We may not forget that God imparted to men the knowledge of salvation before any Scripture existed. It was imparted, of course, by supernatural revelation but by another method of supernatural revelation than that of Scripture. This knowledge was communicated supernaturally and passed on from one man to another and from one generation to another long before what we know as holy Scripture was committed to writing. But as for us today, all of God's supernatural revelation and particularly the revelation that is unto salvation is derived from holy Scripture. We are confined to Scripture, for God does not reveal Himself in the other ways that He used in times past. We derive our whole knowledge of the way of salvation from Scripture and therefore we are limited to Scripture. Scripture is absolutely necessary for us.

When we speak of the *necessity* of Scripture we must not limit God. There are other ways open to Him by which He could have communicated to successive generations the knowledge of His will. But the simple fact is that He was pleased in His

sovereign wisdom to commit His supernatural revelation to writing. He did not do this all at once. Contemporaneous with other ways of supernatural revelation He also inspired chosen instruments to commit to writing as much of His supernatural revelation as He was pleased to give for the instruction of His people to the end of time. This continued over the course of some fifteen centuries, until the whole body of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation was completed. It is this finished canon of Scripture that is our only source of knowledge of God's supernatural revelation. This makes Scripture to be for us most necessary. There is no salvation and no pure and true knowledge for us apart from the light that shines from its sacred page.

We can see in this the marvelous wisdom and grace of God. It is a peculiarly *secure* way of transmitting the knowledge of His will. His revelation in all its fullness and completeness is thereby given permanent shape and embodiment. The Word of God is exceedingly precious. But just because it is precious, it is being constantly attacked by Satan and wicked men. They would destroy it and blot out its memory. Without a perpetual miracle—and perpetual miracle is not the way of God's providence in this world—there is no way known to us whereby knowledge can be rendered so permanently secure as by the committing of that knowledge to writing.

Again, this method makes the Word of God singularly *accessible*. We have but to open the pages of the sacred Word and read. There God in all His majesty and truth speaks to us just as surely as He spoke directly to prophets and apostles. Indeed we have a more sure word of prophecy. And to us with the whole of Scripture in our hands He speaks more fully than He ever did before the Scripture was completed. Upon us the very ends of the ages have come.

Finally, this method is more *universal* in its embrace. As the Scripture is propagated there is no race or class or age that is shut out from its glorious light. Its message is to all and adapted to the needs of all individuals and generations.

So, to conclude, we may say that in the very *necessity* of Scripture resides the guarantee of the security and certainty of God's Word and the universal scope of its accessibility as God's message of light and salvation.